



**CHALLENGING TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS AND PEDAGOGICAL PRACTICES
REGARDING CHILDREN'S GENDER IDENTITY IN EARLY CHILDHOOD
DEVELOPMENT CENTRES**

by

Renisha Singh

Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements of the degree

PHILOSOPHIAE DOCTOR

in

EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT

**IN THE FACULTY OF EDUCATION
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA**

Supervisor: Professor K Bipath

OCTOBER 2023

DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY

I, Renisha Singh, student number 21737216, affirms that this thesis, “Challenging teachers’ perceptions and pedagogical practices regarding children’s gender identity in ECD centres,” is submitted in accordance with the requirements for the Philosophiae Doctor at the University of Pretoria, is my original work and has not previously been submitted to any other institution of higher learning. All sources cited or quoted in this research are indicated and acknowledged with a comprehensive list of references.



Signature of student

5 October 2023

Date

.....

Signature of supervisor

.....

Date

DEDICATION

This doctoral thesis is dedicated to my daughters Shikaara and Darshana Singh, who continue challenging my gender perceptions and practices. Thank you for the inspiration to persevere with my thesis. I am so grateful for your love, support and care; may God continue to bless your lives.

ETHICS CERTIFICATE



Make today matter
www.up.ac.za

FACULTY OF EDUCATION
Ethics Committee

RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE	CLEARANCE NUMBER: EDU197/21
DEGREE AND PROJECT	PhD Challenging teachers' perceptions and pedagogical practices regarding children's gender identity in Early Childhood Development centres
INVESTIGATOR	Mrs. Renisha Singh
DEPARTMENT	Early Childhood Education
APPROVAL TO COMMENCE STUDY	05 May 2022
DATE OF CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE	11 September 2023
CHAIRPERSON OF ETHICS COMMITTEE:	Prof Funke Omidire

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'M. Jiane', written over a horizontal line.

Mr. Simon Jiane
Prof Keshni Bipath

This Ethics Clearance Certificate should be read in conjunction with the Integrated Declaration Form (D08) which specifies details regarding:

- Compliance with approved research protocol,
- No significant changes,
- Informed consent/assent,
- Adverse experience or undue risk,
- Registered title, and
- Data storage requirements.

Fakulteit Opvoedkunde
Lefapha la Thuto

Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I give thanks to Lord Krishna for the mercy, strength and wisdom during this journey. I also wish to acknowledge and express my sincere gratitude to the following:

My deep appreciation goes to my Guru, his Holiness Partha Sarathi Das Goswami, for his encouragement and support.

My gratitude goes to my parents, Meera and Ishwar Ramroop, who always instilled a love for learning.

My heartfelt gratitude goes to my husband, Rakesh Singh, for all his inspiration, patience and financial support. May God continue to bless you.

To my beautiful children, Shikaara and Darshana, thank you so much for being so understanding, especially when I was busy with this research. Your inspiration and love propelled my enthusiasm to complete this study.

I sincerely thank my supervisor, Prof K. Bipath, for your invaluable advice, guidance and inspiring motivation during this research. You have been a pillar of strength to me during my studies. Thank you for all your recommendations and constructive criticisms. I appreciate your immense contribution to this study. Thank you for your patience and continued support.

A big thank you to the University of Pretoria for the Doctoral Research bursary. The financial support I received fostered the completion of my studies.

My appreciation also goes to the ECD participants who contributed to the success of this research. Their time and knowledge will always be remembered.

I want to express my sincere thanks and gratitude to my language editor for taking the time to edit my thesis.

My dear friends and family for their continuous motivation and faith that I could complete this study.

Abstract

Challenging teacher perceptions and pedagogical practices is paramount to gender equality in early childhood development. Teachers' perceptions and pedagogical practices entrench stereotypical gender identities. The rationale of this study was to identify and challenge teachers' perceptions and pedagogical practices in ECD centres. Teachers' beliefs and educational practices influence children's achievement (Palomba, 2022). The study aimed to develop a framework that would make teachers aware of perceptions and pedagogical practices. It was only through understanding the influence of the teachers' perceptions and pedagogical practices on gender that this framework was created. Post-structural, identity, and agency theory provided the conceptual framework for this research. These three theories were the key components used when designing the framework. Qualitative research methods such as interviews, observations, focus group discussions, participatory action research, and thematic analysis were used to collect and analyse data from the teacher participants. The participants consisted of twelve ECD teachers in Gauteng, South Africa. The data was generated in four phases. The first and second phases revealed that teachers' perceptions and pedagogical practices of gender needed to be challenged as they were gender biased. In the third and fourth phases, the teachers discussed the influence of challenging their perceptions, pedagogical practices, and the changes in children's behaviour. The findings revealed that teachers became more aware of the influence of their perceptions and pedagogical practices on gender. The data collected resulted in the development of a framework named "The Renisha Singh Framework for Gender Awareness Teaching" (RS-GAT), which incorporates elements of agency, discourses of power, and identities. This framework can be applied in the ECD centres and is recommended in the professional development of pre-service and in-service teachers.

Key Terms

Early Childhood Centres, pedagogical practices, gender awareness framework, gender identity.

Language Editor



Member South African Translators' Institute
www.language-services.online

29 September 2023

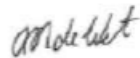
TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

The thesis "Challenging teacher's perceptions and pedagogical practices regarding children's gender identity in Early Childhood Development Centres" by Renisha Singh has been proofread and edited for language by me.

I verify that the manuscript is ready for publication or public viewing regarding language and has been formatted per the prescribed style.

Please note that no view is expressed regarding the document's technical contents or changes made after the date of this letter.

Kind regards



Anna M de Wet

SATI MEMBER 1003422

BA (English, Afrikaans, Latin) (Cum Laude), University of Pretoria.
BA Hons (Latin) (Cum Laude), University of Pretoria.
BA Hons (Psychology), University of Pretoria.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

APA	American Psychological Association
CAPS	Curriculum and Assessment Statement Policy
DoE	Department of Education
ECD	Early Childhood Development
ECE	Early Childhood Education
ECCE	Early Childhood Care and Education
ECEC	Early Childhood Education and Care
GENTE	Gender in Nordic Teacher Education
HIV/AIDS	Human Immunodeficiency Virus/ Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome
NCS	National Curriculum Statement
PAR	Participatory Action Research
RS-GAP	Renisha Singh Gender Awareness Pedagogy
TASUKO	Gender Awareness in Teacher Education
UN	United Nations
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNCRC	The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

Table Of Contents

Declaration of originality	i
Dedication	ii
Ethics Certificate	iii
Acknowledgements	iv
Abstract	v
Language Editor	vi
List of Abbreviations	vii
Table Of Contents	viii
List of Figures	xvii
List of Tables	xviii
List of Photographs	xix
CHAPTER 1: OVERVIEW	1
1.1 INTRODUCTION	1
1.2 BACKGROUND TO THE RESEARCH PROBLEM.....	3
1.3 PROBLEM STATEMENT.....	4
1.4 RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY.....	5
1.5 PURPOSE OF THE STUDY	6
1.6 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF STUDY.....	6
1.7 RESEARCH QUESTIONS	6
1.8 WORKING ASSUMPTIONS	7
1.9 CONCEPT CLARIFICATION.....	7
1.9.1 Gender Identity	7
1.9.2 Early Childhood Developmental Centres	8
1.9.3 Pedagogical Practices	8
1.9.4 Early Childhood And Care Education.....	8
1.10 LITERATURE REVIEW.....	9

1.11	CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK UNDERPINNING THE STUDY	9
1.11.1	Post-Structural Theory.....	10
1.11.2	The Identity Theory	10
1.11.3	The Agency Theory	11
1.12	RESEARCH METHODOLOGY	11
1.12.1	Research Paradigm – Interpretivism.....	12
1.12.2	Research Approach.....	12
1.12.3	Research Design	12
1.12.4	The Role of The Researcher in Participatory Action Research.....	13
1.12.5	Selection of Participants, Cases and Research Sites.....	13
1.13	DATA COLLECTION	14
1.13.1	Semi-Structured Interviews	16
1.13.2	Observation.....	16
1.13.3	Field Notes	17
1.13.4	Document Analysis	17
1.13.5	Workshop.....	17
1.13.6	Focus Group Discussions.....	17
1.13.7	Data Analysis And Interpretation	18
1.13.8	Trustworthiness	18
1.14	LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY	19
1.15	ETHICAL CONSIDERATION	19
1.16	OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY	19
1.17	CONCLUSION	21
CHAPTER 2:	LITERATURE REVIEW	22
2.1	INTRODUCTION.....	22
2.2	TEACHERS’ PERCEPTIONS AND PEDAGOGICAL PRACTICES REGARDING THE GENDER IDENTITY OF YOUNG CHILDREN INTERNATIONALLY AND NATIONALLY	22

2.2.1	Sweden and Gender	24
2.2.2	Norway and Gender.....	26
2.2.3	Finland and Gender	28
2.2.4	Denmark and Gender	31
2.3	AFRICA AND GENDER IDENTITY.....	32
2.3.1	Rwanda and Gender.....	33
2.3.2	Namibia and Gender.....	34
2.3.3	Lesotho and Gender	35
2.3.4	South Africa and Gender.....	37
2.3.4.1	Gender and Poverty In South Africa.....	37
2.3.4.2	Gender and ECD In South Africa	38
2.4	THE IMPORTANCE OF THE ROLE OF THE TEACHER IN GENDER IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT	40
2.4.1	Research in Pakistan.....	42
2.4.2	Research in the United States of Amerca.....	43
2.4.3	Research in Kenya	44
2.5	TEACHERS' PEDAGOGICAL PRACTICES AND GENDER IDENTITY IN EARLY CHILDHOOD	45
2.6	THE EFFECT OF TEACHER EDUCATION ON GENDER IDENTITY	48
2.6.1	The Teacher's Gender and Gender Identity	48
2.6.2	Children's Gender Identity	49
2.7	TEACHER AWARENESS PROGRAMMES THAT ENHANCE GENDER IDENTITY	50
2.8	CONCLUSION	53
CHAPTER 3:	CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK.....	55
3.1	INTRODUCTION.....	55
3.2	THE POST-STRUCTURAL THEORY.....	55
3.2.1	The Background of the Post-Structural Theory.....	55

3.2.2	Core Tenets of Poststructural Theory	57
3.2.3	Poststructural Theory and Challenging Teacher Perceptions and Practices Regarding Gender Identity at ECD.....	59
3.2.4	Rationale For The Use Of Post Structural Theory	62
3.3	IDENTITY THEORY	63
3.3.1	Background of Identity Theory	63
3.3.2	Core Tenets of Identity Theory	65
3.3.3	Identity Theory and Challenging Teacher Perceptions and Pedagogical Practices Regarding Gender Identity at ECD	68
3.3.4	Rationale for Using Identity Theory	69
3.4	AGENCY THEORY IN ECE	70
3.4.1	Background of Agency Theory	70
3.4.2	Core Tenets of Agency	72
3.4.3	Agency – Challenging Teacher Perceptions and Pedagogical Practices With Regard to Gender Identity at ECD.....	73
3.4.4	Rationale for Using Agency	75
3.5	CONCLUSION	76
CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN		77
4.1	INTRODUCTION.....	77
4.2	ASSUMPTIONS OF AN INTERPRETIVE PARADIGM	78
4.2.1	Philosophical Assumptions.....	78
4.2.2	Epistemological Paradigm	79
4.3	THE RESEARCH APPROACH.....	81
4.3.1	Qualitative Approach	81
4.3.2	Key Research Objective.....	82
4.3.3	Strengths and Weakness of the Qualitative Research Approach	83
4.4	RESEARCH DESIGN	83
4.5	POPULATION	85
4.5.1	The Study Population	85

4.5.2	Sampling Size	85
4.5.3	Sampling Technique	86
4.5.3.1	Advantages of the Sampling Technique	86
4.5.3.2	Disadvantages of the Sampling Technique	86
4.5.4	Criteria For Purposive Sampling	86
4.6	RESEARCH CONTEXT	87
4.6.1	Research Site	87
4.6.2	Description of Research Site in Suburban Centre A	90
4.6.3	Description of Research Site in Suburban Centre B	91
4.6.4	Description of Research Site in Suburban Centre C	92
4.6.5	Description of Research Site In Township Centre D	93
4.7	RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS	93
4.7.1	Gaining Access to the Participants	94
4.8	DATA COLLECTION	96
4.8.1	Phases of Data Collection	96
4.8.2	Observation	96
4.8.3	Semi-Structured Interviews	97
4.8.4	Focus Group Discussions	97
4.8.5	Field Notes	98
4.8.6	Document Analysis	98
4.8.7	Audio-Visual Techniques	99
4.9	PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH WORKSHOPS	99
4.9.1	Participatory Action Research And The Researcher	100
4.9.2	Data Analysis And Interpretation	101
4.10	ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS	102
4.10.1	Informed Consent	102
4.10.2	Privacy, Confidentiality And Anonymity	102
4.11	QUALITY CRITERIA FOR TRUSTWORTHINESS	103

4.11.1	Credibility	103
4.11.2	Transferability	103
4.11.3	Dependability	103
4.11.4	Confirmability	104
4.11.5	Authenticity	104
4.12	CONCLUSION	104
CHAPTER 5: DATA FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS		105
5.1	INTRODUCTION.....	105
5.2	DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS.....	105
5.3	THEME 1: TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS.....	107
5.3.1	Sub-Theme: Gender Inequality Perceptions	108
5.3.1.1	The Origin Of Gender Inequality Perceptions	108
5.3.1.2	Gender Inequality Perceptions Of Children	109
5.3.1.3	Gender Inequality Perceptions And The Curriculum.....	109
5.3.1.4	Gender Inequality Perceptions And Discipline.....	110
5.3.1.5	Gender Inequality Perceptions And Classroom Management.....	110
5.3.1.6	The Influence And Effects Of Gender Inequality Perceptions	111
5.3.2	Sub-Theme: Gender Equality Perceptions	114
5.3.2.1	The Teachers' Role Of Gender Equality Perceptions	115
5.3.2.2	The Influence Of Teachers' Perceptions On Gender	115
5.3.2.3	Gender Equality Perceptions And The Curriculum	116
5.3.2.4	Gender Equality Perceptions And Discipline.....	116
5.3.2.5	Gender Equality Perceptions And Classroom Management	116
5.4	THEME TWO: PEDAGOGICAL PRACTICES IN THE CLASSROOM	119
5.4.1	The Implementation of The Hidden Curriculum and the Influence on Boys' Behaviour.....	120
5.4.2	The Implementation of the Hidden Curriculum and the Influence on Girls' Behaviour.....	123

5.5	THEME 3: CHANGES IN TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS AND PEDAGOGICAL PRACTICES	126
5.5.1	Sub-Theme: Changes In Perceptions Of Challenged Teachers	130
5.5.1.1	Category 1: Changes In Perception Of The Curriculum	131
5.5.1.2	Category 2: Changes In Perception In Discipline	132
5.5.1.3	Category 3: Changes In Perception In Classroom Management	132
5.5.2	Pedagogical Practices Of Challenged Teachers	133
5.5.2.1	Category 1: Changes In Pedagogical Practices Of The Curriculum	134
5.5.2.2	Changes In Pedagogical Practices In Discipline	135
5.5.2.3	Changes In Pedagogical Practices In Classroom Management	136
5.6	THEME 4: TEACHER AWARENESS PROGRAMME	137
5.6.1	Subtheme: A Process For Gender Awareness Teaching	137
5.7	CONCLUSION	138
CHAPTER 6:	LITERATURE CONTROL	140
6.1	INTRODUCTION.....	140
6.2	LINKING LITERATURE AND EMPIRICAL RESEARCH FINDINGS	140
6.2.1	Comparison With Existing Knowledge: Supportive Evidence.....	140
6.2.2	Results Versus Existing Knowledge (Contradictory Evidence)	150
6.2.3	Comparison Of Results With Existing Knowledge: Silences In Literature	158
6.2.4	Comparison Of Results With Existing Knowledge: New Insights	160
6.3	INTERPRETATION THROUGH CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK	162
6.3.1	Components That Add Value To The Study	162
6.3.2	Relationship Between Conceptual Research Framework And Data.....	162
6.3.3	Insight Gained From The Conceptual Framework.....	163
6.4	Conclusion.....	163
CHAPTER 7:	ANSWERING RESEARCH QUESTIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS, LIMITATIONS AND FINAL THOUGHTS.....	164
7.1	INTRODUCTION.....	164

7.2	OVERVIEW OF STUDY – A REFLECTION ON EACH OF THE PREVIOUS SIX CHAPTERS.....	164
7.3	ATTENDING TO RESEARCH QUESTIONS.....	165
7.4	ANSWERING THE SECONDARY RESEARCH QUESTIONS	165
7.4.1	Secondary Research Question 1	165
7.4.2	Secondary Research Question 2	167
7.4.3	Secondary Research Question 3	170
7.4.4	Secondary Research Question 4	171
7.4.5	Secondary Research Question 5	173
7.4.6	Main Research Question	174
7.5	RESEARCHER’S REFLECTION.....	178
7.6	UNIQUE CONTRIBUTION FRAMEWORK FOR GENDER	179
7.6.1	Explanation Of The Framework.....	180
7.6.1.1	Gender Awareness Pedagogy.....	180
7.7	RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE STUDY	182
7.7.1	Recommendation For The Implementation Of The RS-GAP Framework.....	182
7.7.2	Recommendations For Teachers’ Professional Development Workshops	183
7.7.3	Recommendation For Policy	183
7.7.4	Recommendations For Teacher Education	184
7.7.5	Recommendations For Future Study	184
7.8	LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY	185
7.9	FINAL THOUGHTS.....	186
7.10	CONCLUSION	188
	References.....	190
8	APPENDICES	219
8.1	APPENDIX A: LETTER TO THE GAUTENG DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION.....	219
8.2	APPENDIX B: SAMPLE OF PRINCIPAL’S CONSENT LETTER	222

8.3	APPENDIX C: SAMPLE OF PRIMARY TEACHER CONSENT LETTER	226
8.4	APPENDIX D: PARENTS' LETTER OF CONSENT	230
8.5	APPENDIX E: SAMPLE OF ORAL LEARNER ASSENT SCRIPT	233
8.6	APPENDIX F: SAMPLE OF SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR ECD TEACHERS.....	235
8.7	APPENDIX G: SAMPLE OF NON-PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION SCHEDULE	237

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1.1: Theories Guiding the Research	10
Figure 1.2: Research Methodology	11
Figure 1.3: Steps of Data Collection Analysis	18
Figure 3.1: The Tenets Of Post-Structural Theory.....	57
Figure 3.2: Poststructural Theory and Challenging Teacher Perceptions and Pedagogical Practices	59
Figure 3.3: Core Tenets of Identity Theory	65
Figure 3.4: Identity Theory and Challenging Teacher Perceptions and Pedagogical Practices.....	68
Figure 3.5: Core Tenets of the Agency Theory	72
Figure 3.6: Agency Theory and Challenging Teacher Perceptions and Pedagogical Practices	73
Figure 4.1: Map of Gauteng.....	88
Figure 4.2: Map of Midrand.....	88
Figure 4.3: Map of Ivory Park	89
Figure 4.4: Research Cycles For This Study	100
Figure 5.1: Themes and Sub-Themes That Emerged From the Study	107
Figure 5.2: The Categories of Gender Inequality Perceptions.....	108
Figure 5.3: The Categories of Gender Equality Perceptions.....	115
Figure 5.4: Pedagogical Practices and the Implementation of the Hidden Curriculum.....	119
Figure 5.5: Sub-Themes and Categories of Theme 3e.....	130
Figure 5.6: Model Illustrating Gender Awareness in Teaching.....	137
Figure 7.1: The Renisha Singh Gender Awareness Pedagogy Framework (RS - GAP)	179

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1.1: Phases of Data Collection.....	14
Table 1.2: Data Collection Techniques.....	15
Table 4.1: Interpretive Assumptions and the Application to My Study	81
Table 4.2: Characteristics of Qualitative Research.....	82
Table 4.3: Profile of the Four ECD Centres	90
Table 4.4: Profile of the Participants	95
Table 5.1: Field Data Generation Timelines	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Table 5.2: Theme 3 With Sub-Theme and Categories.....	131
Table 5.3: Theme 3 With Sub-Themes and Categories.....	134
Table 6.1: Comparing Results to Existing Knowledge: Supportive Evidence	141
Table 6.2: Comparing Results With Existing Knowledge: Contradictory Evidence .	151
Table 6.3: Comparison of Results With Existing Knowledge: Silences in the Literature	159
Table 6.4: Comparison of results with existing knowledge: New Insights.....	161
Table 7.1: Linking the research question, themes and theories.....	186

LIST OF PHOTOGRAPHS

Photograph 4.1: The Ivory Park environment.....	89
Photograph 4.2: The Midrand Environment.....	90
Photograph 4.3: Suburban Centre A.....	91
Photograph 4.4: Suburban Centre B.....	92
Photograph 4.5: Suburban Centre C.....	93
Photograph 4.6: Suburban Centre D.....	93
Photograph 5.1: Images of stereotypical resources	113
Photograph 5.2: Teachers interacting with boys at Centre A and B	113
Photograph 5.3: Children During Play	114
Photograph 5.4: Teacher Interaction With a Boy at Centre B.....	117
Photograph 5.5: Boy as a Class Leader at Centre D	118
Photograph 5.6: Girls and Boys During Line-Up Time.....	118
Photograph 5.7: Boys Engaging in Rough Play	121
Photograph 5.8: Workshop from Centre A	127
Photograph 5.9: Poster from Centre A	127
Photograph 5.10: Workshop from Centre B.....	127
Photograph 5.11: Poster from Centre B	128
Photograph 5.12: <i>Workshop from Centre C</i>	128
Photograph 5.13: Poster from Centre C	129
Photograph 5.14: Workshop from Centre D.....	129
Photograph 5.15: Poster from Centre D	130

CHAPTER 1: OVERVIEW

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Gender equality in early childhood development (ECD) is imperative in protecting all children against many socio-economic challenges, such as poor living standards, lack of education, and sub-standard health care (Van der Gaag & Putcha, 2015). Gender equality in early childhood care and education (ECCE) is identified as critical to increasing academic levels, prospects for future employment, and reducing poverty and inequality throughout society by a considerable body of research (Aubrey, 2017). Furthermore, research shows that children grow best in an atmosphere that promotes educational equality for both males and girls. (Abbott, 2011). Therefore, the teachers' perceptions and pedagogical practices are paramount to developing gender equality (Nabbuye, 2018). Despite these findings, the influence of the teachers' perceptions and pedagogical practices concerning gender equality in the ECD learning environment gets insignificant attention at national and local levels.

The children at ECD centres are exposed to gender inequality consciously or unconsciously through the influences within the institution of schooling (Gansen, 2017). In this environment, young children are vulnerable to several beliefs, myths, stereotypes, norms and values that influence their gender identity (Rogers & Way, 2021). Therefore, a substantial body of research (Aina & Cameron, 2011; Chapman, 2016; Stonkuvienė & Purvanekienė, 2022) indicates that early childhood is crucial for forming gender identity. Gendered identities developed in early childhood education (ECE) influence children through adulthood (Zaki, 2013). Early Childhood Education (ECE) establishes the foundation of gender stereotype development, evident in curricula, resources, pedagogical processes, discipline and male dominance at ECD centres.

In the ECD centres, teachers significantly impact the proliferation of gender stereotypes. Significant research indicates that practitioners interact differently with boys and girls in pre-school settings because of their implicit beliefs and subconscious understanding of gender (Biemmi, 2015; Gilchrist & Zhang, 2022; Palomba, 2022). The teachers' discriminatory and restrictive educational practices influence the self-confidence and

achievement of boys and girls (Biemmi, 2015). However, girls are more affected by the rigidity of a teacher's gender stereotypes (Zhao, 2022).

In addition, gender stereotypes are further developed due to the low percentage of male ECD personnel (Xu et al., 2020). A crucial body of research has been conducted in Australia, China, England, Germany, Israel, Norway and South Africa, which clearly indicates that males can influence children's attitudes towards more gender-equal roles (Islahi, 2019; Warin, 2019; Watson, 2017). The research has illustrated that the presence of more male teachers in ECEC acts as a catalyst for developing gender sensitivity and diversity (Xu et al., 2020). Despite the research on early childhood, the role of teachers' perceptions and pedagogical practices regarding gender identity has been insubstantial. South Africa has various interventions regarding gender equality, but many studies indicate that the country has a long way to go to achieve gender equality as gender inequalities continue to prevail in education and society (Zuze & Beku, 2019).

Teachers assume that gender is unproblematic and often appear oblivious to exploring gender critically (Hogan, 2012). Therefore, teachers' perceptions and practices are reproduced and recreated to reflect stereotypical assumptions that could perpetuate gendered identities. Children develop gender identities as they interact with their teachers (Aina & Cameron, 2011). The fundamental concern is that theories can become truths, and these truths affect the embedded practices which often go unchallenged. Thus, the education sector trusted with the promotion of justice through education may reproduce the old rhetoric that boys and girls are different and require different educational experiences (Wingrave, 2018). For as long as teachers continue to perceive boys and girls as different rather than as individuals, children will experience and replicate social norms in a gender-stereotypical world (Wingrave, 2018).

The Women Empowerment and Gender Equality Bill of 2013 in South Africa emphasised a commitment to gender equity awareness in practice and policy as it addresses the lingering discriminatory patriarchal issues in education (Republic Of South Africa [RSA], 2013). Furthermore, the Commission of Gender Equality Act of 1996 also asserted the need for gender equality in education (RSA, 1996). However, despite the commitment to the provision of a non-sexist curriculum, policy and pedagogical practice, some teachers in ECD continually perpetuate subtle forms of

gender stereotyping as gender is still not afforded any significance in learning (Hogan, 2012).

The National Integrated ECD policy (RSA, 2015) is supportive of gender equality education as a crucial period in facilitating the formation of gender identity and stereotypes in ECD (RSA, 2015). Furthermore, the School African School Act No.84 of 1996 emphasises the need for democratic transformation to combat discrimination in the form of sexism (RSA, 1996). However, despite legislation, ECE continues to be the context for gender inequalities experienced by both boys and girls. Research in South Africa and other countries has alluded to the influence of the teacher's gendered pedagogical repertoire on gender inequality in ECE (Muasya & Kazungu, 2018). Therefore, teachers' perceptions and pedagogical practices must be challenged to develop gender equality (Pardhan & Pelletier, 2017).

1.2 BACKGROUND TO THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

The current ECD landscape in South Africa is an unequal playing field (Ashley-Cooper et al., 2019). The majority of young children are affected by a range of social and economic inequalities. The South African apartheid regime has enforced socio-economic inequalities, which deprived most children of their fundamental rights to equality in education (Ashley-Cooper et al., 2019). In addition, South African children are currently exposed to significant variations in the distribution and quality of ECD programmes. Inequalities in gender tend to persist from ECE into adulthood and across life (Ashley-Cooper et al., 2019). It is within Early Childhood Development (ECD) centres that young children begin to gain exposure to concepts and notions such as masculinity and femininity (Gansen, 2017). However, despite the pivotal role of ECD in children developing their gender identity, there is little research on the gender inequalities in ECD (Lu et al., 2020).

The National Integrated ECD Policy (RSA, 2015) indicated the critical need for the professional development of teachers concerning gender equality. Furthermore, the Commission on Gender Equality Act explicates the need for research to promote gender equality in education (RSA, 1996b). Therefore, there is a need for research on how teachers influence gender identity and how their perceptions may influence their pedagogical practices, as there are gaps in research on teachers' perceptions and

pedagogical practices on gender identity, especially on the African continent (Bhana et al., 2011).

1.3 PROBLEM STATEMENT

Teaching practices reproduce inequality in terms of gender relations between boys and girls and later between men and women in society (Gansen, 2017). Teachers affect the construction of gender in ECE by implementing the hidden curriculum that implicitly and explicitly teaches children about gender (Riddell, 2012). According to Muasya and Kazungu (2018), there needs to be a profound exploration of teachers' perceptions and pedagogical practices of gender in ECE by examining the teaching and learning in ECD environments. Teachers are responsible for the reinforcement of behaviours, learning and attitudes, which are reinforced as teachers interact with children (Wingrave, 2018). Therefore, when children enter into education and care, gender differences are pronounced as girls tend to engage in creative activities while boys tend to be more involved in physical activities (Wingrave, 2018). The main concern is the messages conveyed to children by teachers, which often conform to stereotypes about gender, resulting in the replication of gendered expectations and behaviours (Robson, 2012).

The South African constitution articulates in the Bill of Rights (Section 9) and the National Development Plan of 2030 that there should be equality and freedom from discrimination for the people of South Africa. However, inequalities continue to exist (Mokoena & Jegede, 2017). In addition, the 2030 agenda and the African Agenda 2063 stress that all children should have access to ECD and the need for gender equality and empowerment as sustainable developmental goals. Gender equality is the base for the creation of a sustainable world. There needs to be an elimination of all forms of discrimination and the inclusion of women in political, economic and public life participation to achieve gender equality (Royo et al., 2022). The problem that my research investigates refers to examining how teachers' perceptions and practices influence children's gender identity in ECD centres. In addition, teacher perceptions and pedagogical practices will be challenged by the development of an awareness-raising programme to guide teachers so that gender identity can be enhanced. The development of an awareness-raising strategy that facilitates gender equality for boys and girls is one of the study's aims.

1.4 RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY

Globally and nationally, many studies have been conducted on gender differences in education. However, there is a dearth of research which focuses on the role of the teachers' perceptions and pedagogical practices on gender identity in the ECD sector. This study aimed to fill the gaps in knowledge concerning gender identity at ECD centres to enhance gender equality at ECD centres. Gender ECE rarely features in South African research or debate (Moosa & Bhana, 2018). Therefore, the rationale for this study arose from the findings of various researchers, such as Moosa and Bhana (2018), Mayeza (2017) and Pardhan (2011), who recommended that further studies should be undertaken on gender identity. It is envisaged that such findings would contribute to addressing gender equality.

My interest in gender identity began early in life and it was influenced by my family and community. I was born into a family of three daughters in a turbulent apartheid regime, and I could not understand why my family, the school and the community I grew up in had different expectations for boys and girls. Despite my occasional frustration, I remained passively accepting of unfair treatment. My interest in gender studies was further conceptualised when I worked as an ECD teacher, and I observed that there were distinctive gender differences in the classroom. Therefore, boys would gravitate to the cars and more physical activities during playtime, while girls preferred more stereotypical feminine activities such as taking care of the dolls. Furthermore, over the years, I have realised that as a teacher, I am not often aware of my biased teaching behaviour and the subtle gender stereotypes in the classroom are accepted as the norm. The gender socialisation that I observed and experienced in the story books, lessons and teacher interactions affected the children.

Schools are gendered environments that are influenced by the teachers' pedagogical practices and perceptions of gender (Mokoena & Jegede, 2017). Therefore, by challenging teachers' perceptions and pedagogical practices by developing an awareness programme, this research contributed to the uniquely South African scholarly research. The planned framework is expected to offer practical strategies for gender awareness. Hence, this study is positioned to make recommendations concerning one of the goals of the National Integrated ECD Policy.

1.5 PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study was to explore, describe and explain how perceptions and pedagogical practices influence gender identity in young children at an Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) centre. Secondly, the pedagogical practices and perceptions were challenged by the awareness programme aimed at conscientising gender. Research has illustrated that teachers influence stereotypical gender behaviour in children (Bhana et al., 2011; Mayeza, 2018). Secondly, the framework of gender awareness is expected to offer practical strategies for challenging teachers' perceptions and pedagogical practices. In ECE, children are aware of gender differences, but teachers have not been challenged to be gender-sensitised (Shih & Wang, 2022). This study, therefore, intended to bring uniqueness to gender identity research in the African landscape.

1.6 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF STUDY

The following objectives were envisaged to fulfil the purpose of this study:

- Determine how teachers' perceptions and pedagogical practices enhance gender identity at ECD centres.
- Explain what teachers' perceptions regarding gender identity in ECD centres are.
- Explain what teachers' pedagogical practices regarding gender identity in ECD centres are.
- Determine why teachers' perceptions and pedagogical practices influence gender identity in ECD centres.
- Determine what the perceptions and pedagogical practices of challenged teachers are.
- Explain why a gender awareness programme is essential in challenging teacher perceptions and pedagogical practices.

1.7 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following primary research question guided this study:

Main research question:

How can teachers' perceptions and pedagogical practices enhance gender identity in ECD centres?

Research sub-questions:

- What are the teachers' perceptions regarding the gender identity of the young child?
- What are the teachers' pedagogical practices regarding the gender identity of the young child?
- Why do teachers' perceptions and pedagogical practices influence gender identity in ECD centres?
- What are the perceptions and pedagogical practices of challenged teachers?
- Why is a gender awareness programme essential in challenging teachers' perceptions and pedagogical practices concerning gender identity at ECD centres?

1.8 WORKING ASSUMPTIONS

I undertook this study guided by the existing literature in ECE, considering the following assumptions:

- I assumed teachers' perceptions and pedagogical practices influence gender identity in early childhood education centres.
- I assumed that teachers' pedagogical practices and perceptions need to be challenged to enhance gender identity at ECD centres.
- I assumed that there would be differences in gender identity in young children in different socio-economic settings.
- Finally, as gender is a sensitive subject, I assumed that an awareness programme which promotes gender equality is essential in the promotion of gender quality at school.

1.9 CONCEPT CLARIFICATION

In this section, I conceptualise key constructs and describe my understanding of these constructs within the context of the proposed study.

1.9.1 Gender Identity

In this study, gender identity refers to a set of constructed characteristics, norms, roles, relationships, responsibilities, behaviours, activities and attributes that a society or culture believes proper for males and females (UNESCO, 2003). The conception of gender is a socially constructed trait or characteristic that is culturally prescribed as being appropriate for males and females. Gender identity is defined as a person's sense

of self as a male or female, which serves as social identity (Halim et al., 2011). For this study, gender identity is a child's sense of self as a male or female.

1.9.2 Early Childhood Developmental Centres

Early childhood development is defined as the composite, emotional, physical, behavioural, communicative, social and spiritual development of children that occurs from conception to grade R up to the age of eight (Department of Education [DoE], 2001, p. 5). An ECD centre can be a creche, day-care centre, playgroup, preschool or after-school care. The National DoE defines ECD as the period in which children from birth to nine years grow and develop in physical, mental, emotional, moral and social aspects (DoE, 2001). Early childhood education centres established the foundation for success in future learning. This study focused on institutions that provide early learning services for children from birth to four years. (0-4 years).

1.9.3 Pedagogical Practices

Pedagogical practices are the instructional techniques and strategies that stimulate teaching and learning in a particular context (Wall et al., 2015). Pedagogical practice promotes acquiring knowledge, skills, attitudes, and dispositions among boys and girls (Wall et al., 2015). For this study, pedagogical practice refers to the interaction between the teacher and the child during teaching and learning activities. Children in ECE are influenced and develop according to what is taught and how this facilitation occurs, from planning lessons to managing classrooms and evaluating performance (Anders, 2015). Every facet of pedagogical practice plays a role in developing gender identity. Hence, it was essential in the study to understand pedagogical practices as this would enable challenging the teachers' pedagogical practices to enhance gender identity (Karlson & Simonsson, 2011).

1.9.4 Early Childhood and Care Education

Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) is a crucial facet of ECD. Early Childhood Care and Education is defined as services and programmes that provide care and developmentally appropriate educational stimulation for groups of children aged from birth to nine years in centres and in community or home-based programmes (Richter & Samuels, 2018). Early childhood care and education programmes are provided in various institutions, including day-care centres, nursery schools, pre-kindergarten and

kindergarten (Burger, 2010). This study focused on early childhood care and education offered at ECD centres, day-care facilities, pre-primary schools, kindergartens and creches.

1.10 LITERATURE REVIEW

A preliminary literature analysis found many topics that need more investigation to create a comprehensive grasp of the study area. The literature review will be covered in Chapter 2. Thereafter, teachers' pedagogical practices and perceptions in general and gender specifically are explored. Secondly, the role of the teacher in gender identity development will be illustrated. The study also explored the literature on challenging teachers' perceptions and pedagogical practices concerning gender identity in ECE in South Africa.

1.11 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK UNDERPINNING THE STUDY

The conceptual framework underpinning the research approach is explored from a combination of theoretical perspectives which is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 3. The conceptual framework provides a structure that organises key concepts related to theories and concepts underlying a study (Berman, 2013). It is a plan that enables the researcher to investigate the theories and combination of theories that navigate the problem (Casanave & Li, 2015). The conceptual framework guides the researcher to identify, classify, and organise concepts of the phenomena (Kivunja, 2018). This study's theoretical framework was based on three theories: the identity, post-structural and agency theory, as depicted in Figure 1.1.



Figure 1.1: Theories Guiding the Research

1.11.1 Post-Structural Theory

The post-structural theory argues that knowledge can be turned into various ways of thinking and knowing (Tzuo et al., 2011). The theory focuses on power and control. Therefore, the belief in the classroom is that many stories, textbooks and resource materials are presented as untrue (Belsey, 2012). The core tenets of post-structural theory are related to power, the dominant and secondary discourse (males have more power), and truth (boys are masculine and girls are feminine) (Williams, 2014). Therefore, certain discourses include or exclude children, impacting pedagogy (Youdell, 2011). Applying the theory of post-structuralism strengthened my study as it explored the different ways of looking at things while exploring the teachers' role in challenging stereotypes and the social critique of gender identity (Tzuo et al., 2011). Thus, the post-structural theory focused on social justice and critical thinking (Niesche, 2016).

1.11.2 The Identity Theory

Identity theory is a social psychological theory which concentrates on role engagements and the meaning of the roles. Once individuals develop identity meaning, they are motivated toward a behaviour. Therefore, the self is revealed through interaction, and the theory emphasises the relationship between social structures, identities and behaviour (Carter, 2014). Identity theory realises different forms of identity such as self-meaning (an actor realises their individuality), role identities (the meaning that one attributes to the self while performing a role), group identities (the meanings actors have

when they identify with groups), salience (hierarchy of identities) and the attachment of roles (Carter, 2014). This theory was of significant value to this study because identity theory would explain how teachers' attitudes and pedagogical practices influence gender identity (Carter, 2014).

1.11.3 The Agency Theory

Agency theory is a theoretical framework that illustrates that society is not a fixed entity but has been created by the people who inhabit the society (Ebrahim, 2011). Children are viewed as active agents (social actors) who use their knowledge to reproduce social life (Ebrahim, 2011). However, there may be a constraint that enables or restricts choices and actions available to the agents. (Muthukrishna & Govender, 2011). The core tenets are that agents carry out social interactions, agents gain power and weaken the control others have over them, and agents shape resistance (Nsamenang, 2012). The theory of children's agency was significant for this research as it viewed children as active agents who purposively interpreted and shaped their experiences within ECE. Therefore, each theory had an interrelationship with gender identity, and they were interwoven to develop a unique theory suitable for the study.

1.12 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A research methodology consists of the research strategy, paradigm, design, and sample procedures to be employed in the study. This section explains the research approach used and why the research methodologies utilised in this study were chosen. Figure 1.2 below describes the research methodology chosen for this study.

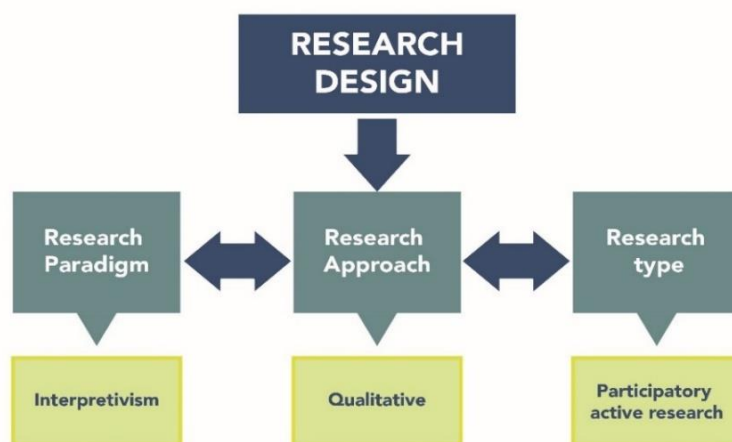


Figure 1.2: Research Methodology

1.12.1 Research Paradigm – Interpretivism

A research paradigm explains a philosophical way of reasoning and defines the researcher's worldview, shaping the research project (Mackenzie & Knipe, 2006). The researcher's worldview is also used to interpret the data in the research. Methodology characteristics of a research project are examined through the lens of the paradigm (Silverman, 2013). The paradigm uses principles to indicate where the researcher comes from, which assists in drawing meaning from the data. A researcher's choice of paradigm is critical to the project, as it underpins information (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). This study employs interpretivism as the epistemological paradigm because it pursues an understanding of the reality that is socially constructed by a person. In addition, the paradigm was chosen because it supports the view that an individual's reality cannot be objectively determined but can be constructed in multiple ways (Kelliher, 2011). Interpretivism is a suitable lens that addressed the current study's aim, namely to challenge the teachers' perceptions and practices of gender identity (Silverman, 2013).

1.12.2 Research Approach

I used the qualitative approach to explore my research questions. Qualitative research focuses on understanding lived social human experiences by identifying themes (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). The qualitative procedures the researcher used in this design included observation, interviews, document analysis and workshops for teachers (Creswell, 2014). Therefore, following the qualitative approach enabled me to challenge teachers' perceptions and pedagogy (Leedy & Ormrod, 2015).

1.12.3 Research Design

Research design is the blueprint for conducting and guiding a study to align with research questions, as illustrated in Figure 1.3. I implemented a multiple case study design and aligned my study design with challenging the teachers' perceptions and pedagogical practices concerning gender identity (Maxwell, 2012). Hence, in the current research, I utilised multiple data generation techniques such as interviews, observations and visual techniques to yield participants' views (Merriam & Grenier, 2019). Furthermore, the awareness programme explored an in-depth understanding of challenging teacher perceptions and pedagogical practices concerning gender identity.

Participatory action research (PAR) principles, such as collaborative workshops were used to strengthen the data collected. Participatory action research addresses practical issues, and the results provide feedback for pedagogical practice. The PAR utilised the participants' perceptions and pedagogical practices of the phenomenon being studied (Mouton, 2022).

1.12.4 The Role of the Researcher in Participatory Action Research

Participatory action research is characterised by a partnership between the researcher and participants (Ferreira et al., 2015). The researcher was situated within the field of action. The researcher and participants took ownership of the research process (Ferreira et al., 2015). The teachers had practical knowledge of the topic under research, listened to their ideas critically and developed solutions to their problems (Pacini-Ketchabaw & Nxumalo, 2013). The researcher ensured that every member's expertise and contributions were equally valued (Duncan & Conner, 2013).

1.12.5 Selection of Participants, Cases and Research Sites

Purposeful and convenient sampling was used when selecting a sample for a specific purpose (Pietersen & Maree, 2019). Firstly, I used convenient sampling to select four ECD centres in the Gauteng province of South Africa that were easily accessible. A possible limitation of convenience sampling was that results may be difficult to generalise, but the awareness programme could be transferable to similar contexts. (Creswell, 2012). Secondly, I used purposive sampling to select twelve (12) participants from ECD centres. Purposeful sampling was most suitable for exploratory research, where the researcher implemented specific criteria to address the study's objectives (Nieuwenhuis, 2016). Purposeful sampling was used based on the benefits of not being very costly or time-consuming, being easy to administer, and the implication that the information required to address the research questions could be obtained. Purposive sampling was used with the following special criteria:

- Participants have to be teachers of 3- or 4-year-old children.
- Participants could be male or female.
- Participants must have five or more years of teaching experience.
- Participants must be able to communicate in English.

- Participants had to provide written consent to participate and share rich information.

1.13 DATA COLLECTION

Data was collected in four phases, and five collection techniques were employed as depicted in Table 1.1. In the first phase, the researcher conducted observations. In phase two, the researcher interviewed the teachers to elicit their perceptions and pedagogical practices regarding gender. The evaluated response from the participants led to the development of phase three, which was the workshop that challenged teachers' perceptions and pedagogical practices. During phase four, teachers gave feedback on the effects of challenging their perceptions and pedagogical practices concerning gender.

Table 1.1: Phases of Data Collection

Phase	Data collection
1	Observation of teachers. Field notes.
2	Interviews with teachers
3	Workshop with teachers (PAR). Focus group discussion
4	Workshop and focus group discussion with teachers

In the qualitative data analysis approach, data collection and analysis aim to interpret content that is both meaningful and symbolic (Nieuwenhuis, 2016). Table 1.2 summarises the data collection sources, the data collection techniques, and the rationale for the chosen instrument to answer the secondary research questions.

Table 1.2: Data Collection Techniques

Secondary research question	Data source	Data collection instrument	The rationale for the chosen data instrument
1. What are the teachers' perceptions regarding the gender identity of the young child?	Primary/secondary sources of data	Face-to-face individual semi-structured interviews Field notes to capture the researchers' thoughts Non-participant observation of learning environments, captured through photographs A systematic review of national/international	Semi-structured face-to-face interviews allowed me to hear directly from the participants. Non-participant observation enabled an understanding of the teachers' perceptions. Reviewed literature provided in-depth information on teachers' perceptions to answer the research question.
2. What are the teachers' pedagogical practices regarding the gender identity of the young child?	Primary/ secondary sources of data	Face-to-face individual semi-structured interviews with ECD teachers. Focus group discussions Field notes to capture researchers' observations. A systematic review of literature.	Face-to-face semi-structured interviews enabled me to gather data directly from those involved in their work environment. Non-participant observation made it possible to see events as they occurred in the ECD centres. Photographs of the resources (without people appearing in them) added to the observation. A systematic literature review expanded the researcher's insight (Flick, 2014).
3. What are the perceptions and pedagogical practices of challenged teachers?	Primary/ secondary sources of data	Focus group discussions and workshops	Workshops challenged teachers' perceptions and pedagogical practices with regard to gender identity.

Secondary research question	Data source	Data collection instrument	The rationale for the chosen data instrument
4. Why is a teacher awareness programme essential in challenging teachers' perceptions and pedagogical practices with regard to gender identity at ECD centres?	Primary and secondary sources of data	Face-to-face individual semi-structured interviews with ECD teachers Focus group discussions and workshops Field notes to capture non-verbal communication and thoughts by the researcher conducting interviews. Document analysis of internal policies. A systematic review of national and international literature related to pedagogical practices regarding gender identity.	Semi-structured interviews allowed for eliciting data directly from the participants about existing policies that the centres used regarding gender identity at selected centres. The responses from the participants' interview sessions coupled with document analysis and systematic review of literature led to developing a framework that enhanced gender identity.

1.13.1 Semi-structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews can allow the researcher to gain knowledge by understanding teachers' perceptions and pedagogical practices concerning gender identity (King et al., 2018). The interviews can be captured using an audio recorder and documented in the form of verbatim transcripts of the recording. I conducted semi-structured interviews with the teachers of the participating schools. The aim was to gain insight into participants' lived experiences and understand the meaning behind their experiences (King et al., 2018). I used a voice recorder to record and verify all semi-structured interviews and transcribed these sessions verbatim (Bless et al., 2013).

1.13.2 Observation

Observation is an important data-gathering strategy for qualitative researchers since it gives an insider's perspective of events. Observations can assist with the understanding

of complex behaviour and interrelationships (Nieuwenhuis, 2016). I observed the teachers in their classrooms with an observation checklist (Strydom, 2011).

1.13.3 Field Notes

I used a research diary to reflect and document observations made during the focus group discussions and interview sessions. Throughout the study, I captured personal thoughts, observations and experiences in the research diary (Litchman, 2010).

1.13.4 Document Analysis

I conducted document analysis in preparation for the research I would undertake. This strategy involves the analysis of written material that contains information about the phenomenon that is being researched (Strydom, 2011). I analysed documents and policies such as the National Integrated ECD policy, early child development policy, national curriculum statement and the national curriculum framework from birth to four years.

1.13.5 Workshop

The collaboration between teachers and the researcher is enriched when there is collaboration to search for a solution to a problem (Duncan & Conner, 2013). I facilitated two workshop discussions for the participants of the research sites. During the first session, I observed the interaction between participants and accessed their verbally expressed opinions, perceptions and experiences with pedagogical practices concerning gender identity. In the second session, I requested participants to map their ideas of gender and then challenge their perceptions and practices (Ferreira & Ebersohn, 2012).

1.13.6 Focus Group Discussions

Focus group discussions are used for gathering data by exploring the discourses that influence everyday life, stimulating group discussion and the development of more data (Strydom, 2011). I conducted focus group discussions which discussed perceptions and pedagogical practices concerning gender identity at the ECD centres, and the implementation and feedback of the awareness programme. This enabled me to gain insight into teaching practice. The focus group discussion was audio-recorded and later transcribed (Nieuwenhuis, 2016).

1.13.7 Data Analysis and Interpretation

My data analysis and interpretation strategy are a dynamic and systematic continuous learning process to gain new insight as the study progresses. The steps in the data collection analysis in Figure 1.3 illustrate the research utilised for data collection and interpretation. The study adopted the thematic data analysis approach, which was carried out manually into the emerging themes and sub-themes. The collaborative discussion, interviews, observations, and field notes after the workshop were organised, coded, grouped into categories, and connections to emerging themes were then established.

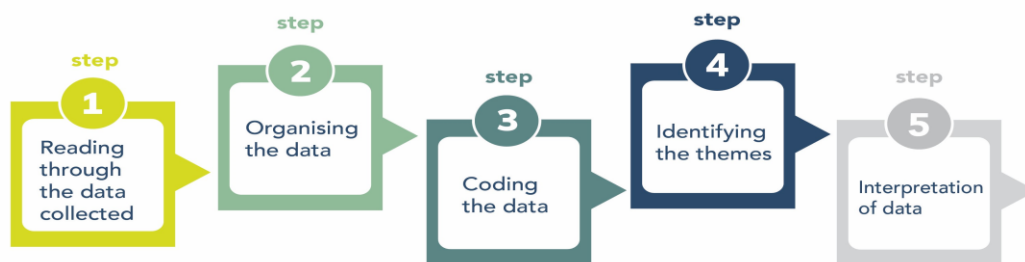


Figure 1.3: Steps of Data Collection Analysis

1.13.8 Trustworthiness

The following strategies were used to secure the accuracy and authenticity of the research:

- Crystallisation – several data collection techniques were used, which increased the trustworthiness of the research (Nieuwenhuis, 2016).
- Mechanical recording of data – The semi-structured interviews were audio-recorded after permission was obtained from the participants. The accuracy and completeness of the conversations were improved by using audio-recorded transcriptions (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014).
- Prolonged and persistent fieldwork – The in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted at the ECD centres to ensure that the participants' reality matched with the findings (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014). In addition, considerable efforts were made to ensure that no mistakes occurred during the research during the data collection and analysis phases.

- Member checking – All the participants were given copies of the transcripts to review to ensure that the accuracy and truthfulness of the records were verified (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014).

1.14 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The research was geographically specific to Gauteng Province in South Africa. The sample size was limited by time and financial constraints. The possible limitation was that the findings could not be generalised to other settings in other parts of the country. Therefore, this may suggest that research must be conducted in different locations in South Africa for the findings to be generalised.

1.15 ETHICAL CONSIDERATION

Research ethics provide guidelines for what is morally acceptable when data is gathered from participants. The researcher must be fully aware of the ethical implications when researching to protect the rights of the participants (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014). The purpose, aim, and relevant details of the study were explained before the commencement of the research to protect the rights of the participants. The participants were informed that they could withdraw from the research process at any stage. To ensure confidentiality and to guarantee anonymity, pseudonyms/codes were used to identify the participants. The potential benefits of the research findings were also shared with the participants., The criteria listed below comply with the ethical and legal guidelines while conducting research:

- Approval for the research from the Ethics Committee of the University of Pretoria, Faculty of Education, was obtained. The research adhered to the conditions set by the committee.
- Written permission from the Department of Education to conduct the study was obtained.
- All information extracted from the published and unpublished sources was declared as such in the research material using APA referencing guidelines.
- The researcher ensured that the participants would not be exposed to any harm or risk, physically or psychologically. (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014).

1.16 OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

The thesis was structured as follows:

Chapter 1: Overview and Rationale – The contextual information and problem statement of the study were outlined. The purpose of the study, the rationale, the supporting research questions driving the investigation, concept clarification, the conceptual framework and research methodology and ethical considerations were explained.

Chapter 2: Literature Review- Chapter 2 dissects the relevant available literature. It involves the discussion of the critical concepts supporting this study, such as ECE policies, factors affecting perceptions and pedagogical practices with regard to gender.

Chapter 3: Theoretical framework - This chapter describes three theorists and how their work contributes to the study's design and analysis of the findings. An understanding of post-structural theory, identity theory and agency theory are expounded and explored in the context of gender.

Chapter 4: Research Methodology – The clarification of the research structure and methods applied for the fieldwork and data gathering are discussed. The study's data collection methods, ethical issues and shortcomings are also explored in greater detail.

Chapter 5: Research Findings and Discussion – This chapter reveals the findings obtained from the information gathered during fieldwork. The findings are presented and then interrogated to provide answers to the research questions.

Chapter 6: Alignment of findings to the literature and theoretical framework-This chapter examines the findings concerning the pre-existing expectations created by the literature. The comparisons are explained, similarities between the study's results and literature are shown, differences are detected, existing silences in the literature are exposed, and new insights emerge from the study. The chapter also presents the findings guided by the conceptual framework also presented in this chapter.

Chapter 7: Summary of findings, conclusions and implications- This final chapter focuses on the conclusions which have been reached by answering the research questions. It also presents concepts for enhancing gender identity. The implications and recommendations emanating from the findings are highlighted. Other areas regarding the provisioning and use of resources at ECD centres that require further research are also pointed out.

1.17 CONCLUSION

This chapter provided an overview of the research. I incorporated the introduction, study background, purpose, reasoning, and research questions pertaining to the topic in the chapter. This chapter also briefly addressed the literature overview, theoretical framework, and methods. The chapter summarised the ethical concerns. Finally, the chapter outline was presented.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The preceding chapter described the study's rationale, concept definition, and background. The basic and secondary research topics were presented, and the study methodology was briefly explained. In this chapter (Chapter 2), there is an exploration of the existing literature on teachers' perceptions and pedagogical practices concerning gender identity in ECD centres. There will be an exploration of teachers' perceptions and pedagogical practices regarding the gender identity of young children internationally and nationally. In addition, this review focuses on aspects of South African education policies on ECE and the factors affecting gender identity. The role of the teacher in gender identity and the teacher's influence of pedagogical practices regarding gender identity will be expounded in ECE. Finally, the awareness programme will be discussed in relation to enhancing gender equality.

2.2 TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS AND PEDAGOGICAL PRACTICES REGARDING THE GENDER IDENTITY OF YOUNG CHILDREN INTERNATIONALLY AND NATIONALLY

Every teacher has individual experiences and beliefs surrounding gender. Any variance in perception may be based on gender bias, which is the result of deep-seated stereotypes (Snowman et al., 2009). Gender bias is perceiving others positively or negatively based on their particular gender (MacNaughton, 2006). At times, bias is so ingrained that it appears so subtle that an individual is unaware of its existence (MacNaughton, 2006). Heterosexuality and the notion of appropriate gender behaviours regulate teachers' behaviour by informing their beliefs about appropriate/inappropriate gendered identity in children (Aina & Cameron, 2011). Thus, behaviours are influenced by the heterosexual matrix, and there is negativity associated with homosexual behaviour (Robinson & Davies, 2016).

In ECCE, this is a problem as children are shamed or bullied when they deviate from the norm (Mashiya, 2018). Boys are often labelled homosexual when they display non-conforming behaviours, which concerns teachers (Robinson & Davies, 2016). Therefore, boys and girls receive different treatment regarding appropriate behaviour. Teachers often praise boys for engaging in masculine activities and criticise them for

engaging in feminine activities (Pardhan, 2011). Teachers want a better future for female students, but they are influenced by environmental factors, school pressure, deeply espoused gender beliefs and religious interpretations of male privilege. These perceptions of teachers in ECE reflect the tensions between the socio-political context of male privilege and practices which maintain existing patriarchal gender images (Pardhan, 2011).

An increasing number of children spend a larger portion of their time in early childhood centres, and teachers influence gender identity development (Aina & Cameron, 2011). Another influencing factor of gender identity is the teacher's instruction (Aina & Cameron, 2011). In the educational setting, teaching and learning is regulated through policy documents supporting performances that produce identities (Gildersleeve & Kleinhesselink, 2017). Gender identity construction is a complex process which affects race, class, language, ethnicity, religion, and teacher's pedagogies influence this process (Amina, 2015).

In the classroom, children develop and reinforce meaning about gender through their language and interactions with the teacher (Blaise, 2010). The interactions in the classroom are a reflection of gender stereotypes in society (Amina, 2015). Hence, teachers play an essential role in developing the learning condition for interaction, and the messages received through interaction construct gender identities. In my experience, I have observed that teachers play an essential role in children's gender identity, and the need for teachers to be challenged is imperative for gender equality. Therefore, the best practices were explored in countries that have made advances in teachers' perceptions and pedagogical practices in gender identity. Gender equality is a global aim, but many countries still lack sustainable strategies to promote equality. The Nordic countries are known for their proactive advances in gender, and these countries' practices will serve as an international comparative perspective to explore the rationale, practices and challenges of gender issues (Kreitz-Sandberg & Lahelma, 2021). The Nordic countries are the international drivers of gender equity. Furthermore, research in Africa will be illustrated, and finally, research in South Africa will be highlighted.

2.2.1 Sweden and Gender

Gender equality has been prominent in the Swedish curriculum since the 1960s. Sweden, Finland, Norway, Denmark and Iceland participated in the Nord-Lilia collaborated projects promoting gender equality. Sweden has a history of striving for gender equality at all levels of society, and recently, there has been a transition from women's rights to awareness concerning masculinity and encouraging male teachers in preschool education (Brody, 2015). Sweden's model of gender neutrality has been adopted in the Nordic Cooperation of Gender Equality. Gender neutrality influences policy, curriculum and critical pedagogy. The implication is that all genders should respect each other, cooperate and not create gender disparities (Bromseth & Sorensdotter, 2014). Gender neutrality challenges stereotyping and opens the mind to a wider range of gender predispositions that may not be congruent to traditional gender roles or gender features (Blomberg et al., 2014). It influences teachers to be more self-aware of how gender influences one's behaviour and relations in the classroom and society as a whole.

In addition, there is training for teachers on the legal framework so children are protected from abuse and discrimination (Chi, 2018). Therefore, girls and boys still have the same possibilities to test and develop capacities without the limitation of gender stereotypical roles, and can counter patterns outside of gender affiliation. Thus, all teachers' practices should treat children in the same manner so they do not feel inferior or superior, and all children should get the same space and time in the classroom (Blomberg et al., 2014). However, the teacher in ECE does not create an artificial wonderland but creates an awareness of diversity and develops respect and trust in all, regardless of race, gender, or economic situation (Odrowaz-Coates, 2015). Gender neutrality postulates a sense of comfort or fulfilment, freeing the child from the oppressive culture of gender stereotyping. In the classroom, there is a removal of gender-specific toys such as cars or dolls (Odrowaz-Coates, 2015). Gender-stereotypical words like brave and strong are avoided and the environment and games are gender neutral. There is an encouragement of inclusive language which deviates from the traditional gender norms. There are programmes and courses for teachers which enhance self-reflection to support gender neutrality at schools in Sweden (Favara, 2012). Firstly, there is a renewal in pre-school that is carried to universities and supported by the government to

promote gender neutrality at all levels (Odrowaz-Coates, 2015). In mathematics, there is a connection to art, music and dance so that barriers to gender in this field are eliminated (Odrowaz-Coates, 2015). Secondly, in literature, books have no gender stereotypes, and there are gender-free toys and animals in ECD centres. The language in the classroom is free from gender adjectives (Favara, 2012). In addition, the discipline practices are based on the democratic values that all children should be treated as equals. The rights of all children, irrespective of gender, are one of the central departure points of the Swedish national curriculum. The curriculum asserts that boys and girls, regardless of gender, have equal rights to develop their interests and skills. Even when compared to other Nordic nations, the Swedish curriculum is advanced in terms of encouraging gender equality in early childhood education (Odenbring, 2014).

Thirdly, children are given the same attention, and there are specific arrangements for activities, sports and toys so that both boys and girls are not restricted by their gender. Fourthly, to implement gender neutrality, staff members are employed to oversee the policy promoting gender equality (Engdahl, 2011). Finally, there are challenges from some parents who may not support the practice, but most schools receive positive support from parents (Odrowaz-Coates, 2015).

The Swedish National Agency for Education is the administrative authority for all public pre-schools, school childcare and the education of adults. It offers guidelines for the curriculum and supporting materials for teachers. In addition, the National Agency for Education in Sweden was committed to gender equality, initiating many projects, follow-ups and evaluation of gender. Gender-sensitive education became prominent in preschools and day-care. Gender-sensitive teaching indicates how teachers manage gender from primary schools to universities. However, despite Sweden's commitment to gender equality in policy documents, the implementation of gender pedagogy practices in the curriculum was criticised (Kreitz-Sandberg, 2013). Sweden revealed that since 2010, instead of challenging gender norms, stereotypes have been strengthened in children, preschool teachers and teacher educators. Thus, there were still traditional notions of women and girls in Swedish schools despite reforms in teacher education programmes (Hedlin & Åberg, 2018). As a result, gender lecturers were introduced to work on gender inclusion, building on gender as content and promoting gender-sensitive strategies and gender awareness (Kreitz-Sandberg, 2013). Gender mainstreaming is promoted at all universities. Teacher education programmes are

essential in highlighting equity perspectives in different teacher education programs (Kreitz-Sandberg, 2013). Therefore, Sweden followed a top-down approach in which all teachers had to present to the Swedish Higher Education Authority how they worked with gender equality (Bartlett & Vavrus, 2017).

In Sweden, gender-inclusive projects such as gender pedagogy, equity work, queer or norm-critical pedagogy, and feminist and post-human pedagogy were formulated during the last three decades (Lahelma, 2011). The Swedish Higher Education Authority evaluates higher education programmes continuously, and gender equality is a prominent quality criterion. In 2016, the gender equality perspective was a goal anchored in education's design, implementation and content (Kreitz-Sandberg & Lahelma, 2021). The focus shifted from a feminist perspective to a goal towards equality between men and women. The amendment of the national curriculum for schools in Sweden took a step towards overcoming the traditional view of genders to a more inclusive formulation regardless of how gender was exhibited throughout the curriculum. This was regarded as the answer to the criticism of hetero-normative views on gender (UKA, 2016).

In conclusion, gender equality in ECE is a quest for social justice influenced by technological advances and critical pedagogy. New phenomena bring new issues, solutions, and visions of societal order that challenge and undermine existing norms and customs (Odrowaz-Coates, 2015). The Swedish norm of pedagogical thinking is gender neutrality, which is embedded in the perception of gender equality (Odrowaz-Coates, 2015). The postulation of gender equality cascades from the pre-schools to the work and professional life of the Swedes. Gender neutrality makes a difference in teachers' perceptions and pedagogical practices to create a more equal society (Odrowaz-Coates, 2015).

2.2.2 Norway and Gender

Norway is regarded as one of the world's most gender-equal nations. Norwegian society embraces egalitarian ideals, with the conviction that everyone are equal and deserve equal rights. (Webster & Siankata, 2016). Egalitarian values are manifested throughout Norwegian society, and there is a commitment to attaining gender equality (Larsen, 2021). Gender in Norway is regulated by the Norwegian Gender Act, which was developed in 1979, and there has been a promotion of gender equality in the school

curriculum (Webster & Siankata, 2016). Gender equality is mandated by law in Norwegian kindergartens and schools. Norway has a high degree of female labour force participation. Their labour market, however, is one of the most gender-segregated in Europe (Meland & Kaltvedt, 2019). All boys and girls have equal education rights regardless of their social and cultural background. There have been some challenges, but Norway successfully implemented gender equality, as set out below.

Firstly, the Norwegian government implemented a gender policy in which both genders are treated as equals and no one gender is preferred. The Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research has a clear policy on gender equality, so teachers feel obligated to implement it. Teachers' lives are influenced by gender equality since they grew up in a culture that values gender equality (Webster & Siankata, 2016).

Secondly, the United Nations (UN) was committed to gender equality, and therefore, it featured as an essential aspect of progressing towards gender equality and empowerment. Norwegian education system introduced gender equality to children early, so it became part of their lives. Gender equality is seen as a prerequisite for a peaceful and sustainable planet. Giving girls and boys equal access to education, health care, and participation in political and economic decision-making would help to preserve economies and humankind as a whole (Webster & Siankata, 2016).

Thirdly, teachers incorporate gender equality in all the classrooms. Teachers use different skills, methods, discipline techniques and experiences to promote gender equality. In ECE, the children's daily practice revolves around discipline. Teachers use discipline methods which promote gender equality regardless of the child's background, and through the promotion of gender equality, each child will feel important. Furthermore, these methods will positively influence children's confidence and improve their learning so that everyone is equal, whether they are a boy or girl (Webster & Siankata, 2016).

The children in schools in Norway come from a background where gender equality is not an issue but is accepted as a part of life. Teachers clarify policy on gender equality, and gender equality is studied in social science, which assists children in looking at issues objectively (Webster & Siankata, 2016). Thus, gender equality is strongly promoted in schools and by Norwegian teachers. The challenge is for Norway to

incorporate gender from kindergarten (ECE) through to high school, integrating it into the curriculum and many other activities involving children.

In addition, teachers' practices and the use of material are essential in promoting gender equality by ensuring that boys and girls have equal opportunities to be heard (Borve & Borve, 2017). However, there are still different gender patterns in kindergartens where traditional gender stereotyping is experienced (Meland & Kaltvedt, 2019). As a result, kindergartens must analyse their behaviours to fight traditional gender roles, disrupt continuing gender role practices and enable transformation within kindergarten practices (Meland & Kaltvedt, 2019).

Fourthly, Nordic countries collaborated regarding gender equality, especially in establishing a curriculum framework to break down gender stereotypes and promote alternative forms of masculinity, education and career choices. Norway is a member of the UN and Nordic countries, where equality between males and females is fundamental to promoting gender equality in societies. The Nordic cooperation on gender has made the region the most gender-equal region in the world. Norway was one of the first countries to give women the right to vote. Furthermore, Norway had one of the first Nordic female Prime Ministers, the first female Bishop and has representation of both males and females on various boards (Webster & Siankata, 2016).

2.2.3 Finland and Gender

The international declarations concerning gender equality were defined in the 1970s, and governments and educational institutions were obligated to implement legislation to promote gender equality through education. The Commission of Gender Equality in Finland influenced gender equality by reforms in education. Firstly, the Commission focused on providing teachers with a readiness to promote gender equality in their profession. Therefore, there was a basic course in gender studies for teacher education (Lahelma & Tainio, 2019). In the Nordic countries, there was collaboration regarding gender equality, especially in establishing a curriculum framework for teacher education.

Nordic forums in the 1980s, which developed research seminars and gender equality projects, were influential in the early work in Finland. Finland supported the prominent gender equality project of Nord-Lilia, but the project at that stage was only implemented by a few teachers, researchers and several schools. In 1995, when Finland became a

member of the European Union, there was an increase in the number of equality projects resulting from feminist gender researchers in education (Lahelma, 2011). The important role of teachers in promoting gender equality has been illustrated. The primary aim was to challenge traditional gender roles and stereotypes (Lahelma & Tainio, 2019). UNESCO provided a guide for gender equality as it included gender-responsive policies, plans, gender-sensitive material and pedagogy. However, it was difficult to implement gender in teacher training because it was associated with feminism, and the discourse of boys' underachievement indicates that teachers are aware of gendered patterns. In addition, there have been problems with the concepts of gender equality in ECE (Lahelma & Tainio, 2019).

Thirdly, there was the adoption of the term gender awareness instead of gender equality. The concept of gender awareness aimed to promote gender equality through teacher education with understanding that there are differences between women and men based on learned behaviour. In the educational context, gender awareness means becoming aware of the experiences and stereotypes of boys and girls (Lahelma & Tainio, 2019). The implementation of the TASUKO (Gender Awareness in Teacher Education) project in 2007 aimed to promote inclusive gender awareness in curricula and practices in all institutions in Finland. Many projects and reports have provided innovations for promoting gender equality awareness and challenging educational segregation. Furthermore, the principle of intersectionality was illustrated. Therefore, categories of ethnicity, age, sexuality, culture and health influence an individual's perception of gender. Gender awareness became imperative for gender-responsive politics, policies, and pedagogical practices (Kreitz-Sandberg, 2013). In university teaching, gender inclusion integrated ideas of gender mainstreaming and gender sensitivity (Lahelma & Tainio, 2019).

Finland developed more collaboration in the national project, and gender awareness was defined as a goal for teacher education programmes. In addition, gender equality dominated policies to ensure that social institutions shape the context of gender equality work (Lahelma & Tainio, 2019). However, Finland experienced difficulties as project-based work was developed from the outside and was not met with enthusiasm from institutions. In addition, there was difficulty in integrating theoretical and critical analysis into teacher education (Lahelma & Hynninen, 2012). Teachers and student teachers who were involved with TASUKO began to see the relationship between gender

inequalities and practices of teaching, learning and the gender difference patterns in their own lives. It was indicated that teachers promote gender equality at schools when they have experienced issues of inequality (Lahelma & Hynninen, 2012). However, there were problems associated with male teachers feeling embarrassed to take gender courses as they felt negative feelings of being responsible for the current state of affairs, leading to personal relationship problems (Lahelma, 2014).

The TASUKO project was further developed by examining the challenges, which led to the Gender Equality Act, which persuaded deans, teacher training institutions and administrators for changes towards gender awareness teaching (Lahelma & Hynninen, 2012). The project drew from feminist researchers, teacher training institutions, and teachers engaged in gender awareness. The project began by examining the curriculum, textbooks and other learning materials to include gender awareness (Lahelma & Tainio, 2019). The action plans for universities for the promotion of gender equality in ECE were superficial, and therefore, the project built a national network as well as organised local, national and international workshops and conferences. Small-scale innovations for new teacher courses and the development of seminars for student organisations were introduced. TASUKO also provided publications and a web page for schools and teacher education. The members of TASUKO gave presentations on various platforms and developed a strategy for positive networking (Lahelma & Tainio, 2019).

Fourthly, there were changes in teacher education, and TASUKO developed a task to implement the ideas of gender awareness and equal education in the structures, curricula and teaching in all education units. Therefore, since the development of TASUKO, there have been new courses in the curricula, new content has been incorporated, and pedagogical innovation has been established (Ahmed, 2012). Furthermore, gender studies have been developed at postgraduate level. However, after many years of the TASUKO projects, there are some challenges, as there are currently new trends of hostility towards women (Ahmed, 2012). Therefore, there were many programmes, such as ECE and primary education, where male teachers were preferred for job applications. The discourse of a lack of male teachers continues to be a challenge in education (Skelton, 2011).

Fifthly, after the creation of TASUKO, the primary teacher education programme designed a new course on education and social justice. This course addressed gender, sexuality, and intersectionality. As a result, gender concerns had a higher profile, and teachers focused more on gender in their instruction. These developments resulted in the creation of GENTE (Gender in Nordic Teacher Education), a resource that offered a web page with a bibliography, literature, and other material regarding gender in education. As a result, gender neutrality emerged, which claimed that not discussing gender renders gender invisible. However, when people avoid talking about gender, there is a risk of subtle sexism (Engelberg, 2016). Finland has implemented various projects, from developing gender programmes in teacher training to TASUKO and GENTE, intending to take small steps in raising gender awareness in Finnish society.

2.2.4 Denmark and Gender

Denmark forms part of the Nordic model, which includes gender equality as an important dimension for gender equality, as well as being a member of the European Union countries. Denmark and other Nordic countries rank among the top on gender equality indexes in the world. Despite challenges, the following key features have been highlighted as some of their success with gender equality. Firstly, like the other Nordic countries, Denmark has infused policy with education management planning and staffing. Nordic countries share a common policy to ensure that there is non-discrimination. The commitment to gender policies and planning assisted in the gender mainstreaming of processes and practices in education (Heikkinen & Lämsä, 2017). In addition to policy, schools have the institutional capacity to ensure gender-based security from ECCE to tertiary institutions. There needs to be a secure school environment with equal access to education to ensure that children's rights are not hampered (Chi, 2018).

Secondly, there is gender equality training for ECCE teachers to prevent discrimination, harassment and the violation of children's rights. There is gender awareness training for teachers in the curriculum, and teachers have relevant skills to prevent gaps (Xu et al., 2020). In addition, the governance mechanism is important as ECCE policy design and implementation involve all levels of the education system, from the national educational authorities to municipality authorities and kindergarten administrators (Heikkinen & Lämsä, 2017). Denmark is facing the challenge of an influx of immigrants into the

country and is attempting to use the legal, political and economic platforms of societal participation. Denmark is investing considerable resources and sensitivity into the economic integration of women. Denmark's strength is working with women to bridge societal gaps (Brix, 2012). Therefore, the nature of ECCE multi-stakeholder engagement between all the role players prevents a disconnect between institutions and policy developers, thus building synergy to ensure efficient planning and implementation of policies (Chi, 2018).

Thirdly, there were budget allocations in Denmark and other Nordic countries for gender equality. Some Nordic countries have budgets dedicated to promoting gender equality in ECCE, and these countries evaluate access to alternative resources to fund projects promoting gender-sensitive pedagogy in early childhood learning settings, such as websites for ECCE teachers involved in gender equality (Chi, 2018). Special project funding encourages teachers to experiment with new approaches to gender equality in ECCE (Heikkinen, 2017).

Finally, the Nordic countries have a network of support from teachers to develop gender awareness in pre-service training and continuing professional development to improve the ECCE teacher workforce pursuing gender equality. Furthermore, Nordic countries have budget allocations, gender empowerment policies, and projects that develop gender awareness. However, stereotypical practices can persist in Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden despite established policies, legislation and training (Chi, 2018). Therefore, teachers need professional development and support in enhancing gender-sensitive pedagogy and dismantling their gender stereotypes. The network of support can strengthen gender awareness in the classroom through regional collaborations, teacher support networks, and online educational resource development (Chi, 2018).

2.3 AFRICA AND GENDER IDENTITY

Africa is home to the fastest-growing economies, offering an exciting frontier for business expansion into new markets. The continent has a rapidly growing population, and there are technological advances. However, women should share equally on the journey to prosperity. Gender equality progress has stalled in many African countries and women lag in most areas of life. Therefore, it is imperative that women reach their full potential; otherwise, Africa will not transform (Debusscher & Ansoms, 2013). The foundation of development for gender is education, and more particularly, ECCE.

2.3.1 Rwanda and Gender

The Rwandan genocide of 1994 is one of the most defining tragedies of the late twentieth century. However, since the conclusion of the genocide, the Rwandan government has rebuilt the state, and there have been developments to enhance gender equality in ECCE (Gready, 2010). However, concerns have been voiced about women's participation in parliament, given the patriarchal constraint of the Rwandan state (Debusscher & Ansoms, 2013). I will discuss significant gender equality programs that succeed in confronting cultural attitudes and behaviours that perpetuate gender inequality.

Firstly, Rwanda has made a firm commitment in the political and social realms to achieve gender equality and practise a policy of affirmative action to promote educational and social advancements in realising the developmental goals of the country (Debusscher & Ansoms, 2013). Furthermore, the Rwandan government has implemented several policies and actions to promote gender equality in ECCE. These measures included raising the number of female teachers, providing scholarships to female students, educating teachers about gender inequities, and upgrading ablution and dormitory facilities. However, funding restrictions prohibit the policies from being implemented (Straus & Waldorf, 2011). Therefore, a stated commitment to promoting the status of women and a good ECCE policy framework is insufficient to achieve gender parity, as several social practices prevent girls from accessing education. Hence, the status of girls must be lifted by socio-economic development. The education of girls is essential in strengthening the economy and other developmental indicators such as decreasing HIV/AIDS, reducing birth rates, improving the health indicators of entire families and developing Rwanda (Straus & Waldorf, 2011).

Secondly, despite strategies to promote girls' educational attainment, several social and institutional barriers impair girls' performance in ECE. Girls continue to lag behind males in completion and performance in school. Therefore, attendance for girls is generally lower. Females in Rwanda have been historically marginalised from the educational system, and there are changes, but stereotypes continue to prioritise boys' education (Ansons & Rostagno, 2012). In addition, poverty is a barrier, and despite the elimination of fees at the primary level, many other costs, such as books, uniforms and school lunches, hinder girls from accessing education from ECCE to tertiary education.

Patriarchal social traditions, gender-biased curriculum and teaching methods still dictate that boys should go to school as they will likely find employment opportunities. The lack of facilities, discrimination and gender-based violence are barriers which prevent girls from attending school (Ansoms & Rostagno, 2012).

Rwanda must guarantee that gender mainstreaming activities are included into district and municipal educational policy in all ECD centres. To increase educational success, school administrators and instructors must accept gender equality ideals (Ansoms & Rostagno, 2012). There should be an increase in retention rates and admission rates for girls. Thus, the government has to implement affirmative action for girls with policies that provide favourable female role models (Debusscher & Ansoms, 2013). Therefore, gender equality policies in Rwanda are within the context of the authoritarian governance model, which does not facilitate bottom-up participation (Ansoms & Murison, 2012). Finally, policies and practices should acknowledge the role of class, location and ethnicity in realising gender equality in Rwanda.

2.3.2 Namibia and Gender

Namibia was a German colony, and later, the country was mandated under the administration of South Africa. The colonial history has impacted the Namibian people, creating a pattern of gross inequalities. To address the gross inequalities, the new government of Namibia developed gender equality policies. Namibia ranks 12th globally and fourth on the African continent for women in parliament (Shejavali, 2018). Namibia's government and citizens expressed strong support for gender equality and endorsed mandatory gender quotas to improve women's representation in leadership. Namibia has sufficient policies to address inequalities, and these policies significantly impact women's lives, especially due to economic, institutional and cultural pressure. However, despite the improvement in women's leadership, Namibians still experience gender-based discrimination (Shejavali, 2018). Therefore, despite attempts to improve Namibia's performance on the Millennium Development towards gender equality and empowerment in ECD, the progress has been insignificant (Weylandt, 2018).

Key developments played a role in improving gender despite the implementation of policies on improving gender issues. Girls continue to experience inequality in ECCE. In Namibia, more girls are enrolled at school than boys. However, more boys remain in secondary school than girls (Weylandt, 2018). Therefore, more girls drop out of primary

school due to education barriers. Gender stereotypes prevail in various forms in the education system (Sasman, 2012). Discriminatory cultural perceptions and practices include early marriage, abuse, gender stereotype resource curriculum, dropping out early from school as a result of domestic duties and taking care of family members infected with HIV/Aids at home (Weylandt, 2018). Thus, to promote gender equality, the departure point is to ensure that the government and society implement policies and measures to ensure girls remain at school (Sasman, 2012).

The government must address gender issues that impact school attendance and performance in ECCE. Traditional customs, gender-based violence, and girls' workloads are all obstacles in Namibia (Sasman, 2012). The opportunity cost in terms of the service rendered to the family by boys or girls impacts their education. However, services affect girls more, so they often have to drop out of school (Sasman, 2012). The barriers that need addressing in Namibia also affect other African countries, such as reducing school fees for girls, employing more female teachers, changing attitudes to girls' education, and tackling gender-based violence and harassment. Therefore, by ensuring girls have equal educational opportunities, governments can have a huge impact on gender equality.

Thus, OECD has made education central to gender transformation by providing individuals with opportunities and capabilities to challenge discriminatory practices and attitudes (Walker et al., 2019). In addition, UNICEF has indicated that girls can be agents of change by working to transform social norms and systemic barriers to gender equality (UNICEF, 2023). Therefore, the UN task force has been very critical of Namibia's gender progress as there are still high rates of gender-related violence, low rates of reproductive health care and low completion rates at school. It was suggested that women should be given equal opportunities for land ownership, attaining housing title and access to credit (Shejavali, 2018). Namibia needs to emphasise literacy, adult education, and ECCE programmes that are not gender neutral should be avoided. Thus, to achieve gender equality, policies and practices have to commence in ECE, and other societal barriers must be addressed.

2.3.3 Lesotho and Gender

In Lesotho, the dominant discourses of gender give ascendancy to masculinities and femininities, which uphold inequitable gender relations. Early child centres are social

arenas in which gender relations are constructed and constantly challenged. Schools play a role in reinforcing and challenging gender inequality (Morojele, 2011). The curriculum and pedagogical practices within ECE play an important role in perpetuating inequality between boys and girls (Morojele, 2011). There have been some areas in which Lesotho has made strides to improve gender equality. Despite the socio-economic challenges, Lesotho has the highest literacy rates in Africa for women (Lekhetho, 2018). Firstly, Lesotho adheres to numerous international policies and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) that target gender inequality. The country exceeded the MDGs regarding girls' enrolment at primary school. Secondly, Lesotho passed the free primary education policy into law as many children did not attend school as parents could not pay school fees (Morojele, 2011). The Lesotho government is committed to ensuring that children are enrolled at school and ensuring ECCE is of good quality.

However, despite these implementations, there were significant challenges. Teachers played a role in encouraging girls to conform to gender roles in ECE. Teachers are not gender sensitive; therefore, the perceptions among teachers and parents are that boys are good at science and mathematics. In addition, teachers perceive that girls are good at languages and home economics, and these gender roles are some of the causes of gender disparities (Lekhetho, 2018). On the other hand, there is the herd-boy phenomenon; child labour and the eventual low participation of boys can be linked to high poverty rates (Lekhetho, 2018). In addition, when resources are scarce, parents would rather send girls to school as their education could be a safety net when they experience marriage problems or remain unmarried (Lekhetho, 2018).

Therefore, the curriculum-infused discourses affirmed inequitable relations between boys and girls in ECE (Lekhetho, 2018). Patriarchal ideologies continue to put boys under pressure to attain hegemonic masculinities. The ideologies play a role in sexual violence, a problem in Lesotho. The schooling environment is unsafe, and boys and girls find it difficult to challenge stereotypical values of gender. Lesotho has not addressed teacher training and gender workshops for teachers; as a result, teachers have not been sensitised to gender issues in ECCE. In addition, Lesotho has to infuse HIV/AIDS awareness with gender programmes for teachers, as the pandemic is a major problem in the country. Despite the development of policies, budget allocations and gender and gender equality strategies in the African countries, there are significant

gender inequalities compared to the Nordic countries. Therefore, the fundamental gender equality driver in South Africa and the rest of Africa is that the training programmes should address gender awareness training which influences the gender identity of girls and boys.

2.3.4 South Africa and Gender

The South African setting is marked by high levels of unemployment, poverty, deep-seated gender inequities regarding women's incomes and access to labour markets, and significant levels of violence against women. South Africa is a patriarchal country, and many South Africans' opinions regarding gender are strongly rooted in gender polarity ideology, which maintains unequal gender interactions in ECE (Mayeza, 2018). Poverty is one of the most challenging problems in South Africa (Gutura & Manomano, 2018). The unemployment rate is high, and the previously African population is affected by high unemployment rates (Mayeza, 2018). Since the demise of apartheid, the poverty rates have declined, but many South Africans remain poor (Nwosu & Ndinda, 2018). Despite the South African constitution that supports gender equality, the country continues to be characterised by strong patriarchal values and stereotypes of masculinity and femininity (Mayeza, 2018). A common feature of gender inequality internationally and in South Africa is poverty. Women have a different experience of poverty than men. Poverty has more severe ramifications for the girl child than boys in South Africa (Gutura & Manomano, 2018).

2.3.4.1 Gender and Poverty in South Africa

In South Africa, females comprise the majority of the most marginalised and impoverished sectors. South African females are more likely to belong to poorer households than males, and women-headed households are poorer than male-headed households (Nwosu & Ndinda, 2018). There has recently been an increase in women-headed households in South Africa. Since women have a higher incidence of poverty than men, poverty is feminised (Gutura & Manomano, 2018). The predominance of patriarchy and rigid social traditions has influenced many factors in the feminisation of poverty (Gutura & Manomano, 2018). Maintaining the patriarchal power excluded women from the mainstream of South African life as females are accorded lower status than males and, therefore, controlled by the males (Nwosu & Ndinda, 2018).

Many causes of gender inequality are rooted in patriarchy, prohibiting girls from acquiring education to empower themselves. The assumptions of girls as carers, mothers and household labourers give the girl child a negative perception of the education, life and career choices available to them (Gutura & Manomano, 2018). Patriarchy influences society, where parents make choices between girls and boys based on traditional gender stereotypes. In addition, males are threatened by educated girls unless they are well-educated. Rigid traditions and beliefs are embedded in pre-colonial traditions in many African countries (Warrington & Kiragu, 2012). Girls are expected to do all the domestic labour such as cleaning, cooking, and caring for the family and therefore, girls have no time for study. Furthermore, they often spend many hours on domestic chores and do not attend school regularly (Warrington & Kiragu, 2012). As a result of their domestic roles, girls are forced to drop out of school and marry at a young age. The feminisation of poverty results in the sexual abuse of the girl child, child forced marriage, commercial sexual exploitation of the girl child, the impact of HIV/AIDS and poor quality of education (Gutura & Manomano, 2018). South Africa uses social protection policies to protect citizens from poverty in the form of social security programmes which attempt to readdress the inequalities of gender from the past (Plagerson et al., 2019). However, various social and economic inequalities impact the children in South Africa. Apartheid has played an instrumental role in depriving children of access to healthcare, social services and ECE (Ashley-Cooper et al., 2019).

2.3.4.2 Gender and ECD in South Africa

In recent years, ECD education has featured as a theme in the international dialogue. Therefore, the UN has adopted a resolution regarding children's rights internationally (Makhubele & Baloyi, 2018). Girls' education is core to the development in South Africa and other African countries. Developing gender equality is difficult to achieve, but some countries have made some progress in expanding girls' participation. The World Education forum and the Millennium Development Goals have accelerated ECD policy development. Early childhood development programmes play a critical role in offsetting inequalities by protecting children against the effects of poverty, poor nutrition, inadequate health care and a lack of education (Gutura & Manomano, 2018).

Early childhood development programmes have provided profound developmental opportunities as they enable children to develop to their full potential, thus resulting in

increased primary school enrolment, enhanced school performance and lower drop-out rates (Van der Gaag & Putcha, 2015). Despite the developments in ECD, the historically segregated apartheid policies and socio-economic inequalities have created adversities for most African children (Makhubele & Baloyi, 2018). In South Africa, four million children under six years of age live in the poorest households. The poorest children have the least opportunities for development as they have inadequate access to education, health care and social services (Aubrey, 2017). Since 1994, various laws, policies and programmes have been developed to meet the child's needs in ECE. The constitution of South Africa guarantees that all children will have a right to basic education, family, basic health, nutrition, social services, a healthy environment, language and culture (RSA, 2015). This has increased the enrolment of girls, but girls cannot access education on an equal basis with boys. Furthermore, girls face many obstacles like discriminatory treatment, sexual abuse, constant harassment and negative societal attitudes toward females (Gutura & Manomano, 2018). Thus, many girls drop out of school and face poverty issues. In addition, girls are forced into low-paying caring and nurturing professions, increasing their vulnerability to poverty (Gutura & Manomano, 2018). Girl children face discrimination, unequal opportunities and unfair treatment in schools.

Despite success in increasing ECD programmes, children in this nation are subjected to differences in ECD programme distribution, including varying levels of quality and finance. Age, colour, gender, handicap, socioeconomic level, language, provinces, and the urban/rural split vary (Ashley-Cooper et al., 2019). Thus, structural obstacles such as a drop in government subsidies, parents unable to pay fees at ECD centres, inadequate ECD teacher training, the skills gap, infrastructural concerns, and a lack of experience required to care for children have impeded ECD programmes (Makhubele & Baloyi, 2018).

The South African government recognizes the socioeconomic benefits of investing in ECD. Government and non-profit organisations have enhanced ECD education availability and quality. The new National Integrated Childhood Development Policy presents a complete and integrated package accessible to all children. According to the policy, ECD is a universal right of children and is available to all children from conception to age five (Ashley-Cooper et al., 2019). However, the implementation strategy has yet to materialise more than two years after the policy's creation. While the South African

government has taken ECD more seriously, substantial obstacles have arisen in South Africa. There is a lack of government support and inadequate funds to implement policy goals. Secondly, the government's institutional frameworks for successful ECD programme execution are currently inadequate (Ashley-Cooper et al., 2019). Thirdly, there is a lack of ECD organisation and resources to provide for ECD programmes, which will impact the number of children who require comprehensive ECD programmes. The reality in South Africa is that despite excellent ECD policies, the political will and the insubstantial budget allocations did not support policy implementation (Ashley-Cooper et al., 2019). Fifthly, there is a lack of training for ECD teachers. There is currently a mushrooming of ECD centres in rural areas, and ECD teachers have limited training.

As a result of the lack of training and limited skills, knowledge and training, these teachers are not aware of gender stereotypes. The Flemish Association for Development Cooperation and Technical Assistance developed a practical toolkit for gender-responsive pedagogy in KwaZulu Natal in South Africa. However, the research recommended that there needs to be further awareness training for parents, teachers, and school management teams to ensure gender equality (Ismail et al., 2022). Therefore, teachers continue to reinforce gender inequalities. It is imperative that teachers have the necessary training, and there needs to be follow-up support and training to make them aware of gender inequalities (Makhubele & Baloyi, 2018). In South Africa, the availability of financial resources and adequate infrastructure is essential to ensure that ECD programmes are successful. However, a major problem is insufficient, unhygienic and unsafe environments, especially in the rural areas, which is a barrier for girls accessing ECD centres. Thus, private organisations and businesses must collaborate in the development of ECD programmes which are income-generating so that their sustainability can be strengthened (Makhubele & Baloyi, 2018).

2.4 THE IMPORTANCE OF THE ROLE OF THE TEACHER IN GENDER IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT

Early childhood education has been based upon the principles of developmentally appropriate practices described by psychological literature from the twentieth century. The social and economic contexts influenced the learning theories, which need to be challenged as ECE has often alienated gender (Blaise, 2012). Therefore, in recent

times, these contentions have been challenged, and ECE has facilitated the process of reconceptualising alternative views and practices that impact pedagogy and practices (Blaise, 2012). Gender stereotypes shape our behaviour, education, career choices, ambitions and relationships. These stereotypes influence how children perceive themselves and others, develop their potential, and relate with others (Huysmans et al., 2021). The construction of gender identity is a complex process that begins at the formative stage of development. Early childhood development plays a significant role in developing children's gender identity (Baig, 2015). Gender bias affects both boys and girls as the classroom environment prepares them for developing their personalities and future gender roles. Children develop certain perceptions from home, which also contribute to the gender discourse in the school context. Teachers promote these gender role stereotypes in the social context of the schools (Baig, 2015).

Research in the United States of America, Sweden, Spain, Serbia, India and Kenya revealed that ECD teachers arrange play environments, games, play spaces, and storytelling tend to be influenced by gender (Muasya & Kazungu, 2018). Serbia illustrated that girls performed gendered play in the kitchen, and the teacher favoured girls over boys because girls behaved in a way that corresponded with the feminine nature of the kindergarten culture. Gender-stereotyped activities could lead to rigid rules and prejudices (Breneselovic & Krnjaja, 2016). According to research conducted in Kerala, India and Pakistan, teachers are more likely to support guys in debates and group discussions, whereas ladies continue to receive less attention in different class activities (Fousiya & Musthafa, 2016).

Thus, teachers need to be challenged to engage in contemporary ideas and practices stemming from ideas that have emerged from other disciplines. Thus, ECD teachers must be conscious of practices and learning environments promoting equality and social justice (Blaise, 2012). Of primary concern is gender stereotypes, which need to be criticised as the traditional expectations of boys and girls have limited their potential. Teachers often regulate how they interact with children, and we must challenge our assumptions to recreate practices based on equality so we can move forward in the twenty first century.

Early childhood education has become important for children younger than five years of age as children spend over ten hours at ECD centres (Spjeldnes et al., 2010). In

America, 56% of children are in early child care centres and spend an average of 35 hours a week in the care of someone other than their parents (National Centre for Education Statistics, 2013). Therefore, there were close to 70% of 4-year-olds and almost 87% of 5-year-old children attending early childhood institutions (Statistics South Africa, 2019). Early childhood is the foundation for the construction of gender identities, and children's learning are culturally shaped within a particular context (Lancy et al., 2010). How we perceive ourselves results from relationships with our parents, caregivers and other individuals we interacted with during these formative years (Mashiya, 2018). Therefore, gender identity is a complicated process initiated in the early formative years as children attempt to understand how boys and girls are positioned in society (Baig, 2015).

2.4.1 Research in Pakistan

In Pakistan, most of the population lacks access to early childhood programmes, and children are influenced by religious gender socialisation that establishes gender inequality as a normative practice. Early childhood development programmes and efforts in poor nations may help to reduce gender disparities. However, investment in ECE and gender in Pakistan has been modest as it is an Islamic country and gender norms are influenced by the teachings of Islam. Therefore, parental consultations are imperative in developing gender transformation. Gender identity development occurs in the classroom and is impacted by the teacher's own gender identity experiences and perspectives. Gender roles are formed in the educational environment, and classrooms are where gendered identities are learned. Teachers are often ignorant of the gendered signals they communicate via their instruction and instruction. Gender stereotypes in educational contexts are encouraged (Baig, 2015).

Research in Pakistan by Baig (2015) illustrated that teachers in ECE play a significant role in developing, practising and reinforcing gender relationships. Teachers present curricula that contain stereotypic attitudes and behaviours. As a result, gendered signals are delivered within school contexts via verbal and nonverbal interactions between children and teachers (Baig, 2015). Children internalise gender stereotypes, which influence their tastes and behaviours. (De Groot Kim, 2011). In ECD, the most subtle ways that teachers shape gender identity is through child and teacher interactions taking place in the classroom, which reflect gender stereotypes of society (Baig, 2015).

Teachers are primary developers of a classroom environment because they influence the construction of the learning atmosphere and conditions for student interaction (Baig, 2015). Teachers, therefore, have some stereotypical expectations that influence children's gendered identity. Stereotypes define how men and women should behave, and they limit the accepted behaviours. Gender messages are received through interactions, and the classroom environment influences children's gender identities (Baig, 2015). The spaces, play materials, books, illustrations and language usage convey messages regarding gender roles (Aina & Cameron, 2011). The use of language in the classroom plays a role in the gender identity development of children through interactions. Children construct their identities through interactions. Therefore, the learning environment, resources, and learning material influence gender identity (Baig, 2015). Children categorise information by gender from an early age, influenced by clothing and choice of toys (Aina & Cameron, 2011). Children's participation in curricular and co-curricular activities socialise themselves into gender roles. Therefore, teachers need to be challenged so that they reflect on their teaching and learning in the classroom, which unconsciously promotes gender stereotypes (Jacobson, 2011).

Gender stereotypes are reinforced in classrooms. Teachers' practice in Pakistan is shaped by their perceptions about gender interactions in an Islamic society. As a result, females are assigned household tasks such as cleaning and dishwashing. Girls are groomed for future duties by being allocated to home tasks. Furthermore, whereas males are energetic, teachers prefer girls to be quiet, and their physical mobility is limited (Baig, 2015). Furthermore, whereas females are encouraged to pursue an interest in English, boys are encouraged to pursue an interest in mathematics (Baig, 2015). It is through these messages that children construct gendered identities.

2.4.2 Research in the United States of America

Early childhood is an important phase in gender development in the United States of America. Gender is displayed explicitly, and the differences between boys and girls are clear (Halim et al., 2013). The gender type of behaviour can be related to media, class and the teacher, but these behaviours reflect a developmental phenomenon that initiates the early phase of gender differences. Gender stereotyping emerges with the development of gender identity (Halim, 2016). Research by Halim (2016) was conducted on American children between two and six years of age, and it illustrated

those children rigidly being exposed to gender-stereotyped clothing, toys and activities. These children were African American, Mexican and Dominican, and highly rigid gendered typing was found across ethnic groups. The research illustrated that children displayed a gender-typed appearance, with differences in dress-up and toy play. Girls played dress-up more frequently than boys (Halim et al., 2013). Therefore, children adhered to gender norms as girls prefer to wear pink gowns while boys prefer to wear only superhero clothing.

Furthermore, Halim (2016) found an adherence to gender in activities, interests, toys and social relationships. Thus, children decipher gender and personalise the information while establishing gender identity (Halim et al., 2013). I agree with the various researchers that ECE is the bedrock of gender development as it profoundly affects gender. Gender continues to characterise many children across many realms of life (Halim et al., 2013). Teachers will guarantee that students can access diverse gender discourses in classrooms by questioning gender narratives. As a result, the teachers must be made aware of the gender problems they perpetuate in the classroom, and students must be allowed to examine various gender discourses. Teachers' activities shape their ideas that males and girls are different and need distinct treatment. Perceptions of teachers influence their instructional activities.

Research on teacher perceptions illustrated that boys are perceived as more independent, patriotic, and self-assured than girls (Berekashvili, 2012). These perceptions reflect gender stereotypes, as these attributes are associated with more masculine characteristics than feminine ones. In addition, boys and girls are disciplined differently. Girls are perceived to have different learning skills than boys in ECE. Thus, the study proves the persistence of gender-stereotyped expectations among teachers (Berekashvili, 2012). The gender-related differentiations promote gender inequality and build a basis for gender differentiation. Hence, teachers must examine and rethink their educational strategies to achieve a more gender-equitable school environment and society (Baig, 2015).

2.4.3 Research in Kenya

Early childhood education is crucial in enabling gender identity and stereotypes, which impact the development of the child (Muasya & Kazungu, 2018). It is essential that gender equality must be addressed from the early years of a child's life so gender

equality can be achieved (Pohjolainen & Westendorff, 2014). A study of fifteen preschool teachers in Kenya found that teachers must be conscious of their views, gender position, and beliefs and consider these during interactions with children (Pohjolainen & Westendorff, 2014). Children have limited perception of gender roles, and the task of preschool teachers is to guide boys and girls to be critical thinkers. How ECD teachers act and speak and their facial and body expressions show children how to act as girls and boys (Pohjolainen & Westendorff, 2014). The research revealed that through role play, songs, poems, story-telling and group work, there was emphasis on masculinity over femininity. In addition, teachers used resources such as pictures which portrayed boys as doctors or engineers while girls were displayed as nurses in the resources. The research illustrated that teachers continue to influence the role played by boys and girls in terms of masculinity and femininity. Teachers at ECD centres need to be challenged to use gender as a responsive pedagogy (Muasya & Kazungu, 2018).

2.5 TEACHERS' PEDAGOGICAL PRACTICES AND GENDER IDENTITY IN EARLY CHILDHOOD

An increasing number of children spend significant time in ECD centres, and therefore, teachers profoundly influence their gender identity development (Aina & Cameron, 2011). One of the main influencing factors of gender identity is the teacher's instruction. Teaching and learning are regulated by policy documents that support performances that endorse specific identities (Gildersleeve & Kleinhesselink, 2017). Gender identity construction is a complex process that affects race, class, language, ethnicity, and religion, and the teachers' pedagogies influence the process (Baig, 2015). It is through interactions with the teacher that gender identity is revealed. Research by Baig (2015) on teachers' interactions concluded that they actively facilitated the production and reproduction of gender in the classroom. Through interactions with the teacher, gender identity is revealed through both the school culture and society (Robinson & Jones-Diaz, 2016). The process involved in young children's gender identity formation through school experiences is distinctive in the growing body of research (Baig, 2015; Blaise, 2010; Robinson & Jones-Diaz, 2016).

In the classroom, children develop and reinforce meaning about gender through their talk and actions with the teacher (Blaise, 2010). Teachers shape children's gender identity within the classroom by interactions that reflect gender stereotypes in society.

Hence, teachers develop the learning conditions for interactions, and the messages received through interaction construct gender identities. In my experience, I have observed that teachers influence children's gender identity, and teachers must be challenged.

Research conducted by Pardhan (2011) explored the interaction between the teacher and gender identity. It was evident that the classroom practice reflected patriarchal structures, and teachers maintained deep-rooted cultural values of patriarchy (Pardhan, 2011). This research and other research from ECE have reflected gender differences in teacher's interactions with children (Pardhan, 2011). The research expounded that boys dominate classes and are more disciplined, praised and listened to than girls (Pardhan, 2011). In addition, boys were given higher-order questions, more strategies, and more challenges and tended to be perceived to have a more prominent ability in science and mathematics than girls (Halai, 2010). In research by Pardhan (2011), the interaction between the children and the teacher revealed an incorporation of patriarchal values. Therefore, boys were given more attention as they were more visible and problematic academically and socially (Pardhan, 2011). On the other hand, girls were more invisible, more compliant, received less attention and independently performed successfully (Pardhan, 2011). Thus, the differences in teaching practices in ECE reinforce gender identities (Pardhan, 2011). Hence, there is a need to challenge teacher practices through an awareness programme, as this is essential for gender equality. The study by Pardhan (2011) found that boys were perceived as responsible for earning and girls for caring for the family. I agree with the relationship between perception and the development of gender identity. Thus, challenging teacher perceptions through an awareness programme will encourage progress towards gender equality.

Furthermore, research by Gansen (2019) illustrated the differences in the teaching practices of discipline. Discipline enforces normative behaviour by correcting inappropriate or disruptive behaviour, which results in gender stereotyping to regulate boys' and girls' behaviour (Gilliam et al., 2016). The research illustrated that through the controlling of voices and reprimands, gender differences seemed to feel natural. Therefore, girls were reprimanded when they did not display appropriate behaviour like being responsible, respectful, and good manners (Gansen, 2019). Girls were expected to be passive and disciplined when displaying aggressive behaviour. In my experience, I have observed differences in gendered disciplinary teachers' practices.

In addition, there are gender differences in the management of the classroom. Classroom management is the process that involves the teachers and the administrators in maintaining appropriate and assertive behaviour in the classroom. Classroom management aims to develop children's progress and increase their academic engagement (Ahmed et al., 2018). Gender relations do not operate in a vacuum but influence how classrooms are managed. Research indicates that the teacher's gender influences classroom management. Female teachers focus more on teamwork and building relationships and are more organised in the classroom. However, male teachers are more authoritarian, rigid, assertive and aggressive than female teachers (Ahmed et al., 2018). Thus, differential treatment instils different behaviour, reproducing gender stereotypes and unequal gender roles in ECE. The need to challenge a change of behaviour is paramount for gender equality.

Therefore, policy and curriculum can steer practices in implicit and explicit ways (Kilderry, 2015). Policy offers guidelines which function as regulative ways to direct the construction of identities in early childhood settings (Kilderry, 2015). Early childhood teachers interact in multiple contexts, each affecting their professional identity (Rogers et al., 2015). The contexts which affect teachers include teacher education, policy, early childhood setting, gender, ethnicity, religion, family, sexuality, family, and history. Each of these contexts has a relational impact on their identity (Rogers et al., 2015).

The South African National Curriculum framework for the early years discusses identity and belonging. Identity is related to a child's development of their sense of self, and belonging is related to a child's identity (Department of Basic Education [DBE], 2015). Children that have a strong feeling of belonging have stable connections with people or groups that share particular values, customs, and beliefs (DBE, 2015). Therefore, this sense of belonging assists children in knowing where and with whom they belong. Identity and belonging are interconnected and influence perceptions of equality (DBE, 2015). One of the aims of identity and belonging makes reference to identity and celebrating differences. This aim discusses and stresses the development of an anti-bias approach to help children learn about gender. There is special reference to being observant of activities which prevent the integration of gender in the ECE classroom (DBE, 2015).

2.6 THE EFFECT OF TEACHER EDUCATION ON GENDER IDENTITY

Tertiary education should be appropriate for teaching young teachers how to teach so they can be more aware of gender identity issues, problems and opportunities in the early childhood setting (Robinson & Diaz, 2006). Research on pre-service educators established that teachers appeared to be unaware or have little interest in gender and were often resistant to discussing gender (Hogan, 2012). Teachers are essential to positive gender development, and resistance needs to be included in any study on gender diversity (Faulkner & Crowhurst, 2014). Teachers in pre-service bring their own understanding of gender, often based on stereotypes reinforced by stereotypes through culture (Robinson & Diaz, 2012). It is difficult to challenge beliefs about gender and how the social and identity categories intersect. Therefore, teachers must examine their own experiences of privilege and oppression; otherwise, they will make pedagogical decisions that maintain the status quo (Souto-Manning, 2017). Thus, this research aims to challenge teachers' perceptions and pedagogical practices by providing them with a programme of lesson plans that challenge gender identity at ECD centres.

2.6.1 The Teacher's Gender and Gender Identity

The teacher's gender has an immense power to make a difference in the identity of gender in the classrooms. The arrangements of a classroom, classroom management, discipline, teaching methods and assessments all have gender-related impacts which affect what happens to boys and girls in the classroom (Hinitz & Hewes, 2011). Teachers can extend children's experience of gender roles via their interaction, for example, playing hockey with a female teacher (Estola, 2011). At this juncture, it must be acknowledged that the ECEC workforce essentially consists of women. I concur with the statement that teachers in most ECE centres are mostly female. Thus, teachers can provide gender challenges to stereotypes often experienced in their social lives (Iorio & Visweswaraiyah, 2011). Teachers play a vital role in positive intervention in gender construction and relations (Hjelmér, 2020). However, there is limited research on the influence of teachers' pedagogical practices and gender identity in South Africa (Bhana et al., 2011). Research has indicated that the teachers' values, beliefs, preferences and attitudes are highly relevant in their interactions with children (Jacobson, 2011). Most practitioners are products of educational and gender discourses which consciously/unconsciously influence their teaching practices (Estola, 2011). Therefore,

teachers need to be challenged as they play an important role in the elimination of gender stereotypes in ECE.

2.6.2 Children's Gender Identity

Children are aware of the subjectivities, acceptable ways of being a boy or girl, and the inconsistencies that gender introduces into their lives (Blaise, 2010). Children between the ages of three and five begin to build their gender identity and learn what it means to be male or female (Aina & Cameron, 2011). Once children are gender-conscious, they create stereotypes that they apply to themselves and others as they learn about gender identity via interactions with peers, instructors, and family (Aina & Cameron, 2011).

Children perform according to their gender as they interact in their relations with others. Thus, being a girl is related to and defined by girls' relations with boys and vice versa (Lahelma, 2014). Research by Blaise (2014) also concurred that children adhere to gender stereotypes; otherwise, they will be ridiculed. Therefore, playing with an aeroplane is associated with boys. Children construct their subjective perception of gender in relation to their peers. Boys and girls divide themselves into groups that share interests and play separately. Hence, by distancing themselves, they gain a gender perspective of being a boy or girl (Boldt, 2011).

In most cases, children's gender discourses are powerfully organised in early childhood classrooms. Boys and girls are labelled "sissies" or "tomboys" and such labels are associated when they display behaviour of the opposite gender (Xu, 2020). Xu (2020) researched practitioners' and children's gender identity and concluded that holding babies, kicking balls and reading books had gender associations. Often, these children's labels result in being teased and shamed, and these labels impact children who suffer when they deviate from gender norms (Mashiya, 2018).

A study by Chapman (2016) on the beliefs and practices of educators in relation to gender identity in play also concluded that educators' perceptions and practices influence children's play. Furthermore, there are gender groups which mostly consist of boys playing together or girls playing together (Chapman, 2016). In addition, when it comes to dramatic play, which involved dressing up, only girls participated in the princess or family play (Chapman, 2016). Research done by Meland (2020) challenged the stereotypical expectations of gender roles in fairy tales. Children's literature provides role models of masculinity and femininity, shaping children's perspectives and

reinforcing traditional stereotypical behaviour (Meland, 2020). In the South African context, research done by Cikeso (2013) also expounded on the stereotypical gender roles portrayed in children's literature. I concur with Meland (2020) that males are portrayed as brave while females are portrayed as incompetent, beautiful princesses in fairy tales. Therefore, the research illustrated the influence of the teachers' perceptions and pedagogical practices on gender identity.

2.7 TEACHER AWARENESS PROGRAMMES THAT ENHANCE GENDER IDENTITY

Gender portrayals are reproduced socially at a young age, and children's experiences with wider societies outside the early childhood setting impact gender perception. However, there needs to be further research to challenge the established gender perceptions through gender-reflective and sensitive practices (Xu, 2020). Research by Xu (2020) concluded that teachers must challenge gender stereotypes as children need more freedom in exploring gender subjectivities. I agree with Xu (2020) that practitioner-child interactions have the potential to transform and challenge gender stereotypes in ECE centres. Research by Chapman (2016) also indicated that since ECE is a gendered environment, teachers must consider how their practice influences gender bias. Teachers need to design their schedules and activities and facilitate the support of children's participation through a reflective approach. Furthermore, research was conducted on the teacher's role in gender-typed and gender-neutral behaviour, and various findings revealed the following (Granger et al., 2017).

Firstly, there must be workshops on gender roles in gender-flexible ways, linked to a robust child-centred discourse in ECEC settings and connected to the goal of developing respect for diversity (Warin & Adriany, 2017). Furthermore, gender flexibility provides the platform for recruiting and retaining more males in ECEC. Early childhood development teachers are traditionally female, but there should be a disruption of this normalisation. There is a need to encourage the participation of males in programmes so that masculinity is challenged and social relations are improved among children (Xu, 2020). Males can be involved in different programmes in ECD, so children develop gender flexibility.

Secondly, teachers need to develop gender sensitivity by adapting their approaches. In addition, they need to be gender sensitive by developing training which would benefit

their critical engagement with gender in their pedagogies. The training should also reflect the cultural patterns and individual experiences which assist in shaping gendered and non-gendered interactions. Therefore, gender-responsive pedagogy was developed as it proactively adopts specific strategies in the classroom (Ismail et al., 2022). The reflection by teachers on their personal perceptions makes them aware of their gender biases, and consciousness-raising is the first step in gender-responsive teaching (Ananga, 2021). Therefore, teachers had to give equal chances to males and females, use participatory methods and equal participation strategies, and ensure females have equal access to teaching and learning materials. Furthermore, teachers must be patient and provide positive verbal feedback to both females and males. However, research in Zambia, Vietnam and South Africa illustrated that gender-responsive pedagogy has challenges as gender norms are deeply ingrained. Hence, teachers need time to internalise gender-responsive pedagogy through gender awareness-raising activities (Ismail et al., 2022).

Gender standards are exceedingly difficult to modify since they pervade every facet of society. Hence, education still reflects harmful gender norms in the curricula, teaching practices and textbooks. However, the most powerful influence on young people in the educational spaces is transforming gender. Therefore, gender transformation aims to address the root cause of gender inequality and promote equitable outcomes for children in all their diversity. Gender transformative strategies focus on redressing gender inequality as it contributes to change in an individual's life. This should be accomplished through critically examining inequalities, strengthening positive norms, promoting the relative position of girls and transforming social structures that perpetuate gender inequalities. Boys are agents in gender transformation, and the approach intersects with race, religion, class, migration status, etc. These challenges in implementing gender transformation require scaling up transformation in the household, institutions, groups, markets, policy and legal issues. However, to date, few strategies have successfully implemented whole-scale gender transformation (Nugroho et al., 2022). Thus, gender flexible awareness pedagogy will support gender equality and benefit young children's experiences and well-being in an ECEC setting (Xu, 2020).

Thirdly, gender is constructed and negotiated through play, activities, games and toys. Through such activities, children's gender perceptions are facilitated by gender-type behaviour in ECE. It was implicated that teachers need to be made aware of their

facilitation during early childhood activities to ensure that boys and girls receive support for equal engagement with various classroom activities (Granger et al., 2017). As a result, children must be exposed to a range of experiences that enable them to explore various aspects of masculinity and femininity. Teachers have to create a classroom environment that disrupts traditional gender roles (Giraldo & Colyar, 2012). Therefore, boys should be allowed to care for baby dolls, and girls should be allowed to repair trains. Teachers should give children the opportunity to explore both masculine and feminine gender roles. Teachers should encourage boys to express themselves emotionally. Boys need to be allowed to express themselves through their body language; therefore, there is a transcendence of traditional gender beliefs. Girls should be encouraged to play with trucks, build blocks, and play at being superheroes. Girls should not be limited to playing with dolls and be confined to quiet indoor games. They need to be given the opportunities to explore roles traditionally reserved for males (Giraldo & Colyar, 2012).

Fourthly, all resources in the classroom should be adapted and modified to be inclusive so each child is given an equal opportunity and representation. Therefore, an essential aspect of an awareness programme is making teaching conscious of non-stereotypical choices for the children and the classroom. Additional instructional material, such as songs, needs to be more inclusive and disrupt gender stereotypes which portray women in nurturing and caring roles (Giraldo & Colyar, 2012). The resources, décor and set-up of various spots should not reflect a stereotypical colour or pattern. All the children can make use of outfits and costumes.

Fifthly, the core of the awareness programme is to provide the same opportunities for all children. Therefore, it is imperative that planning should reflect gender equality by selecting projects, themes and activities which do not favour just one group of children. Boys and girls should be involved in all sporting events, gymnastics, art and drama. Teachers need to offer children a variety of gender practices which explore different ways of being masculine and feminine. Teachers tend to inhibit boys in their explorations of gender roles and should encourage boys to be nurturing, have pink candles and enjoy gymnastics. Boys and girls should be involved in all sporting events.

Sixthly, teachers need to promote an awareness of gender stereotypes, which can reduce the impact of traditional stereotypes. Therefore, teachers must be aware of

gender roles and stereotypes in fairy tales. Furthermore, teachers must challenge fairy tales' stereotypical princes and princesses (Meland, 2020). In addition, the use of language is imperative in creating gender sensitivity. Therefore, the teacher needs to be aware of the use of pronouns during lessons; for example, the pronoun "he" should not be used to describe a truck driver.

Finally, a growing number of children have gender identities that differ from their birth-assigned gender norms. Some identify as transgender, and others consider themselves to be gender fluid. Gender-fluid children are different from transgender children in their identity and expression of gender. Gender fluidity is when a person does not identify with a single fixed gender (Diamond, 2016). Gender exists on a spectrum and should not be limited to male or female (Parker, 2016). Therefore, research recently acknowledged the experience of individuals with fluid identities. A study by Proulx et al. (2019) found that schools with lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer inclusive sex education programmes have children that are less likely to experience bullying or suicidal thoughts. Through the media, people are currently opening up about being transgender. However, young children are also sharing with family and school personnel that gender fluidity is not supported. Hence, schools, families and communities need resources and tools that provide safe spaces for youth to express their gender identity (Fox, 2015). Thus, the development of an awareness programme assists in the development of an awareness of how teachers impact gender development in selecting topics, materials, talking with children, setting up the environment, and letting children engage in a variety of activities that support gender fluidity. Children should be allowed to broaden the spectrum of gender possibilities, disrupting gender-stereotypical teaching and creating more inclusive learning spaces for all children (Giraldo & Colyar, 2012).

2.8 CONCLUSION

International conventions on education and the Millennium Development Goals indicated that gender equity goals should have been achieved by 2015. However, there is still a lack of full participation of males and females (Muasya & Kazungu, 2018). Therefore, the key to gender equality is ECD, as children begin developing gender perceptions. Gender issues must be addressed at the ECD if gender equality is to be achieved (Muasya & Kazungu, 2018).

Research in different countries has illustrated the role of teachers in gender development. The teacher plays a fundamental role in developing gender stereotypes through toys, books, materials, activities, games and various curricular methods. The teachers' perceptions and pedagogical practices influence the gender stereotypical development of gender roles of children. The teacher needs to be challenged through gender awareness programmes to raise consciousness of their influence in the classroom. When teachers understand their role in gender awareness, then gender identity can be enhanced to become more gender equitable. Teachers need take a gendered approach to be more gender inclusive and develop more all-embracing practices.

CHAPTER 3: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The preceding chapter investigated teachers' perspectives and pedagogy on gender identity in ECD. The chapter addressed the significance of the teacher's role and an awareness campaign. This chapter addresses the conceptual framework. A conceptual framework is the logical direction of everything that defines the complete research's ideas, structures, goals, methods, and execution (Kivunja, 2018). Furthermore, the conceptual framework encompasses the topic's thinking, the issues to be explored, the theories to be used, the methodology, data analysis, interpretation of results, suggestions, and conclusions. (Ravitch & Riggan, 2017). Conceptual frameworks are similar to theoretical frameworks as they describe and explain how different forms of research are related and contrasted with each other (Lederman & Lederman, 2015). Thus, the conceptual framework is a logical masterplan for all concepts and ideas developed in the research's planning, implementation and conclusion (Kivunja, 2018).

I used a conceptual framework as it gave structure and direction to frame the problems, the research design, the data analysis and the conclusions from the data. The conceptual framework guided the researcher to identify, classify, and organise ideas, concepts, processes, and outcomes. It strengthened this research by identifying, classifying and organising the concepts and processes of the phenomena. Therefore, the conceptual framework assisted in identifying gaps in this research. It allows the researchers to make a compelling argument and contribute to knowledge development. This study's theoretical framework is based on three theories: the identity theory, the post-structural theory and the agency theory. Each theory provided different analytical tools for gender with gender perceptions and practices. The theories will be explored in terms of their background, core tenets, the theory in relationship to challenging teacher perceptions and pedagogical practices concerning gender identity at ECD, and rationale for the use of the theory.

3.2 THE POST-STRUCTURAL THEORY

3.2.1 The Background of the Post-Structural Theory

The post-structural theory originated in France in the mid-1960s and 1970s. The theory came as a way of critiquing power and privilege. The theory focuses on power and

control. (Tzuo et al., 2011). The theory illustrates the relationship between power, wealth, privilege and identities. Power works through language and its discourses (Belsey, 2012). There are significant power relationships in language, which are expressed through discourses. In the ECD classroom, many visual representations such as reading books and posters, focus on truth and power. Therefore, the classroom believes that many stories, textbooks and resource materials are untrue and present gender stereotypes through language (Belsey, 2012).

Five influential post-structural theorists developed post-structural thought in their scholarships. The theorists Foucault, Derrida, Deleuze, Butler and Youdell developed ideas that are formative to the theory. The main theorists will be discussed briefly in terms of their education and gender identity. Foucault was a French philosopher who popularised the term discourse, which refers to a particular way of speaking about things (Ball, 2013). Derrida is renowned for the deconstructionism concept, which focuses on reading texts from different perspectives. Therefore, textbooks, novels and other media can be read from a different perspective (Derrida, 2013). Deleuze explored the concept of rhizomatic thinking, an eclectic and exploratory approach to learning that gathers information from various sources to develop deeper knowledge. Therefore, the truth is open for debate as different people will have different ideas about the truth (Ball, 2013). In addition, the theorist Butler explored the discourse of gender and dominant discourses of gender, which marginalises children on the basis of gender. Teachers play a role in reinforcing masculine and feminine gender behaviour. Therefore, according to Butler (2011), gender norms, such as the view that girls should be passive while boys should be aggressive, are unnatural (Butler, 2011). Finally, Youdell explores the role of the school in including and excluding certain students. How students are spoken about can be inclusive or exclusive, and gender plays a role in excluding children (Youdell, 2011).

3.2.2 Core Tenets of Post-Structural Theory

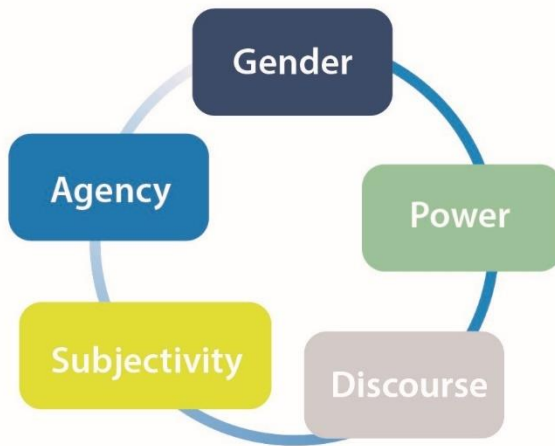


Figure 3.1: The Tenets of Post-Structural Theory

The core tenets of the post-structural theory that influence gender identity are power, agency, discourse and subjectivity, as illustrated in Figure 3.1. It is represented in a cyclic diagram as it repeatedly influences the pattern of gender identity. Each tenet will be briefly discussed in relation to gender identity in ECD. Firstly, the core tenant is related to power, who has it and who doesn't have it. Post-structuralism does not have one fixed meaning, but it is the mechanism of power and how meaning and power are organized, enacted, and oppressed in our society. According to the power of language, all meaning and knowledge generated via language is the key to how we make meaning as socially built humans (Blaise, 2012). In the classroom, boys and girls, through their talk, are actively constructing gender, and at times, they challenge the gender norms through their relationships in the classroom; for example, a girl may want to play the role of a firefighter instead of the role of a nurse (Blaise, 2012).

Secondly, the tenet of discourse, as illustrated in Figure 3.1, is a broad concept that refers to how power and knowledge are integrated (Blaise, 2012). Discourse is a way of speaking, writing, thinking, feeling or acting that provides a framework establishing a set of rules about power. Hence, as depicted in Figure 3.1, there is a relationship between all the core tenets of post-structuralism. Thus, it is through discourse that

power, status and privilege are constructed. Discourses comprise the dominant and secondary discourse. The dominant discourse refers to the most popular way of speaking about something and may be seen as the truth (Francis & Paechter, 2015). In the classroom, the teacher will speak in a dominant discourse about gender. The dominant discourse could be that males are superior in the classroom. The alternative discourse is different because people have different opinions (Blaise, 2012). However, discourses influence the gender identity of children in ECD.

Thirdly, the tenet of subjectivity refers to an individual's conscious and unconscious thoughts and understanding of one's relations to the world. A person's subjectivity is actively constructed. Therefore, Figure 3.1 depicts the relationship between subjectivity, power, discourse and gender. Subjectivity expounds on the contradictory nature of human beings (Blaise, 2012). Gender provides individuals with a range of subjectivities during the school day. An illustrated example is when a girl quietly plays with Barbie cards and is referred to as being well-behaved. However, the same quiet girls may be mean to other children during the line-up. So, there is a change in behaviour, and the subjectivity is changing (Blaise, 2012).

Fourthly, the tenet of agency in post-structural theory is concerned with an individual's ability to make choices, control events and be powerful (Blaise, 2012). Agency is one's capacity to resist, subvert and change discourses. Traditional ECE positions young children as powerless, making children's agency difficult. However, there is a possibility that children can resist the teacher's intention in terms of equality (Blaise, 2012). Furthermore, the tenet of agency is influenced by power, as elucidated in Figure 3.1. The concept of power as a relationship or process operates in the social world that constructs individuals. Power relates to the strategies and techniques of power, not about who possesses power. Therefore, girls will play with Barbie dolls to wield their power with other girls. In addition, since boys know the dominant discourse of gender, they criticise or ridicule girls when they play with Barbie dolls. Thus, they exert a sense of power by criticising girls when they play with dolls (Blaise, 2012). Power and relationships are related and influence each other. Power relationships are produced and exercise particular forms of power relations. Thus, by understanding power relations, gender stereotypes can be challenged (Williams, 2014).

3.2.3 Post-Structural Theory and Challenging Teacher Perceptions and Practices Regarding Gender Identity At ECD

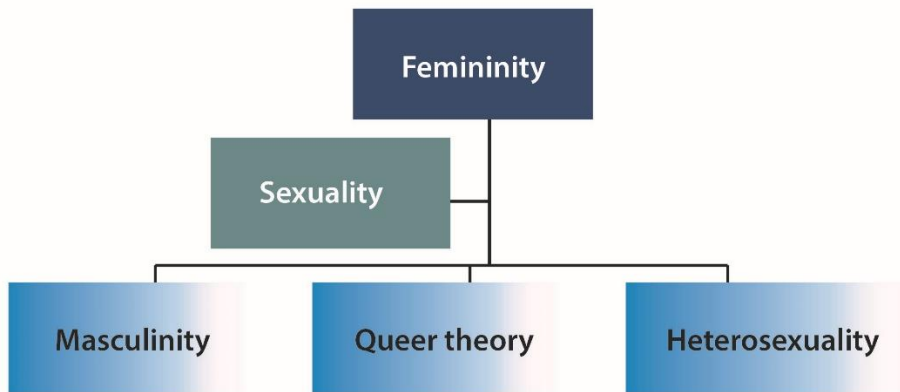


Figure 3.2: Post-Structural Theory and Challenging Teacher Perceptions and Pedagogical Practices

The tenets of power, discourse, subjectivity and agency will influence teacher perception and pedagogical practice concerning identity and gender. However, post-structuralism plays an important role in challenging teacher perceptions and pedagogical practices through understanding the tenets' effects on gender. Children learn to position themselves to traditional discourses of femininity and masculinity (Martin & Muthukrishna, 2011). The discourses have rules and discursive practices which influence world views. The concept of discourses is the body of ideas or beliefs that are repeatedly enacted and give meaning to masculinity and femininity (Blaise & Taylor, 2012). The discourse regulates gendered behaviours, so boys comply with the discourse of masculinity, and girls comply with the discourse of femininity. The discourses provide insight into how children construct identities and the different powers available to boys and girls (Blaise & Taylor, 2012)

The discourse of femininity enforces the category of belonging to either masculinity or femininity. Post-structuralism clearly indicates that the discourse of femininity is powerful in ascribing particular ways of understanding and behaving. For girls to be

seen as normal, they participate in practices of a particular gender to make sense of the world. Girls' understanding of normality was about being quiet and gentle, while boys' understanding of normality was about being loud and boisterous (Martin & Muthukrishna, 2011). These alternative frameworks encourage teachers to question how children experience gender and power. It is essential that teachers are challenged to change their perceptions and pedagogical practices.

The discourses of essential female sexuality affect regulating behaviour. This discourse regulates sexuality and behaviour. The regulatory practices of labelling were the punishment for deviation from established gender stereotypes. As a result, if girls play with boys, they are ridiculed (Bhana et al., 2011). The discourse ensures the maintenance of gender behaviours; those who do not subscribe to norms are alienated or ostracised. The norms reinforce a culture where norms and power relationships go unchallenged and uncontested (Martin & Muthukrishna, 2011). Therefore, the discourses must be challenged.

The discourse of masculinity influences the behaviour of males who dominate and control who are subordinate to them and is reproduced in schools to ensure dominance (Martin & Muthukrishna, 2011). Hegemonic masculinity is the domination of one group over another and regulates patterns of masculinity and femininity (Bhana et al., 2011). Hegemonic masculinity maintains practices that institutionalise boys' dominance over girls (Blaise, 2012). Therefore, girls who displayed "tomboy" behaviour explained that boy-like behaviour made them feel more powerful.

In ECE, the prominent feature of hegemonic masculinity and femininity is heterosexualism. The gendered social order of heterosexualism is regulated by stereotypical gendered norms and expectations (Blaise, 2012). There is a male hierarchy in interpersonal relationships between boys and girls; for example, boys will want to play with a popular male. The discourse of masculinity motivated heterosexual behaviour, while homophobic behaviour was ridiculed or humiliated (Bhana et al., 2011). In addition, boys' behaviour is policed by boys, and any deviation is subject to questioning (Bhana et al., 2011). Poststructuralism provides an alternative pathway for teachers to think about how children become gendered and to rethink, create and invent gender strategies that challenge and change the gendered social order of the classroom.

Queer theory builds on the feminist post-structural understanding of gender by linking the construction of gender with the influence of heterosexual norms (Blaise & Taylor, 2012). Queer theory reflects how children's gender behaviour reflects and reinforces the norms of heterosexuality. Queer theory illustrates that heterosexual norms influence gender identity, therefore, stereotypical behaviour, such as girls being passive is gender normalised behaviour. Gender perception is formed through the way children communicate about themselves as a boy or girl or by bodily practices and expressions (Blaise & Taylor, 2012).

Post-structural heterosexual discourse is a form of sexism which disempowers women and other marginalised populations. Thus, the concept of masculinity, femininity and heterosexuality clearly influences the stereotypical notion that everybody should be heterosexual. As a result, boys are ridiculed when they play with make-up. (Blaise & Taylor, 2012). The discourses of heterosexuality maintain power over females and others (Blaise, 2012). In ECD classrooms, heterosexuality is encouraged to maintain their gendered roles. It is through the understanding of heterosexual behaviour that teachers have an understanding of gender stereotypical behaviour and explore how the stereotypes can be challenged.

In the United States of America, research in a kindergarten illustrated that children build a sense of who they are and who they want to be through dominant heterosexual discourses (Blaise & Taylor, 2012). During play, children depict the heterosexual matrix of gender stereotyping as the girls will play the role of the mother while the boys will play the role of the father (Blaise & Taylor, 2012). Furthermore, children participate in heterosexual girlfriend/boyfriend play to secure their sense of belonging in a group. Thus, gender in the classroom takes a different set of meanings, and these perspectives challenge teachers to reflect on their perceptions and practices of gender equality for boys and girls (Blaise, 2012). Gender equality emphasises equal access to resources, rights, responsibilities and opportunities for boys and girls. However, gender equity illustrates the need to respect all people without discrimination, irrespective of their gender. The United Nations and the 2030 Agenda highlighted the need for gender equality as it encapsulates health, social, economic, political and educational disparities arising from discrimination based on gender in many developing and developed economies (Guthridge et al., 2022).

Finally, a post-structural feminist perspective on gender is influenced by language, discourse, subjectivity, agency and power. Gender is an interactive social construction that is constructed through talk, actions and interactions with the social world (Butler, 2011). Therefore, power relations are revealed, and it becomes possible to intervene when there is an understanding of power relations. Therefore, the teacher needs to understand the girls' situations and positions concerning patriarchal power relations (Blaise, 2012).

Feminist poststructuralism is a theoretical perspective which provides new ways of teaching and learning. It is through understanding language, discourse, subjectivity, agency and power that the complexities of gender can be challenged by the teacher. A teacher working from post-structuralism would engage children so they are critical of their play or activities (Blaise, 2012). In the classroom post-structuralism challenges teachers to question, rethink and challenge dominant discourses. Teachers need to be challenged so that their practice creates a new knowledge base in ECE (Youdell, 2011).

3.2.4 Rationale for the use of Post Structural Theory

Applying the theory of post-structuralism will strengthen my study as it explores the different ways in which gender is performed and the teachers' role concerning gender stereotype development (Ball, 2013). Post-structuralism highlights the important role of discourses, power, subjectivity and agency in ECE. Post Structural asserted that the teacher's experiences of prejudice, discrimination and homophobia influence gender identity (Blaise & Taylor, 2012).

Furthermore, post-structuralism encourages teachers to reflect on their own attitudes and beliefs about gender. Therefore, post-structuralism develops critical reflective pedagogical strategies such as an anti-bias approach, analytical thinking, and encouraging discussion with teachers about gender, power, inclusion and exclusion (Blaise & Taylor, 2012). Post-structuralism explores the role of women and how they have been excluded from history. Applying the theory will strengthen my study by encouraging social critique of gender identity, challenging gender stereotypes, and including historically underrepresented groups (Tzuo et al., 2011). Thus, the post-structural theory focuses on social justice and critical thinking (Niesche, 2016).

3.3 IDENTITY THEORY

3.3.1 Background of Identity Theory

Over the past decades, identity theory has received sustained interest within sociology and psychology. The interest in identity is based on an individual's understanding as situated in social interaction and embedded within society (Serpe & Stryker, 2011). Identity theory concentrates on role engagements and how individuals create and maintain the meaning of their roles. Once individuals develop identity meaning, they are motivated toward a behaviour.

An identity is a common set of meanings that characterise people in specific roles (such as parent or child), as members of specific groups (such as a book club), and as individuals with unique qualities (such as an artistic identity) (Stets & Serpe, 2013). Therefore, an identity is a set of meanings attached to a social structure and the unique ways individuals see themselves. The self is revealed through interaction (Carter, 2014). There are three emphases in identity theory versions. For starters, one focus is on the link between social structures, identities, and behaviour. A second focus is on the internal dynamics of the self that shape behaviour. The third domain investigates role identities in the prominence hierarchy (Carter, 2014). Identity theorists study how identities interact with one another, as well as how identities interact with behaviour, emotions, physical and mental health, self-concept, and social structure.

Several proponents of the theory will be briefly discussed. The most dominant intellectual in the field of identity theory has been George Herbert Mead (1863-1931), who developed a theory of social behaviourism to explain how social experience develops an individual's personality. Identities emerge through social interaction (Askegaard & Heilbrunn, 2018). Stryker (1968, as cited in Askegaard & Heilbrunn, 2018) developed the central idea of structural symbolic interaction and the influence of roles related to social relationships and interaction. It was illustrated that society shapes behaviour (Stets & Carter, 2011).

Since 1988, there has been an extension of identity theory. Burke's perceptual control theory was developed in 1991 from Stryker's theory and Mead's concept of self (Burke, 2006). Burke's research also focused on using identity control theory to understand gender. The emphasis in identity control theory is on how identity influences behaviour (Askegaard & Heilbrunn, 2018). Heise's (1979) control theory can be viewed in terms

of identity theory development. The control theory began due to significant gaps in Mead's and other theorists' view of identity theory. Heise developed the cultural meanings attached to persons, others and their interactions, thus enabling an analysis of how changes in the cultural meaning of one aspect impacted other aspects (Heise, 1979). Recently, Carter and Stets have extended the theory to include identities based on the person as a unique biosocial identity (Stets & Carter, 2011).

The identity hypothesis explains why gendered behaviour and gender preconceptions developed via familial socialisation persist throughout adulthood. Children's gender identities will solidify when they meet new people and form new connections. Certain situations and relationships will increase a child's commitment to gender, depending on how many people they interact with and how strongly attached the child is to those specific people. For example, a child who plays with a group of children of the same sex gender may develop a more committed gender identity than a child who plays alone. (Stets & Carter, 2011).

Therefore, friendships are gendered and based on gender roles – boys tend to play rough. Thus, gender serves as a mechanism for influencing interaction norms and replicating social structure. Gender identities are developed, socialised and internalised (Stets & Carter, 2011). Therefore, women are often treated as subordinates as gender stereotypes replicated in behaviour and expectations through the generations. Identity theory explains how gender exists and influences socialisation within the family. Finally, identity theory offers evidence of how and why gendered characteristics differ between sexes and why they perpetuate over time (Stets & Carter, 2011).

3.3.2 Core Tenets of Identity Theory

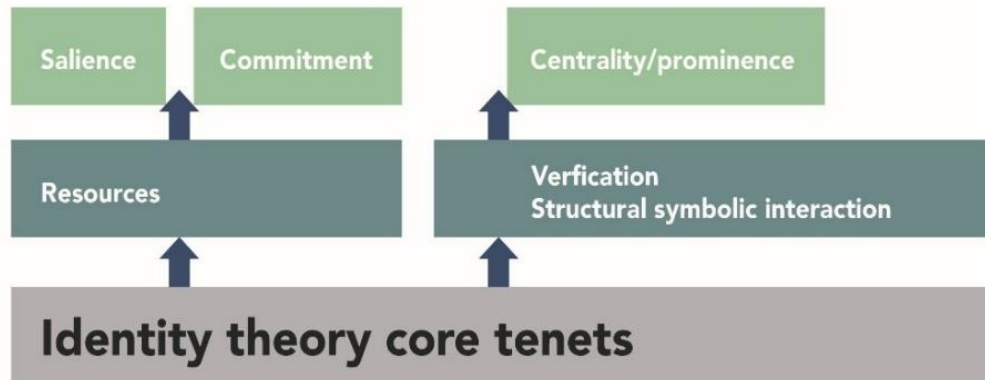


Figure 3.3: Core Tenets of Identity Theory

The core tenets of identity theory that influence gender identity are verification, saliency, commitment, centrality/prominence, resources and base of identities, as illustrated in Figure 3.3. Each tenet will be briefly discussed in relation to gender identity in ECD. The core tenet is structural symbolic interactionism, which addresses how society is created and maintained through repeated individual interactions (Stets & Serpe, 2013). Symbolic resources facilitate interacting with others, which is useful for understanding the construction of gender identity. Gender construction is influenced by the socially constructed nature of masculinity and femininity as developing out of repeated patterned interaction and socialisation (Carter & Fuller, 2015).

Identity verification, as depicted in Figure 3.3, is when individuals perceive that others see them in a situation the same way they see themselves. Identification verification is influenced by the perceptual control dynamics occurring for any identity (Stets & Serpe, 2013). A feedback loop is established when an identity is activated in a situation. The feedback loop influences the meaning of identities; how individuals see themselves, the feedback they receive from others, and the emotions that influence the identity a person evokes in a situation. (Stets & Serpe, 2013).

Salience is another core tenet, which is the probability that one will invoke a specific identity across situations. More salient identities will increase the likelihood of being brought into situations through verbal or behavioural actions (Stets & Serpe, 2013). Therefore, individuals have a choice to enact an identity across situations, and identity salience is an agentic aspect of identity in social action. The level of identity salience across a set of identities makes up the identity salience hierarchy (Stets & Serpe, 2013). Identity salience as depicted in Figure 3.3, is based on how committed one is to the identity and commitment brings in social structure because it refers to the degree to which a social network influences individuals. Gender can be a highly salient and committed aspect of the self (Carter, 2014). Thus, gender becomes committed as children become more embedded in social networks as they are introduced to others and forge new relationships (Carter, 2014).

Commitment is another core tenet, which is depicted in Figure 3.3. Commitment is the degree to which relationships with others depend on roles and identities. The more committed one is to an identity, the more salient an identity will be. Commitment has been conceptualised in two ways from a structural and a perceptual control perspective (Stets & Serpe, 2013). Furthermore, gender defines most social settings and social interactions. Therefore, the more individuals a child interacts in their environment, the more committed they become to their gender identity (Carter, 2014). Certain situations and relationships will increase a child's commitment to gender identity. Therefore, commitment will be influenced by a child's interactions with individuals and how strongly a child is attached to those individuals (Carter, 2014).

Centrality/prominence is another tenet depicted in Figure 3.3 that organises self-concept aspects. Centrality is based on how important self-components of identities are to individuals. An identity that is important to self-concept has greater centrality. An identity based on prominence represents the importance of the identity to the individual, characterising their desires and values (Carter, 2014).

Resources is a tenet depicted in Figure 3.3, which sustains and enhances a system of interaction through socialisation (Stets & Serpe, 2013). Resources are dynamic in a situation, and there are three types of resources: structural, interpersonal and personal. Structural resources are processes that afford individuals greater influence in social interactions. Interpersonal resources are processes arising out of relationships and

personal resources facilitating identity verification (Stets & Serpe, 2013). Therefore, gender identity, gendered stereotypes and gendered behaviour are influenced by resources (Carter, 2014).

Finally, the base of identities is a core tenet depicted in Figure 3.3. Identities influence social structure. Base identities are organised into role, group and person identities. Roles are the expectations attached to a social position in society, such as a girl. The role identity is a set of internalised meanings associated with a role; for example, a boy's identity involves rough behaviour. Group identities are the meanings that emerge in interactions with a specific set of others like family, work groups and clubs (Stets & Serpe, 2013). Group identities differ from social identities, which are the meanings associated with an individual. Social categories are created by society for stratification purposes, such as gender. The different categorisations facilitate understanding the status of groups of people in social structure, their resources, and how they are treated (Stets & Serpe, 2013).

Role identities are the meanings attached to a role. Gender expectations, behaviour and stereotypes influence roles. The role identities are influenced by social surroundings and are learned in early childhood. An example is the family, which is defined by role identities influenced by gender (Stets & Serpe, 2013). Therefore, the role of the "mother" may involve being nurturing. The person identities are culturally internalised and based on a set of meanings that distinguish the person as a unique individual. Thus, identity theory illustrates the influence of gender socialisation on personal identities and roles (Carter, 2014)

3.3.3 Identity Theory and Challenging Teacher Perceptions and Pedagogical Practices Regarding Gender Identity at ECD



Figure 3.4: Identity Theory and Challenging Teacher Perceptions and Pedagogical Practices

It is necessary to review the components of identity theory that influence gender to challenge teacher perceptions and pedagogical practices regarding gender identity. The fundamental emphases of the base of identities and identity saliences are imperative in challenging teacher perceptions and pedagogical practices regarding gender identity. The tenet of salience and the base identities (person, role and group identities) will be discussed. Firstly, gender socialisation and gendered identities are a function of identity salience, as illustrated in Figure 3.4. The more salient an identity, the more likely a person will perform roles consistent with role expectations (Stets & Serpe, 2013). Therefore, teachers must know how gender patterns are developed to challenge their perceptions and pedagogical practices.

Secondly, the base of identities depicted in Figure 3.4 influences teachers' perceptions and pedagogical practices. The base of identities comprises person, role, social identity and gender and is expressed in person identities (Stets & Serpe, 2013). These identities may be dominant or submissive and are internalised equally between boys and girls while socialised by the family. Therefore, boys are encouraged to be assertive, and girls learn to be caring (Carter, 2014). In addition, role identity is the meaning a person

attaches to themselves while performing roles. Role identities are socialised and based on gender. Therefore, the role identity of the mother is to be nurturing. The role identity of the father is powerful as the one who makes the major decisions in life. Therefore, one learns what it means to be male or female in relation in reference to the alternate gender (Carter, 2014).

Furthermore, gender as a social identity represents group memberships and an individual's participation in collective categories. Some groups are based on gendered behavioural norms and expectations (Carter, 2014). Therefore, parents who put their children in gender organisations learn masculine and feminine norms. These group activities instil a sense of difference. Hence, socialisation is influenced by gender as soon as a child is born, and families and teachers cultivate gendered identity traits. The identity theory of identity (person, role and social) is defined by traditional gendered expectations and are internalised by children. Therefore, teachers have a pivotal role to challenge their perceptions and adapt their pedagogical practices to become more gender equitable.

3.3.4 Rationale for Using Identity Theory

The application of the identity theory will strengthen my study as it examines how family socialisation can be applied and explained in relation to gender identity. Identity theory can identify how and why gender stereotypes and gender behaviours are perpetuated in ECD classrooms. The core tenets can be related to challenging teacher perceptions and pedagogical practices in the ECD classroom. The base of identities gives the teacher insight into how the curriculum and pedagogical practices must be challenged to achieve gender equality.

The person identities can challenge teacher perception and pedagogical practices by introducing play activities which explore caring activities for boys and girls. In addition, teachers can challenge role-performing identities by encouraging girls to be leaders in the classroom and boys to be nurses. The group identity illustrates that the role of the teacher is imperative in eliminating gendered behaviour. Teachers will be more conscious and reflective of gender in the ECD centres. Thus, identity theory explores gender behaviour and expectations, which provides a lens for teachers to intervene in gender stereotypical behaviour (Carter, 2014).

3.4 AGENCY THEORY IN ECE

3.4.1 Background of Agency Theory

The concept of agency has become popular in education, social sciences, psychology, working-life studies and gender research (Eteläpelto et al., 2013). In ECE, the concept of children as agents who actively and competently participate in the construction of childhood has been exemplified. Children's agency is presently the focus of widespread interest in research in ECE (Varpanen, 2019). There has been a change in the dominant image of children from incompetent to assertive individuals (Ebrahim, 2011). The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) has inspired the transformation and understanding of children as agents through research. Research in ECE in New Zealand, Sweden and Finland has illustrated that children can assert themselves and manage regulations. In South Africa, the focus of children as agents is with older children in the foundation phase, while children in ECE have been undermined (Muthukrishna & Govender, 2011). However, the research concluded that adults channel children's actions and regulations (Ebrahim, 2011).

In addition, agency illustrates that society is not a fixed entity but is created by the people who inhabit the society (Ebrahim, 2011). Agency defines children as agentic beings who reflect and construct their own social world. Children are viewed as active and meaningful contributors who direct actions for a given purpose (Gavora, 2016). The notion of agency illustrates that humans are not mere products of society but affect their environment by making decisions. Thus, individuals are actively constructing their world, and people are agents of experience by exerting influence over their actions (Gavora, 2016). Agentic behaviour requires motivation to achieve one's goal in the planning and execution of actions. Agency in childhood is related to the quality of a child that enables the initiation and action to achieve goals.

Furthermore, since children are viewed as active agents who use their knowledge to reproduce social life, agency foregrounds children as social actors in ECE (Ebrahim, 2011). However, there may be a constraint that enables or restricts choices and actions available to the agents. Nevertheless, young children do not passively comply with rules but actively interpret childhood experiences at centres (Muthukrishna & Govender, 2011). Agency has implications for learning and the belief that children are capable of

reflecting and making decisions rather than passive receipts of teaching. Agency emphasises children's voices in their own development (Gavora, 2016).

The main proponent of agency is Giddens, who conceptualised the relationships between social structure, human action and agency (Eteläpelto et al., 2013). Giddens's ideas are instrumental in understanding that children are active agents in ECE as society is an active flow of social life. However, agents are actors who draw on the resources and rules to carry out social interactions that contribute to society's production and reproduction (Ebrahim, 2011). Agents are rooted in a structural context from which they draw their knowledge when participating in any action. The structure of domination enables agents to utilise strategies such as resources to gain power and control in their context (Ebrahim, 2011). Thus, agents pursue alternative ways of knowing and actions that may shape resistance (Ebrahim, 2011). Giddens emphasised the meaning of intentionality when actors believe they will have a particular outcome and that knowledge is utilised to achieve the outcome. According to Giddens, agentic action depends on the individual's capability to make a difference in the course of events. There is a strong emphasis on the individual's capacity to use power to influence social events (Ebrahim, 2011).

Prout illustrated that childhood is constructed through the interaction between human agents. Alison James' research focused on children as social actors in relation to the theory of socialisation. Furthermore, agency ascertains how children experience gender and how they use their agency to adapt in the context of the diversities of their childhood (James, 2013)

3.4.2 Core Tenets of Agency

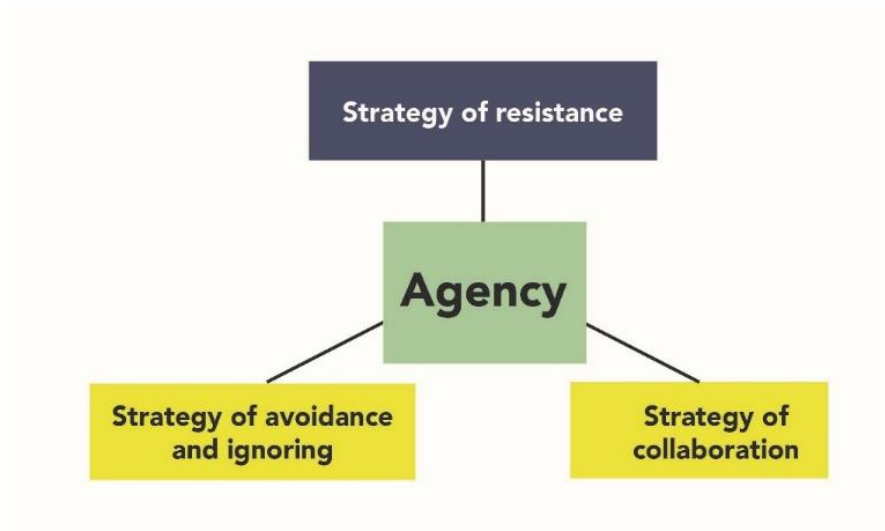


Figure 3.5: Core Tenets of the Agency Theory

The core tenets of agency theory that influence gender identity are the strategy of resistance, the strategy of avoidance and ignoring and the strategy of collaboration, as illustrated in Figure 3.5. Each tenet is briefly discussed in relation to gender identity in ECD. The strategy of resistance is the core tenet. Children test the structural properties of routine and collective activities as they actively extend, overturn and transform procedures by exploring alternative activities (Ebrahim, 2011).

Children in ECEC are conscious of participating in daily routine, and it is through experience that they become knowledgeable of position and gender practices which are appropriate (Ebrahim, 2011). Thus, children have an idea of the power available to them. In the ECE, girls were unhappy with certain colours of crayons and used to exchanging their crayons so that they could have “pretty” pictures (Ebrahim, 2011). Girls would prefer pink or purple despite the teacher's instruction not to use pink. Hence, pink is a colour which has a feminine gender stereotype (Jonaskaite et al., 2019).

The next tenet is the strategy of avoidance and ignoring, as depicted in Figure 3.5. Children are aware of strategies of avoidance and ignoring as a means to escape the control of other people. Children know the power of teachers and other children who perform as gatekeepers of normative expectations. Children have to conform to gender norms as they are bullied by other children (Adriany, 2019). Children are aware of

shifting action through intentional behaviour. Intentionality is an important skill requiring a plan of action and a commitment to pursue a goal.

Agents use knowledge of a particular practice to achieve an outcome. Thus, some children ignored adult authority as they gained insight into the socially constructed routines. In addition, children remained silent as a powerful way to ignore adult authority. Children also use avoidance in interactions with peers; for example, girls will protect their play spaces by using discourses such as “boys do not play with dolls” (Ebrahim, 2011). In ECE, boys would avoid dolls as they would prefer to play with superheroes as it was a legitimate version of masculinity. In addition, many teachers explicitly reinforced masculinity and femininity (Adriany, 2019).

The final tenet, the strategy of collaboration, as illustrated in Figure 3.5 is a resource in which there is shared intentionality of groups of people wanting to influence social life. In ECE centres, children work in peer culture to achieve certain goals. During fantasy play, children collaborated with same-gender groups. Children use fantasy play to perform activities carried out by adults (Ebrahim, 2011). Children collaborated to test their understanding of social life flexibly and creatively. The collaboration strategy was used to show their creative use of language by creating their own games, and songs and building togetherness during routine activities (Ebrahim, 2011).

3.4.3 Agency – Challenging Teacher Perceptions and Pedagogical Practices With Regard to Gender Identity at ECD

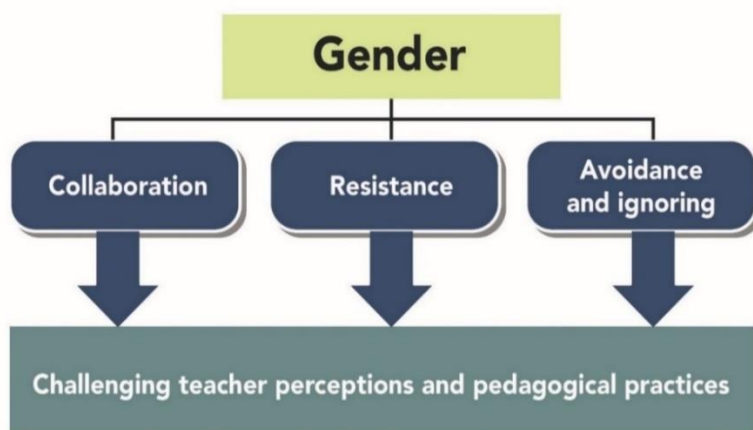


Figure 3.6: Agency Theory And Challenging Teacher Perceptions And Pedagogical Practices

The tenets of resistance, avoidance and ignoring, and collaboration influences teacher perception and pedagogy with regard to gender identity, as depicted in Figure 3.6. Therefore, agency plays an important role in understanding the effects of the tenets on gender. Children use their tenets of agency to adhere to gender-stereotypical behaviour. Therefore, children used resistance, ignoring, avoidance and collaboration to assert their autonomy (Ebrahim, 2011). The tenets of agency influence how children comply with masculinity and femininity. In addition, the tenets illustrate how children perform as social actors concerning gender identity. Boys would avoid playing with dolls, and girls were reluctant to play with cars (Dickins, 2014). Thus, the lives of boys and girls would be impacted through adulthood should these stereotypes continue. In addition, stereotypes have an impact on future generations as teachers are unaware of the gender stereotypes that are reinforced through the hidden curriculum (Jennet, 2013). The tenets of agency influence the hidden curriculum as behaviour, norms and implicit values are transferred without teachers' and children's conscious intention or awareness (Sedigheh et al., 2019). It is necessary to review the tenets concerning gender identity to challenge teacher perceptions and pedagogical practices concerning gender identity.

The agency of resistance, as illustrated in Figure 3.6, in the form of an activity and attitude, results in a child refusing to comply or to give in to pressure from the teachers. Jennet (2013) state that certain items like colour, toys, games, activities and books enforce gender stereotypes. In a study by Jennet (2013), boys refused to play with bicycles or other pink toys and would be teased for wearing or choosing items with pink. In a study by Ebrahim (2011), children had to perform a prescribed task with the use of specific colours in their worksheets. However, some girls only wanted to use certain colours which prescribed to gender stereotypical norms. Therefore, teacher perceptions and pedagogical practices must be challenged to develop activities in ECE that create opportunities for gender roles to be unlearned and relearned (Rao & Gibson, 2021).

The tenet of avoiding and ignoring, as depicted in Figure 3.6 is a means to escape the control of authority by openly ignoring or avoiding teachers' instructions through action or silence. The agency of resistance, as illustrated in Figure 3.6, in the form of an activity and attitude, results in a child refusing to comply or to give in to pressure from the teachers. Jennet (2013) states that for certain items like toys and books in ECE, play is a powerful means by which children learn to make sense of the world. A study by Shih and Wang (2022) revealed that children would deliberately select toys and play areas

in relation to their gender despite the attempts to create a non-stereotyped play environment. Therefore, boys would choose more masculine toys like guns, while girls would want to play with dolls. Children were anxious to deter from gender norms; for example, girls would be nervous about climbing trees, and boys would be hesitant to participate in cooking (Shih & Wang, 2022). Teachers did not intervene when children played out stereotypical behaviour but used to intervene when unconventional gender roles were mimicked (Breneselovic & Krnjaja, 2016). Teachers do not challenge children's stereotypical gender identities as there is a lack of detailed pedagogical approaches and practices from teachers on challenging gender stereotypical gender discourses (Shih & Wang, 2022).

Finally, the tenet of collaboration, as indicated in Figure 3.6 in which children would work together to achieve certain goals, influences gender identity. A study by Ebrahim (2011) found that children collaborated to show their creative language through games, play and songs. Children's peer collaboration tends to be segregated by gender as boys and girls segregate into same-gender peer groups, especially on the school playground (Fabes et al., 2019). Teachers play a role in contributing to reinforcing gender segregation as teachers create gender salience in the classroom through their perceptions and pedagogical practices, such as lining up children by gender. Children often collaborated with same-gender preferences when there is no teacher intervention. Therefore, children's agency for the preference to collaborate with same-gender peers lead to gender-stereotypical behaviour and is instrumental in promoting gender segregation. Teachers play a role in contributing to the gendered nature of collaborated peer relationships (Vollet, 2017). Therefore, teachers' perceptions and pedagogical practices need to be challenged, as illustrated in Figure 3.6, to use collaboration with different gender groups to develop more inclusive educational environments, practices and policies which promote gender equality (Fabes et al., 2019).

3.4.4 Rationale for Using Agency

The application of the agency strengthened my study as it examines how young children as agents use strategies to influence gender identity (Ebrahim, 2011). Young children are knowledgeable and skilled actors who use resistance, avoidance, ignoring and collaboration to participate actively in gender identity construction in early childhood. Agency challenges the dominant idea that children are adults in the making, and this

will result in a fundamental shift in practice and research. Thus, there needs to be a fundamental transformation of practices to become more inclusive and participatory. To shape practices, teachers need professional development to develop an empowerment approach at ECE centres. Agency explores how and why gender stereotypes and gender behaviours are perpetuated in ECD classrooms. The tenets provide insight into the role of resources in developing gender-stereotypical norms. It illustrates the important role that the teachers' perceptions and pedagogical practices play in the development of gender identity. Teachers need to adapt the curriculum and pedagogic mandates so gender identities are equitable (Ebrahim et al., 2011). Agency is significant for this research as children can be participants who make their views and opinions heard within ECE.

3.5 CONCLUSION

This chapter considered the work of three theories and their contribution to the study's conceptual framework. The tenets of post-structural, identity, and agency theories were considered to guide the research and to develop an innovative framework that sustains gender equality. The tenets of power, discourse, subjectivity and agency challenge teacher perceptions and pedagogical practices by analysing research on femininity, sexuality, masculinity, queer and heterosexuality in the ECE. Secondly, the tenets of verification, salience, commitment, centrality, prominence, resources and base of identities in identity theory are pivotal to challenging teachers' perceptions and pedagogical practices. Hence, children are conscious of gendered identities.

Thirdly, agency theory has illustrated that children are active and competent in constructing gender identities. The tenets of resistance, avoidance, ignoring and collaboration provide insight into how teachers' perceptions and pedagogical practices can be challenged. Therefore, agency theory, post-structural, and identity theory was imperative in challenging teachers' perceptions and pedagogical practices. Each theory has an interrelationship with gender identity and was interwoven to develop a unique theory suitable for the study. The following chapter explores the methodology process guiding the research.

CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of my study was to challenge teachers' perceptions and pedagogical practices regarding children's gender identity in ECD centres. It was imperative to gain insight into how teachers' perceptions and pedagogical practices influenced gender identities to understand how to challenge teachers' perceptions of gender. This chapter explains the methodological context and strategies used to conduct the research study in challenging teacher perceptions and pedagogical practices about gender in ECE centres. As part of the research design, the interpretive paradigm, the qualitative research approach, and the case study are explained. The qualitative research approach was most appropriate for the present study because it allowed the use of different methods and a wide range of designs. This approach allows the researcher to make the best philosophical assumptions to study the phenomenon of interest (Mohajan, 2018).

In addition, there is a description and justification of selected paradigms. This chapter discusses the research methodology, covering topics such as semi-structured interviews, non-participant observations, workshops, and document analysis. The four phases of data collection were as follows:

- Phase 1: Observation of teachers
- Phase 2: Interviews with teachers
- Phase 3: Workshops with teachers and focus group discussions (PAR)
- Phase 4: Workshops with teachers and focus group discussions

The research methods are explained, along with the role of the researcher, purposive sampling, the research site and the selection of participants. The sampling process, gaining access to research sites, the research process and the structuring of the workshops are explored. In this chapter, the researcher discusses how the data was collected and analysed within the interpretive paradigm. The discussion includes the methods used to ensure trustworthiness, ethical considerations and the limitations of the research. The research aimed to challenge teacher perceptions and pedagogical practices about gender identity. To do this, the research methodology assisted with making sense of the data by:

- Eliciting the experiences of teachers' perceptions and pedagogical practices about gender identity
- Enabling the analysis of the data in determining whether teachers' perceptions and pedagogical practices influence gender identity and, if so, how perception and pedagogical practices influence gender
- Determining whether challenging teachers' perceptions and pedagogical practices influence gender identity
- Probing teachers on whether there is a visible difference in children's identity when perceptions and pedagogical practices are challenged

Designing a research project requires careful consideration of the nature of the phenomenon (ontology), the nature of knowing (epistemology), the purpose of the research and ethical considerations of human values (Hammersley, 2014). Creswell (2014) states that there should be congruence between the researcher's paradigmatic assumptions and the research methodology, which is the chosen worldview and the specific methods of research that translate the approach to practice.

4.2 ASSUMPTIONS OF AN INTERPRETIVE PARADIGM

A paradigm is a collection of assumptions, beliefs or opinions about nature or life (Nieuwenhuis, 2016). Kivunja and Kuyini (2017) have indicated that a paradigm consists of convictions and principles that influence the researcher's ideology. It is imperative to conceptualise the philosophical assumptions and beliefs that foreground qualitative research to communicate them in the research study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). According to Creswell and Poth (2018) and Maree (2016), comprehending these assumptions directs the researcher to find information to answer the research questions regarding reality (ontology), the nature of knowledge (epistemology), and the process of research (methodology).

4.2.1 Philosophical Assumptions

The ontological assumption relating to reality is that there is no single truth about reality or a phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The ontological assumption of interpretivism is that the perceived reality should be studied utilising scientific methods (Cohen et al., 2017). The ontological assumption of reality about how pedagogical practices and perspectives influence gender identity can be understood by exploring the experiences

and beliefs of different participants. As themes take shape according to the findings, I will then provide different perceptions from different participants.

According to Dieronitou (2014), epistemology is the ability to be astute and to impute something by experiencing it through a close relationship with the knower and the known. The epistemological assumption when conducting qualitative research is that the researchers should be as close to the participants as possible to obtain subjective evidence based on participants' personal views (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In this study, I spent time at the research sites interacting with the teachers (participants) and relied on verbal evidence from the participants. The methodological assumption refers to the procedures or processes of qualitative research, which are characterised as being inductive since they emerge from the researchers' experiences while collecting and analysing data (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

4.2.2 Epistemological Paradigm

A paradigm is a way of thinking about and making sense of the real world (Hammersley, 2014). A paradigm attaches the researcher to a particular worldview that prescribes how specific systems of meaning and ways for interpreting reality will be approached (Lincoln & Guba, 2016). The research paradigm is an all-encompassing system of interrelated practices that define the dimensions of ontology, epistemology and methodology. The paradigm implies a pattern, structure and framework of academic ideas that reflect the views of the world. Research paradigms can be classified as positivism, interpretivism and critical theory. Positivism is based on the social reality of observation and reason and regards human behaviour as passive, controlled and determined by the external environment. Therefore, the understanding of human behaviour and knowledge is based on the senses (Scotland, 2012).

On the other hand, critical theory adopts a more transactional epistemology where the investigator and the investigated object are linked to the investigator, influencing inquiry (Aprilianti et al., 2021). Critical theory assumes that social reality is produced and reproduced by people. Critical research is constrained by various forms of social, cultural and political domination. Critical theory aims to critique the status quo and seeks to bring cultural, political and social change that eliminates domination (Aprilianti et al., 2021). However, interpretive researchers believe that reality consists of people's subjective experience of the external world. Therefore, there is no single route to

knowledge and reality is socially constructed. Interpretivism is underpinned by observation and interpretation; thus, observation to collect information about events and interpretation is used to make meaning of information by drawing inferences. Interpretivism aims to explain subjective reasons and meanings that lie behind social actions (Pietersen & Maree, 2019). Because of this study's qualitative research design, the interpretivist paradigm is the most relevant philosophical paradigm.

The study followed the interpretivist paradigm, enabling an understanding of the meaning that the participants assigned to their experiences and recognising the social reality that individuals constructed due to their philosophical positions (Cohen et al., 2011). The interpretive paradigm was best suited to the study since the study intended to generate knowledge constituted by the lived experiences of the participants. Interpretivism is based on multiple human experiences, and the social contexts are best suited to reconciling the subjective interpretations made by different participants (Bhattacharjee, 2012). The interpretive paradigm generates knowledge and constructs accounts of individuals' cultural backgrounds that are characterised by authenticity and trustworthiness (Taylor & Medina, 2013).

Pietersen and Maree's (2019) opinion is that behaviour is socially constructed and that interpretivist research will give the researcher insight into how people make sense of the circumstances they encounter daily. The advantage of interpretivism is the rich descriptions that it provides (Pietersen & Maree, 2015). However, interpretivism has been criticised for not being able to generalise the findings further than the situation being studied (Pietersen & Maree, 2015). The interpretive paradigm was the most appropriate for this research project because it facilitates the understanding and description of the phenomenon under investigation (Thanh & Thanh, 2015). Furthermore, an interpretive paradigm assisted in achieving the aim of this study to identify and challenge the teachers' perceptions and pedagogical practices about gender identity. The interpretivist stance is ideal for subjective and in-depth analysis of the participants' responses for this research project. The following are key features of the interpretivist paradigm shown in Table 4.1

Table 4.1: Interpretive Assumptions and the Application to My Study

Assumption	How it relates to my study
The focus is on the individual's experiences and interpretations of people and their interaction with their social environment (Maree, 2016).	This viewpoint allowed me to gain access to the individual's viewpoints and understanding of the lived world of the teachers' perceptions and pedagogical practices.
The meaning attributed to a phenomenon by people is always related to their unique context (Maree, 2016).	This study created an understanding of teachers' perceptions and pedagogical practices and how gender identity is influenced and challenged by these.
The knowledge of the social world is affected by human behaviour (Maree, 2016). Our conceptual world is improved when there is an understanding between the concrete world and the abstract theory (Creswell, 2012).	Multiple realities emanated from multiple truths, and the multiple realities emanated from participants' perceptions at the different preschools. These different perspectives enabled an understanding of what exists in the social world and the theoretical framework.
Our prior knowledge, values, beliefs and perceptions influence how we understand reality (Maree, 2016).	There is a recognition that my previous knowledge and experiences impacted my research.

4.3 THE RESEARCH APPROACH

The study explored the research questions using a qualitative approach with an interpretative paradigm. The qualitative research approach was selected because the study's focus was on providing detailed information and in-depth descriptions of teachers' perceptions and pedagogical practices pertaining to gender identity. The research goal focuses on explaining and defining the phenomenon under investigation from an interpretive perspective (Rehman & Alharthi, 2016). This paradigm allows for rich interactions with the participants, and the data collection phase becomes more interactive (Mertens, 2010).

4.3.1 Qualitative Approach

Nine research characteristics have been identified as relevant for qualitative research (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014). The assumption was that these characteristics could be used as an assessment gauge to determine the quality and authenticity of the chosen

research methods and instruments during this study. These characteristics identified by McMillan and Schumacher (2014) are reflected in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2: Characteristics of Qualitative Research

Characteristics	Applicability to this study
Behaviour is studied in the natural setting (Creswell, 2013).	This study was about teachers' experiences and perceptions at ECD centres.
Behaviour is context-sensitive.	The interviews considered situational factors and even encouraged teachers to tell their stories in this regard.
Direct data collection is appropriate as the researchers collect data themselves, as they are the research instrument (Creswell, 2013).	The data was collected directly from the teachers whose experiences were the main focus.
Rich narrative description is imperative for an in-depth understanding of a multifaceted phenomenon (Creswell, 2013).	The combination of questions allowed teachers to become quite insightful regarding their experiences, as it often was the first time they reflected on these experiences.
Process orientation	It was inevitable that participants reflected on why and how their perceptions and pedagogical practices influence gender.
Inductive data analysis enables the researcher to analyse data effectively and generate a new understanding of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2013).	The teachers gave their experiences in ECD centres about gender. Therefore, similarities and differences were used to determine categories, and some generalisation was possible.
Participants' perspectives are used to ensure that reality is reconstructed (Creswell, 2013).	The teachers gave meaning to their own experiences, using their own language to describe their perceptions and pedagogical perspectives.
Emergent design is chosen, and changes in the research design are needed after data collection (Creswell, 2013).	It was anticipated that this might happen; however, it did not happen to the extent that it influenced the original aim and question of the study.
Complexity of understanding and explanation	This became quite evident early in the study. The identified experiences of teachers which were much more layered than initially anticipated.

4.3.2 Key Research Objective

The study's objective investigated the teachers' perceptions and pedagogical practices of gender identity in ECD centres. The question was considered against the gender equality policy, which places the responsibility on the DBE to promote gender equality and prevent unfair discrimination. The research objectives guided the study to provide appropriate recommendations for teachers in ECE. The research methodology, such as

the sampling methods, the data collection strategy and analysis, were determined by the objectives and the questions to be answered. To this end, the researcher identified teachers from different ECD centres.

4.3.3 Strengths and Weakness of the Qualitative Research Approach

Like every other research approach, a qualitative research approach has advantages and disadvantages. The main advantage of qualitative research is that the results are richly descriptive. The data collected is reflected in words and pictures rather than numbers, and it should communicate what the researcher understood about a particular phenomenon (Babbie, 2015). The transcription of interviews and the analysis of relevant data should provide an understanding of teachers' perceptions and pedagogical practices concerning gender identity. Qualitative research enables the examination of the “why”, “what” and “how” questions. Furthermore, it enables the dissection and description of the data, which leads to the point of saturation.

However, qualitative research is sometimes denounced for a lack of scientific rigour and objectivity as the researcher's opinion may affect the prejudice of the results (Sharma, 2015). In addition, there is a small sample size used in qualitative research, and the findings may be valid in a specific setting and cannot be generalised to other settings. By using multiple data collection sources and data collection methods, bias and subjectivity were addressed.

4.4 RESEARCH DESIGN

A research design is a set-up that describes how the researcher collects, analyses and interprets the data to answer the research questions (Sekaran, 2003). Research design is a rational plan of action that generates reliable research results (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Three parts make up the research plan during the design phase. These three parts comprised the researcher's own understanding of the world, the philosophical worldview of the researcher, the strategies for inquiry and the research methods (Chawla & Sodhi, 2011; Creswell, 2014, p. 5). The three parts navigated the processes of determining the research objective, the kind of inquiry strategies, and the methods to ensure that the data collected could be formulated and presented as findings.

The researcher in this study opted for a descriptive research design using the case study method (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014). According to Yin (2012), a case design

is an aspect of enquiry that investigates the current phenomena in real life circumstances, when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident, and in which multiple sources of evidence are utilised. Case studies have detailed information from different sources, such as a single case study or multiple case studies that highlight the differences among multiple case studies (Crowe & Sheppard, 2011). I implemented a multiple case study design and aligned my study design (Maxwell, 2012). Therefore, this research adopted a multiple case study method using a sample of four ECD centres (one from the township, one from a middle-class suburban area and one private ECD centre). The unit of analysis in this research was the teachers in the ECD centres. The multiple case studies provided a fuller picture of the influence of the teachers' perceptions and pedagogy on gender identity. In addition, the similarities and differences between the teachers' challenged perceptions and pedagogical practices from the four ECD centres were explored.

In this study, a case study was suitable because it allowed the utilization of several instruments: interviews, document analysis, workshops (PAR) and observations. Using the case study for this research was ideal as it could add impetus to the investigation. The depth of the research was further enhanced by carrying out interviews, observations and workshops to allow participants to have open discussions and reflections. I used various data generation techniques to understand the participants' diverse experiences about a specific case or situation (Yin, 2012). In doing a case study, I engaged with the participants to gain insight into their perceptions and pedagogical practices. Case study research has some methodological advantages and disadvantages. Multiple case studies are advantageous as they enable the analysis and research of two or more cases to establish an informative understanding of the phenomena in the natural setting (Yin, 2012).

There are also some disadvantages of using case study design, such as the gathering of large quantities of data that are not applicable to the case. Secondly, case studies may lack rigour as researchers may prefer to look for correlations in several case studies and sometimes overlook variations (Rule & John, 2011). Hence, I utilised multiple data collection and documentation techniques in the current research to yield multiple views of the case. Therefore, multiple data collection process was used to overcome the problem of rigour. In exploring the role of the awareness programme, an in-depth understanding of challenging teacher perceptions and pedagogies was expounded.

The researcher should be aware of the possible disadvantages to ensure that these weaknesses can be avoided. To overcome the problem of rigour, the researcher utilised triangulation by using multiple data collection methods (Crowe & Sheppard, 2011). An interview schedule was established to ensure the necessary data was collected to answer the research questions. To establish an ethical protocol, I obtained voluntary informed consent from all participants, and no personal information about participants was reflected in the published data during the interviews, observations and workshops (PAR) (Crowe & Sheppard, 2011). Finally, I kept a research journal and reflected with my supervisor throughout the research to ensure my subjective thoughts and opinions did not permeate the research.

4.5 POPULATION

The population in research is described as all the possible individuals who are eligible to be included in the study (Mcmillan & Schumacher, 2014). Therefore, the population refers to the group of people from which a sample can be drawn; the sample in this study was the teachers in selected ECD centres in the Gauteng province.

4.5.1 The Study Population

Gauteng is divided into three metropolitan municipalities, the cities of Ekurhuleni, Johannesburg and Tshwane, and two district municipalities. The metropolitan municipality of the city of Johannesburg is the most populous in the country. In this study, the population was the ECD centres in Midrand in the City of Johannesburg. Thus, the eligibility criteria were that ECD centres must be registered with the Department of Social Development and be situated in Midrand's township or suburban area.

4.5.2 Sampling Size

Obtaining data from the vast population of registered ECD centres would not be possible due to constraints of time and finance. Hence, a sample of four registered ECD centres was selected from Midrand, two ECD centres from the suburban areas and two from the townships. The study utilised a sample size consisting of twelve ECD teachers, three ECD teachers from each centre.

4.5.3 Sampling Technique

Sampling is a process of selecting a population that the researcher could use to generate data to address the research questions (Cohen et al., 2011). Qualitative researchers usually select their participants using purposive sampling due to practical and financial implications (Flick, 2014). Sampling is identifying, choosing and gaining access to suitable data sources critical to the study's integrity (Mason, 2010). An ideal sample will lead to the generation of quality data while a poorly selected sample may lack authenticity (Patton, 2014).

4.5.3.1 Advantages of the Sampling Technique

This study utilised purposeful sampling. In this type of sampling, the researcher uses personal knowledge and opinions to choose the participants for the study (Tuckman & Harper, 2012). Purposeful sampling is used when selecting a sample with a specific purpose (Pietersen & Maree, 2019). I was confident that purposeful sampling provided the most relevant information in selecting ECD centres in Midrand, Gauteng Province. Therefore, purposeful sampling was used based on the benefits of not being time-consuming and being easy to administer. (Creswell, 2012).

4.5.3.2 Disadvantages of the Sampling Technique

A possible limitation of convenience sampling is that results may be difficult to generalise, but the awareness programme could be transferable to similar contexts. (Creswell, 2012).

4.5.4 Criteria for Purposive Sampling

The participants are chosen according to a predetermined set of criteria relevant to the research question. Purposive sampling is the process of selecting who will participate in the study and the sites of the ECD centres. Twelve participants were chosen for this study. These participants were ECD teachers, and I relied on purposeful sampling to select participants. Purposeful sampling is most suitable for exploratory research, where the researcher implements specific criteria to address the study's objectives (Nieuwenhuis, 2016). The research participants are intentionally selected, according to the predetermined set of criteria, because of their knowledge, interest, experience in the research topic and their suitability for the research (Rule & John, 2011). In the context of this study, the following criteria applied:

- Participants must be teachers of 3- or 4-year-olds.
- Participants were either male or female teachers in the ECD centres.
- Participants should have five years or more experience working at an ECD centre.
- Participants must be able to communicate in English.
- Participants should be able and willing to attend sessions after school.
- Participants must be willing to participate in the study and provide informed consent.

4.6 RESEARCH CONTEXT

4.6.1 Research Site

The research site should fit the study's design and be practical in terms of time, mobility and resources (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014). Since I live and work in Midrand, four ECD centres in Midrand were selected for easy accessibility and to build a good working relationship with the participants. I purposively selected one ECD centre in a township, one Reggio Emilia centre, one Montessori ECD centre and an ECD centre at a private school (a suburban area of Midrand). The study was not originally intended to be comparative, but I realised through reflection that the diverse setting would enrich the findings and contribution of the study (Table 4.3 shows the profiles of the selected ECD centres). The township ECD selected is located in Midrand, with a population of about 182,000 people. Many people occupy small brick buildings inherited from the apartheid era (Shole, 2022). There are also numerous informal dwellings in the form of shacks, a phenomenon characteristic of the democratic government since 1994 (Photograph 4.1). Midrand is in the province of Gauteng in South Africa. There are many suburbs situated in Midrand. There are high rise buildings, estates, complexes and corporate parks which accommodate people from the middle and more affluent classes (Photograph 4.2). Midrand is surrounded by hotels and businesses which attract people from other parts of the country. I chose this community to represent the suburban area as the research site of the study. The maps and pictures below (Figures 4.1, 4.2 and 4.3) provide an overview of the research sites.

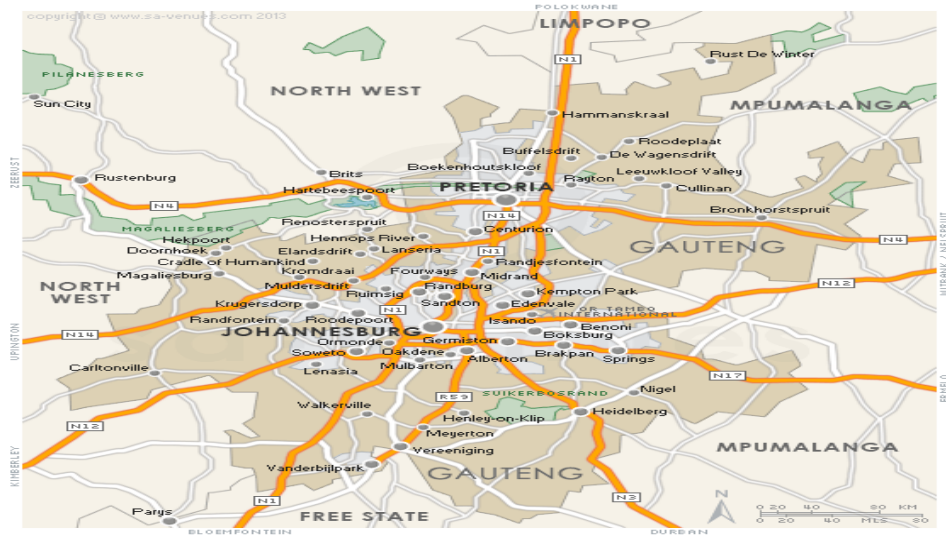


Figure 4.1: Map of Gauteng

Source: Google Maps (2022)



Figure 4.2: Map of Midrand

Source (Google Maps, 2023)



Figure 4.3: Map of Ivory Park
Source: Google Maps (2022)



Photograph 4.1: The Ivory Park environment



Photograph 4.2: The Midrand Environment

Table 4.3: Profile of the Four ECD Centres

Centre	Type of location	Number of years of existence	Enrolment	Number of Staff members	Fees per child per month
A	I.E.B private school	16 years	117	1 principal 7 teachers 7assiststants 1 cook 1 cleaner	Fees range from R 4350 – R5900 per month
B	Reggio Emilia	16 years	Around 117	1 principal 5 teachers 1 assistant 1 cook 4 cleaners	R4000 per month, depending on half-day or full-day
C	Montessori	16 years	85	1 principal 4 teachers 2 assistants 3 cleaners	R 4800 for half-day or R 6000 for full-day.
D	Township	19 years	110	6 teachers 1 principal 1 part-time gardener	R 450 per month

4.6.2 Description of Research Site in Suburban Centre A

In any qualitative research, it is important to describe the research setting to give the reader a clearer picture of the environment where a phenomenon is investigated.

Descriptions of the selected sites (as outlined below) assisted in providing an in-depth understanding of the participants' experiences and the uniqueness of the environment. Suburban Centre A is situated in Midrand, Gauteng, as illustrated in Figure 4.3. This centre is specifically built for ECE purposes, with the playground built in the middle of the ECD centre, as illustrated in Figure 4.6. There are reading areas, a fantasy corner, an art area, and a reading area with a library. The centre has been in existence for over 20 years. There is a total of 117 children attending the ECD centre. The total staff is 17 (1 principal, seven teachers, seven assistants, one cook and one cleaner). All the staff at the school are female except for the coach and the security guard. At this centre, there is a principal who reports to the board of directors. There is a primary and high school attached to the ECD centre.



Photograph 4.3: Suburban Centre A

4.6.3 Description of Research Site in Suburban Centre B

Suburban centre B is situated in Centurion. Centurion is in the Gauteng province of South Africa, located between Pretoria and Midrand, as indicated in Figure 4.3. The centre was built for ECE with a Reggio Emilia approach around 16 years ago. The classroom is divided into different play areas. There is a construction corner where children learn about spatial relationships. There is an art centre where children develop observational, creative, imaginative and problem-solving skills. There is a fantasy corner, library and music area. The playground is organised to facilitate learning, as depicted in Figure 4.7. There are sandpits, swings, tunnels, a climbing wall, and a water

area with a rowing boat. There are about 117 children in the school. The staff consists of one principal, five teachers, one assistant, one cook and four cleaners. All the teachers are female, and the only male in the school is the gardener.



Photograph 4.4: Suburban Centre B

4.6.4 Description of Research Site in Suburban Centre C

Suburban Centre C is situated in Midrand, and the entire school was built according to the Montessori philosophy. There is a specific play area with a jungle gym, sand pit and slides, as depicted in Figure 4.8. There are 85 children at the school. The classrooms are divided into different areas such as language, a sensory area, the mathematics area, the cultural studies and the practical life area. Each area consists of work areas, and the children choose their work. The school consists of four teachers, two assistants and three cleaners. There are only female teachers at the school; the only males are the security guard and the gardeners.



Photograph 4.5: Suburban Centre C

4.6.5 Description of Research Site in Township Centre D

Township Centre D is situated in Ivory Park, as illustrated in Figure 4.4. The township is densely populated with informal settlements, as depicted in Figure 4.5. The school is attached to a government clinic. The school was funded by a corporate organisation. There are small classrooms with a play area in front of the classrooms. There is a play area with a jungle gym, and swings, as depicted in Figure 4.9. There are 110 children at the school. The classrooms have play areas for the children. The school consists of one principal and six teachers. There are only female teachers at the school and the only male is the part-time gardener and the security guard.

4.7 RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS



Photograph 4.6: Suburban Centre D

In a qualitative study, the participants are expected to possess experience and be able to provide relevant and rich information on the phenomenon under study (Creswell & Poth, 2016). The participants selected for this study were teachers. The teachers from each ECD centre were required to have job experience. The selected practitioners from each centre are those indicated by the principal as knowledgeable in the centre.

4.7.1 Gaining Access to the Participants

To access the participants of this study, I used a gatekeeper who provided access to a site and assisted in identifying possible study participants. The coordinator of ECD centres in Midrand acted as a gatekeeper for this study. (Van den Brink & Benschop, 2014). The coordinator gave me a list of contact details and information about potential participants who met the research criteria.

I initially contacted the ECD centres via email and a telephone call. I introduced myself and explained the aim and objectives of the study. I followed up with phone calls and some centres were happy to participate in the study while others refused to participate. I began working with ECD centres that agreed to be part of the study by explaining thoroughly what the study entailed. Firstly, I handed each participant a research consent form to sign for volunteering to participate. Secondly, dates and times were agreed upon for the interviews and observation.

To protect the identity of the participants, each participant was assigned a code as illustrated in Table 4.2 below. The letter “T” means township, and the “S” means suburban centre. The participants are numbered 1 to 8. The letters “Pr” indicates the practitioner. The centres A, B, C, and D are referred to as “CA”, “CB”, “CC” and “CD”. Hence, the coding of each participant is as TPr1CA, TPr2CA and so on. Apart from attaching codes to identify each participant, I present verbatim responses extracted from the generated data to provide relevant evidence for this study. The data transcription is attached in Appendix 5 to locate the verbatim responses of the participants.

Table 4.4: Profile of the Participants

Participant	Centre	Participant Code	Gender	Age	Highest qualification	Position	Years of experience in ECD
SPr1CA	A	SPr1CA-Suburban Centre A	female	40	Bachelor of Education	teacher	4 years
SPr2CA	A	SPr2CA-Suburban Centre A	female	42	Diploma in Education	teacher	16 years
SPr3CA	A	SPr3CA-Suburban Centre A	female	58	Diploma in Education	teacher	31 years
SPr1CB	B	SPr1CB-Suburban Centre B	female	28	Bachelor of Education	teacher	10 years
SPr1CB	B	SPr2CB-Suburban Centre B	female	41	ECD Certificate	teacher	16 years
SPr1CB	B	SPr3CB-Suburban Centre B	female	50	ECD Certificate	teacher	16 years
SPr1CC	C	SPr1CC-Suburban Centre C	female	25	Diploma in ECD.	teacher	5 years
SPr1CC	C	SPr2CC-Suburban Centre C	female	31	Diploma in ECD.	teacher	7 years
SPr1CC	C	SPr3CC-Suburban Centre C	female	28	Diploma in ECD.	teacher	19 years
SPr1CD	D	SPr1CD-Suburban Centre D	female	52	Diploma in ECD	teacher	19 years

Participant	Centre	Participant Code	Gender	Age	Highest qualification	Position	Years of experience in ECD
SPr1CD	D	SPr2CD-Suburban Centre D	female	60	Diploma in ECD	teacher	16 years
SPr1CD	D	SPr3CD-Suburban Centre D	female	71	No education	teacher	27 years

4.8 DATA COLLECTION

I used multi-method data generation and documentation such as interviews, observations, focus group discussions, workshops, and field notes, which were compiled to record non-verbal communication during the observations and interviews. In addition, consented photographs were taken for the observation of learning environments. However, all the participants' faces were blurred to respect their anonymity.

4.8.1 Phases of Data Collection

There were four phases of data collection. Phase 1 comprised the observation of participants from Centres A, B, C and D. In Phase 2; there were semi-structured interviews with the participants and document analysis relating to Centres A, B, C and D. In Phase 3, there were focus group discussions with the participants to explain the research study and workshops with the participants to challenge their perceptions and pedagogical practices on gender. In Phase 4, there were workshops and focus group discussions to reflect on the challenges in the ECD centres.

4.8.2 Observation

Observation is an essential data collection tool for qualitative researchers that assists with understanding complex behaviour (Nieuwenhuis, 2016). Observations were conducted at the selected centres using a pre-designed observation schedule to gain insight into how the perceptions and pedagogical practices of teachers influence gender identity. The conceptual framework was used as a guide to structuring the observation schedule. The observation process enabled the comprehension of actual events in the

research environment without communicating with the participants (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014). I did observations with a checklist as I interacted with participants (Strydom, 2011). During the observations, I took photographs of the teachers and children, but the faces of the teacher and children were blurred to maintain their confidentiality. However, there were challenges, such as the possibility of being subjective, and therefore, I filtered my thought process through reflection.

4.8.3 Semi-Structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews allowed the researcher to gain knowledge in the form of an in-depth understanding of teachers' perceptions and pedagogical practices concerning gender identity (King et al., 2018). A semi-structured interview schedule was used with pre-structured questions, which served to elicit answers to the research questions (Annexure B). The interview schedule was designed to understand how teachers' perceptions and pedagogical practices influence gender identity. Firstly, the principal was contacted to get permission to interview the teachers. Secondly, there was a group discussion on the research with the relevant teachers. Thirdly, appointments were set up to interview the teachers. All the interviews were conducted after work hours. Three teachers from each centre were interviewed. The interview sessions with each participant took fifty minutes. The participants expressed their views in detail, and notes were taken during the interview session. Permission was obtained to photograph the children at the ECD centre to enrich information from other sources.

4.8.4 Focus Group Discussions

Focus group discussions are used for gathering data by exploring the discourses that outline everyday life, which stimulates group discussion (Strydom, 2011). Focus group discussion interviews are carefully planned discussions to obtain participants' perceptions (Doody & Noonan, 2013). Permission for focus group discussions was obtained from the principal. The teachers were contacted, and appointments were established. The focus group discussion was conducted after work hours, and it provided insight into the perceptions and pedagogical practices of teachers. I conducted three focus group discussions: the first discussed perceptions and pedagogical practices concerning gender identity at the ECD centres, while the second focus group discussion covered the implementation of the awareness programme. Finally, after implementing the programme, the third focus group discussion was arranged to get

feedback from the teachers about how to challenge their perceptions and pedagogical practices. The outcome of the focus group interviews and workshops led to the development and implementation of the awareness programme. The focus group discussion was audio-recorded and later transcribed (Annexure C) (Nieuwenhuis, 2016). One advantage of focus-group discussions is the possibility of producing vital data on a topic of interest (Strydom, 2011). A concern with a focus group discussion is that the findings may not be generalisable (Strydom, 2011).

4.8.5 Field Notes

I used a research diary to reflect and document observations made during the focus group discussions and interview sessions. I captured personal thoughts and experiences throughout the study in a research diary. I used the research diary to keep track of my subjective thoughts and have a deeper understanding of the research (Litchman, 2010). I made systematic descriptive notes to capture the essence of the research process. The descriptive notes were information on the observed sessions, what the physical setting looked like, which activities took place, which participants attended and which informal interactive conversations with participants transpired (Sanjek, 2019).

4.8.6 Document Analysis

I conducted document analysis in preparation for the research I undertook. This strategy involved analysing written material containing information about the phenomenon being researched (Strydom, 2011). I analysed documents and policies such as the National Integrated ECD, early child development policy, national curriculum statement and the national curriculum framework from birth to four years (RSA, 2015). The early child development policy influences the lesson plans of each centre. In analysing these documents, I focused on how teachers' perceptions and pedagogical practices influence gender identity at the ECD centres. Therefore, teachers' perceptions and pedagogical practices with regard to gender identity informed the analysis of documents. A potential benefit of document analysis is that it allowed me to plan and implement an awareness programme. Document analysis allowed additional insights beyond the participants' viewpoints (Flick, 2014). Although policy cannot be changed, it enabled me to challenge teachers' perceptions and pedagogical perspectives concerning gender identity.

4.8.7 Audio-Visual Techniques

I used a voice recorder to record, verify and clarify all contribution sessions, focus group discussions, and semi-structured interviews. The sessions were then transcribed verbatim (Bless et al., 2013). Throughout the visual data collection, I provided a descriptive image of the participants and their activities through my observations and experience in the field (Erickson, 2011). However, I ensured that participants were informed about the strategy's purpose. In addition, the participants provided their consent for photographs to be taken. However, none of the participants' faces were made visible to respect their anonymity.

4.9 PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH WORKSHOPS

After six months of preparation, which included planning my study, conducting a literature review, interviewing teachers, gaining permission for data collection from the ethics community and the DBE, gaining access to research sites and meeting my participants, I was finally ready to do the workshop. Workshops are a popular strategy when emphasising the importance of participant involvement in formulating the aims of a research process (Ferreira, 2012). I facilitated two informal workshops for the participants of the research sites. During the first session, I observed the interaction between participants and accessed their verbally expressed opinions, perceptions and experiences with pedagogical practices concerning gender identity. I ensured that teachers understood the research project's purpose and were actively involved as research partners. I requested participants to map their ideas on gender (Ebersöhn & Ferreira, 2012)

The second workshop focused on challenging teacher perceptions and pedagogical practices. It took the form of small group discussions where the participants discussed, captured their ideas, shared and elaborated on their ideas. The participants were given a poster chart paper divided into quarters. In the first quarter, the teachers had to brainstorm their ideas and feelings on gender identity and problems with gender in ECD centres. In the second quadrant, the teachers brainstormed their thoughts and feelings about gender roles.

In addition, they brainstormed about gender stereotypes. The teachers watched a video on a story about the female being the leader in the story. The teachers then had to return to the classroom and tell the story to the children. The workshops were over an

hour and had to be structured around the teacher’s availability. Each workshop was structured to allow time for reflection, feedback and the discussion of challenges. After a week, the teachers met again to discuss how the story challenged their perceptions and pedagogics in the classroom. The teachers brainstormed ideas on how their perceptions could be challenged in the third quadrant. In the final quadrant, the teachers brainstormed the children’s and parental reactions to the story. Finally, they discussed any problems associated with their perceptions and pedagogical practices being challenged. Figure 4.4. depicts the PAR in the form of workshops.

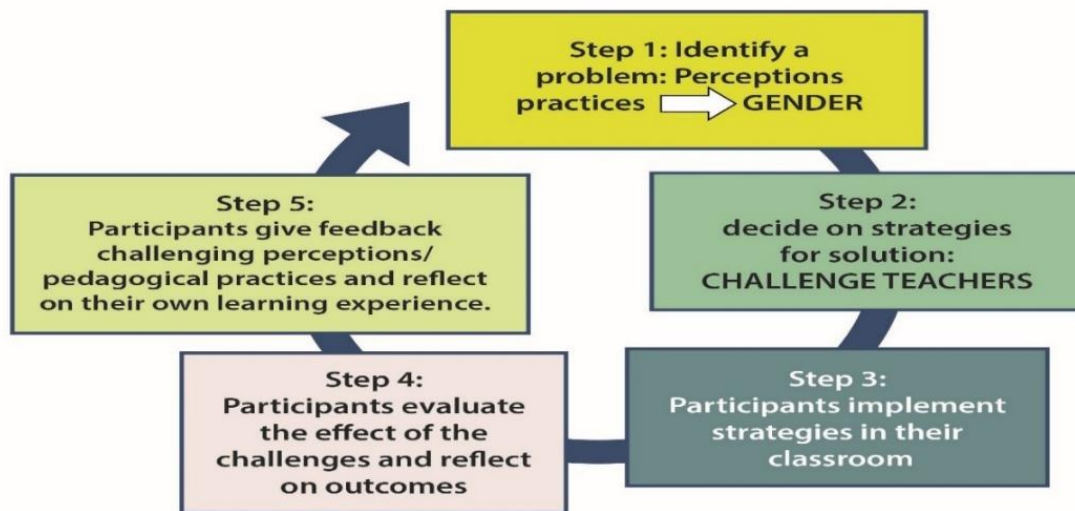


Figure 4.4: Research Cycles For This Study

Adapted from the five-step action research cycle of McNiff (2015)

The data collection for this study took place during the second and third term of the year and commenced with observations, interviews, workshops and group discussions with the teachers. At each step, as illustrated in Figure 4.4, the participants were viewed as experts throughout the discussions, and I fulfilled the role of a facilitator. Therefore, there were workshops and focus group discussions where participants discussed, challenged and reflected on their perceptions and pedagogical practices about gender.

4.9.1 Participatory Action Research and the Researcher

The role of the researcher as facilitator was essential to the quality of the workshops and participants in PAR (Zuber-Skerritt, 2018). The participants in the ECD centres were unfamiliar with PAR and relied on my guidance during the workshops. As a facilitator, I had to present knowledge relevant to the facilitator, facilitate collaborative discussions

and support participants when their perceptions and pedagogical practices were challenged. By guiding them with enthusiasm, the researcher provides the scaffolding they need to develop new knowledge that influences their professional development (Zuber-Skerritt, 2018). Furthermore, the participants were given ample opportunity to give feedback on their learning experiences during the group discussions and after their perceptions and pedagogical practices were challenged (Zuber-Skerritt, 2018). The learning experiences during the first workshop had to be evaluated to determine the participants' needs, which in turn influenced the research cycle. The group discussion was anonymous, and participants could reflect on questions while they did the poster. The participants were given ample opportunities to apply the new knowledge gained through collaborative discussions and critical self-reflection. Participatory action research is regarded as effective when participants can apply the new knowledge in their professional lives and when such application contributes to higher levels of self-efficacy (Zuber-Skerritt, 2018). In the second workshop, teachers implemented the intervention strategies to adjust their perceptions and pedagogical practices. The teachers collaborated and completed the poster in an informal session. There was a group discussion on their experiences. The participants could give feedback on how being challenged influenced their perceptions and practices and the children's responses to their changed practices.

4.9.2 Data Analysis and Interpretation

My data analysis and interpretation strategy implied a dynamic and systematic continuous learning process to gain new insight as the study progressed. The study adopted the thematic data analysis approach, which was carried out manually into the emerging themes and sub-themes. The purpose of inductive thematic analysis and interpretation in the proposed study was firstly to understand participants' experiences through observations and semi-structured interviews. Secondly, I described the variety of the participants' experiences through focus group discussions. Thirdly, I studied the participants in their natural contexts by observation of teachers in the classroom and reviewed documents (Bless et al., 2013). I conducted thematic inductive data analysis, relying on possible themes and then used general categories for the sorting process in consultation with my supervisor (Guest et al., 2012). After a process of systematic reading, I manually coded the data, using colour coding to indicate possible patterns

(Creswell, 2012). After I reached saturation with the coding process, I finalised the themes and sub-themes.

4.10 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

4.10.1 Informed Consent

Research ethics provide guidelines for what is morally acceptable when gathering data from participants. Throughout the study, I adhered to all the ethical principles, ensuring the protection of human rights and social justice established by the University of Pretoria Code of Ethics in Research (University of Pretoria, 2013). In addition, children were informed about the research, and they had to draw either a smiling face to indicate consent to participate in the research or a sad face to indicate they did not want to participate in the research. No challenges were experienced with child assent. My ethical decision-making was informed by reflexivity, shared dialogue and supervisor consultation.

4.10.2 Privacy, Confidentiality and Anonymity

I honoured the principle of obtaining voluntary informed consent before the participants' involvement in the study to record their discussions and observe and photograph them throughout the research (Strydom, 2011). However, before I entered the research field, I obtained the required permission from the DoE (Gauteng region), the principals and the school governing bodies. I took photographs of the teacher with the children. However, the faces of the teacher and children were blurred. Furthermore, I adhered to the ethical obligation to ensure the participants benefitted from the study, that the research could contribute to the well-being of the participants, and that there was protection from any possible harm (Bless et al., 2013). Before conducting any fieldwork, I requested informed consent from each teacher participant at the ECD centres (Christensen et al., 2015). Before the workshops, I send out a letter of invitation to the potential participants' teachers, requesting their participation and explaining their right to withdraw from the study at any time without any negative consequences (Maxwell, 2012).

In addition, the principle of privacy was applied, so all obtained information was handled with sensitivity (Leedy & Ormrod, 2015). All documented information was securely stored and protected by a password (Christensen et al., 2015). The participants'

anonymity was ensured by the use of pseudonyms (Leedy & Ormrod, 2015). After completing my study, I destroyed the audio recordings and protected participants' identities in publications (Strydom, 2011). Finally, debriefing sessions after the workshops will ensure that every participant's confidentiality is respected.

4.11 QUALITY CRITERIA FOR TRUSTWORTHINESS

The foundation of trustworthiness within the study is how the researcher can convince the reader that the study's findings are worth paying attention to and that the research is of good quality (Maxwell, 2012). I used a multi-media approach that collected data from numerous sources, effectively addressing the trustworthiness of qualitative research (Nieuwenhuis, 2016). In addition, I continuously addressed potential methodological challenges and adhered to the following criteria to ensure trustworthiness: credibility, transferability, dependability, conformability and authenticity.

4.11.1 Credibility

Credibility in qualitative research is the relationship between how a researcher portrays the perceptions of participants and the actual viewpoints of the participants (Silverman, 2013). I applied rigour with integrity using multimedia data sources and implemented specific methodological strategies for credible research (Creswell, 2012).

4.11.2 Transferability

Transferability aims to connect study aspects that could be transferred from one context to a similar situation (Barnes et al., 2012). I used extensive descriptions and interpretations of the data, visual data, transcripts of the documents and the reflective journals so that researchers in other similar contexts could determine the transferability of the findings for their contexts. (Gajjar, 2013).

4.11.3 Dependability

Dependability implies that a research process has been documented and the research process was logical (Bless et al., 2013). Dependability represents the extent to which research can be referred to participants and their experiences can be reproduced in a similar setting (Gajjar, 2013). In this regard, I kept a research diary to document the many steps and procedures followed and my reflections on the research process itself.

4.11.4 Confirmability

Confirmability is the extent to which a study's findings can be verified and is not seen as a fabrication to serve a specific purpose and not influenced by the researcher's bias (Bush, 2012). I validated and triangulated my findings using multiple data collection techniques. Triangulation is critical in the facilitation and establishment of data trustworthiness (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014).

4.11.5 Authenticity

Authenticity aims to ensure that a study provides a fair representation or faithful reconstruction of participants' perceptions (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014). I worked in partnership with my supervisor and the participants to meet the criterion of authenticity. I used member checking and reflexivity to authenticate the data collected and documented through focus group discussions, transcription of interviews and reflections in the field notes (Creswell, 2012). Therefore, reflexivity improves the validity, reliability and rigour of the research by making the process more transparent and coherent. Furthermore, member checking and reflexivity enhance the contextualisation and innovation of the research (Maree, 2016).

4.12 CONCLUSION

Chapter 4 explained the research methodology and design of the study. This study was embedded in the qualitative research paradigm, which enabled the researcher to read and listen to the participant's stories and thus make sense of the collected data (Creswell & Clark, 2017). The rationale for employing the interpretivist stance was justified in adopting the qualitative research approach. After that, the research design, the research context, the profile of the site, the research participants and data collection strategies were discussed. Lastly, the strategies which were applied to ensure trustworthiness and other ethical issues were pointed out. The data is presented and discussed in the next chapter (Chapter 5), which also summarises the research study's findings.

Chapter 5: Data Findings and Analysis

5.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the findings elicited from the data collection and analysis. All the data was generated at an ECD centre. I analysed the observations and teacher participants' interviews in relationship to the perceptions and pedagogical practices of gender. After the interviews and the workshops, four themes emerged. The generated data was further classified into sub-themes. Each theme and subtheme will be elucidated to compare the research participants' responses.

5.2 DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

From the start of the field process, all the field activities, including data generation, consolidation and transcription, were performed in four months. I arranged a meeting with the ECD teachers at Centre A and explained the purpose and procedures of the research. They were eager to be part of the research. They were excited to join the team and eagerly shared their teaching experience. The teachers signed the consent letters and discussed dates for observations, interviews, group discussions and workshops.

The ECD teachers at Centre B were polite and friendly. Some of the teachers were a bit reserved, but once I explained the purpose of the research, they were eager to be part of the research and immediately shared their experiences with gender identity in the classroom. One of the teachers was extremely nervous as she felt she could not explain herself in English as Afrikaans was her first language. I had to spend time reassuring her that her communication in English was adequate, and then she felt more comfortable participating in the research. All three teachers signed the informed consent letters and confirmed the observation dates.

At Centre C, the teachers were experienced but appeared quiet and somewhat nervous. I had to clearly explain the purpose of the research and reassure them that all information would be strictly anonymous. They felt more relaxed after the meeting, and the teachers signed the consent letters. The dates of the prospective observations, interviews, focus group discussions and workshops had to be clearly established as they had a stringent sporting timetable.

At Centre D, the teachers were extremely eager to assist as it was the first time in many years that a researcher wanted to do research at the school. The teachers were excited to share their experiences and responded positively to the observations, interviews and workshops. I realized that the teachers wanted an opportunity to share their perceptions and pedagogical practices with a passion.

During the data collection process, I faced several challenges related to participation by teacher participants. Many teachers did not want to participate. I managed this challenge by consistently following up with teacher participants who showed initial interest in the study to increase the number of participating teachers. I also explained the research in greater detail and how participation would impact gender equality in ECD. This section discusses the details of the findings garnered from the interpretative analysis of the generated data. The analysis of the transcriptions of interviews, documents, observations, workshops and field notes revealed the themes and subthemes. The specific timeline of the research is indicated in Table 5.1.

Table 5.1: Field Data Generation Timelines

Action	Date	ECD Centre
Phase 1: Group Discussion and Observation of participants	30 May 2022	A
Phase 1: Semi structured Interview of participants	14 June 2022	A
Phase 1: Group Discussion and Observation of participants	1 July 2022	B
Phase 1: Semi structured Interview of participants	12 July 2022	B
Phase 1: Group Discussion and Observation of participants	5 July 2022	C
Phase 1: Semi structured Interview of participants	6 July 2022	C
Phase 1: Group Discussion and Observation of participants	13 July 2022	D
Phase 1: Semi structured Interview of participants	14 July 2022	D
Phase 2: Workshop and Group discussion Follow up workshop/Group Discussion	3 October 2022 10 October 2022	A
Workshop and Group discussion Follow up workshop/Group Discussion	4 October 2022 11 October 2022	B
Workshop and Group discussion Follow up workshop/Group Discussion	12 October 2022 19 October 2022	C
Workshop and Group discussion Follow up workshop/Group Discussion	3 October 2022 10 October 2022	D

As the data analysis progressed, four main themes emerged, each with sub-themes. These themes and sub-themes also captured the data responses arising from the research question and research sub-questions. Each theme was organised to have sub-themes, which were used to build data to conduct an analysis based on themes (Creswell, 2012). The main themes are teachers' perceptions, pedagogical practices in the classroom, teacher awareness programmes, their challenged perceptions and pedagogical practices. Furthermore, the researcher also wanted to determine the need for an awareness programme to enhance gender identity at ECD centres.

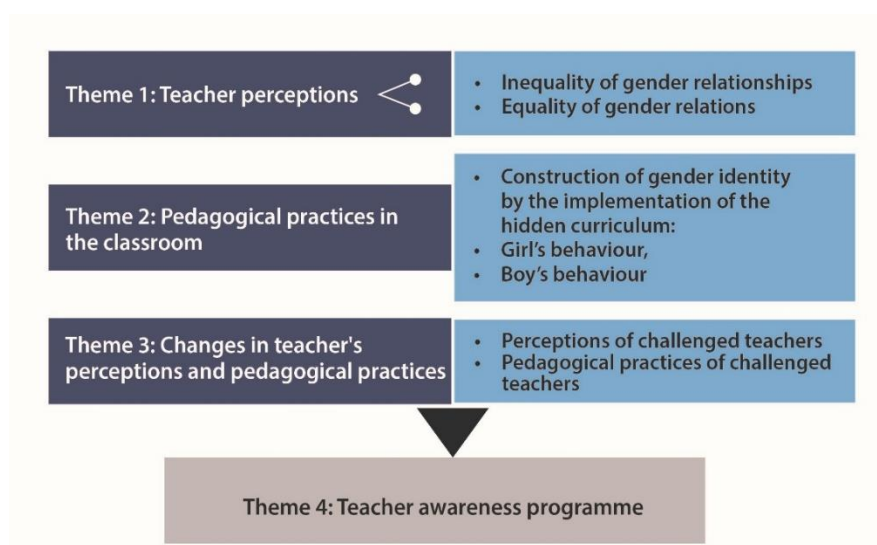


Figure 5.1: Themes and Sub-Themes That Emerged From the Study

5.3 THEME 1: TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS

A sub-research question of the study is: *What are the teachers' perceptions regarding the gender identity of the young child?* In answering this research question, participants had to illustrate how children develop their gender identity to understand what influences gender. In addition, the teachers had to indicate their perceptions and how they influenced the curriculum, discipline and classroom management. The semi-structured interviews and observations of participants from different ECD centres revealed two distinctive subthemes which emerged from the study: gender inequality perceptions and gender equality perceptions.

5.3.1 Sub-theme: Gender Inequality Perceptions

The research revealed specific categories of gender inequality that were manifested. Figure 5.2 illustrates the categories of gender inequality. The findings of each area of gender inequality will be discussed briefly.

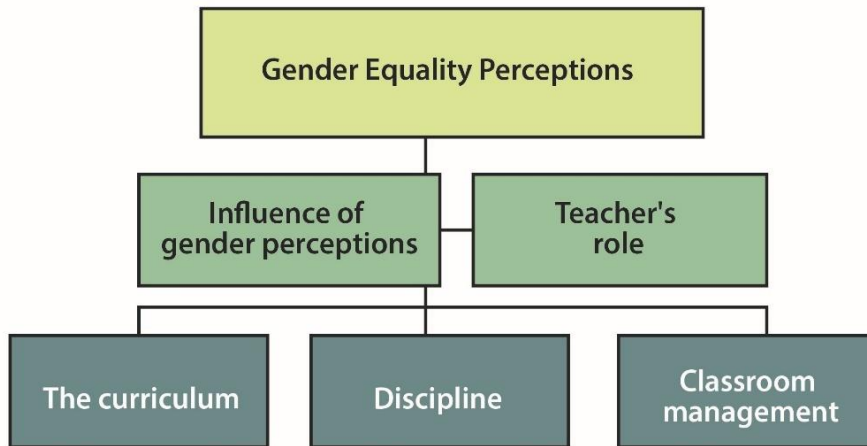


Figure 5.2: The Categories of Gender Inequality Perceptions

5.3.1.1 *The Origin Of Gender Inequality Perceptions*

In response to how children develop their gender identity, participants SP1CA, SP2CB, SP1CC and SP1CD indicated that gender identity develops from a child's home environment. Therefore, participant SP1CA mentioned, "*They come to school knowing they are a boy or girl. When they interact with children, they are aware they are a boy or a girl. When they play and call a girl a boy or a boy a girl, they get angry and complain. They get upset when they are referred [to] as another gender. They get most of their knowledge from home.*" Participant SP1CC asserted gender identity "*starts at home from mum and dad.*" In addition, the response from participant SP1CD argued that "*Children develop gender from their home environment.*". Participant SP2CC opined that "*the parents firstly influence them.*" The indication of teachers' responses to Sub-theme 1 is that the home environment plays an important role in developing a gender identity.

5.3.1.2 Gender Inequality Perceptions of Children

In response to teachers' perceptions of gender, as illustrated in Figure 5.2. the participants indicated differences between boys and girls in ECD centres. Participant SPr2CA, argued that *"girls tend to be more emotional while boys tend to be rougher."* Participant SPr1CA argued, *"Boys are rough. Girls are more out-spoken."* Participant SPr1CB asserted that the *"the girls in the class are highly developed."* Participant SPr1CC indicated that *"I have difficulty with more boys."* Participant TPr2CD indicated, *"I believe that girls are fast learners and boys are slow,"* Furthermore, participant SPr2CC indicated, *"I find boys are more energetic and lack concentration. We find that girls get emotional."* Therefore, there were gender differences between boys and girls. Hence, the teachers had unequal perceptions of children based on their gender. *In addition*, research in Norway indicated that teachers related differently to girls and boys concerning expectations and behaviour (Meland & Kaltvedt, 2019).

5.3.1.3 Gender inequality perceptions and the curriculum

In addition, the hidden curriculum in the ECD, especially in how boys and girls experience gender differences, influences their gender identity. In response to participants' perceptions concerning gender identity, the participants SPr1CA, SPr1CB, SPr1CC and SPr2CD illustrated gender inequality perceptions. Firstly, the participants addressed children according to their gender as either *"girls"* or *"boys"*. Secondly, the participants used distinctive gender stereotypical language to address the boys and girls. Participant, SPr2CA used the term *"angel"* to address the girls in the class.

In response to how the teachers' perception of gender influences the curriculum, participant SPr2CC asserted,

In the books, the boys are dressed in shorts and doing boisterous things. That will be the main thing that books can bring to separate boys and girls. The reading cards, which are classified cards, deal with emotions and there are gender bias emotions in the cards. (SPr2CC)

Photograph 5.1 shows some of the stereotypical resources at the ECD centre. Participant TPr1CD indicated that *"some of the books and materials have different roles for boys and girls."* Participant SPr1CA opined that *"Some books show boys and girls doing different activities."* Participants SPr2CC, TPr1CD and SPr1CA indicated that curriculum resources have stereotypical gender portrayal in books.

5.3.1.4 Gender Inequality Perceptions and Discipline

There are distinctive differences in disciplining boys and girls because of the influence of gender perceptions. Discipline, as depicted in indicated that *“boys need firm discipline, but girls tend to be softer.”* Additionally, participant SPr2CB indicated, *“The Participant SPr2CC opined that “Girls are easier to discipline than boys. Girls take disciplining quite seriously. Girls are more remorseful and reflective about a negative consequence.”* Participant TPr2CD asserted that *“boys are naughty, and they beat other children.”* The participants actions confirmed that there were significant gender differences in the discipline of boys and girls. Firstly, boys were more difficult to discipline. Secondly, boys were naughtier than the girls. Thirdly, boys did not respond positively to discipline strategies. Therefore, gender inequalities influence perceptions and discipline.

5.3.1.5 Gender Inequality Perceptions and Classroom Management

There are differences in how teachers manage their classrooms, and their perception influences the management of activities and resources for children. Early childhood practices in ECE remain gendered. In addition, the gender of the teacher influenced engagement and the use of instructional strategies. However, all the participants in the ECD centres were female.

Therefore, participant SPr2CA asserted that *“boys are treated differently; girls tend to be more sensitive.”* Participant SPr1CB indicated:

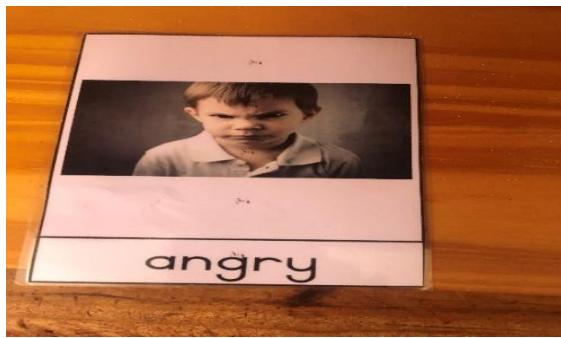
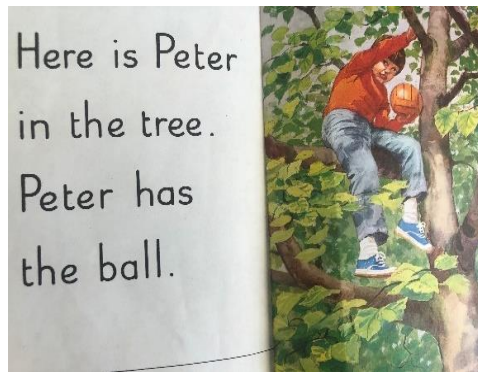
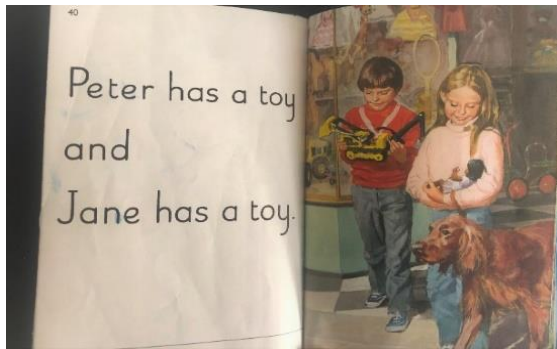
I had boys who would prefer blocks, and they liked structure[d] things. The girls prefer the dress-up.” Participant SPr2CC indicated, *“The boys like to build structures, and they choose areas such as blocks. The girls seem to like art activities. They gravitate to certain activities depending on gender. (SPr1CB)*

Participant TPr2CD opined, *“When it comes to writing, I take girls first. When I am finished with the girls, I will take the boys. The boys are too slow.”* Hence, classroom practices and teachers' gendered expectations of children's behaviours contribute to gender inequality (Gansen, 2019). The teachers' perceptions of learning activity preferences of young children are characterised by stereotypically gendered differences. In addition, teachers perceived girls to be treated differently to boys because girls were perceived to be more sensitive. Furthermore, according to the teachers, the pace at which girls learn to write is much faster than of boys.

5.3.1.6 *The Influence and Effects of Gender Inequality Perceptions*

Finally, the semi-structured interviews reflected on what influenced the participants' perception of gender development and how their perceptions influenced gender identity. Participant SPr2CA asserted, *"My upbringing has influenced my gender identity. They were distinctive roles for males and females. The males were seen as the providers and protectors. Females had to clean, cook, look after the family and collect the water."* Participant SPr1CA indicated that in the classroom her perceptions influenced her teaching; therefore, *"The teacher's influence is important. The way the teacher talks affects children's gender. Teacher has a strong influence."* Furthermore, participant TPr1CD indicated, *"My understanding is from my home. I grew up with my sister's son. Boys were not allowed to cook, wash dishes or clothes."* Participant TPr1CD asserted, *"Teachers can influence gender by the way they treat boys or girls. If they treat boys and girls differently, then they will behave differently."* Thus, participant TPr2CD opined, *"I believe that girls are fast learners and boys are slow."* Therefore, the interviews show a link between what influenced the participants' perception of gender development and how their perceptions influenced gender identity. Boys were treated differently from girls and teachers' influence gender by the way they treat boys and girls. Research in Croatia concurred that raising teachers' awareness of their own experience of gender discrimination during childhood increases their ability to recognise the unequal treatment of boys and girls (Rogošic et al., 2020). Below is an extract from the observations.

From my observations, the gender inequality perceptions of participants SPr2CA, SPr1CB, SPr1CC and TPr2CD actions confirmed that teachers' perceptions influence gender inequality in children. The influence of gender inequality affects the curriculum. Secondly, the participants SPr1CB and SPr1CC stated that boys need more discipline. In addition, there was a difference in criticism, praise and interaction between the children and the teacher. Boys received more interaction than girls, as indicated in Photograph 5.2. Teachers condone gender-stereotypical play, as depicted in Photograph 5.3. Thus, gender inequality perception influences the curriculum, discipline, and classroom management and affects the gender perception of boys and girls. (13 July 2022)



Photograph 5.1: Images of stereotypical resources



Photograph 5.2: Teachers interacting with boys at Centre A and B



Photograph 5.3: Children During Play

5.3.2 Sub-theme: Gender Equality Perceptions

Participants were asked various questions in the semi-structured interviews related to their perceptions of gender. While some participants had gender perceptions of inequality, others had perceptions of gender equality. The research revealed specific categories of gender equality, which are depicted in Figure 5.3. In response to their perceptions of gender, the participants asserted that they had gender-equal perceptions of children. Gender equality perceptions included not having separate activities for boys and girls, allowing individual children choices in their engagements regardless of gender, and not foregrounding gender differences when engaging with young children. Participant SPr3CA indicated, “I believe that both girls and boys are equal. I treat boys and girls equally.” Participant SPr1CB asserted, “I don’t think there are boy and girls’ things, I don’t discriminate as some things boys do [as] well as girls.” Participant SPr1CC stated that “I don’t encourage difference. In Montessori, everything is for everyone.” Participant TPr1CD stated, “I believe that boys and girls are the same.”

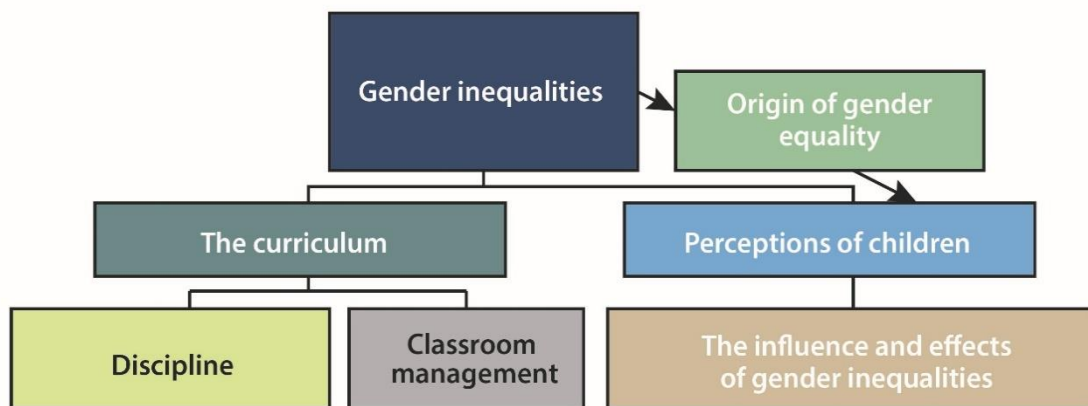


Figure 5.3: The Categories of Gender Equality Perceptions

5.3.2.1 The Teachers' Role of Gender Equality Perceptions

Secondly, in the semi-structured interviews, participants were asked what the teacher's role was in influencing gender identity. Some participants believed that their role was to promote gender equality. Participant SPr3CA asserted, "*the teacher needs to make sure that both boys and girls are treated equally.*" Participant SPr3CB indicated, "*The teacher's role is important as teachers can encourage gender bias in the classroom by what we say and we do.*" Participant TPr1CD commented, "*We must let boy/girl explore everything as life is about choices.*" Participant SPr3CC added, "*I speak to boys and girls the same. Some children are challenging; I have both challenging boys and girls.*" Teachers needed to reflect on their engagements with young children in an attempt at not perpetuating gender stereotypes in their communication and actions.

5.3.2.2 The Influence of Teachers' Perceptions on Gender

The participants were asked why teacher perceptions influenced gender identity. Participant SPr3CA indicated "*The way we experienced gender will influence how we treat boys and girls in the class.*" Participant SPr3CB asserted, "*I believe that both boys and girls should do the same activities, and we encourage that in the classroom.*" Participant TPr1CD stipulated that the "*teacher can influence gender by the way they treat boys or girls. Teachers can variate [sic] gender. If they treat boys and girls differently, then they will behave differently.*" Participant SPr2CC illustrated that "*A teacher has a big role in their lives and influences them many years without knowing.*"

Teachers indicated that the way they experience gender influences how they treat boys and girls. In addition, teachers acknowledged that their treatment of boys and girls influences gender. Therefore, teachers have an impact on influencing gender identity in children.

5.3.2.3 Gender Equality Perceptions and the Curriculum

The participants were asked to expound on the influence of gender perceptions on the curriculum. The curriculum, as illustrated in Figure 5.3, is a category of gender equality perceptions. Participant SPr3CA indicated, *“All curriculum activities are planned to be inclusive so both boys and girls are equal.”*

Participant SPr3CB added:

The curriculum ensures that, since all children are competent, curious, creative and capable, teachers guide the children as they explore their interests, and it can lead to greater desire. We are aware of each child’s potential and we help support and guide children. (SPr3CB)

Participant SPr1CC affirmed:

Each area of the Montessori approach is a phase which will be covered by both boys as well as girls.” Participant TPr2CC proclaimed, “all children have access to the curriculum. There is nothing in [the] curriculum just for boys or girls. (SPr1CC)

5.3.2.4 Gender Equality Perceptions and Discipline

The participants explained the relationship between perceptions and discipline. Discipline is a category of gender equality perceptions, as depicted in Figure 5.3. Participant SPr3CA indicated, *“I treat both the boys and girls equally. No gender is given special treatment.”* SPr1CB asserted that *“Discipline is exactly the same, we get rough boys and sometimes get calm boys.”* Participant TPr1CD stated, *“I don’t have a different discipline style for boys and girls.”* Participant SPr3CC opined, *“I speak the same to both boys and girls.”* So, it is evident that teachers are aware of the difference in the tone of their voices when addressing girls or boys. Therefore, teachers are aware of gender equality. Therefore, they treat and discipline boys and girls similarly. Gender Equality Perceptions and Classroom Management

The participants were asked to clarify the difference between gender and the management of the classrooms. Participant SPr3CA explained, “*No difference as both boys and girls are involved in all activities. They are all treated equally.*” Participant SPr2CB opined that “*There is no difference between managing boys and girls in the classroom.*” Participant SPr2CC stated, “*There is not much difference between the girls and boys.*” Finally, participant TPr1CD asserted that “*I am not aware of differences between girls and boys.*”. Hence, the teachers are often unaware of the influence of gender perceptions on classroom management.

From my observations, participants SPr3CA, SPr3CB, SPr3CC and TPr1CD’s actions confirmed the contradictions in what teachers perceive and practice regarding gender perception. However, despite participants SPr3CA and SPr3CB indicating that they encourage gender equality, from the observations, the boys were criticised more than the girls for their behaviour. Both participants SPr3CA and SPr3CB spent more time with boys than girls to complete tasks. In addition, participants SPr3CC and TPr1CD opined that they discipline and manage tasks so that both boys and girls experience equality. Despite participants SPr3CC and TPr1CD attempting to give boys and girls the same interaction, there are differences in the interactions. Boys are disciplined more and receive less praise than girls. Participants SPr3CC and TPr1CD indicated that some of their resources are gender stereotypical. (5 July 2022)



Photograph 5.4: Teacher Interaction With a Boy at Centre B



Photograph 5.5: Boy as a Class Leader at Centre D



Photograph 5.6: Girls and Boys During Line-Up Time

The interviews and the observations explained the research question: *What are the teachers' perceptions regarding the gender identity of the young child?* Through the participants answers to the research question, the influence of the perceptions on gender identity were illustrated. The teachers asserted their perceptions and how their perceptions influenced curriculum, discipline and classroom management. The next theme is the pedagogical practices of the participants in relation to their perceptions of gender.

5.4 THEME TWO: PEDAGOGICAL PRACTICES IN THE CLASSROOM

A sub-research question of the study is: What are the teachers' pedagogical practices regarding the gender identity of the young child? In answering this research question, participants had to explain what the pedagogical practices concerning gender identity were. Secondly, participants reflected on how their teaching practices influence gender. Thirdly, there was discussion on gender and pedagogical practices concerning the curriculum, discipline and classroom management of children.

The hidden curriculum of gender is an internalised construction of beliefs, thoughts, values and social practices of boys and girls (Hernández et al., 2013). Teachers do not realise that gender stereotypes are an aspect of the hidden curriculum (Safta, 2017). The hidden curriculum was explained in the research findings in terms of what the pedagogical practices were and how their teaching influenced gender perceptions. ECD teachers have no formal training on gender equity, and through the hidden curriculum, they are transmitting gender inequality. As a result, once differences between the children have been established, the foundations of inequality are entrenched (Callahan & Nicholas, 2019). Two distinctive sub-themes emerged from the observations and interviews. Firstly, the implementation of the hidden curriculum and the influence on boys' behaviour. Secondly, the implementation of the hidden curriculum and the influence on girls' behaviour are indicated in Figure 5.4.

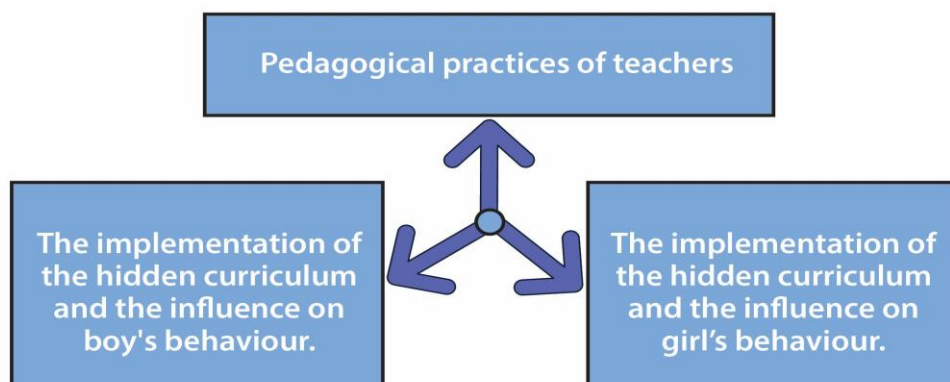


Figure 5.4: Pedagogical Practices and the Implementation of the Hidden Curriculum

5.4.1 The Implementation of the Hidden Curriculum and the Influence on Boys' Behaviour

The implementation of the hidden curriculum will be discussed in relation to the influence on boys' behaviour. The participants were asked, "*What are your pedagogical practices regarding gender identity?*" During the interviews, participant SPr2CA indicated that "*My pedagogical practices are equal.*" Participant SPr3CB elaborated, "*We don't make them feel that this activity is only for girls or that activity is for boys.*" Participant SPr2CC asserted, "*When we doing an activity when we talk about boys/girls.*" Participant TPr2CD stated, "*I let boys and girls choose where to sit so they can communicate.*" The participants illustrated that they encouraged equality of opportunity for boys and girls. However, the hidden curriculum influences gender inequality. The observations below are from the field notes and illustrate the hidden curriculum's influence.

From my observations, the actions of participants SPr2CA, SPr3CB, SPr2CC, and TPr2CD confirmed that the pedagogical practices influence the hidden curriculum. Participants SPr2CA, SPr3CB, SPr2CC and TPr2CD addressed children by their gender stereotypical norms. Therefore, girls are referred to as princesses. Hence, girls are often called using terms of endearment. In addition, boys were given the first opportunities and more attention than girls in all ECD centres. Furthermore, participants SPr2CA, SPr3CB, SPr2CC and TPr2CD encouraged stereotypical practices (1 July 2022). The teachers' stereotypical practices, such as giving boys more time and attention than girls, influenced gender identity (Gansen & Martin, 2018).

Photograph 5.7: Boys Engaging in Rough Play



Secondly, the participants were asked, “How do your pedagogical practices influence gender identity?” Participant SPr2CA indicated, “I am not firm with girls as they are soft, while I am firm with boys.” Participant SPr3CB asserted, “The teacher is a mentor and guide.” Participant TPr2CD illustrated that “The boys love driving cars.” Participants SPr2CA and TPr2CD indicated that boys are influenced to scribe to gender stereotypical roles. However, interaction and discussions as well as focusing on biological differences, play a role in implementing the hidden curriculum. The teachers’ discussions and interactions can reinforce gender differences and stereotypical gendered behaviours (Gansen, 2019). The observations below are from the field notes and expound on implementing the hidden curriculum and the influence on boys’ behaviour.

From my observations, participants SPr2CA, SPr3CB, SPr2CC and TPr2CD actions confirmed that the hidden curriculum influenced boys’ behaviour. The observations of participants SPr2CA, SPr3CB, SPr2CC and TPr2CD indicated that the boys receive more attention and are louder and rougher than girls at ECD centres. In addition, boys were active, disruptive and attention-seeking. Furthermore, all participants asserted that boys were naughty, so participants constantly had to stop lessons to remind boys to focus on the lesson (30 May 2022). Therefore, boys had to be disciplined more often than girls as they were perceived to be more active than girls. Research in Chile indicated that teachers give more attention to boys, and boys talk more in classrooms.

Therefore, raising teacher awareness of gender is paramount to ensure all children benefit from good teaching practices (Bassi et al., 2018).

Thirdly, participants were asked, “*How does your discipline style influence gender identity?*” The participants SPr2CA indicated that “*boys need firm discipline.*” Participant SPr3CB asserted, “*I have to be firm with boys.*” The participant opined that “*Boys are more rough.*” Participant TPr2CD stated that “*The boys are naughty.*” The observations below are from the field notes and elucidate the implementation of the hidden curriculum and the influence on boys’ behaviour.

From my observations, participants SPr2CA, SPr3CB, SPr2CC and TPr2CD confirmed the influence of the boys’ discipline and the hidden curriculum. The observations of participants SPr2CA, SPr3CB, SPr2CC and TPr2CD actions indicated that the boys are “*naughty, rough, aggressive, a handful and difficult to discipline*” at ECD centres. The teachers had to spend more time disciplining boys. Therefore, the stereotypical behaviours of boys prevailed in all ECD centres (13 July 2022). Research has indicated that boys have more behavioural and academic problems (Owens, 2016).

Finally, the participants were asked, “*How does the classroom management and curriculum influence gender identity?*” Participant SPr2CA indicated that “*Boys are treated differently.*” Participant SPr3CB asserted, “*I find that the boys sometimes need more time to choose their activities. I find the boys rougher and play[ing] more.*” Participant SPr3CC stated, “*The curriculum is all the same. What a boy is taught and what girls are taught is all the same.*” Participant TPr2CD stipulated, “*When it comes to writing, I take girls first. When I am finished with the girls’, I will take the boys.*” The observations below clarify the implementation of the hidden curriculum and its influence on boys’ behaviour.

From my observations, participants SPr2CA, SPr3CB, SPr3CC and TPr2CD actions confirmed that classroom management and curriculum influence gender differences. Therefore, despite the curriculum and the various philosophies of Reggio Emilia and Montessori, the teachers' classroom management of the curriculum was different for boys and girls. Furthermore, all participants stated that boys were more of a challenge in the classroom as they lacked focus and preferred play. Teachers spent more time facilitating the learning of boys. These stereotypes are reinforced in the hidden curriculum school through curricula resources. The hidden curriculum reinforces gender bias, and it leads to social inequalities (Lee, 2019). Research in Vietnam on teachers' practice illustrated the role of the hidden curriculum and the need to raise teachers' gender awareness to develop gender equality (UNWomen, 2020).

5.4.2 The Implementation of the Hidden Curriculum and the Influence on Girls' Behaviour

The implementation of the hidden curriculum will be discussed in relation to the influence on girls' behaviour. The participants were asked, "*What are your pedagogical practices regarding gender identity?*" During the interviews, Participant SPr2CA indicated, "*All practices promote equality; if there is a theme on my body, boys and girls are encouraged to both play with dolls.*" Participant SPr3CB asserted:

We use the Reggio practices so that both boys and girls are given the same opportunity to do things. There are activities and both girls and boys do the same activities. We don't make them feel that this activity is only for girls or that activity is for boys. (Participant SPr3CB)

Participant SPr2CC explicated, "In Montessori, we have separate bathrooms. We line up in a mixed line. When we are doing an activity, when we talk about boys/girls." Participant TPr1CD stated, "*My practices are not related to gender.*"

From the interviews, participants SPr2CA, SPr3CB, SPr3CC and TPr1CD asserted that all practices were equal. The observations of participants SPr2CA, SPr3CB, SPr3CC and TPr2CD actions indicated that despite the teachers indicating that the pedagogical practices of the curriculum were equal, boys at all the centres received more attention and support. Most of the girls engaged in tasks independently. The

hidden curriculum produces student differentiation and hierarchies through inclusion and exclusion. (Wyse et al., 2015)

Secondly, the participants were asked, “How do your teaching practices influence gender identity?” Participant SPr2CA indicated, “The way the teacher talks affects children’s gender.” Participant SPr3CB stated, “The teacher’s role is important as teachers can encourage gender bias in the classroom.” Participant SPr2CC affirmed, “I am here to guide them, and as they get older, they can make the decisions. In this age it is good to understand to have the vocabulary of what you are.” Participant TPr1CD postulated, “When they play and bully each other, as a teacher, I influence them. A boy or girl must not punch each other.”

From my observations, participants SPr2CA, SPr3CB, SPr3CC and TPr1CD actions confirmed that the teachers play a pivotal role in influencing the girls’ behaviour. These stereotypes are enhanced in the hidden curriculum by the teachers. The observations illustrated that children learn these rules, norms and characteristics through the school socialisation process (Rahman, 2013). Therefore, it is through the hidden curriculum students receive the beliefs and ideologies of mainstream society. The observations showed a difference in discipline, criticism and praise between boys and girls. Thus, teachers relate differently to boys and girls and children adapt their behaviour to stereotypical gender patterns (Meland & Kaltvedt, 2019).

Thirdly, the participants were asked, “How does your discipline style influence gender identity?” Participant SPr1CA indicated that “Discipline is not linked to gender but the personality of the child. Both boys and girls may be boisterous or loud.” Participant SPr3CB asserted, “I have to be firm with boys as they are tough and rough. I find the girls are calm.” Participant SPr2CC opined, “I will not say boys versus girls. The girls are more emotional, and the boys are not affected by their emotions. Girls are easier to discipline than boys.” Participant TPr1CD stated, “I don’t have a different discipline style for boys and girls.”

From the interviews, participants SPr1CA, SPr3CB and SPr2CC actions confirmed that boys are rough and girls are calm. In addition, participant SPr2CC indicated that girls are more emotional than boys. Participant TPr1CD asserted that the same discipline style is utilised for boys and girls. The observations of participants SPr1CA, SPr3CB, SPr2CC and TPr1CD revealed that boys receive more attention and are disciplined more than girls. The hidden curriculum influences girls' behaviour and reinforces stereotypical behaviour of girls. Research in Norway illustrated that boys are boisterous, physical and active, while girls are calm and quiet (Meland & Kaltvedt, 2019). Therefore, the research stated that ECD centres need to challenge gender role practices (Bosacki et al., 2015).

Finally, the participants were asked, "How does the classroom management of the curriculum influence gender identity?" Participant SPr1CA stated, "We follow the G.D.E curriculum with I.E.B guidelines. Every child is given equal opportunity." In addition, the participants postulated that there are "no differences" in the classroom. Participant SPr3CB asserted, "The curriculum ensures that since all children are competent, curious, creative and capable, we are aware of each child's potential, and we help support and guide children."

Participant SPr2CC said, "I find that the boys sometimes need more time to choose their activities." Participant SPr2CC indicated, "In the books, the boys are dressed in shorts and doing boisterous things. That will be the main thing that books can bring to separate boys and girls." The participant added:

General discussion is sometimes related to gender." In addition, the participants indicated that in terms of classroom management, "The boys like constructive things. The girls like emotional side of things. Girls like talking and discussing things. (SPr2CC)

Finally, participant TPr1CD stated, "We follow GDE curriculum. There is nothing specific for just boys or girls. We teach according to themes."

Participants SPr1CA and TPr1CD indicated that the curriculum is equal for boys and girls. In addition, participant SPr3CB believed that the curriculum supports and guides

each child, and gender did not feature during the interview. However, Participant SPr2CC expounded on aspects of the curriculum which influence gender inequality. Firstly, the content of resources reinforces gender stereotypes. Secondly, there are differences in the choice of activities between boys and girls. Finally, girls prefer to engage in discussions and are more emotional than boys. Research in Romania illustrated that gender bias is so subtle that teachers are often unaware of stereotypical prejudice, and teachers, as mentors of children's learning, need to be challenged so that children can learn about gender stereotypes (Safta, 2017).

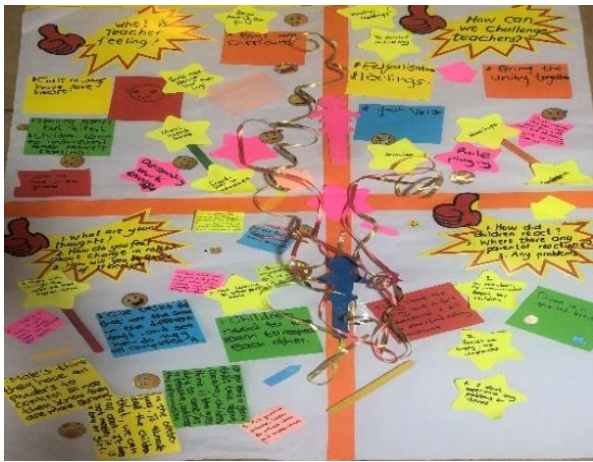
5.5 THEME 3: CHANGES IN TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS AND PEDAGOGICAL PRACTICES

Research in Pakistan illustrated that teachers' perception of young children's learning and their practices influenced gender norms in early childhood. Therefore, challenging ECD teachers is paramount so teachers' perceptions will influence their practice in developing gender equality (Pardhan, 2012). In addition, research in the United States explicated that teachers' perceptions influenced the pedagogical practices of girls differently from boys. The teachers rate girls as having better social and behavioural skills than boys; therefore, there were disparities in achievement between boys and girls. Boys lag behind girls in education achievement (Zimmermann, 2018).

Hence, this theme focused on the research question: *What are the perceptions and pedagogical practices of the challenged teachers?* To answer the question there were two workshops that were conducted, and participants were involved in the development of posters. The first workshop challenged the teachers' perceptions and pedagogical practices. The second workshop was on the discussion of changes that had occurred. The following are images of the workshops and posters from the different centres.



Photograph 5.8: Workshop from Centre A



Photograph 5.9: Poster from Centre A



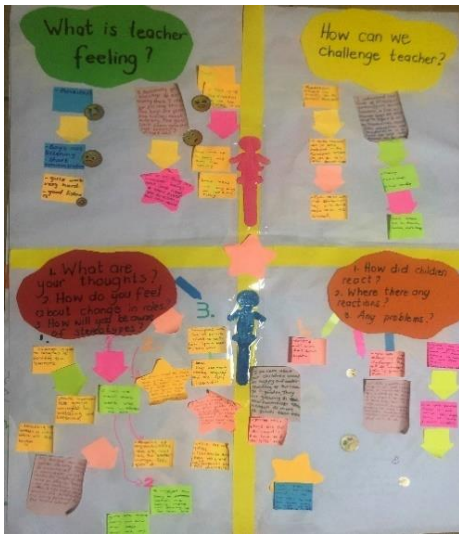
Photograph 5.10: Workshop from Centre B



Photograph 5.11: Poster from Centre B



Photograph 5.12: Workshop from Centre C



Photograph 5.13: Poster from Centre C



Photograph 5.14: Workshop from Centre D



Photograph 5.15: Poster from Centre D

I attempted to answer the research question by dividing this theme into two subthemes: Perceptions of challenged teachers and pedagogical practices of challenged teachers. Figure 5.4 displays the subthemes and core categories of Theme 3.

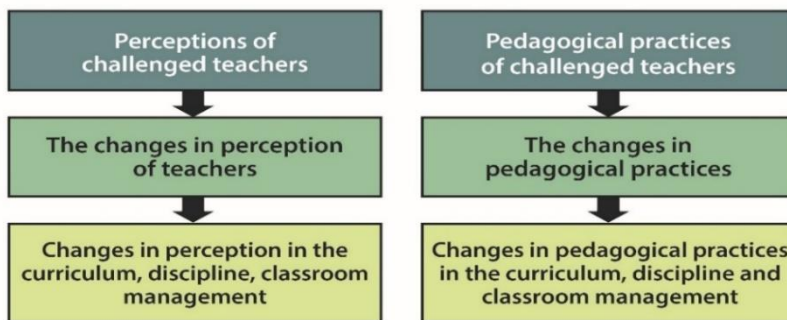


Figure 5.5: Sub-Themes and Categories of Theme 3e

5.5.1 Sub-theme: Changes in Perceptions of Challenged Teachers

This subtheme describes the changes in perceptions of the challenged teachers. The perceptions of teachers can be detrimental to gender stereotyping of impressionable children (Lynch, 2015). Therefore, teachers need to be challenged to be aware of gender stereotypical norms (Warin & Adriany, 2017). In the research, teachers' perceptions have been challenged by workshops conducted at the four ECD centres. There are three categories under this sub-theme (as explained below). Table 5.1 below shows Theme 3 with sub-themes and categories, as well as the inclusion and exclusion criteria.

Table 5.2: Theme 3 With Sub-Theme and Categories

Category 1: Changes in perception of the curriculum	This category includes data related to the curriculum at the centres.	This category excludes data not related to the curriculum at the centres.
Category 2: Changes in perception of discipline	This category includes data related to discipline at the centres.	This category excludes data not related to the discipline at the centres.
Category 3: Changes in perception in classroom management	This category includes data related to classroom management at the centres.	This category excludes data not related to classroom management at the centres.

5.5.1.1 Category 1: Changes in perception of the curriculum

Research in Sweden illustrated that teachers who are gender unaware need to be challenged and changed so that education engages all children (Gullberg et al., 2018). The participants gave the following descriptions of the changes in perception of the curriculum after the workshops.

SPr1CA: "I am aware of gender roles in the curriculum."

SPr1CB: "I am more aware of my attitude to gender in books, charts and worksheets."

SPr2CC: "I am aware of gender stereotypes in the five areas of Montessori."

TPr2CD: "I know that the curriculum influences gender, so I pay attention to gender stereotypes."

The extract from the field notes supported the participants' responses, as shown below.

The participants felt that the challenges gave them insight into gender in the curriculum and the hidden curriculum. They became more aware of gender stereotypes in the classroom, and they felt that gender is overlooked in the classroom.

The data revealed that challenging the teachers' perceptions made them cognisant of gender stereotypes in the curriculum and the hidden curriculum at ECD centres. However, some participants acknowledged that gender was not of concern in the classroom, as some participants were oblivious to gender stereotypes. Therefore, it is imperative to challenge teachers (Callahan & Nicholas, 2019).

5.5.1.2 Category 2: Changes in Perception in Discipline

Early childhood development centres provide the foundational context in which gender ideologies operate and maintain systems of gender inequality (Gansen, 2019). Teachers reinforce gender rules through disciplinary interactions, in which children receive sanctions and disciplinary consequences for behaviours (Gansen, 2019). The participants gave the following descriptions of the changes in their perception of discipline after the workshops.

SPr2CA: “I am more aware of stereotyping boys as aggressive and girls as calm.”

SPr3CB: “I am more observant of my gender expectations of boys and girls in the classrooms.”

SPr3CC: “I have greater awareness of having gendered expectations of how boys and girls should behave in the classroom.”

TPr3CD: “I understand that my beliefs influence how I use discipline in my class.”

The extract from the field notes supported the participants’ responses, as shown below.

The participants felt that the challenges increased their awareness of the relationship between gendered perceptions and discipline in the classroom. Teachers became more reflective of their perceptions of discipline and gender norms of society.

The data revealed that challenging the teachers’ perceptions made them knowledgeable of gender stereotypes, gender bias and the relationship between perceptions and discipline. The teachers became more reflective and more conscious of gender expectations, perceptions and discipline in the classroom. Therefore, teachers need sustainable workshops on discipline to be knowledgeable about the influence of perceptions on gender inequalities (Mulaudzi & Mudzielwana, 2016).

5.5.1.3 Category 3: Changes in Perception in Classroom Management

Research illustrates that any significant change is related to the skill and ability of teachers. The teachers’ perception is paramount to actualising ideas in the curriculum as teachers make the ultimate decision to create a classroom environment based on a well-organised management plan (Cobbold & Boateng, 2016). Classroom management establishes the teacher’s ability to maintain order and engage children to achieve the knowledge, skills, values and attitudes necessary for success (Cobbold & Boateng,

2016). The participants gave the following descriptions of the changes in their perception of classroom management after the workshops.

SPr3CA: "I am more aware of gender equality in the planning activities."

SPr2CB: "I have become aware of gender stereotypes."

SPr2CA: "I think about gender bias when I plan teaching and learning."

TPr1CD: "I am able to reflect on my attitudes and beliefs about gender."

The extract from the field notes supported the participants' responses, as shown below.

The teachers felt that the challenged perceptions influenced them to think differently about gender in all early childhood teaching and learning activities. They become more aware of gender bias when they do their planning of activities. Teachers felt that they were so busy with the routine of everyday activities that gender stereotypes were not given any attention.

The data revealed that challenging the teachers' perceptions in classroom management influenced their thinking and planning of activities. It is through challenging teachers' perceptions in classroom management that gender stereotypical roles can be diminished to facilitate change in ECE practice (Meland & Kaltvedt, 2019).

5.5.2 Pedagogical Practices of Challenged Teachers

This sub-theme describes the changes in the pedagogical practices of the challenged teachers. Teachers project their prejudices onto the children through gender-biased pedagogical practices (Lynch, 2015). Therefore, teachers' pedagogical practices need to be challenged. (Warin & Adriany, 2017). Teachers' pedagogical practices were challenged by workshops conducted at four ECD centres. There were three sub-themes (as explained below). Table 5.3 below shows Theme 3 with sub-themes and categories and the inclusion and exclusion criteria.

Table 5.3: Theme 3 With Sub-Themes and Categories

Category 1: Changes in pedagogical practices in the curriculum	This category includes data related to the curriculum at the centres	This category excludes data not related to the curriculum at the centres.
Category 2: Changes in pedagogical practices in discipline	This category includes data related to discipline at the centres	This category excludes data not related to the discipline at the centres.
Category 3: Changes in pedagogical practices in classroom management	This category includes data related to classroom management at the centres	This category excludes data not related to classroom management at the centres.

5.5.2.1 Category 1: Changes in Pedagogical Practices of the Curriculum

Teachers are important agents in combatting gender-stereotyped ways of thinking. Children develop their educational choices during childhood, and it is important that they receive equal opportunities to explore their abilities (Gullberg et al., 2018). Therefore, stereotypical gender norms should be challenged and changed to achieve gender equality in society (Xu & Waniganayake, 2018).

The participants gave the following descriptions of the changes in pedagogical practices after the workshops.

SPr3CA: “I am aware not to separate boys and girls into separate groups during group work.”

SPr1CB: “I encourage both boys and girls to play with dolls and build blocks.”

TPr2CD: “I choose books carefully to make sure books have both boys and girls as leaders.”

SPr3CA: “I am more aware to ensure that boys and girls are given the opportunity to be class leaders.”

The extract from the field notes supported the participants’ responses, as shown below.

The teachers became more attentive to the influence of their perception [of gender] on their pedagogical practices. Therefore, the activities are planned so that boys and girls are involved in all activities. They teachers felt the group discussions definitely created an awareness of gender. The teachers asserted that an awareness programme will assist and equip teachers to be conscious of gender equality in the classroom.

The data revealed that challenging the teachers' pedagogical practices in the curriculum influenced significant changes in pedagogical practices. The participants became more aware of the need to change their practices as it is fundamental to gender-equitable early childhood environments (Lynch, 2015).

5.5.2.2 *Changes in Pedagogical Practices in Discipline*

Teachers enforce rules about gender through disciplinary interactions for behaviours that violate gender-stereotypical norms of the ECE environment (Gansen & Martin, 2018). Therefore, when teachers are challenged to change their disciplinary practices, there are changes in their gendered expectations for boys and girls (Gansen & Martin, 2018).

The participants gave the following descriptions of the changes in pedagogical practices in discipline after the workshops.

SPr1CA: "I am aware that both boys and girls should be disciplined in the same way."

SPr2CB: "I make sure that both boys and girls get the same immediate consequences for unacceptable behaviour."

TPr2CD: "I am more aware of using the same methods of discipline for both boys and girls."

SPr3CA: "I have become attentive to use the same discipline techniques for boys and girls."

The extract from the field notes supported the participants' responses, as shown below.

The awareness created by the workshops gave the participants insights into the influence of their gender stereotypical practices on gender differences in discipline. Teachers developed disciplinary methods to reinforce gender equality.

The data revealed that challenging the teachers' pedagogical practices in discipline informed significant changes in disciplinary approaches. Therefore, it is imperative that teachers receive training on gender biases (Gansen & Martin, 2018).

5.5.2.3 Changes in Pedagogical Practices in Classroom Management

The teachers' pedagogical practices influence the perceptions of gender stereotypes, and their beliefs impact their management strategies (Cobbold & Boateng, 2016). The participants gave the following descriptions of the changes in pedagogical practices in classroom management after the workshops.

SPr3CA: "I am more aware of gender when I am arranging classroom activities. I make sure both boys and girls do the same activities."

SPr3CB: "I am able to develop a classroom management system that does not have gender bias."

TPr2CD: "I am able to assist both boys and girls equally when they are doing an activity."

SPr1CA: "I am more aware of gender in the management of the class and I more attentive to the need for gender equality."

The extract from the field notes supported the participants' responses, as shown below.

The teachers realised that the whole day is influenced by gender. The teachers are more aware of the role of their management strategies on gender. The teachers have become cognisant of arranging activities, lessons, resources and books which reinforce gender equality.

The data revealed that challenging the teachers' pedagogical practices in classroom management influenced crucial changes in the daily management of ECE (Warin & Adriany, 2017).

5.6 THEME 4: TEACHER AWARENESS PROGRAMME

Promoting gender equality within and through education has been a worldwide mission since the 1970s. The participants illustrated the need for a teacher's programme which challenges teachers' perceptions and practices. The teachers have indicated that the awareness programme is beneficial in developing an awareness of gender in their perceptions and pedagogical practices. In addition, teachers asserted that the awareness programme assisted in the development of pedagogical skills to foster gender equality. The sub-theme, a process for gender-aware teaching, assists in the process of gender-aware teaching, which can be applicable to pre- and in-service teachers.

5.6.1 Subtheme: A process for Gender Awareness Teaching

The observations, interviews and workshops have illustrated the need for gender-aware teaching. The detection of gendered situations was the starting point for the process of the teaching programme. The detection process opened up self-reflection and/or the possibility of counteracting stereotypical gender norms. Once the teacher pays attention to gendered situations, the process of self-reflection is initiated. Therefore, when teachers notice and scrutinise their actions and thoughts, behaviours may change. The process is driven towards gender-aware teaching (Gullberg et al., 2018).

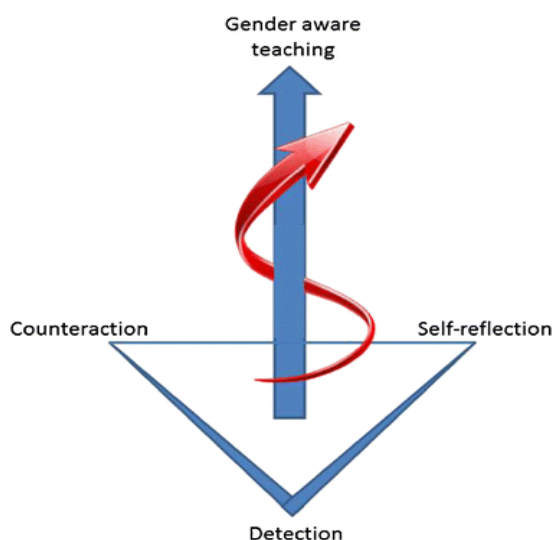


Figure 5.6: Model Illustrating Gender Awareness in Teaching

Source: Gullberg et al. (2018, p 21)

The participants gave the following descriptions after the workshops:

SPr1CA: “The awareness programme assisted me to reflect on gender stereotypes in all activities at school.”

SPr2CB: “The awareness programme is essential in assisting teachers to be aware of gender in my teaching.”

TPr3CD: “The awareness programme will equip me with skills to ensure that gender equality is maintained.”

The extract from the field notes supported the participants’ responses, as shown below.

The teachers did feel that an awareness programme will assist and equip teachers to be conscious of gender equality in the classroom. The teachers felt that being challenged in perceptions influenced them to think differently about gender in all early childhood teaching and learning activities. The teachers felt that an awareness programme would equip them with skills to ensure gender equality is maintained.

The participants felt that the gender awareness workshops gave them insight into gender in the curriculum and the hidden curriculum. The participants became more aware of gender stereotypes in the classroom and resource materials. They felt that gender is important, and it is often overlooked in the classroom as teachers get so busy with teaching the core curriculum that they have no time to acknowledge that gender is an issue in the classroom. Teachers felt that gender is often unconsciously ignored in the classroom. There were significant differences in gender in terms of play, art activities, discipline and curriculum work. The awareness created by the workshops gave the participants insights into the influence of their gender stereotypical practices on gender differences in discipline. Teachers became more aware of how they disciplined boys and girls. In addition, they developed disciplinary methods to reinforce gender equality. Hence, the data revealed that gender-aware pedagogy counteracts stereotypical gender structures and provides children with opportunities for learning (Gullberg et al., 2018).

5.7 CONCLUSION

The teachers’ challenged perceptions and pedagogical practices influence the use of instructional support, using of resources, discipline, curriculum and classroom

management at ECD centres. This chapter discussed teachers' perceptions, pedagogical practices, changes in teacher perceptions and pedagogical practices and the need for teacher awareness. The findings were discussed with references to the four main themes, sub-themes and categories that emerged during the thematic analysis of the raw data. The direct responses by the participants and observations were used to substantiate the findings. The findings illustrated that challenging and changing the teachers' perceptions and pedagogical practice raises the teachers' awareness of gender in the ECD centres. Therefore, it is imperative that teachers' gender awareness needs to be raised to develop children's full potential. Chapter six presents the interpretation of the results and findings in comparison to existing literature on the topic under study.

CHAPTER 6: LITERATURE CONTROL

6.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, I provide a comparative analysis of the research findings with existing literature regarding challenging teachers' perceptions and pedagogical practices regarding children's gender identity. The supporting evidence, contradictions, silences, and knowledge gained from this study are discussed. In concluding this chapter, I discuss findings in terms of the conceptual framework.

6.2 LINKING LITERATURE AND EMPIRICAL RESEARCH FINDINGS

Linking findings with existing literature is an approach used by qualitative researchers (Creswell, 2014), to improve the quality of the data analysis process. To further strengthen and improve the analyses of findings, four tables were created: supporting evidence (where there is alignment between the findings and existing literature), contradictory evidence existing literature challenging the findings in this study), silences that identify the gaps in the literature, and fresh insights are described (Ebersöhn, 2014).

6.2.1 Comparison with Existing Knowledge: Supportive Evidence

Table 6.1 summarises how existing literature reinforces the findings of this study. Each of the comparisons is described in an interpretive manner as it relates to the themes, subthemes and categories that emerged from the data analysis. The sources that support the findings are listed and related to the literature review in chapter two which explored the topic of challenging teachers' pedagogical practices and perceptions of gender identity. The column outlining the findings shows the results obtained from analysing the interview data, observation notes and photographs from the study.

Table 6.1: Comparing Results to Existing Knowledge: Supportive Evidence

Theme 1: Teachers' perceptions: Gender inequality			
Sub-themes and categories	Existing knowledge (Author & year)	Findings	Interpretive discussion
Sub-theme 1.1: Gender inequality perceptions Category 1: The origin of gender inequality perceptions	Several authors recognised that children's gender identity is influenced by parents (Gutura & Manomano, 2018; Van der Gaag & Putcha, 2015)	The findings illustrated that gender identity is developed by parents in the home environment. (SPr1CC, SPr2CC, SPr1CA, SPr2CB and SPr1D)	The literature and this present research's findings confirm that children's gender identity is developed in the home environment by parents.
Category 2: Gender inequality perceptions of the teacher	Several authors recognised that gender inequality perceptions are stereotypical. In addition, there is a correlation between the unequal treatment of boys and girls and teacher's attitudes (Baig, 2015; Halim, 2016; Rogošic et al., 2020).	The participants SPr2CA, SPr1CA, SPr1CB and TPr2CD have clearly illustrated that teachers have gender-stereotypical perceptions.	The findings agree with the literature regarding the relationship between gender inequality perceptions of children and the attitude of teachers in the suburban and township ECD centres.
Sub-theme 1.1: Gender inequality perceptions: Category 3: Gender inequality perceptions and the curriculum	Authors recognised that the hidden curriculum influences and reinforces gender differences between boys and girls (Perszyk et al., 2019). The curriculum infused discourses which affirmed inequitable relations between boys and girls through gender-biased resources such as reading books (Lekhetho, 2018; Li, 2023).	The findings showed that participants have gender inequality perceptions, and through the hidden curriculum, the perceptions are internalised by children. Participants SPr1CA, SPr1CB and SPr2CD have addressed children according to gender stereotypical language, and the resources used are gender biased, as indicated in Photograph 5.1.	The existing literature agrees that gender inequality perceptions are evident in the hidden curriculum. The resources in books, reading cards, workbooks and charts display gender-stereotypical behaviour, which influences the internalisation of gender bias. The participants were unaware of the subtle gender bias in the resources.

Theme 1: Teachers' perceptions: Gender inequality			
Sub-themes and categories	Existing knowledge (Author & year)	Findings	Existing knowledge (Author & year)
Sub-theme 1.1: Gender inequality perceptions Category 4: Gender inequality perceptions and discipline	Several researchers have indicated that boys were more problematic academically and socially. (Gilliam et al., 2016) (Baig, 2015; Halim, 2016; Rogošic et al., 2020).	The findings show that boys needed firm discipline as they were more aggressive than girls (SPr2CC, TPr2CD, SPr2CB).	The participants' description of discipline and the literature confirm that boys and girls are disciplined differently at ECD centres.
Category 5: Gender inequality perceptions and classroom management	The literature indicated that gender equality perceptions influenced classroom management (Ahmed et al., 2018).	The participants indicated that boys and girls were treated differently. The boys engaged in building structures while the girls preferred dressing up (SPr2CA, SPr1CB, SPr2CC)	The participants' description of classroom management agrees with the literature that there is a relationship between gender perceptions and classroom management.
Category 6: The influence and effects of gender inequality perceptions	Teachers' gendered identity is influenced by teacher education, policy, religion, family, sexuality and history (Rogers et al., 2015).	The findings indicate that the participant's perception influenced gender identity (SPr1CA, TPr1CD, TPr2CD).	The literature and the findings confirm that the perception of gender influences gender inequality perceptions in the curriculum, discipline, and classroom management.

Theme 1: Teachers' perceptions: Gender equality perceptions			
Sub-themes and categories	Existing knowledge (Author & year)	Findings	Interpretive discussion
Sub-theme 1.1: Gender equality perceptions: Category 1: The teachers' role	Teachers with gender equality perceptions play an important role in developing gender equality (Warin & Adriany, 2017).	The findings illustrated that teachers, boys and girls are treated differently (SPr1CB, TPr1CD)	The participants' description of gender equality perceptions of the teacher and the literature expounds on the teacher's influence on gender equality.

Theme 1: Teacher perceptions: Gender equality perceptions (continued)			
Sub-themes and categories	Existing knowledge (Author & year)	Findings	Interpretive discussion
Category 2: The influence of teachers' perceptions on gender	The teachers' gender equality perceptions influence how they treat boys and girls (Stanworth, 2019).	The participants indicated gender equality perceptions of boys and girls (SPr3CA, TPr1CD).	The literature and the findings confirmed that teachers' perceptions influence gender differences.
Category 3: The influence of gender equality perceptions on the curriculum, discipline and classroom management	Teachers with gender equality perceptions influence gender equality in the curriculum, discipline and classroom management (Gansen, 2019; Hamel, 2021).	The findings showed a link between gender equality perception and how their perceptions influenced equality in the curriculum, discipline and classroom management strategies.	The literature and the findings confirm that the teacher's gender equality perceptions influence equality in curriculum, discipline and classroom management strategies.

Theme 1: The implementation of the hidden curriculum and the influence on boys' behaviour			
Sub-themes and categories	Existing knowledge (Author & year)	Findings	Interpretive discussion
Sub-theme: Pedagogical practices Category 1: The teachers' role in gender	Several authors have indicated that teachers play a role in promoting gender equality (Meland & Kaltvedt, 2019; Webster & Siankata, 2016).	The participants indicated that their role is to promote gender equality (SPr3CB, SPr3CA, TPr1CD).	The findings and the participants indicated that teachers play a role in the promotion of gender equality.
Category 2: The influence of gender perceptions on pedagogical practices	Research indicated that values, beliefs and gender perceptions influence pedagogical practice (Gansen, 2019; Hjelmer, 2020).	The findings illustrated that teachers' perception of gender influences the pedagogical practices of boys (SPr3CA, SPr3CB, TPr1CD).	The findings agree with the literature on the influence of gender perceptions on the pedagogical practices of boys.
Category 3: Gender perceptions and the curriculum	The research illustrated that the curriculum is based on equality between males and females (Webster & Siankata, 2016).	The participants indicated that curriculum activities are planned so boys and girls have equal access (SPr3CB, TPr2CC, SPr1CC).	The participants' description of the curriculum agrees with the existing literature on gender equality perceptions and the curriculum. The curriculum promotes gender equality in all learning areas in ECE.
Category 4: Gender perceptions and discipline	Gender influences teacher and child relationships. Hence, boys experience more behavioural problems than girls (Meland & Kaltvedt, 2019).	The field notes illustrated that the teacher, especially in the township centre, spent more time disciplining boys than girls (SPr2CA, SPr3CB, SPr2CC and TPr2CD).	The findings indicated that the teachers spent more time interacting and disciplining boys despite indicating that boys and girls are treated equally.
Category 5: Gender perceptions and classroom management	Gender perceptions influence classroom management, as boys receive more attention. (Hedlin & Aberg, 2013).	The participants explained that there was some difference between gender and classroom management (SPr3CA, SPr2CC, TPr1CD).	The existing literature agrees that gender equality perceptions influence classroom management.

Theme 2: The implementation of the hidden curriculum and the influence on girls' behaviour.				
Sub-themes and categories	Existing knowledge (Author & year)	Findings	Interpretive discussion	
Category 1: Pedagogical practices and gender identity	Authors have illustrated that pedagogical practices influence gender equality (Lahelma, 2011; Larsen, 2021).	The findings indicated that girls receive less support and interaction from the teachers (TPr1CD, SPr2CA).	The literature and research indicated that pedagogical practices influenced gender.	
Category 2: The teacher's role in the hidden curriculum	The literature indicates students receive ideologies of gender inequality through the hidden curriculum (Meland & Kaltvedt, 2019).	The findings indicated that teachers spent less time assisting girls with tasks. (SPr2CA, SPr3CB & SPr2CC)	The existing literature agrees that teachers influence gender through the hidden curriculum. Teachers spend less time supporting girls academically.	
Category 3: Discipline style and gender identity	Research has indicated that gender influences discipline methods (Webster & Siankata, 2016)	The findings indicated that girls received less discipline as they were calmer than boys (SPr1CA, SPr2CC & TPr1CD).	The literature and research concurred that gender influences discipline.	
Category 4: The classroom management and the curriculum	The classroom is managed according to the curriculum's gender equality directives, but the hidden curriculum subtly affects gender (Borve & Borve, 2017).	The participants indicated that classrooms are managed to ensure gender equality, but girls prefer dress-up and art activities (SPr3CB and TPr1CD).	The literature and research have asserted that the classroom is managed to ensure equality, but girls tend to be more emotional and do tasks independently.	

Theme 3: Changes in teachers' perceptions and pedagogical practices			
Sub-themes and categories	Existing knowledge (Author & year)	Findings	Interpretive discussion
Category 1: Changes in perception of the curriculum	Teachers who are gender unaware may limit children's opportunities and interest in the curriculum. Several authors illustrated that gender stereotypical ideas need to be challenged and changed so that education engages all children (Gullberg et al., 2018).	The participants revealed that challenging teachers' perceptions made them cognisant of gender stereotypes in the curriculum and the hidden curriculum at ECD centres (SPr1CA, SPr1CB, SPr2CC)	The research and the literature indicated that teachers' perceptions need to be challenged so that they are aware of the influence of gender stereotypical perceptions on the curriculum. When teachers are cognisant of their perceptions, their pedagogical practices become more gender equitable as they dismantle gender stereotypes.
Category 2: Changes in perception of discipline	The literature has illustrated that teachers reinforce gender rules through disciplinary interactions. Teachers transmit their gender perceptions for appropriate behaviour through disciplinary interactions with children (Gansen & Martin, 2018; Odenbring, 2014).	The participants became more aware of their gendered perceptions and the influence of stereotypical gender perceptions on discipline, as indicated in Photograph 5.7. The participants indicated that boys were rough and more attention-seeking than girls (SPr2CA, SPr3CB, SPr3CC).	The literature and the research asserted that participants' perceptions need to be challenged by gender awareness teaching programmes to make teachers cognisant of the influence of gender on disciplinary strategies in ECE.

Theme 3: Changes in teachers' perceptions and pedagogical practices (continued)			
Existing knowledge (Author & year)	Existing knowledge (Author & year)	Findings	Interpretive discussion
Category 2: Changes in perception in classroom management	Several authors opined that challenging teachers would facilitate changes in their perception of classroom management. The teachers' perception is paramount to the development of gender differences through classroom management (Cobbold & Boateng, 2016; Granger et al., 2017).	The participants felt that the challenged perceptions influenced them to think differently about gender and become more aware of gender bias in ECD (SPr3CA, SPr2CB, SPr2CA).	The research and the participants advocated the need to change perceptions in classroom management to develop gender equality. When teachers are aware of the influence of gender perceptions in classroom management, they become aware of gender bias in the classroom.
Subtheme: Changes in pedagogical practices Category 1: Changes in pedagogical practices of the curriculum	The literature indicated that gender stereotypes are influenced by pedagogical practices, and they need to be challenged (Cobbold & Boateng, 2016; Gansen & Martin, 2018).	The teachers have become cognisant of the changes in pedagogical practices (SPr3CA, SPr1CB, TPr2CD).	The research and the literature concurred that challenge influences changes in pedagogical practices. Therefore, girls were encouraged to use the building blocks to build a structure. The boys were encouraged to make cakes using play dough. Thus, teachers challenge gender stereotypes through dialogue when play themes or books present non-traditional gender roles, allowing children to develop as people rather than just boys and girls.

Theme 3: Changes in teachers' perceptions and pedagogical practices (continued)			
Existing knowledge (Author & year)	Existing knowledge (Author & year)	Findings	Interpretive discussion
Category 2: Changes in pedagogical practices in discipline	The literature illustrated that teachers enforce rules about gender through disciplinary interactions for behaviours that violate gender-stereotypical norms. Therefore, when teachers are challenged, there are changes in their gendered expectations and practices for boys and girls (Gansen & Martin, 2018).	The participants revealed that challenging the teachers' pedagogical practices in discipline influenced significant changes in disciplinary approaches. The participants became more aware of the influence of gender on their practices of discipline (SPr1CA, SPr2CB, TPr2CD)	The literature and the research asserted the need to challenge practices in discipline to develop an awareness of gender by developing gender awareness teaching programmes. Therefore, both boys and girls will receive equal disciplinary treatment from the teachers.
Category 3: Changes in pedagogical practices in classroom management	Teachers need to be challenged so management practices are equal, as gendered practices reproduced gender differences between boys and girls. Teachers use gender as a tool to organise classroom management interactions and activities (Cobbold & Boateng, 2016). Teachers' gendered classroom management practices provide a platform in which children become recruited to gender-specific activities and learn the normative conceptions of masculinity and femininity (Gansen & Martin, 2018).	The research revealed that challenging classroom management is crucial in ECD as it plays a significant role in developing gender equality. Gendered pedagogical practices of classroom management contribute to the embodiment and reinforcement of gender inequality. In addition, teachers' gendered classroom management practices offer mechanisms through which gender differences are perceived as natural. Hence, gender inequality has become the norm in ECD. (SPr3CA, SPr3CB, TPr2CD).	The literature and research indicated the need to challenge teachers so there are changes in pedagogical practices in classroom management in ECD. Therefore, training teachers to identify gender biases, gendered expectations, and differential classroom interactions with boys and girls is imperative as ECD shapes children's gender identity. Teachers need to have the opportunity to reflect on their beliefs about gender and its implications to influence crucial changes in the daily management of ECE by teaching children differently.

Theme 4: Teacher awareness programme			
Sub-themes and categories	Existing knowledge (Author & year)	Findings	Interpretive discussion
Category 1: A process for gender awareness teaching	The literature on gender awareness teaching promotes self-reflection to counteract stereotypical gender norms. Once the teacher pays attention to gendered situations, the process of self-reflection is initiated, which enables the teacher to be aware of the prejudices about gender (Gullberg et al., 2018).	The participants indicated that a gender awareness programme is essential to inform teachers of gender bias in their perceptions and pedagogical practices. If stereotypical ideas are challenged and changed in the curriculum, hidden curriculum, discipline and classroom management, there is a potential to develop education that engages all children (SPr1CA, SPr2CB, SPr2CA).	The literature and the research emphasised the need for the process of gender awareness teaching to enable teachers to become cognisant of gender prejudices in all facets of ECE through the RS-GAT (Renisha Singh-Gender awareness teaching) framework. The framework creates an awareness of gender in ECD centres. It is important that higher education institutions and departments of education realise the importance of educating students and teachers on gender awareness to ensure equality between boys and girls.

As presented in Table 6.1, the findings of this study correspond with existing literature on teacher perceptions, the hidden curriculum and influence on girls' and boys' behaviour, changes in perceptions and pedagogical practice, and teacher awareness programme in ECD centres. The findings show ECD practitioners are not aware of their perceptions and pedagogical practices with regard to gender identity. Therefore, the awareness programme is fundamental to gender equality.

6.2.2 Results Versus Existing Knowledge (Contradictory evidence)

In table 6.2 the summary of how existing literature contradicts the research findings, is presented. The findings are compared to the literature review, which is limited by its nature, and therefore this needs consideration when contradictions are illustrated. Each of the differences (contradictions) are discussed in an interpretative manner according to the themes and subthemes which emerge from the data analysis. The existing literature reviewed in chapter Two that differs with the findings is itemised, which explored teacher perceptions, the influence of the hidden curriculum on girls and boys, changes in perceptions and pedagogical practice, and teacher awareness programme. The information in the finding's column is elicited from the analyses of interviews, subthemes and categories that apply here are discussed in an interpretative manner in the discussion column

Table 6.2 : Comparing Results With Existing Knowledge: Contradictory Evidence

Theme 1: Teacher perceptions		
Sub-themes and categories	Existing knowledge (Author & year)	Findings
Sub-theme 1.1: Gender inequality perceptions Category 1: The origin of gender inequality perceptions	The home environment is the main influence, but teachers also play a role in gender identity (Okelo et al., 2021).	Some participants did not acknowledge the role of the teacher, while others did acknowledge the role of teachers in gender development (SPr1CA, SPr1CC & SPr1CD).
Category 2: Gender inequality perceptions of children	The teacher plays an important role in gender inequality perceptions (Rogošic et al., 2020)	The participants are unaware of the influence of their perceptions on gender (SPr2CA, SPr1CA, SPr1CB)
Category 3: Gender inequality perceptions and the curriculum	The curriculum content is saturated with negative perspectives of gender. (Simmonds, 2014).	The participants are not aware of the influence of gender identity on the curriculum (SPr2CC, TPr1CD and SPr1CA).
Category 4: Gender inequality perceptions and the discipline	Teachers gendered perceptions and practices influence how boys and girls are disciplined differently. (Gansen & Martin, 2018).	The findings revealed that gender played an important role in discipline. (SPr2CC, TPr2CD, SPr2CA)

Theme 1: Teacher perceptions (continued)		
Sub-themes and categories	Existing knowledge (Author & year)	Findings
Sub-theme: Gender equality perceptions Category 1: The teachers' role in gender equality perceptions	The teacher's perceptions influence classroom practices and children's learning. (Nikolopoulou et al., 2019).	The teachers asserted that they treat both the boys and girls the same (SPr3CB, TPr1CD, SPr3CC).
Category 2: Gender equality perceptions and the curriculum	It is imperative that boys and girls have equal access to a curriculum that is based on gender equality (Egamberdieva, 2021). Research has denoted that the curriculum is the primary agent of change which necessitates a new gender discourse (Simmonds, 2014).	Each centre utilised a different curriculum, which was gender equitable, but some of the practices were inequitable (SPr3CA, TPr2CC).
Category 3 Gender equality perceptions and discipline	It is understanding the influence of discipline through gendered lenses that teachers will have more gender equitable discipline practices (Hines-Datiri & Carter-Andrews, 2020).	The findings indicated that teachers claim to discipline the boys and girls the same. However, there are gender differences in discipline (SPr3CC, TPr1CD)
Category 4 : Gender equality perceptions and classroom management	Teacher's used differences in terms of instructional strategies and engagement based on the gender (Nejati et al., 2014).	The participants indicated that there were no gender differences in management of classrooms (SPr2CB, SPr2CC & TPr1CD).

Theme 1: Hidden curriculum and the influence on boys' behaviour			
Sub-themes and categories	Existing knowledge (Author & year)	Findings	Interpretive discussion
Category 1: Pedagogical practices and gender identity.	In ECD teachers apply gender stereotypes, norms and expectations to children through the hidden curriculum (Gansen, 2017).	The findings show that there were gender differences as boys in the suburban and the township centres were given more attention than the girls. (SPr2CC and TPr1CD)	The findings illustrated that there were contradictions in the pedagogical practices of the teachers as boys received more academic support than girls.
Category 2: Role of the teacher and gender identity.	ECD teachers act as agents for gendered socialization (Gansen, 2017)	The participants asserted that teachers influence gender identity as they used different teaching practices based on gender. Boys received more attention and support than girls (SPr2CA, SPr3CB, SPr3CC & TPr1CD).	There are contradictions as teachers indicated that practices are equal. However, teachers interacted more with boys than girls due to discipline problems. The observations of participants SPr2CA, SPr3CB, SPr2CC and TPr2CD indicated that the boys receive more attention as boys are louder and active.
Category 3: Discipline style and gender identity	Gender plays a paramount role in teacher's disciplining children and it impacts on children's development. Research has indicated that boys are more likely to experience conflict with their teachers than girls (Shivers et al., 2022).	The participants stipulated that discipline is not linked to the gender but teachers spent more time disciplining boys (SPr2CA, SPr3CB, SPr2CC). Therefore, the stereotypical behaviours of boys as being rough prevailed in all ECD centres.	The findings explicated that the teachers had to spend more time interacting with boys as a result of behavioural problems in both township and suburban centres. Boys are perceived to be continuously disrupting teachers.

Theme 1: Hidden curriculum and the influence on boys' behaviour (continued)			
Sub-themes and categories	Existing knowledge (Author & year)	Findings	Interpretive discussion
Category 4: Classroom management of the curriculum	The teacher's management of the curriculum results in gender stereotypes which regulate boys' and girls' behaviours. It is through the management of the classroom that gendered differences are reinforced. Teachers affect the construction of gender through the implementation of the hidden curriculum which explicitly and implicitly teaches children about their gender (Gansen, 2019).	The findings showed that despite the curriculum and the various philosophy of Reggio Emilia, Montessori, the teachers' classroom management of the curriculum was different for boys and girls. (SPr2CA, SPr3CB, SPr3CC).	The findings reported that the classroom management of the curriculum influences gender difference. Teachers spent more time in facilitating the learning of boys. These stereotypes are reinforced in the hidden curriculum school through reading books, reading cards, posters and other curricula resources. Boys are portrayed as brave heroes.

Theme 2: Hidden curriculum and the influence on girls' behaviour			
Sub-themes and categories	Existing knowledge (Author & year)	Findings	Interpretive discussion
Category 1: Pedagogical practices and gender identity.	Girls are socialized early to ascribe to a subordinate status at school. Pedagogical practices influenced the hidden curriculum to ensure that gender identities are established (Haynes et al., 2016.)	The findings show that girls receive less attention than boys. Furthermore, girls did not interrupt lessons often and therefore teachers gave less attention to the girls. The girls received no additional support in order to complete tasks. Most of the girls engaged in tasks independently (SPr2CA, SPr3CB, SPr3CC and TPr1CD)	The findings asserted that all practices were equal. However, there was incongruity as, despite the teachers indicating that the pedagogical practices of the curriculum are equal, girls at all the centres received less attention and support than boys. Girls would complete tasks quicker and quietly. Girls did not engage in rough play but played quietly in the dressing up area.
Category 2: Role of the teacher and gender identity.	Teachers play a pivotal role in the influence of a gendered identity. These stereotypes are enhanced in the hidden curriculum by the teachers. The pedagogical practices influence the hidden curriculum	The finding elucidates that teachers influence gender identity through the implementation of the hidden curriculum; for example, girls are assigned the cleaning chores in the classroom.	The finding expounds on the role of the teacher in influencing gender through the hidden curriculum. The participants indicated that the teachers' role is paramount to gender identity as teachers do not intervene when children engage in play activities. Therefore, girls will gravitate to the dressing-

Theme 2: Hidden curriculum and the influence on girls' behaviour (continued)			
Sub-themes and categories	Existing knowledge (Author & year)	Findings	Interpretive discussion
Category 3: Discipline style and gender identity.	Teachers organise boys and girls through disciplinary interactions in which children receive consequences for behaviours that violate gender norms (Gansen, 2019).	The findings revealed that boys are disciplined more often than girls. Furthermore, if boys do not engage in stereotypical gender activities, like playing with a truck, they are often ostracized. Therefore, there are consequences for children who violate gender norms. (SPr1CA, SPr3CB, SPr2CC).	The finding of this study asserted that the same discipline style is utilised for boys and girls. However, there are variances of discipline strategies based on gender. Therefore, girls receive more subtle discipline strategies than boys. Secondly, discipline is utilised to reinforce gender norms. When girls play rough, they are reprimanded; therefore, there are consequences if they deviate from the gendered norms. Girls become emotional when they are reprimanded.
Category 4: The classroom management and the curriculum.	The classroom management of the curriculum is so subtle that teachers are often oblivious of the influence of the hidden curriculum (Safta, 2017)	The findings reveal that centres situated in suburban and township areas reinforce gender stereotypes through the differences in the choice of activities between boys and girls. In the dress-up area, there are dresses and therefore girls play in this area as	The teachers, through the hidden curriculum, continually reinforce gender stereotypes. Therefore, there were contradictions in the classroom management as girls were not given leadership roles. Boys and girls had to line up separately. Girls had to line up first for the wash up time. During snack time, girls were given snacks first. In addition,

Theme 3: Changes in teachers' perceptions and pedagogical practices			
Sub-themes and categories	Existing knowledge (Author & year)	Findings	Interpretive discussion
Category 1: Changes in perception of the curriculum Category 2: Changes in perception in discipline Category 2: Changes in perception in classroom management	The teachers' perception in curriculum, discipline and classroom management needs to be challenged (Warin & Adriany, 2017).	The findings show that the teachers became aware of the influence of gender on the curriculum, discipline and classroom management of boys and girls. (SPr2CA, SPr3CB, SPr3CC, TPr3CD)	There were inconsistencies in the teachers' perceptions. In the interviews the teachers asserted that they promoted equality but after the workshops the teachers indicated that they became aware of their gender bias.
Category 1: Changes in pedagogical practices of the curriculum Category 2: Changes in pedagogical practices in discipline Category 3: Changes in pedagogical practices in classroom management	Teachers project their prejudices onto children through pedagogical practices and therefore, teachers need to be challenged so they become critically aware of gender bias (Warin & Adriany, 2017).	The findings stipulated that teacher's became cognizant of gender bias in the discipline and classroom management of boys and girls. (SPr3CA, SPr3CB, TPr2CD)	The findings indicated that there were incongruency before and after the workshop. Before the workshop teachers asserted that they promoted equality. However, after the workshops, they developed an awareness of gender perceptions and pedagogical practice.

Theme 4: Teacher awareness programme			
Sub-themes and categories	Existing knowledge (Author & year)	Findings	Interpretive discussion
Category 1: A process for gender awareness teaching	There has been an increase in gender bias between boys and girls in ECE. Therefore, teachers' perceptions and pedagogical practices have to be challenged through gender awareness (Lahelma & Tainio, 2019).	The findings explained that an awareness programme will assist and equip teachers to be conscious of gender equality in the classroom. (SPr1CA, SPr2CB TPr3CD)	The findings show that there are incongruencies as the teachers during the interviews explicated that their perceptions and pedagogical practices reflect gender equality. However, the gender training illustrated that teachers' were unaware of their influence on gender identity. Therefore, gender awareness pedagogy counteracts stereotypical gender structures.

6.2.3 Comparison of Results with Existing Knowledge: Silences in Literature

Table 6.3 lists the silences or gaps in the literature and their connection to the findings that emerged from the data analysis, which was not initially highlighted in the literature review in Chapter 2 as there were gaps in the literature review. The table has three columns: the first lists the themes and sub-themes; the findings column indicates the results from the analysis of the interviews, observations, field notes, photographs and reflective journals. The third column is for the interpretive discussion, looking at the silences in the present literature.

Table 6.3: Comparison of results with existing knowledge: silences in the literature

Themes and Subthemes	Findings	Interpretive discussion
Theme 1: Gender inequality perceptions	The findings illustrate that gender inequality perceptions influence the curriculum, discipline and classroom management.	The literature is silent on how gender inequality perceptions can be challenged in ECE.
Theme 2: The hidden curriculum and the influence on boys' and girls' behaviour	The findings indicated that the hidden curriculum influences pedagogical practices, discipline style and classroom management. These practices entrench gender identity in boys and girls.	The literature is silent on how teachers' pedagogical practices can be challenged.
Theme 3: Changes in teachers' perceptions and pedagogical practices	The findings indicated that the teachers experienced an awareness of gender in perception and pedagogical practices of the curriculum, discipline and classroom management.	The literature is silent on how teachers' perceptions and pedagogical practices can be challenged in ECE.
Theme 4: Gender awareness	The gender awareness program makes teachers aware of gender in their perceptions and pedagogical practices.	The literature is silent on how teachers' awareness practices can be challenged in ECE.

6.2.4 Comparison of Results With Existing Knowledge: New Insights

Table 6.4 displays new insights that were realised from the findings of the study. The first column shows the themes and subthemes from the generated data after the analysis. In the second column, I present details of newly gained knowledge. The last column provides an interpretative synopsis concerning challenging teachers' perceptions and pedagogical practices regarding children's gender identity in ECD centres.

Table 6.4: Comparison of Results With Existing Knowledge: New Insights

Themes and Subthemes	Findings	Interpretive discussion
Theme 1: Gender inequality perceptions	Before the e-workshops on gender awareness, the teachers were unaware of their influence on gender inequality.	The ECD practitioners need to analyse the workshops facilitated by experts so that they can be assimilated into ECE.
Theme 2: The hidden curriculum and the influence on boys' and girls' behaviour	The current study's findings revealed that most teachers are not cognisant of the impact of the hidden curriculum on gender.	The workshops need to challenge perceptions and pedagogical practices within the hidden curriculum.
Theme 3: Changes in teachers' perceptions and pedagogical practices	The findings indicated that participants changed their perceptions and pedagogical practices of gender in ECE.	There is a need for the professional development of teachers in the form of gender awareness. Teachers will acquire the relevant competencies to develop gender equality.
Sub-theme: Gender awareness	Teachers reacted positively to the potential implementation of the gender awareness workshops as a strategy to enhance gender equality in ECE.	Gender awareness workshops need to be integrated regularly into the professional development of all teachers in ECE.

6.3 INTERPRETATION THROUGH CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

6.3.1 Components that Add Value to the Study

This study adopted the conceptual framework of Butler (2011), the post-structural theory, the identity theory of Stets and Carter (2011) and the agency theory of James (2010). These frameworks (Figure 1.2) guided the data collection and analysis process. Firstly, the components and information contained in these conceptual frameworks added value to the study. The key components of post-structuralism expound the basis of how gender norms are reinforced through talk and action (Blaise, 2012).

Teachers will speak in a dominant discourse about gender, and therefore, discourses influence the gender identity of children in ECD. Teachers influence subjectivity through discourses and language. The component of agency in post-structuralism influences how teachers' exercise particular forms of power relations (Williams, 2014). Hence, post-structuralism provided the basis to challenge teachers' perceptions and pedagogical practices (Blaise & Taylor, 2012)

Secondly, the Identity theory in Figure 3.3 a and Section 3.5.2 provides insight for teachers by elucidating how stereotyped gender patterns are developed. Teachers must know about the development of gender patterns to challenge their perceptions and pedagogical practices. The identity theory can identify how and why gender stereotypes can be challenged (Carter, 2014). Lastly, the theory of agency, in Figure 4.3 and Section 3.4.2, explores the practices in which young children develop strategies to influence gender (Ebrahim, 2011). Young children utilise the core tenets of agency to participate actively in gender identity construction. Agency theory provides the platform for developing empowerment approaches such as gender awareness workshops (Ebrahim et al., 2011).

6.3.2 Relationship between Conceptual Research Framework and Data

The conceptual frameworks gave the researcher the insight to challenge teachers' perceptions and pedagogical practices. The post-structural theory, identity and agency theory affirmed discrepancies in teachers' perceptions and pedagogical practices. Gender inequality perceptions are manifested in the curriculum, disciplinary

interactions and the management of the classrooms, which were outlined in themes, subthemes and categories in Chapter 5.

Finally, this understanding guided me to develop gender awareness workshops to promote gender equality (Figure 5.7). The ECD practitioners need to analyse the workshops facilitated by experts to integrate their contents and guidelines into their daily teaching-learning activities. Further details and the relevance of the gender awareness workshops is explained in Chapter 5. It is recommended that gender awareness workshops form part of the professional development of all teachers at ECD.

6.3.3 Insight Gained From the Conceptual Framework

The conceptual frameworks gave the researcher insight into challenging teachers' perceptions and pedagogical practices. Early childhood development centres enlist support from the post-structural, identity and agency theories. This implies that ECD centres need to challenge teachers' perceptions and pedagogical practices to eradicate gender inequality in the curriculum, disciplinary interactions and classroom management. Further details of the awareness workshops are explained in Chapter 5.

6.4 Conclusion

In this chapter, I discussed the interpretation of the results and presented the findings compared to existing literature. The collected data was linked to previous literature on the topic. Hence, I could recognise findings that confirmed existing knowledge and those that contradicted it. In addition, the silences (gaps) in the literature and new insights were also discovered. I concluded this chapter by discussing the analysed data through the study's conceptual framework. In the next chapter, I draw conclusions elicited from answers to the secondary and primary research questions, list the limitations, outline the study's implications, and present the researcher's reflections.

CHAPTER 7: ANSWERING RESEARCH QUESTIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS, LIMITATIONS AND FINAL THOUGHTS

7.1 INTRODUCTION

In chapter six, I presented the findings and compared them with the existing literature in the first section. I also presented contradictory findings, silences and new insights in the current study. Chapter seven, the final chapter, commences with reflections on the previous six chapters and then relates the study's conclusions to the primary and secondary questions. The chapter continued with a discussion of the limitations and recommendations, which are based on the findings of this study.

7.2 OVERVIEW OF STUDY – A REFLECTION ON EACH OF THE PREVIOUS SIX CHAPTERS

Chapter one presented the research overview. The research background: contextual problems, rationale, research questions, methodological approach and the purpose of the study were introduced. In Chapter 2, I critically reviewed national and international literature related to teachers' perceptions and pedagogical practices of gender. I outline ECE and the gender awareness programme in relation to teachers' perceptions and pedagogical practices of gender. Chapter 3 explained the conceptual frameworks of post-structural theory (Tzuo et al., 2011), identity theory (Serpe & Stryker, 2011) and agency theory (Eteläpelto et al., 2013) that underpin this study. Chapter 4 presented an explanation of the research methodology employed in the study. The chapter discussed the qualitative approach, interpretative paradigm, data collection, data analysis strategy and the research design. Chapter 5 reported the findings of the study from the data analysis. The data generated from interviews, field notes, document analysis and the themes were structured to answer the research questions. In Chapter 6, I presented the literature control, the findings, the interpretative discussions and the values of the conceptual frameworks in this study. This final chapter presents the conclusions, limitations and recommendations related to the study's findings.

7.3 ATTENDING TO RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study explored the teachers' perceptions and pedagogical practices concerning gender identity with semi-structured interviews, observations, field notes, and a comprehensive literature review as data collection tools to answer the research questions. The secondary research questions are instrumental in answering the main research question. The responses to these research questions provided a complete understanding of how the study's conclusions were derived.

7.4 ANSWERING THE SECONDARY RESEARCH QUESTIONS

7.4.1 Secondary Research Question 1

Secondary Research Question 1 is: What are the teachers' perceptions regarding the gender identity of the young child?

Every teacher has individual perceptions about gender, and these beliefs influence gender bias. Gender stereotype perceptions are deeply ingrained, and teachers are often unaware of the existence of these biases (Mahmood & Kausar, 2019). Interviews, field notes and observations were analysed (Chapters 5 and 6) to determine the teachers' perceptions regarding the gender identity of the young child at the participating ECD centres. Various sub-themes emerged in the responses to these questions (Table 6.1). The contextual factors that emanated from the data analysis included gender identity developed from the home environment, the relationship between gender inequality perceptions of children and the attitude of teachers, the influence of gender on teachers' perceptions, the hidden curriculum and gender inequality perceptions. The teachers are unaware of the influence of the hidden curriculum on the routine of teaching and learning. Gender inequality and equality perceptions influence classroom management, discipline and curriculum.

The findings indicated that the young children's gender identity develops from the home environment. Therefore, parents are pressured by society to develop gender stereotypical roles in boys and girls (Waters et al., 2022). The literature and the present research's findings confirm that children's gender identity is developed in the home environment. Secondly, the unequal treatment towards boys and girls is influenced by teachers' attitudes towards children's gender roles. The findings illustrated that participants SPr2CA, SPr1CA, SPr1CB and TPr2CD have gender-stereotypical

perceptions (Chapter 6). The literature concurred with the findings as a relationship exists between teachers' perceptions and children's gender bias (Oppermann et al., 2019).

In addition, gender influences the teachers' perceptions of inequality. Therefore, gender differences are continuously constructed and refined as is natural in young children (Gansen, 2019). The findings showed that gender influences teachers' perceptions of inequality between boys and girls. In addition, the teachers can produce gender inequality through the curriculum (Akpakwa & Bua, 2014). Therefore, in the findings, teachers used gender-stereotypical language to address children. Hence, gender inequality perceptions are evident in the hidden curriculum in urban and township schools. The findings of the participants (SPr2CA, SPr1CB and SPr1CC) expounded on the lack of awareness of the influence of perceptions on gender inequalities.

The literature and findings asserted that gender inequality perceptions are evident in the hidden curriculum. The hidden curriculum in the form of books, reading cards, workbooks and charts displays adherence to gender stereotypes, which influences the internalisation of gender bias (Coyne et al., 2021). Hence, gender inequality perceptions influenced classroom management, discipline and the curriculum. The curriculum carries gender stereotypes, and children internalise gendered expectations (Sheehy, 2022). The findings and the literature have stipulated the influence of the curriculum on gender inequality (Chapter 6).

Furthermore, gender inequality perceptions influenced discipline. The literature indicated that children are socialised to accept social norms that legitimate power hierarchies which manifest within educational institutions (Ismail et al., 2022). The findings asserted that both in the township and suburban ECD centres, there were gender disparities in terms of discipline (Chapter 6). The findings showed that boys needed firm discipline as they were more aggressive than girls. The participants (SPr2CC, SPr2CA and SPr2CB) stated that boys were a discipline challenge at ECD centres.

Gender inequality perceptions have influenced the management of classrooms. There were gender differences in terms of instructional strategies and engagement based on the teacher's gender. The findings indicated that different teachers managed their

classrooms differently. Girls spent more time in the dress-up area while boys engaged in building structures (SPr2CA, SPr1CB & SPr2CC). The teachers were unaware of the children engaging in gender-stereotypical play. The findings in the research indicated that all the ECD teachers were female in both the township and suburban ECD centres. Thus, research on gender inequality indicated that gender disparities is influenced by the lack of male teachers in ECE (Okeke & Nyanhoto, 2021).

Finally, the findings and research acknowledged the role of the teacher in promoting gender equality (Meland & Kaltvedt, 2019). In some Nordic countries, the curriculum, discipline strategies and classroom management are based on gender equality. However, despite the teachers indicating that they promote equality in the curriculum, in reality, teachers spent more time disciplining and interacting with boys than girls (Gansen & Martin, 2018). Teachers in both the suburban and township centres spent more time interacting with boys. Teachers interacted more with boys on disciplinary issues in all ECD centres. Additionally, teachers spent more time explaining tasks to boys than girls.

The township ECD centres focused more on disciplining boys than girls (SPr2CD, SPr3CC, SPr3CB). Teachers in the township and suburban schools indicated that they experienced more discipline problems with boys than girls. In addition, in the township centres it was noticed that boys were more aggressive than girls. Therefore, the township ECD centre experienced more discipline problems with boys than girls. Because the curricula were gender equal, the teachers were unaware of gender disparities in the practice of the curriculum. However, the hidden curriculum highlighted the teachers' influence on gender disparities. In the suburban and township ECD centres, it was noticed that teachers play a pivotal role in influencing gender identity.

7.4.2 Secondary Research Question 2

Secondary Research Question 2 is: What are teachers' pedagogical practices regarding the gender identity of the young child?

In this study, the pedagogical practices are the instructional techniques facilitating teaching and learning among boys and girls (Wall et al., 2015). The participants were interviewed to understand the teachers' pedagogical practices regarding the gender

identity of the young child, and their teaching activities were observed. The answer to this research question emerged in Chapter 6.

The answer to this question resulted in the emergence of sub-themes (Table 6.1). The contextual sub-themes that emanated from the data analysis included the hidden curriculum and its influence on boys' and girls' behaviour, the influence of pedagogical practice on gender identity, teaching practices and gender identity, discipline style and classroom management. Firstly, the findings indicated that implementing the hidden curriculum influenced boys' and girls' behaviour. Teachers reinforce gendered identities through the hidden curriculum (O'Gara, 2013). The literature and research findings indicated that pedagogical practices influence gender identity. The hidden curriculum reproduces inequalities as it controls children in gendered ways (Gansen, 2017).

Pedagogical practices are influenced by gender. Therefore, boys are given more time to do tasks in both the suburban and township ECD centres. However, the findings indicated that girls had to complete tasks independently and received less attention than boys. It was observed that staff in both the suburban and township ECD centres spent more time explaining tasks to boys than girls. It was also noticed that teachers gave more attention to boys in the classroom and on the playfield. Girls participated more in discussions than boys in suburban and township ECD centres. In addition, boys were given more time to complete activities than girls. However, girls received more praise and rewards for success than boys in both the suburban and township ECD centres. Hence, teaching practices were influenced by gender (SPr2CA, SPr3CB, TPr1CD). Although the participants indicated that they encouraged gender equality, the observations revealed gender inequalities. Thus, teachers influence gender identity through interaction and non-verbal and verbal communication.

Secondly, teachers have different discipline styles with boys and girls (Shivers et al., 2022). The participants stipulated in the interviews that the disciplinary style for the boys and girls were equal. However, the observations indicated that teachers spent more time disciplining boys in suburban and township centres. The township centres experienced more discipline problems with boys than girls. In the township centres, the teacher had punitive discipline methods for boys. The interviews in the township centre revealed that girls responded favourably to discipline methods, but boys would

constantly disregard the teacher's authority. Additionally, the interviews with the teachers from the township centre explained that boys were more aggressive than girls. In both the suburban and township ECD centres, mixed seating arrangements are used to ensure that children are disciplined. Hence, a quiet girl was seated next to a boy who had discipline problems. Furthermore, mixed-gender seating arrangements were used in township and suburban ECD centres during activity sessions to ensure children focused on their tasks. Thus, these biases are reinforced in the hidden curriculum without the teachers being aware of the impact of gender stereotypical behaviour.

Thirdly, the teachers' management of the classrooms results in gender stereotypical regulation of boys and girls. It is through the implementation of the hidden curriculum that the classroom is managed to influence the construction of gender. The participants indicated that they managed the classroom to ensure equality between boys and girls. The suburban and township ECD centres had separate lines for boys and girls for bathroom time. There were separate bathroom facilities for boys and girls. During snack time, the township ECD centre had separate seating arrangements based on gender. Some suburban centres encouraged mixed-gender seating arrangements, while other centres encouraged children to choose their own seating arrangements. It was noticed when children chose their own seating arrangements; they preferred to sit with the same gender. Teachers did not intervene to encourage mixed-gender seating arrangements. The findings were that teachers' spent more time facilitating the learning of the boys than the girls.

In summary, the teachers had specific pedagogical practices such as giving more attention to boys, giving boys more time to complete tasks and spending more time disciplining boys than girls. In addition, boys were placed in the front of the class, and teachers often paired a naughty boy with a girl, as boys were perceived to have more behavioural problems than girls. The boys and girls were also put into separate groups during lunchtime. Boys and girls were only put into separate lines for bathroom and snack time. During snack time, the boys in the township centre received their snack first. However, the subtle pedagogical practices induce stereotypical prejudice in boys and girls (Safta, 2017).

7.4.3 Secondary Research Question 3

Secondary Research Question 3 is: Why do teachers' perceptions and pedagogical practices influence gender identity in ECD centres?

In this study, the teachers' perceptions and pedagogical practices were researched to understand why teachers' perceptions and pedagogical practices influence gender identity in ECD centres. The participants were interviewed, and their teaching activities were observed. The answer to this research question emerged in Chapter 6. Answering this question led to the emergence of various sub-themes (Table 6.1). The contextual subthemes emanating from the data analysis included gender inequality perceptions, the teacher's role in gender equality perceptions, gender inequality perceptions and pedagogical practices of the hidden curriculum.

Firstly, the literature and research findings have illustrated that teachers have gender inequality perceptions of boys and girls. Participants SPr2CA, SPr1CA, SPr1CB and TPr2CD have clearly illustrated that teachers have gender-stereotypical perceptions. The biased perceptions influence their pedagogical practices. In addition, the findings concur with the literature regarding the relationship between gender inequality perceptions and gender inequality pedagogical practices of teachers (Master et al., 2021).

Secondly, teachers influence children's attitudes by their stereotypical beliefs of gender. Teachers impact children's gender attitudes and behaviour by reinforcing gender traits. Teachers influence the children's toys, games, play and sports, representing their gender identity. Reinforcing gender stereotypical patterns influences children's subject and career decisions in adulthood (Wright, 2022). Teachers promote gender stereotypical roles of masculinity and femininity through gender steering, which guides a child's choice to adhere to the practice of a gendered role. Thus, teachers' perceptions influence children's behaviour, physical gestures and other nonverbal actions identified as stereotypically masculine or feminine (Wright, 2022).

Every teacher has individual experiences and beliefs surrounding gender, which affects how they influence gender identity (Chapman, 2016). However, teachers are unaware of their perception of stereotypes and how their behaviour may hinder equitable pedagogical practices. Furthermore, few teacher education institutions teach

prospective teachers about gender. Hence, many teachers do not have the skills and knowledge to change the school curriculum, interactional patterns, pedagogical strategies and use of resources. Teachers' awareness of gender issues in teaching and learning is crucial to gender equality (Akpakwu & Bua, 2014). Teachers must receive in-service training to develop gender-equitable teaching and learning (Li, 2023).

Thirdly, teacher perceptions and pedagogical practices influence gender identity through the curriculum, classroom management and discipline (Perszyk et al., 2019). The findings denoted that through the hidden curriculum, teachers' gender bias was internalised by children. Hence, participants SP1CA, SP1CB and SP2CD exhibited gender bias. The literature illustrates that teachers relate differently to boys and girls concerning expectations, behaviour and characteristics. In the observations, girls were seen to be encouraged to work independently, while boys were given additional assistance with tasks. Therefore, boys depended on the teacher's assistance to complete tasks. On the other hand, girls developed skills to cope with tasks independently. When the teacher did not pay attention to the boys, they became talkative. Children adapt their behaviour in relation to what is expected of them (Meland & Kaltvedt, 2019). Teachers are unaware of their gender bias, and this results in the development of gender inequality.

Finally, teachers' perceptions and pedagogical practice influence gender identity in ECE as teachers' gendered identity is influenced by teacher education, policy, early childhood setting, gender, ethnicity, religion, family, sexuality, family and history, and each of these contexts impacts their identity relationally (Robinson & Dias, 2006; Rogers et al., 2015; Kilderry, 2015). Hence, ECD centres must analyse stereotypical gender roles to counteract them to impede gender role practices and facilitate transformation within ECE (Rogosic et al., 2020).

7.4.4 Secondary Research Question 4

Secondary Research Question 4 is: What are the perceptions and pedagogical practices of challenged teachers?

In this study, the research revealed that teachers were unaware of the effect of their gender identity perceptions on pedagogical practices. The literature and research indicated the need to challenge teachers through workshops so there are changes in

perception and pedagogical practices in classroom management, discipline and curriculum. The participants were observed and interviewed to determine the perceptions and pedagogical practices of challenged teachers. The answer to this research question emerged in Chapter 6.

The answer to this question resulted in the emergence of various sub-themes (Table 6.1).

The contextual subthemes that emanated from the data analysis included changes in teachers' perceptions in the curriculum, in discipline and in classroom management, and changes in pedagogical practices of the curriculum, discipline and classroom management. Firstly, the literature and the research findings illustrated that teachers' perception of curriculum, discipline and classroom management needed to be challenged (Warin & Adriany, 2017). After the workshop, teachers' perceptions were challenged, and participants became more aware of gender stereotypes in the hidden curriculum, discipline strategies, and classroom management of teaching and learning (SPr2CA, SPr3CB, SPr3CC, TPr3CD). Gender awareness reduces the development of stereotypical norms in children (Meland, 2022).

Secondly, teachers need to be challenged so they become critically aware of pedagogical practices on gender (Warin & Adriany, 2017). Furthermore, teachers need to be challenged to be empowered to act against gender discrimination (Spitzman & Balconi, 2019). The findings indicated that the teachers became more aware of gender resources in the curriculum. In addition, teachers are more conscious of gender bias in the discipline and classroom management of boys and girls (SPr3CA, SPr3CB, TPr2CD). Thus, after the workshops, the participants expounded that challenging the teachers' perceptions and pedagogical practices concerning gender identity led to significant changes in the curriculum, discipline and classroom management. Therefore, after workshop two, the teacher indicated in group discussions and on the PAR charts that they could reflect on gender stereotypes in all activities at school (SPr1CA). In addition, workshops made teachers aware of the influence of gender in teaching (SPr2CB). The teachers indicated that the awareness programme equipped them with skills to ensure gender equality (TPr3CD). The teachers felt the awareness programme assisted in raising the consciousness of gender equality in ECD centres.

7.4.5 Secondary Research Question 5

Why is a teacher awareness programme essential in challenging teachers' perceptions and pedagogical practices with regard to gender identity at ECD centres?

In this study, the research revealed that teachers were unaware of the effect of their perceptions and pedagogical practices on gender identity. The literature and research indicated the need to challenge teachers. Therefore, teachers' perceptions and pedagogical practices were challenged by workshops. Therefore, changes were initiated in the pedagogical practices of the curriculum, discipline practices and classroom management. The answer to this research question emerged in Chapter 6. Answering this question led to the emergence of various sub-themes (Table 6.1). The contextual subtheme that emanated from the data analysis was the gender awareness process, which promotes self-reflection to counteract stereotypical gender norms (Gullberg et al., 2018). The literature stipulates that awareness training conscientises teachers about gender inequalities (Diez et al., 2021).

Teachers in ECD centres play a critical role in children's acquisition of gender roles. The teachers' perceptions of gender can transfer to children through interaction, communication and social modelling (Šabić et al., 2022). Therefore, biased teachers' assumptions constrain a child's ability and affect children until adulthood (Li, 2023). Teachers' gender-biased perceptions and pedagogical practices can limit children's academic and career development. Because teachers set lower expectations for girls, many girls do not follow a career in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (Wieselmann et al., 2020). Therefore, the teachers' gender perceptions influence the educational achievement and motivation of children (Brandmiller et al., 2020).

In the findings, the participants indicated that gender awareness makes the teachers attentive to the boys and girls so they develop their abilities without restrictions based on gender stereotypes. Gender awareness challenges and changes stereotypical bias so all children develop to their fullest potential (SPr1CA, SPr2CB, SPr2CA). The workshops introduced teachers through interactive discussion to the development of an awareness of gender in the curriculum, discipline strategies and the management of the classroom. There were two PAR workshops, which were interactive and reflective.

The workshop was designed in phase three to challenge the teachers' gender perceptions and pedagogical practices. After phase three, teachers had the opportunity to implement their challenges while they received support from their colleagues. Teachers practised gender awareness in the teaching and learning situation, documented their presentations, and reflected on their perceptions and pedagogical practices. In phase four, during the second workshop, teachers gave feedback on the effect of challenging their perceptions and pedagogical practices of gender. In addition, there were group discussions on the effect of challenging gender stereotypes. The teachers discussed the children's responses to challenging gender bias. The boys and girls responded favourably to gender awareness as teachers became attentive to the importance of treating boys and girls equally. The teachers indicated they became cognisant of gender in their perceptions and pedagogical practices in the ECD centres. Thus, after the workshops, all the teachers in the four ECD centres indicated that they experienced significant changes in their perceptions and pedagogical practices concerning gender.

The research questions, literature review, and conceptual frameworks were pulled together to develop a gender awareness framework to enhance gender equality. The answer to this research question establishes the framework to challenge perceptions and pedagogical practices illustrated in Figure 7.1. In this regard, Warin and Adriany (2017) asserted that the framework should be interconnected and in the process of active engagement that stimulates gender equality.

7.4.6 Main Research question

The primary research question is: How can teachers' perceptions and pedagogical practices enhance gender identity in ECD centres?

This study first sets out to explore the perceptions and pedagogical practices of teachers concerning gender identity at ECD centres in both the township and suburban areas of Midrand. It was discovered that teachers' perceptions and pedagogical practices influence gender identity. Girls and boys internalise gender inequality to become normalised in education. Therefore, to challenge teachers' biased perceptions and pedagogical practices, there needs to be an understanding of the third research question: Why do teacher perceptions and pedagogical practices influence gender identity in ECD? The findings and literature distinctively disclosed

that teachers have gender-stereotypical perceptions which influence pedagogical practices through the curriculum, classroom management, and approaches to discipline. Hence, teachers' gender stereotypical perceptions and pedagogical practices have been negatively influenced by a lack of gender awareness.

Secondly, the research unquestionably denoted the need to challenge the teachers' perceptions and pedagogical practices concerning gender identity. Workshop interventions actively challenged teacher perceptions and pedagogical practices about gender. After the workshops, the participants of the township and suburban ECD centres were observed, and there were reflective discussions on implementing a teacher awareness programme at ECD centres. Therefore, the fourth research question on the perceptions and pedagogical practices of challenged teachers was explained. The teachers' perceptions and pedagogical practices on gender stereotypes were challenged.

In addition, the findings affirmed that teachers' perceptions and pedagogical practices became more gender-sensitive and gender transformative after the workshops. The pedagogical practices need a gendered lens which is sensitive to inequalities. Gender-sensitive pedagogy is beneficial to all children despite their gender. Furthermore, gender-sensitive pedagogy develops a methodology that prevents gender stereotyping in the classroom (Meyiwa & Cekiso, 2020). A gender-sensitive pedagogy promotes gender equality as both boys and girls are given active participation and learning opportunities. However, a gender-sensitive pedagogy is not used in the classrooms as teachers do not have the necessary knowledge and training, and they have gender biases (Singh, 2023). Furthermore, a study by Keddie (2022) illustrated that gender transformative pedagogy problematises relations of oppression and privilege that produce gender equality. Therefore, such pedagogies will be discomforting for children, especially boys who are vested in masculine norms of power and entitlement. Hence, challenging educators to navigate gender transformation involves self-reflection. The research participants unequivocally articulated the need for teacher development training that challenges gender discriminatory practices. Thus, gender-sensitive pedagogical training transforms stereotypical notions into behavioural changes by increasing awareness of gender equality issues (Meyiwa & Cekiso, 2020). Hence, teachers realise their influence on gender perceptions and pedagogical practices.

Thirdly, the teacher programmes challenged teachers to have more gender-equitable portrayals of male and female characters in resources (Axell & Boström, 2021). Books should have more portrayals of women in the science and technology field so girls' interest in science can be cultivated. Teachers must share books which no longer portray boys as leaders who fight bravely to rescue girls. The portrayal of women leaders in stereotypical ways is problematic because early messages influence children's views of gender roles (Lay et al., 2021). However, excluding all books with gender-biased ideas may be impossible, and the gender awareness findings have indicated that discussions are opportunities to challenge gender stereotypes (Li, 2023).

Fourthly, by challenging the teachers, children were exposed to different activities that are gender-equitable. However, there is a tendency for boys to be more active and to engage in more physical activities than girls (Prioletta & Pyle, 2017). Therefore, the findings indicated that teachers need to challenge children's gendered stereotypes on choice of activities. On the other hand, children should receive support while they engage in their preferred play. The teacher awareness programme challenges teachers to not exclude children from school activities (McCabe & Anhalt, 2022).

Fifthly, the teacher awareness programme challenges gender stereotypes by encouraging children to play with an assortment of toys. Traditional toys have been categorised into masculine and feminine toys (Dinella & Weisgram, 2018). However, children may favour gender-stereotyped toys, and therefore, teachers must provide abundant toys to encourage gender-counter stereotypical behaviour (King et al., 2020). In addition, toys should not be assigned to children based on gender-biased colour or type. Hence, the findings revealed that teachers need to encourage children to explore an assortment of toys and to support children (Aina & Cameron, 2011). Teachers need to organise group activities promoting collaboration between boys and girls. The activities should encourage every child, irrespective of gender, to participate in physical and traditional feminine activities. Thus, there should not be differentiation of boys and girls based on gender (Prioletta & Pyle, 2017).

Sixthly, teachers' perceptions and pedagogical practices need to be challenged in their interactions with children. Teachers need to be challenged to use different addressing languages when interacting with different children. The findings asserted that children

are usually addressed according to gender stereotypical roles. Therefore, girls are referred to as “honey” and boys are called “strong boys”. Gender-stereotypical language is used in both suburban and township ECD centres. Hence, the teachers’ instruction language was challenged. Furthermore, discipline approaches are often stereotyped, and therefore, the findings revealed that girls are praised more than boys. Therefore, teachers need to support boys when they become emotional and be aware that they should not treat girls as “princesses” (Li, 2023). The findings revealed that children in the township and suburban ECD centres use stereotypical language in their interaction with children. Teachers need to be challenged to change their discipline approaches to become more gender equitable.

Seventhly, teachers need to be aware of how their perceptions and pedagogical practices led to gender stereotypes in children's academic performance. Teachers need to be aware that gender does not influence academic performance. Gender awareness programmes should form part of an ongoing process of introspection to help teachers consider how they relate to genders differently. Teachers should be able to monitor and reflect on their language and actions to eliminate biased messages. The teacher awareness programme should be part of in-service professional development in the area of anti-bias in the curriculum, classroom management, and discipline strategies. Therefore, teaching instructions and pedagogical practices should be innovative. Teachers must create a positive learning environment that stimulates cognitive, social, emotional, physical and equitable teaching. The awareness programme aims to eradicate stereotypes and biases that stress the biological differences between boys and girls.

In addition, teachers can involve parents as partners by engaging parents in information sessions to make them aware of the effects of gender bias in teaching and learning in ECD. Secondly, during the information sessions, the teachers need to emphasise the role of the teachers and parents as partners in ensuring gender equality between the boys and the girls. The information sessions need to encourage parents to support the teachers in developing gender equality. In addition, the information sessions will practically support the parents in developing gender equality between their sons and daughters. The practice sessions need to conscientise parents to cultivate gender equality awareness by selecting toys, books and other resources for

children. Furthermore, information sessions can assist parents with the necessary skills and knowledge to discuss gender stereotypes with children at an early age.

Therefore, parents can be involved in developing the foundations for gender equality. The uniqueness of gender awareness information sessions for parents instils an open-minded learning environment in which equal opportunity and an anti-biased worldview are developed (Li, 2023). Furthermore, gender norms and relations are not limited to the classroom environment. Gender stereotypes can reach children through many different channels. Children are affected by the use of gender stereotypes by parents, school, family, institutions, social media, community, etc. Therefore, children are affected by gender-stereotypical norms, and gender views can lead to misunderstanding. Therefore, the parents and community must work together with the teachers and the school management team to overcome societal barriers to gender equality.

7.5 RESEARCHER'S REFLECTION

This study chose three ECD centres from the suburban areas and one ECD centre from the township area of Midrand. I engaged with ECD centres, which gave me access to the centres. During data collection, I continually reminded myself of the purpose of the study so that I did not deviate from the objectives. I did member checking to ensure truthfulness and the correct transcription of the recorded version of the interviews. I made all efforts to ensure credibility by triangulating the interview by using transcriptions, observation field notes and pictures for data gathering. To further advance the trustworthiness of my research study, I engaged with my supervisor to critically check the data interpretation process.

My research unravelled that teachers' perceptions and pedagogical practices must be challenged to achieve gender equality. My understanding of the role of the hidden curriculum on gender grew from minimal to an advanced level. I learnt that perceptions influence pedagogical practice, and there needs to be ECD centre-based workshops to make teachers aware of gender. The findings confirmed that the ECD teachers were unaware of how perceptions and pedagogical practices influence gender stereotypes., There needs to be continuous professional development in the form of workshops to sustain gender awareness.

In addition, I learnt that the leadership of the ECD centres should continually support teachers' professional development so that gender bias can be inhibited. I initially planned to conduct this study at only the suburban centres in the Midrand area. However, after the preliminary literature review, I discovered a dearth of literature about gender in township areas of Midrand. Therefore, I thought it would be more enlightening to investigate how teachers' perceptions and pedagogical practices can be challenged in the suburban and township ECD centres.

7.6 UNIQUE CONTRIBUTION FRAMEWORK FOR GENDER

The Renisha Singh Gender Awareness Pedagogy framework (RS-GAP) was created using the elements of developing gender equality in teaching and learning proposed by Li (2023), the need to challenge teachers' perceptions as set out by McCabe and Anhalt (2022), the gender reflective teaching proposed by Gullberg et al. (2018), and this study's research findings.

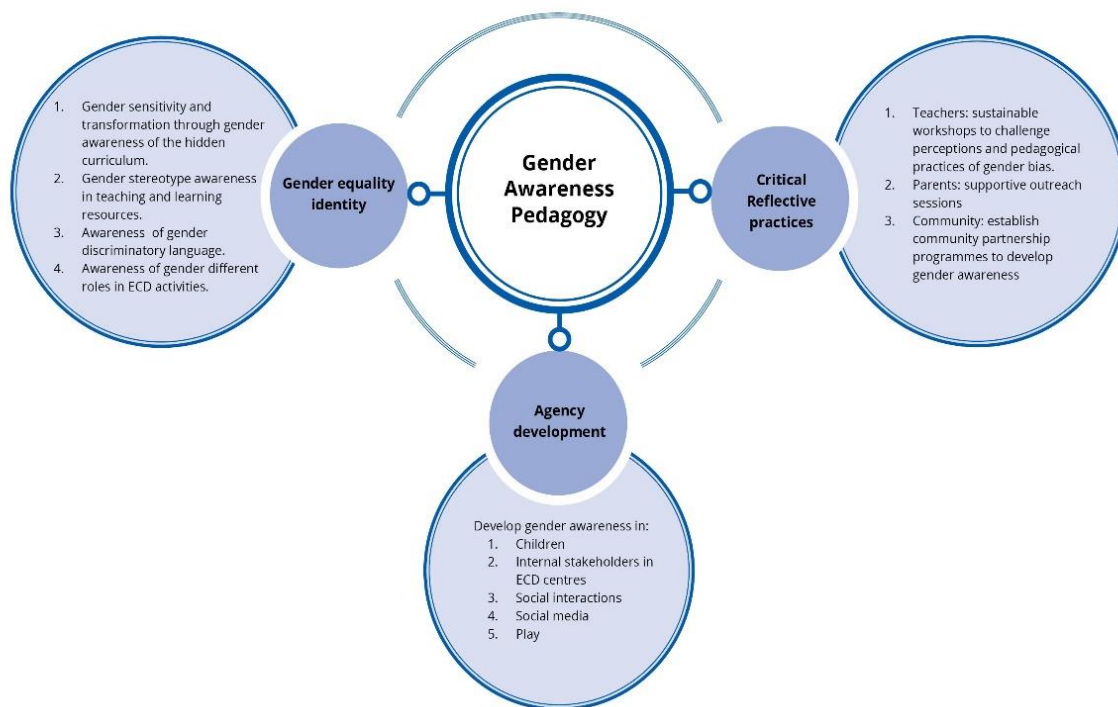


Figure 7.1: The Renisha Singh Gender Awareness Pedagogy Framework (RS - GAP)

7.6.1 Explanation of the Framework

The main terms used in the framework are explained in the sub-section below.

7.6.1.1 Gender Awareness Pedagogy

Gender awareness pedagogy aims to challenge perceptions and pedagogical practices at the ECD centres, as indicated in Figure 7.1. The Renisha Singh Gender Awareness Pedagogy Framework has been designed to develop and sustain gender awareness. Firstly, to develop critical reflective teaching, continual professional teacher development through interactive workshops is imperative for challenging teachers to be aware of their perceptions and the influences of their perceptions on pedagogical practices. The ECD teachers are regarded as one of the most important human resources who have direct relationships to influence the gender identity of children (Maleki et al., 2019). The teachers' consciousness of their own gendered perceptions and behaviour affects the children's gendered identity (Warin & Adriany, 2017). The gender awareness pedagogy framework challenges teachers' perceptions and pedagogical practices in the whole ECD organisation. There is an understanding of gender stereotypes through challenging the teachers' thinking and practices (Warin & Adriany, 2017). The workshops are an implication for teachers based on the findings of the research.

In addition, parental outreach supportive sessions are an implication for the research as they make parents aware of their influence on gender development. Parents lay the foundation of gender stereotypes through their attitudes, behaviour and expectations of their sons and daughters. Furthermore, parents play an important role in the achievement of their children based on the gender of the child (Osman, 2021). Therefore, parents need guidance on how they support their children to develop gender equality. The outreach sessions provided guidance and support in gender awareness in language, play, resources, interaction, household chores, and academic achievement. The elimination of gender stereotypes leads to social and economic progress (Chang & Milkman, 2020).

Community partnership programmes support the teachers and sustain gender awareness in the home, school, cultural and community environment. In addition, community partnerships programmes are an implication for the research. There is a significant relationship between the influence of the family, culture and community on

children's academic and educational achievement. In partnership, families, teachers and community members work together to share information, guide children, solve problems and celebrate successes. Home, school and community partnerships sustain gender awareness (Epstein, 2018). Therefore, community-based organisations must develop partnerships with the schools to mobilise gender transformation within the community and to take cognisance of the culture of the home and school context (Enaifoghe & Idowu, 2021).

Secondly, to develop gender equality identity, there needs to be gender sensitivity and transformation through gender awareness of the hidden curriculum. The hidden curriculum influences gender identity through pedagogical practices, discipline style and classroom management. These practices entrench gender identity in boys and girls. These stereotypes are enhanced in the hidden curriculum by teachers' actions (Rahman, 2013). An important aspect of the hidden curriculum is the resources. Gender awareness pedagogy makes teachers, parents, children and the community aware of gender stereotypes in books, charts, games, worksheets, computer games, toys and other resources used in ECE. The stakeholders in the ECE need to have discussions about gender stereotypes so there is greater awareness of gender identity in teaching and learning resources.

Furthermore, language is a powerful mechanism of gender discrimination. Gender stereotypes are manifested in gender roles through lexical choices of communication. Therefore, language influences status as men's status as being male is embedded in the structure of many languages, and masculine pronouns have a generic function to refer to both male and female. Language subtly represents women less favourably and thus enacts gender discrimination without meaning to discriminate or even being aware of gender-discriminatory language (Menegatti & Rubini, 2017). Hence, an awareness of the influence of language on gender discrimination is important in developing gender equality identity.

Additionally, children start to stereotype everyday life as early as two. The ECD centres, in reading, playing, music, arts, crafts, dress-up, sports and other activities reinforce gender difference through stereotypical expectations of gender roles. Teachers, parents and the community support traditional gender roles, and children are influenced to behave appropriately (Meland & Kaltvede, 2017). Gender

stereotypes are reflected in perceptions and expectations as there is a lack of awareness of the influence of stereotypical gender roles in activities. The awareness of different gender roles in ECD activities is paramount to developing gender equality. Finally, agency development teaches children to become more alert to how they and other people around them create gendered identities. The development of gender consciousness through reflection, as indicated in Figure 7.1, is a key element of gender development (Warin & Adriany, 2017). The Nordic countries have made some strives to achieve gender equality. At a policy level, the Nordic countries are progressing; however, in everyday practices in early childhood settings, gender equality is not a reality (Heikkilä, 2020). As a result, there were gender educational gaps in some of the Nordic countries (Lahelma, 2011). Therefore, gender awareness through agency development in children, internal stakeholders in ECD centres, social interactions in ECE and social media is essential for gender equality.

7.7 RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE STUDY

In this section, I discuss the study's implications for ECD teachers, policymakers and researchers on collaboration to attain gender equality based on the study's findings.

7.7.1 Recommendation for the Implementation of the RS-GAP Framework

This study recommends that ECD centres implement the Renisha Singh Gender Awareness Pedagogy framework in which parents, teachers, community stakeholders, ECD internal stakeholders and children are made aware of gender stereotypes. Furthermore, all stakeholders should be made aware of gender bias in teaching and learning resources, language, social interactions, ECE activities, the hidden curriculum and social media. By fostering the development of gender awareness for all the stakeholders, a sustainable approach to creating gender equality can be created.

The teachers can be supported by workshops which challenge their perceptions and pedagogical practices. The parents can be supported by outreach sessions which offer parental guidance on developing gender awareness. The community can be supported by promoting partnership programmes to develop gender awareness. Therefore, implementing the Renisha Singh Gender Awareness Pedagogy framework in ECE will establish the foundation of gender equality in ECE. When children develop

gender equitable identities in ECE, they influence the academic levels of boys and girls. In addition, gender equality provides opportunities for future employment and improves socio-economic levels across society (Aubrey, 2017).

7.7.2 Recommendations for Teachers' Professional Development Workshops

This study recommends that ECD teachers should participate in professional development workshops. The workshops should be sustainable and practical so teachers can implement gender equality strategies in the ECD centres. The workshops aim to challenge teacher perceptions and pedagogical practices of gender bias. Teachers' perceptions and pedagogical practices must be challenged so that they become aware of gender stereotypes and gender bias in discipline, classroom management and the hidden curriculum. In addition, challenging teachers through workshops should provide them with the skills and knowledge about the long-term impact of gender stereotypes on children's academic and career development (Mulaudzi & Mudzielwana, 2016).

In addition, the internal stakeholders of the ECD centres, such as the school management team, administrators, support staff and governing body, need to be involved in the workshop development. Therefore, teachers can be supported by planning and implementing gender awareness workshops in the ECD settings. The ECD teachers' professional development workshops should be based on the Renisha Singh Gender Awareness pedagogy framework. The professional programme should foster an ethos of critical reflection in perceptions and pedagogical practices. Furthermore, the development of agency and gender equality identity is imperative in the professional development of teachers, which encompasses all aspects of teaching and learning in ECD.

7.7.3 Recommendation for Policy

The national integrated ECD policy acknowledges the need for the professional development of teachers at ECD centres. However, there needs to be more focus on gender awareness programmes. The policy does not provide guidelines for implementing the programmes. Additionally, the guidelines for implementing gender awareness pedagogy programmes should be incorporated into the curriculum as they can potentially facilitate gender equality in ECE.

Furthermore, policymakers need to challenge ECD teachers' professional development by adopting gender awareness professional development programmes in the form of workshops. This approach will ensure that all teachers in ECD centres would receive in-depth training in implementing gender awareness-based pedagogical practices to deliver gender equality within the curriculum effectively. Initially, a research study can take place where the researcher or facilitator assesses the current levels of gender awareness in ECD. After that, the researcher can host participatory action and reflection workshops with the teachers to discuss these strategies. The DBE could use the RS-GAP framework as an action plan to train all teachers in developing gender awareness to ensure the development of.

7.7.4 Recommendations for Teacher Education

It is recommended that the RS-GAP framework be used in training prospective teachers, especially the Foundation Phase teachers. This training will develop teachers' perceptions and pedagogical practices of gender. I recommend that a module on gender education should be used to conscientise teachers about the influence of gender bias in all teaching and learning activities in ECE. Critical reflective practices are paramount to developing gender awareness in teacher education. Hence, teachers need to examine their personal gender bias perceptions – only then will they be able to practise gender equality meaningfully. In addition, using PAR as a teaching methodology will allow pre-service teachers to develop agency towards becoming activists for gender equality. Therefore, teachers will learn how to teach in a way that increases gender equality in the learning environment. Hence, PAR resonates with the education principles for the liberation and transformation of the ECD sector in South Africa.

7.7.5 Recommendations for Future Study

This study hopes to inspire further research in challenging teacher perceptions and pedagogical practices in the teacher professional development field. There needs to be specific research to understand the implementation of the gender awareness pedagogy framework. Further research should be undertaken to determine the effectiveness of the framework. A comparative study at two similar ECD centres could be valuable, where one centre uses the framework to challenge teachers while the other maintains the status. The researchers should engage with the teachers from

both centres before the case study commences to determine the level of gender awareness at each centre. The researcher should then host the teacher workshops where the framework is explained, with the researcher working as a unit.

Therefore, when teachers start implementing the framework, the researcher should get regular feedback to determine whether the implemented framework was developing teacher awareness of gender or whether the status quo was being maintained. If the RS GAP framework is not challenging teachers' perceptions and pedagogical practices on gender, the researcher and teachers should meet again to discuss measures to develop gender awareness. As the teachers are involved in workshops other multilevel concentrics may develop to support the ECD frontline workers. In addition, the effects of gender awareness on the curriculum, discipline strategies and classroom management need to be researched. It is recommended that further research in discipline and gender will be beneficial to understanding bullying and violence in ECE.

7.8 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This research aimed to contribute to the development of gender equality by challenging teacher perceptions and pedagogical practices. The intention was to determine and understand the teachers' perceptions and pedagogical practices. Although the research achieved its aims and objectives, it must be recognised that any research study is implemented within a certain context, which dictates what is possible and what cannot be done. According to Creswell (2014), any qualitative research study has strengths and weaknesses, presenting limitations on a study. Given the context in which the research was conducted, several limitations were imposed on the study. Although the data was collected in a reliable manner, the researcher had to find alternative ways to access the sample populations. There were a few limitations to this study.

Firstly, the study was limited to one district in the Gauteng Province and looked at different ECD centres in township and suburban areas. This focus was to get an idea of the perceptions and pedagogical practices of gender in the different ECD centres. Some differences were found in teacher perceptions and pedagogical practices of gender in the township and suburban ECD centres. It is essential to note that the findings may not be generalised to the wider ECCE sector. However, it is important to

be mindful that most ECCE centres in South Africa may experience similar problems with gender bias. Further research into other districts and provinces involving different ECD centres is recommended.

Secondly, access to the township ECD centre was restricted due to rioting in the area. This restriction affected the observation of lessons in the ECD centre. Therefore, there were delays in the research as the township ECD centre could only be accessed once the rioting in the area had subsided. Thirdly, one of the participants' parents passed away during the research, which affected the rich data that would have been collected from her because she took leave to conduct her parents' funeral. Finally, a limitation of this study is that all the participants were female. The findings of this research would have been different if the participants were male. However, male teachers were not deliberately excluded from the study; there were no male teachers in the schools that participated in the study. Therefore, the sample is not representative of the population of the ECE teachers in Gauteng; hence, the findings cannot be generalised to all ECD teachers. Determining the influence of male teachers' perceptions and pedagogical practices concerning gender is recommended.

7.9 FINAL THOUGHTS

ECE provides the bedrock for gender identity development as schools are gendered environments (Mokoena & Jegede, 2017). In Table 7.1, I connected the themes, research questions and relevant theories. The themes related to teacher perceptions, pedagogical practices in the classroom, changes in teachers' perceptions and pedagogical practices, and the teacher awareness programme. The theories linked to the conceptual framework.

Table 7.1: Linking the research question, themes and theories

Research question	Themes and Subthemes	Theories
What are the teachers' perceptions regarding the gender identity of the young child?	Theme 1 teacher perceptions: 1. Inequality of gender relationships. 2. Equality of gender relationships.	Post-structural theory

Research question	Themes and Subthemes	Theories
What are the teachers' pedagogical practices regarding the gender identity of the young child?	Theme 2 Pedagogical practices in the classroom: 1. The implementation of the hidden curriculum and the influence on boys' behaviour 2. The implementation of the hidden curriculum and the influence on girls' behaviour	Identity theory Post-structural theory
What are the perceptions and pedagogical practices of challenged teachers?	Theme 3: Changes in perceptions and pedagogical practices. 1. Perceptions of challenged teachers. 2. Pedagogical practices of challenged teachers.	Agency theory Post-structural theory
Why is a teacher awareness programme essential in challenging teachers' perceptions and pedagogical practices with regard to gender identity at ECD centres?	Theme 4: The teacher awareness programme.	Agency theory Post-structural theory

In Table 7.1, I attempted to link the themes of the research findings with the research questions and the conceptual framework of this study. Theme one focused on teacher perceptions, and the sub-themes that emerged from the findings were inequality and equality of gender perceptions. The themes linked to the research question: *What are the teachers' perceptions regarding the gender identity of the young child?* The sub-themes of equality and inequality in gender perceptions are linked to the post-structural theory, which explicates the discourse of power and control (Williams, 2014). Therefore, teachers have gender-stereotypical perceptions of boys and girls.

Secondly, in Table 7.1, the second theme and subthemes emerged from exploring the research question: *What are the teachers' pedagogical practices regarding the gender identity of the young child?* Theme 2 focused on possible factors that explain teachers' pedagogical practices regarding gender identity. The theme and subthemes link to the post-structural theory and identity. The post-structural theory elucidates the discourse of power and control (Niesche, 2016). In addition, the identity theory concentrates on role engagements (Carter, 2014).

Thirdly, theme three emerged from the research question: *What are the perceptions and pedagogical practices of challenged teachers?* The theme changes in perceptions and pedagogical practices expounded on the perceptions and pedagogical practices of challenged teachers as denoted in Table 7.1. The theme links to the agency theory and post-structural theory. The agency theory emphasises that agents can use their critical awareness to take up alternative ways of knowing (Nsamenang, 2012). The post-structural theory focuses on social justice and critical thinking, pivotal to challenging teachers' perceptions and pedagogical practices.

Finally, theme four focused on the teacher awareness programme, which developed from the research question: *Why is a teacher awareness programme essential in challenging teachers' perceptions and pedagogical practices with regard to gender identity at ECD centres?* The findings and the literature clarified that a teacher awareness programme is paramount to gender equality. The theme correlated with the agency theory and post-structural theory. The post-structural theory postulates the social critique of gender identity (Tzuo et al., 2011). Furthermore, the agency theory accentuates the utilisation of critical awareness to initiate changes in the perceptions and pedagogical practices of teachers.

7.10 CONCLUSION

This study investigated how perceptions and pedagogical practices influenced gender identity in young children at Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) centres. After responding to the research questions by exploring different literature sources and noting my personal learnings, contributions, limitations and recommendations, I now conclude my study. It has been an emotional journey fraught with challenges and interesting learning experiences. The study's outcome gave me the most satisfying joy because the teachers experienced a greater awareness of gender stereotypes in

perceptions and pedagogical practices. This research exposed me to a new perspective on conducting research. The use of PAR was a novel way of involving teachers to make meaningful transformations in the entrenchment of gender equality.

The unique contribution of the research added to three theories and displayed the action that needs to be taken to create gender equality from the early years. The RS-GAP framework would be shared with the main stakeholders in education and also used by Higher Education Institutions in the Higher Learning Development Area- “Personal Identity and Belonging”, as contained in the diploma or the degree in Early Childhood Care and Education so that teacher trainees can emerge understanding their agency in their role regarding gender equality in ECD centres as well as creating a gender equal South Africa and world.

References

- Abbott, D. A. (2011). *Is there an optimal environment for child development?* University of Nebraska.
- Adriany, V. (2019). Being a princess: young children's negotiation of femininities in a Kindergarten classroom in Indonesia. *Gender and Education, 31*(6), 724-741. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09540253.2018.1496229>
- Ahmed, M., Ambreen, M., & Hussain, I. (2018). Gender differentials among teachers' classroom management strategies in Pakistani context. *Journal of Education and Educational Development, 5*(2).
- Ahmed, S. (2012). *On being Included. Racism and Diversity in Institutional Life*. Duke University Press.
- Aina, O. E., & Cameron, P. A. (2011). Why does gender matter? Counteracting stereotypes with young children. *Dimensions of Early Childhood, 39*(3), 11-19. <https://www.seca.info/dimensions>
- Akpakwu, O. S., & Bua, F. T. (2014). Gender equality in schools: Implications for the curriculum, teaching and classroom interaction. *Journal of Education and Practice, 5*(32), 7-12.
- Amina, J. A. (2015). Evaluation of headteachers 'performance in supervision of instruction and involvement of staff in decision-making in schools. *International Journal of Research in Humanities and Social Studies, 2*(7).
- Ananga, E. D. (2021). Gender-responsive pedagogy for teaching and learning: The practice in Ghana's initial teacher education programme. *Creative Education, 12*(4), 848-864.
- Anders, Y. (2015). *Literature review on pedagogy*. OECD.
- Ansoms, A., & Murison, J. (2012). *Formalizing the informal in Rwanda: interaction between national policy and local level-level entrepreneurship*. In *Unpublished paper. Presented at the Conference Informal Economy, Vulnerabilities and Employment*. University of Geneva (pp.9-10).

- Ansoms, A., & Rostagno, D. (2012). Rwanda's Vision 2020 halfway through: what the eye does not see. *Review of African Political Economy*, 39(133), 427-450. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03056244.2012.710836>
- Aprilianti, L., Adriany, V., & Syaodih, E. (2021, March). Gender Constructions in Early Childhood Education. In *5th International Conference on Early Childhood Education (ICECE 2020)* (pp. 330-333). Atlantis Press.
- Ashley-Cooper, M., van Niekerk, L. J., & Atmore, E. (2019). Early childhood development in South Africa: Inequality and opportunity. *South African Schooling: The Enigma of Inequality: A Study of the Present Situation and Future Possibilities*, 87-108.
- Askegaard, S., & Heilbrunn, B. (Eds.). (2018). *Canonical authors in consumption theory*. Routledge.
- Aubrey, C. (2017). Sources of inequality in South African early child development services, *South African Journal of Childhood Education*, 7(1), 1-9
- Axell, C., & Boström, J. (2021). Technology in children's picture books as an agent for reinforcing or challenging traditional gender stereotypes. *International journal of technology and design education*, 31, 27-39.
- Babbie, E. (2015). *Observing ourselves: Essays in social research*. Waveland Press.
- Baig, A. B. (2015). Exploring the contribution of teaching and learning processes: constructing students' gender identity in an early years classroom of a government girls primary school in Pakistan. *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 16(3), 1.
- Ball, S. (2013). *Foucault, power, and education*. Routledge.
- Barnes, J., Conrad, K., Demont-Heinrich, C., Graziano, M., Kowalski, D., Neufeld, J., Zamora, J., & Palmquist, M. (2012). *Generalizability and transferability*. Writing@CSU. Colorado State University.
- Bartlett, L., & Vavrus, F. (2017). Comparative case studies: An innovative approach. *Nordic Journal of Comparative and International Education (NJCIE)*, 1(1). <https://doi.org/10.7577/njcie.1929>

- Bassi, M., Mateo Díaz, M., Blumberg, R. L., & Reynoso, A. (2018). Failing to notice? Uneven teachers' attention to boys and girls in the classroom. *IZA journal of labor economics*, 7(1), 1-22.
- Belsey, C. (2012). *Poststructuralism: A very short introduction*. Oxford University Press.
- Berekashvili, N. (2012). The role of gender-biased perceptions in teacher-student interaction. *Psychology of language and communication*, 16(1), 39-51.
- Berman, J. (2013). Utility of a conceptual framework within a doctoral study: A researcher's reflections. *Issues in Educational Research*, 23, 1-18. doi/abs/10.3316/informit.356179062206358
- Bhana, D., Nzimakwe, T., & Nzimakwe, P. (2011). Gender in the early years: Boys and girls in an African working class primary school. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 31(5), 443-448. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijedudev.2010.09.001>
- Bhattacharjee, A. (2012). *Social science research: Principles, methods, and practices*. University of South Florida
- Biemmi, I. (2015). Gender Stereotypes in Childhood: When is Difference Born?. *Education Sciences & Society*, 6(2), 127-135.
- Blaise, M. (2010). New maps for old terrain: Creating a post developmental logic of gender and sexuality in the early years. In L. Brooker, & S. Edwards (Eds.), *Engaging Play* (pp. 80 - 95). Open University Press.
- Blaise, M. (2012). *Playing it straight: Uncovering gender discourse in the early childhood classroom*. Routledge.
- Blaise, M. (2014). Interfering with Gendered Development: A Timely Intervention. *International Journal of Early Childhood: Journal of OMEP: l'Organisation Mondiale pour l'Education Prescolaire*, 46(3), 317-326. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13158-00122-9>
- Blaise, M., & Taylor, A. (2012). Using Queer Theory to Rethink Gender Equity. *Young Children*, 67(1), 88-97.
- Bless, C., Higson-Smith, J., & Sithole, S. L. (2013). *Fundamentals of social research methods: An African perspective*, 5th ed. Juta

- Blomberg, E., Waldemarson, Y., & Zvinkliene, A. (2014). Gender Equality Policies: Swedish and Lithuanian Experiences of Nordic Ideas. In: Gotz, N. (ed) *The Sea of Identities*. pp. 225-246. Elanders.
- Boldt, G. M. (2011). One hundred hotdogs, or performing gender in the elementary classroom. In T. Jacobson (Ed.), *Perspectives on Gender in early childhood* (pp.77-94). Redleaf Press.
- Borve, H. E., & Borve, E. (2017). Rooms with gender: physical environment and play culture in kindergarden. *Early Child Development and Care*, 187(5-6),1069-1081.
- Bosacki, S., Woods, H., & Coplan, R. (2015). Canadian female and male early childhood educators' perceptions of child aggression and rough-and-tumble play. *Early Child Development and Care*, 185(7), 1134-1147.
- Brandmiller, C., Dumont, H., & Becker, M. (2020). Teacher perceptions of learning motivation and classroom behavior: The role of student characteristics. *Contemporary Educational Psychology*, 63, 101893.
- Breneselovic, D. P., & Krnjaja, Z. (2016). Discourses on gender in early childhood education and care (ECEC) setting: Equally discriminated against. *Journal of Pedagogy*, 7(2), 51-77. <http://dx.doi.org?10.1177?109804821702100207>
- Brix, K. (2012). National Identity Crisis: The Intersection of gender Equality and Ethnic Minority Integrations in Denmark. In *Claremont-UC Undergraduate Research Conference on the European Union* (Vol. 2009, No. 1, p.4).
- Brody, D. L. (2015). The construction of masculine identity among men who work with young children, an international perspective. *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal*, 23(3), 351-361.
- Bromseth, J., & Sorensdotter, R. (2014). Norm-critical pedagogy. In Lundbergm, A. & Werner, A. (eds) *Gender Studies Education and Pedagogy*. Pp. 24 -32. Gothenburg: Swedish Secretariat for Gender Research.
- Burger, K. (2010). How does early childhood care and education affect cognitive development? An international review of the effects of early interventions for children from different social backgrounds. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 25(2), 140-165. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecresq.2009.11.001>

- Burke, P. J. (2006). Perceptions of leadership in groups: An empirical test of identity control theory. *Purpose, meaning, and action: Control systems theories in sociology*, 267-291.
- Bush, T. (2012). Authenticity in research: Reliability, validity and triangulation. In *Research methods in educational leadership and management*, pp. 75-89. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781473957695.n6>
- Butler, J. (2011). *Gender trouble: feminism and the subversion of identity*. Routledge.
- Callahan, S., & Nicholas, L. (2019). Dragon wings and butterfly wings: Implicit gender binarism in early childhood. *Gender and Education*, 31(6), 705-723.
- Carter, M. J. (2014). Gender Socialization and Identity theory. *Social Sciences*, 3(2), 242-263. <https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci3020242>
- Carter, M. J., & Fuller, C. (2015). Symbolic interactionism. *Sociopedia. isa*, 1(1), 1-17.
- Casanave, C. P., & Li, Y. (2015). Novices' struggles with conceptual and theoretical framing in writing dissertations and papers for publications. *Publications*, 3, 104-119. <https://doi.org/10.3390/publications3020104>
- Chang, E. H., & Milkman, K. L. (2020). Improving decisions that affect gender equality in the workplace. *Organizational Dynamics*, 49(1), 100709.
- Chapman, R. (2016). A case study of gendered play in pre-schools: how childhood educators' perceptions of gender influence children's play. *Early Child Development and Care*, 186(8), 1271-1284. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03004430.2015.1089435>
- Chawla, D., & Sodhi, N. (2011). *Research methodology: Concepts and cases*. Vikas Publishing House.
- Chi, J. (2018). Pathways for Gender Equality through Early Childhood Teacher Policy in China. Echidna Global Scholars Program, Discussion Paper. *Centre for Universal Education at The Brookings Institution*.
- Christensen, L. B., Burke Johnson, B., & Turner, L. A. (2015). *Research methods, design and analysis* (12th ed). Pearson Educations Limited.
- Cobbold, C., & Boateng, P. (2016). How Confident Are Kindergarten Teachers in Their Ability to Keep Order in the Classroom? A Study of Teacher Efficacy in Classroom Management. *Journal of Education and Practice*, 7(36), 181-190.

- Cohen, L., Manion, L., & Morrison, K. (2011). *Planning educational research. Research methods in education*. Routledge.
- Cohen, L., Manion, L., & Morrison, K. (2017). Observation. In *Research methods in education* (pp. 542-562). Routledge.
- Coyne, S. M., Linder, J. R., Booth, M., Keenan-Kroff, S., Shawcroft, J. E., & Yang, C. (2021). Princess power: Longitudinal associations between engagement with princess culture in preschool and gender stereotypical behavior, body esteem, and hegemonic masculinity in early adolescence. *Child Development, 92*(6), 2413-2430.
- Creswell, J. W. (2012). *Educational research: Planning, conducting and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research*, 4th ed. Pearson
- Creswell, J. W. (2013). *Research design: Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (3rd Ed). Sage.
- Creswell, J. W. (2014). *A concise introduction to mixed methods research*. Sage.
- Creswell, J. W. & Creswell, J. D. (2017). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed method approaches*. Sage.
- Creswell, J. W., & Clark, V. L. P. (2017). *Designing and conducting mixed methods research*. Sage.
- Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2016). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches*. Sage.
- Creswell, J. W. & Poth, C. N. (2018). *Qualitative enquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (4th ed). Sage.
- Crowe, M., & Sheppard, L. (2011). A review of critical appraisal tools show they lack rigor: Alternative tool structure is proposed. *Journal of Clinical Epidemiology, 64*(1), 79-89. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jclinepi.2010.02.008>
- De Groot Kim, S. (2011). Lessons learned early: Girls wait. In *Perspectives on gender in early childhood*, (Ed). T. Jacobson, 231-246. Redleaf.
- Debusscher, P., & Ansoms, A. (2013). Gender equality policies in Rwanda: public relations or real transformations? *Development and change, 44*(5), 1111-1134. <https://doi.org/10.1111/dech.12052>

- Department of Basic Education (DBE). (2015). *The South African National Curriculum Framework for children from Birth to Four*.
<https://www.unicef.org/southafrica/media/911/file/SAF-national-curriculum-framework-0-4-En.pdf>
- Department of Education (DoE). (2001). *Education White Paper 5: Meeting the Challenge of Early Childhood Development in South Africa*.
<https://www.education.gov.za/Resources/Legislation/WhitePapers.aspx>
- Derrida, J. (2013). *Of grammatology*. Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Devenish, A. (2016). Judicial deconstruction of customary law for gender equality: Some thoughts on selected case law. *Agenda*, 30(1), 26-35.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/10130950.2016.1196984>
- Diamond, L. (2016). Sexual fluidity. In *Introducing the new sexuality studies* (pp. 192-194). Routledge.
- Dickins, M. (2014). *A-Z of inclusion in early childhood*. Open University Press.
- Dieronitou, I. (2014). The ontological and epistemological foundations of qualitative and quantitative approaches to research. *International Journal of Economics, Commerce And Management*, 2(10), 1-17.
- Diez, R., Dominguez, A., Ponsoda, S., & Ortuño, B. (2021). Social Science Pedagogy as a Way of Integrating Sustainable Education and Global Citizenship into the Initial Training of Pre-Primary Teachers. *European Journal of Investigation in Health, Psychology and Education*, 11(3), 975-989.
- Dinella, L. M., & Weisgram, E. S. (2018). Gender-typing of children's toys: Causes, consequences, and correlates. *Sex Roles*, 79, 253-259.
- DiPrete, T.A., & Buchmann, C. (2013). *The rise of women: the growing gender gap in education and what it means for American schools*. Russell Sage Foundation
- Doody, O., & Noonan, M. (2013). Preparing and conducting interviews to collect data. *Nurse researcher*, 20(5).
- Duncan, J., & Conner, L. (2013). Conclusion: Research partnerships in early years education. In *Research partnerships in early childhood education* (pp. 153-165). Palgrave Macmillan.

- Ebersöhn, L. (2014). Teacher resilience: Theorizing resilience and poverty. *Teachers and Teaching*, 20(5), 568-594.
- Ebersöhn, L., & Ferreira, R. (2012). Coping in an HIV/AIDS-dominated context: teachers promoting resilience in schools. *Health education research*, 26(4), 596-613. <https://doi.org/10.1093/her/cyr016>
- Ebrahim, H. B. (2011). Children as agents in early childhood education. *Education as Change*, 15(1), 121-131. <https://doi.org/10.1080/16823206.2011.568947>
- Ebrahim, H. B., Verbeek, D. C., & Mashiya, J. N. (2011). Enabling roles to reclaim teacher agency: Insights from the Advanced Certificate in Teaching (Foundation Phase). *Perspectives in Education*, 29(4), 58-63.
- Egamberdieva, T. (2021). Mechanisms Of Gender Equality and Differences in The Educational Process. *European Journal of Humanities and Educational Advancements*, 2(12), 136-140.
- Enaifoghe, A., & Idowu., T. U. (2021). The attitudes and perceptions toward sexuality and the social influence on gender-based violence in South Africa." *African Journal of Public Affairs*, 12(1), 153-170.
- Engdahl, I. (2011). Toddler interaction during play in the Swedish preschool. *Early Child Development and Care*, 181(10), 1421-1439
- Engelberg, M. (2016). *The generic man. Generic, covert and grammaticalizing masculinity*. Faculty of Arts, University of Helsinki.
- Epstein, J. L. (2018). *School, family, and community partnerships: Preparing educators and improving schools*. Routledge.
- Erickson, F. (2011). A history of qualitative inquiry in social and educational research. *The Sage handbook of qualitative research*, 4, 43-59. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800412454834>
- Estola, S. (2011). Discussing gender. In T. Jacobson (Ed.), *Perspectives on gender in early childhood* (pp.39 -58). Redleaf Press.
- Eteläpelto, A., Vähäsantanen, K., Hökkä, P., & Paloniemi, S. (2013). What is agency? Conceptualizing professional agency at work. *Educational research review*, 10, 45-65. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.edurev.2013.05.001>

- Fabes, R. A., Martin, C. L., & Hanish, L. D. (2019). Gender integration and the promotion of inclusive classroom climates. *Educational Psychologist, 54*(4), 271-285.
- Faulkner, J., & Crowhurst, M. (2014). 'So far multicultural that she is racist to Australians': discomfort as a pedagogy for change. *Pedagogy, Culture & Society, 22*(3), 389-403. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14681366.2014.910251>
- Favara, M. (2012). The Cost of Acting "Girly": Gender stereotypes and Educational Choices. IZA discussion paper no 7037. <http://ftp.iza.org/dp7037.pdf>
- Ferreira, R. & Ebersohn, L. (2012). *Partnering for resilience*. Van Schaik.
- Ferreira, R. (2012). Writing a research proposal. In J. G. Maree (Ed). *Complete your thesis or dissertation successfully: practical guidelines*. Juta & Company Ltd.
- Ferreira, R., Ebersöhn, L., & Mbongwe, B. B. (2015). Power-sharing partnerships: teachers' experiences of participatory methodology. *Progress in community health partnerships: research, education, and action, 9*(1), 7-16.
- Flick, U. (2014). *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Data Analysis*. (U. FLick, W. Scott, & K. Metzler, Eds.). SAGE Publications Ltd. <http://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781107415324.004>
- Fousiya, P., & Musthafa, M. A. (2016). Gender bias in school curriculum curbs girls career aspirations. IOSR. *Journal of Humanities and Social Science (IOSR-JHSS), 21*(3): 19-22.
- Fox, R. K. (2015). Is he a girl? Meeting the needs of children who are gender fluid. In *Discussions on sensitive issues* (Vol. 19, pp. 161-176). Emerald Group Publishing Limited.
- Francis, B., & Paechter, C. (2015). The problem of gender categorisation: Addressing dilemmas past and present in gender and education research. *Gender and Education 27*(7), 776-790.
- Gajjar, D. (2013). Ethical consideration in research. *Education, 2*(7), 8-15. <http://www.raijmr.com>
- Gansen, H. M. (2017). Reproducing (and disrupting) heteronormativity: Gendered sexual socialisation in pre-school classrooms. *Sociology of Education, 90*, 255. 272. <https://doi.org/10.1177/003804071772098>.

- Gansen, H. M. (2019). Push-ups versus clean-up: Preschool teachers' gendered beliefs, expectations for behavior, and disciplinary practices. *Sex Roles, 80*(7-8), 393-408.
- Gansen, H. M., & Martin, K. A. (2018). Becoming gendered. *Handbook of the Sociology of Gender, 83-93*. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-76333-0_6
- Gavora, P. (2016). *Preschool children in book reading situations with parents: The perspective of personal agency theory*. Masaryk University.
- Gilchrist, E., & Zhang, K. C. (2022). Gender Stereotypes in the UK Primary Schools: Student and Teacher Perceptions. *International Journal of Educational Reform, 10567879221114889*.
- Gildersleeve, R. E., & Kleinhesselink, K. (2017). A mangled educational policy discourse analysis for the Anthropocene. In J.N. Lester, C.R. Lochmiller, & R. E. Gabriel (Eds.). *Discursive perspectives of education policy and implementation* (pp.113-132). Palgrave Macmillan.
- Gilliam, W. S., Maupin, A. N., Reyes, C. R., Accavitti, M., & Shic, F. (2016). Do early educators' implicit biases regarding sex and race relate to behavior expectations and recommendations of preschool expulsions and suspensions. *Yale University Child Study Center, 9*(28), 1-16.
- Giraldo, E., & Colyar, J. (2012). Dealing with gender in the classroom: a portrayed case study of four teachers. *International Journal of Inclusive Education 16, 1, 25-38*.
- Granger, K. L., Hanish, L. D., Kornienko, O., & Bradley, R. H. (2017). Preschool Teachers' Facilitation of Gender-Typed and Gender-Neutral Activities during Free Play. *Sex Roles: A Journal of Research, 76*(7-8), 498-510. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-016-0675-1>
- Gready, P. (2010). You're either with us or against us": civil society and policy making in post-genocide Rwanda. *African Affairs, 109*(437), 637-657
- Guest, G., MacQueen, K. M., & Namey, E. E. (2012). Introduction to applied thematic analysis. *Applied Thematic Analysis, 3*(20), 1-21. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781483384436>

- Gullberg, A., Andersson, K., Danielsson, A., Scantlebury, K., & Hussénus, A. (2018). Pre-service teachers' views of the child—Reproducing or challenging gender stereotypes in science in preschool. *Research in science education, 48*(4), 691-715.
- Guthridge, M., Kirkman, M., Penovic, T., & Giummarra, M. J. (2022). Promoting gender equality: a systematic review of interventions. *Social Justice Research, 35*(3), 318-343.
- Gutura, P., & Manomano, T. (2018). Feminisation of poverty among girl children: towards social transformation. *Ubuntu: Journal of Conflict and Social Transformation, 7*(1), 81-97.
- Halai, A. (2010). Gender and Mathematics Education in Pakistan: A situation analysis. *The Mathematics Enthusiast, 7*(1), 47-62. <https://scholarworks.umt.edu/tme/>
- Halim, M. L. D. (2016). Princesses and Superheroes: Social-Cognitive Influences on Early Gender Rigidity. *Child Development Perspectives, 10*(3), 155-160. <https://doi.org/10.1111/cdep.12176>
- Halim, M. L., Ruble, D. N., & Amodio, D. M. (2011). From Pink Frilly Dresses to 'One of the Boys': A Social-Cognitive Analysis of Gender Identity Development and Gender Bias. *Social and Personality Psychology Compass, 5*(11), 933-949. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1751-9004.2011.00399.x>
- Halim, M. L. D., Ruble, D. N., Tamis-LeMonda, C. S., & Shrout, P. E. (2013). Rigidity in gender-typed behaviors in early childhood: a longitudinal study of ethnic minority children. *Child development, 84*(4), 1269-1284.
- Hamel, E. E. (2021). Science starts early: A literature review examining the influence of early childhood teachers' perceptions of gender on teaching practices. *Journal of Childhood, Education & Society, 2*(3), 267-286.
- Hammersley, M. (2014). On the ethics of interviewing for discourse analysis. *Qualitative research, 14*(5), 529-541.
- Haynes, C., Stewart, S., & Allen, E. (2016). Three Paths, One Struggle: Black Women and Girls Battling Invisibility in U.S. Classrooms. *The Journal of Negro Education, 85*(3), 380-391. <https://www.proquest.com/scholarly->

journals/three-paths-one-struggle-black-women-girls/docview/1967045868/se-2

- Hedlin, M., & Åberg, M. (2013). The call for more male preschool teachers: Echoed and questioned by Swedish student teachers. *Early Child Development and Care*, 183(1), 149-162. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03004430.2012.660149>
- Heikkilä, M. (2020). Gender equality work in preschools and early childhood education settings in the Nordic countries—an empirically based illustration. *Palgrave Communications*, 6(1), 1-8.
- Heikkinen, S., & Lämsä, A. M. (2017). Narratives of spousal support for the careers of men in managerial posts. *Gender, Work & Organization*, 24(2), 171-193. <https://doi.org/10.1111/gwao.12157>
- Heise, D. R. (1979). *Understanding Events: Affect and the Construction of Social Action*. Cambridge University Press.
- Hernández, M. D. R. N., González, P. I. R., & Sánchez, S. V. (2013). Gender and constructs from the hidden curriculum. *Creative Education*, 4(12), 89.
- Hines-Datiri, D., & Carter Andrews, D. J. (2020). The effects of zero tolerance policies on Black girls: Using critical race feminism and figured worlds to examine school discipline. *Urban Education*, 55(10), 1419-1440. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0042085917690204>
- Hinitz, B. F., & Hewes, D. (2011). Practical applications from the history of gender and early childhood education. In T. Jacobson (Ed.), *Perspectives on gender in early childhood* (pp.21-38). Redleaf Press.
- Hjelmér, C. (2020). Free play, free choices?—Influence and construction of gender in pre-schools in different local contexts. *Education Inquiry*, 11(2), 144-158. <https://doi.org/10.1080/20004508.2020.1724585>
- Hogan, V. (2012)._Locating My Teaching of Gender in Early Childhood Education Teacher Education within the Wider Discourse of Feminist Pedagogy and Poststructuralist Theory. *AARE-APERA—International Conference, Sydney, Australia: Australian Association for Research in Education*.
- Huysmans, H., Pieck, L., Hlatshaneni, D., & Geyer, S. (2021). Gendered Behaviours and Practices in Early Childhood Centres in Kwa-Zulu Natal Province: The

- Need to Promote Positive Gender Norms in Early Education Settings. *Journal of Educational Studies*, 2021(si1), 46-67.
- lorio, J., & Visweswaraiyah, H. (2011). *Do daddies wear lipstick? And other child-teacher conversations exploring constructions of gender*. Victoria University.
- Islahi, F. (2019). Exploring teacher attitude towards information technology with a gender perspective. *Contemporary educational technology*, 10(1), 37-54.
- Ismail, I., Cabus, S., & Pieck, L. (2022). VVOB – education for development
- Jacobson, T. (2011). Understanding our gender identity: connecting the personal with the professional. In T. Jacobson (Ed.), *Perspectives on gender in early childhood* (pp.1-20). Redleaf Press.
- James, A. (2013). *Socialising children*. Springer.
- Jennet, M. (2013). *Stereotypes stop you doing stuff: Challenging stereotypes through primary education*. National Union of Teachers. <https://neu.org.uk/media/2926/viewhttps://neu.org.uk/latest/library/stereotype-s-stop-you-doing-stuff>
- Jonauskaite, D., Dael, N., Chèvre, L., Althaus, B., Tremea, A., Charalambides, L., & Mohr, C. (2019). Pink for girls, red for boys, and blue for both genders: Colour preferences in children and adults. *Sex Roles*, 80(9), 630-642.
- Karlson, I., & Simonsson, M. (2011). A Question of Gender-Sensitive Pedagogy: Discourses in Pedagogical Guidelines. *Contemporary Issues In Early Childhood*, 11(1), 1-10.
- Keddie, A. (2022). Engaging boys in gender transformative pedagogy: navigating discomfort, vulnerability and empathy. *Pedagogy, Culture & Society*, 30(3), 401-414.
- Kelliher, F. (2011). Interpretivism and the pursuit of research legitimisation; an integrated approach a single-case design. *Leading Issues In Business Research Methods*, 1(2), 123-131. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/292141333_'Leading_Issues_in_Business_Research_Methods_Volume_2'
- Kilderry, A. (2015). the intensification of performativity in early childhood education. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 47(5), 633-652. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00220272.2015.1052850>

- King, N., Horrocks, C., & Brooks, J. (2018). *Interviews in qualitative research*. Sage.
- King, R. A., Scott, K. E., Renno, M. P., & Shutts, K. (2020). Counterstereotyping can change children's thinking about boys' and girls' toy preferences. *Journal of Experimental child psychology*, 191, 104753.
- Kivunja, C. (2018). "Distinguishing between theory, theoretical framework, and conceptual framework: a systematic review of lessons from the field." *International Journal of Higher Educations*, 7(6), 44-53.
- Kivunja, C., & Kuyini, A. B. (2017). Understanding and applying research paradigms in educational contexts. *International Journal of Higher Education*, 6(5), 26-41.
- Kreitz-Sandberg, S. (2013). Gender inclusion and horizontal gender segregations: stakeholders' strategies and dilemmas in Swedish teachers' education, *Gender and Education*, 25(4), 444-456. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09540253.2013.772566>
- Kreitz-Sandberg, S., & Lahelma, E. (2021). Global Demands-Local Practices: Working towards Inclusions of gender Equality In Teacher Education In Finland and Sweden. *Nordic Journal of Comparative and Inetrnational Education (NJCIE)*, 5(1), 50-68. <https://doi.org/10.7577/njcie.4052>
- Lahelma, E. (2011). Gender Awareness in Finnish Teacher Education: An impossible Mission?, *Educational Inquiry*, 2(2), 263-276
- Lahelma, E. (2014). Troubling discourses on gender and education. *Educational Research*, 56(2), 171 -183, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080?00131881>
- Lahelma, E., & Hynninen, P. (2012). Gender equality in Finnish teacher education- with reflections from Nordic and European collaboration, In Strand, T. & Roos, M. (eds) *Education for Social Justice, Equity and Diversity. Studies on Education Vol.1*. Berlin-Munster-Wien-Zurich-London: Lit Verlag, 109-130.
- Lahelma, E., & Tainio, L. (2019). The long mission towards gender equality in teacher education: Reflections from a national project in Finland. *Nordic Studies in Education*, 39(1), 69-84.
- Lancy, D. F., Bock, J. & Gaskins, S. (2010). *The anthropology of learning in childhood*. AltaMira.

- Larsen, E. (2021). 'The gender-progressive Nordics': A matter of history. In *Gender equality and nation branding in the Nordic region* (pp. 13-38). Routledge.
- Lay, J. C., Holman, M. R., Bos, A. L., Greenlee, J. S., Oxley, Z. M., & Buffett, A. (2021). TIME for kids to learn gender stereotypes: Analysis of gender and political leadership in a common social studies resource for children. *Politics & Gender*, 17(1), 1-22.
- Lederman, N.G., & Lederman, J.S. (2015) What is a theoretical framework? A practical answer. *Journal of Science Teacher Education*, 26, 593-597. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10972-015-9443-2>
- Lee, J. F. K. (2019). In the pursuit of a gender-equal society: Do Japanese EFL textbooks play a role? *Journal of Gender Studies*, 28, 204-217.
- Leedy, P. D. & Ormrod, J. E. (2015). *Practical research: planning and design* (11th ed.). Pearson Education Limited.
- Lekhetho, M. (2018). Education In Lesotho: An overview. *Education in Lesotho: Prospects and challenges*, 1-12
- Li, J. (2023). Gender never defines me: A study on preschool teachers' do and don't about gender. *Social Sciences & Humanities Open*, 7(1), 100397.
- Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (2016). *The constructivist credo*. Routledge.
- Litchman, E. (2010). Invisible invaders: non-pathogenic invasive microbes in aquatic and terrestrial ecosystems. *Ecology Letters*, 13(12), 1560-1572. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1461-0248.2010.01544.x>
- Lu, C., Cuartas, J., Fink, G., McCoy, D., Liu, K., Li, Z., Daelmans, B., & Richter, L. (2020). Inequalities in early childhood care and development in low/middle-income countries:2010-2018. *BMJ Global Health*, 5(2), 002314. <http://doi.org/10.1136/bmjgh-2020-002314>
- Lynch, M. (2015). Guys and dolls: A qualitative study of teachers' views of gendered play in kindergarten. *Early Child Development and Care*, 185(5), 679-693.
- Mackenzie, N., & Knipe, S. (2006). Research dilemmas: paradigms, methods and methodology. *Issues In Educational Research*, 16(1), 1-15.
- MacNaughton, G. (2006). Constructing gender in early-years education. *The SAGE handbook of gender and education*, 127-138.

- Mahmood, T., & Kausar, G. (2019). Female teachers' perceptions of gender bias in Pakistani English textbooks. *Asian Women*, 35(4), 109-126.
- Makhubele, J.C., & Baloyi, T. V. (2018). Challenges impeding the successful implementation of early childhood development programmes in South Africa: implications for practice. *Gender and Behaviour*, 16(1), 10773-10783.
- Maleki, M., Mardani, A., Mitra Chehrzad, M., Dianatinasab, M., & Vaismoradi, M. (2019). Social skills in children at home and in preschool. *Behavioral Sciences*, 9(7), 74.
- Maree, K. (2015). *First steps in research* (Revised ed.). Van Schaik.
- Maree, K. (2016). *First Steps in Research*. Pretoria: Van Schaik.
- Marshall, C., & Rossman, G. B. (2016) *Designing qualitative research*. (6th ed.). Sage.
- Martin, M., & Muthukrishna, N. (2011). Deconstructing discourses of gender equality in cross-gender friendships: grade seven boys and girls in an inner-city school. *Gender and Behaviour*, 9(1), 3798-3816.
- Mashiya, N. (2018). Learning in childhood: an autoethnography of girl childrearing practices and identity construction in Southern Africa. *Gender & Behaviour*, 16(1), 10739-10747. <https://www.ajol.info/index.php/gab>
- Mason, M. (2010, August). Sample size and saturation in PhD studies using qualitative interviews. In *Forum qualitative Sozialforschung/Forum: qualitative social research* (Vol. 11, No. 3).
- Master, A., Meltzoff, A. N., & Cheryan, S. (2021). Gender stereotypes about interests start early and cause gender disparities in computer science and engineering. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 118(48), e2100030118.
- Maxwell, J. A. (2012). *Qualitative research design: An interactive approach*. Sage.
- Mayeza, E. (2017). 'Girls don't play soccer': Children policing gender on the playground in a township primary school in South Africa. *Gender and education*, 29(4), 476-494. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09540253.2016.1187262>
- Mayeza, E. (2018). *"It's not right for boys to play with dolls": Young children constructing and policing gender during "free play" in a South African*

classroom, *Discourse: studies in the cultural Politics of Education*, 39:4, 590-602, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01596306.2017.1290584>

McCabe, P. C., & Anhalt, K. (2022). Changing the narrative in schools: Addressing systemic barriers and stereotypes that prevent gender and sexual diverse youth from thriving. *Psychology in the Schools*, 59(1), 5-13.

McMillan, J., & Schumacher, S. (2014). *Research in Education Evidence-Based Inquiry* (7th Ed.). Pearson Education Limited.

McNiff, J. (2015). *Writing up your action research project*. Routledge.

Meland, A. T. (2020). Challenging gender stereotypes through a transformation of a fairy tale. *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal*, 28(6), 911-922. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1350293X.2020.1836589>

Meland, A. T., & Kaltvedt, E. H. (2019). Tracking gender in kindergarten, *Early Child Development and Care*, 189(1), 94-103, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03004430.2017.1302945>

Menegatti, M., & Rubini, M. (2017). Gender bias and sexism in language. In *Oxford research encyclopedia of communication*.

Merriam, S. B., & Grenier, R. S. (Eds.). (2019). *Qualitative research in practice: Examples for discussion and analysis*. John Wiley & Sons.

Mertens, D. M. (2010). Divergence and mixed methods. *Journal of mixed methods research*, 4(1), 3-5.

Mohajan, H. K. (2018). Qualitative research methodology in social sciences and related subjects. *Journal of economic development, environment and people*, 7(1), 23-48.

Mokoena, C., & Jegede, A. O. (2017). SDGs as a framework for realizing the right to education of the girl child in South Africa: challenges and possibilities. *Gender and Behaviour*, 15(4), 9873-9889. <https://hdl.handle.net/10520/EJC-c1e24791c>

Moosa, S., & Bhana, D. (2018). 'They won't take you as a man, as a real man', why men can't teach young children in foundation phase. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, a 6), 577-593. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2017.1390002>

- Morojele, P. (2011). What does it mean to be a boy? Implications for girls' and boys' schooling experiences in Lesotho rural schools. *Gender and Education*, 23(6), 677-693. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09540253.2010.527828>
- Mouton, J. (2022). *How to succeed in your masters' and doctoral studies: A South African guide and resource book* (second). Van Schaik.
- Muasya, J. N., & Kazungu, T. W. (2018). 'The Unfinished Business': Exploring Teachers' Views on Gender and Pedagogical Practices in Public Preschools in Nairobi County, Kenya. *African Educational Research Journal*, 6(1), 10-19. http://www.netjournals.org/aer_index.html
- Mulaudzi, L. M. P., & Mudzielwana, N. P. (2016). Assessment of gender understanding of classroom discipline in South Africa: The case of Thohoyandou Community. *Gender and Behaviour*, 14(2), 7519-7524.
- Muthukrishna, N., & Govender, D. (2011). Moral reasoning in the early years: age and gender patterns amongst young children in South Africa. *Gender and Behaviour*, 9(1), 3624-3641. <https://doi.org/10.4314/gab.v9i1.67463>
- Nabbuye, H. (2018). Gender-Sensitive Pedagogy: The Bridge to Girls' Quality Education in Uganda. Echidna Global Scholars Program, Policy Brief. *Center for Universal Education at The Brookings Institution*.
- National Centre for Education Statistics. (2013). Early childhood program participation: From the *National Household Education Surveys Program 2012*. <http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2013029>
- Nejati, R., Hassani, M. T., & Sahrapour, H. A. (2014). The relationship between gender and student engagement, instructional strategies, and classroom management of Iranian EFL teachers. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, 4(6), 1219.
- Niesche, R. (2016). What use is Foucault in education today? *Journal of Educational Administration and History*, 48(1), 113-118. <http://doi.org/10.1080/00220620.2015.1034575>
- Nieuwenhuis, J. (2016). Introducing qualitative research. In K. Maree (Ed.), *First steps in research* (2nd ed.). Van Schaik.

- Nikolopoulou, K., Akriotou, D., & Gialamas, V. (2019). Early reading skills in English as a foreign language via ICT in Greece: early childhood student teachers' perceptions. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 47, 597-606.
- Nsamenang, A. B. (2012). On researching the agency of Africa's young citizens: issues, challenges and prospects for identity development. *Racial Stereotyping and Child Development*, 25, 90-104. <https://doi.org/10.1159/000336284>
- Nugroho, D., Delgado, M., Baghdasaryan, B., Vindrola, S., Lata, D., & Mehmood Syed, G. (2022). Tackling Gender Inequality from the Early Years: Strategies for Building a Gender-Transformative Pre-Primary Education System. *UNICEF Office of Research-Innocenti*.
- Nwosu, C. O., & Ndinda, C. (2018). Gender-based household compositional changes and implications for poverty in South Africa. *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 19(5), 82-94. <http://www-proquest-com.uplib.idm.oclc.org>
- Odenbring, Y. (2014). Gender, order and discipline in early childhood education. *International Journal of Early Childhood*, 46, 345-356.
- Odrowaz-Coates, A. (2015). Is gender neutrality a post-human phenomenon? The concept of 'gender neutral' in Swedish education.
- O'Gara, C. (2013). Education-based approaches to early childhood development. *Handbook of early childhood development research and its impact on global policy*, 227-241.
- Okeke, C. I., & Nyanhoto, E. (2021). Recruitment and retention of male educators in preschools: Implications for teacher education policy and practices. *South African Journal of Education*, 41(2), 1-12.
- Okelo, K., Onyango, S., Murdock, D., Cordingley, K., Munsongo, K., Nyamor, G., & Kitsao-Wekulo, P. (2021). Parents' Attitudes About Gender Roles In Caregiving and Practices: Perspectives From A Community-Led Parenting Empowerment Program In Rural Kenya And Zambia. *Research Square*. <https://doi.org/10.21203/rs.3.rs-993436/v1>
- Oppermann, E., Brunner, M., & Anders, Y. (2019). The interplay between preschool teachers' science self-efficacy beliefs, their teaching practices, and girls' and

- boys' early science motivation. *Learning and Individual Differences*, 70, 86-99.
- Osman, S. (2021). Preservice Teachers' Perception of Gender Stereotype Beliefs and Practices at Tumu College of Education, Ghana. *Journal Of Advanced Educational Philosophy*, 5 (11): 340, 349(340), 2523-2665.
- Owens, J. (2016). Early childhood behavior problems and the gender gap in educational attainment in the United States. *Sociology of education*, 89(3), 236-258.
- Pacini-Ketchabaw, V., & Nxumalo, F. (2013). Re-generating research partnerships in early childhood education: A non-idealized vision. In *Research partnerships in early childhood education* (pp. 11-26). Palgrave Macmillan..
- Palomba, E. (2022). How to beat gender stereotypes in early childhood education: guidelines on teaching practices. In *Edulearn22 Proceedings* (pp. 8930-8938). IATED.
- Parker, S. (2016). Gender fluidity. In *Ethical ripples of creativity and innovation* (pp. 165-173). Palgrave Macmillan UK.
- Pardhan, A. (2011). Influence of teacher-student interactions on kindergarten children's developing gender identity within the Pakistani urban classroom culture. *Early Child Development and Care*, 181(7), 929-948. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03004430.2010.504371>
- Pardhan, A. (2012). Pakistani teachers' perceptions of kindergarten children's learning: An exploration of understanding and practice. *Frontiers of Education in China*, 7(1), 33-64.
- Pardhan, A., & Pelletier, J. (2017). Pakistani pre-primary teachers' perceptions and practices related to gender in young children. *International Journal of Early Years Education*, 25(1), 51-71.
- Patton, M. Q. (2014). *Qualitative research & evaluation methods: Integrating theory and practice*. Sage.
- Perszyk, D. R., Lei, R. F., Bodenhausen, G. V. Richeson, J. A., & Waxman, S. R. (2019). Bias at the intersection of race and gender: Evidence from preschool-

aged children. *Developmental Science*, 2(3), e12788.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/desc.12788>.

Pietersen, J., & Maree, K. (2019). Surveys and the use of questionnaires. In *First steps in research*, 2nd ed, pp. 215-224. Van Schaik.

Plagerson, S., Hochfeld, T., & Stuart, L. (2019). Social security and gender justice in South Africa: Policy gaps and opportunities. *Journal of Social Policy*, 48(2), 293-310.

Pohjolainen, L., & Westendorff, A. (2014). *Towards a More Gender-Sensitive Early Childhood Education, Developing Critical Practice through Participatory Workshops*. Unpublished Thesis, Bachelor of Social Services, Helsinki Metropolia University of Applied Sciences.

Proulx, C. N., Coulter, R. W., Egan, J. E., Matthews, D. D., & Mair, C. (2019). Associations of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning–inclusive sex education with mental health outcomes and school-based victimization in US high school students. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 64(5), 608-614.

Prioleta, J., & Pyle, A. (2017). Play and gender in Ontario kindergarten classrooms: implications for literacy learning. *International Journal of Early Years Education*, 25(4), 393-408.

Rahman, K. (2013). Belonging and learning to belong in school: the implications of the hidden curriculum for indigenous students. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, 34(5), 660-672.

Rao, Z., & Gibson, J. L. (2021). You pretend, I laugh: Associations between dyadic pretend play and children's display of positive emotions. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 12, 1-8. <http://doi.org/10.14324/111.444.ijsp.2019.v7.1.009>

Ravitch, S. M., & Riggan, M. (2017). Reason & rigor: How theoretical frameworks guide. *The Qualitative Report*, 21(9), 1708.

Rehman, A. A., & Alharthi, K. (2016). An introduction to research paradigms. *International Journal of Educational Investigations*, 3(8), 51-59.

Republic of South Africa (RSA). (1996a). *South African Schools Act 84 of 1996*. <https://www.gov.za/documents/south-african-schools->

- Rogers, L. O., Scott, M. A., & Way, N. (2015). Racial and gender identity among Black adolescent males: An intersectionality perspective. *Child Development, 86*(2), 407-424.
- Rogošić, S., Maskalan, A., & Krznar, T. (2020). Preschool Teachers' Attitudes towards Children's Gender Roles: The Effects of Sociodemographic Characteristics and Personal Experiences of Gender Discrimination. *Problems of Education in the 21st Century, 78*(3), 410-422.
- Royo, M. G., Diep, L., Mulligan, J., Mukanga, P., & Parikh, P. (2022). Linking the UN Sustainable Development Goals and African Agenda 2063: Understanding overlaps and gaps between the global goals and continental priorities for Africa. *World Development Sustainability, 1*, 100010.
- Rule, P., & John, V. (2011). *Your guide to case study research*. Pretoria: van Schaik.
- Šabić, J., Baranović, B., & Rogošić, S. (2022). Teachers' self-efficacy for using information and communication technology: The interaction effect of gender and age. *Informatics in education, 21*(2), 353-373.
- Safta, C. G. (2017). Gender Stereotypes – Dimension of the Hidden Curriculum. *Jus et Civitas, 4*, 61.
- Sanjek, R. (Ed.). (2019). *Fieldnotes: The makings of anthropology*. Cornell University Press.
- Sasman, L. (2012). Education is still not equal for girls in Namibia. *Sister Namibia, 24*(2), 18.
- Scotland, J. (2012). Exploring the philosophical underpinnings of research: Relating ontology and epistemology to the methodology and methods of the scientific, interpretive, and critical research paradigms. *English language teaching, 5*(9), 9-16.
- Sedigheh, M., Shahram, Y., Leila, A., & Muhamadreza, A. (2019). A comprehensive model of hidden curriculum management in medical education. *Journal of Advances In Medical Education and Professionalism, 7*(3), 123-130. <http://doi.org/10.1080/1350293x.2019.1634239>
- Sekaran, U. (2003). *Research Methods for Business: A Skill-Building Approach*. 4th Edition, John Wiley & Sons.

- Serpe, R.T., & Stryker, S. (2011). The symbolic interactionist perspective and identity theory. In S. Schwartz, K Luyckx & V. Vignoles (Eds.), **Handbook of identity theory and research** (pp. 225 – 248). Springer.
- Sharma, A. (2015). Teacher activism: Got post-structuralism? *Journal for Activist Science and Technology Education*, 6(1).
- Sheehy, A. (2022). *Promoting gender equality in primary schools through teachers' reflections upon their own constructions of gender and the implicit messages that they may convey to pupils*. (Doctoral dissertation, University of Worcester).
- Shejavali, N. (2018). *Through a leader in gender representation, Namibia still has to ensure full equality*. afrobarometer.org
- Shih, Y. H., & Wang, R. J. (2022). Incorporating gender issues into the classroom: Study on the teaching of gender-related courses in the general curriculum of Taiwan's universities. *Policy Futures in Education*, 20(1), 44-55. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1478210321100964>
- Shivers, E. M., Farago, F., & Gal-Szabo, D. E. (2022). The role of infant and early childhood mental health consultation in reducing racial and gender relational and discipline disparities between Black and white preschoolers. *Psychology in the Schools*, 59(10), 1965-1983.
- Shole, S. J. (2022). Multilingual dialogue in a post-Apartheid television drama in South Africa: More than a rhetorical function. *Pula: Botswana Journal of African Studies*, 34.
- Silverman, D. (2013). *Doing qualitative research: a practical handbook* (4th ed.). Sage.
- Simmonds, S. (2014). Curriculum-making in South Africa: promoting gender equality and empowering women (?). *Gender and Education*, 26(6), 636-652.
- Singh, R. (2023). Gender-Sensitive Pedagogy. *Gender and Education*, 81.
- Skelton, C. (2011). Men teachers and the “feminised” primary school: a review of the literature, *Educational Review*, 64(1), 1-19. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00131911.2011.616634>
- Snowman J., McCowan R., Biehler R. F. (2009). *Psychology applied to teaching*. Houghton Mifflin.

- Souto-Manning, M. (2017). Generative text sets: Tools for negotiating critically inclusive early childhood teacher education pedagogical practices. *Journal of Early Childhood Teacher Education*, 38(1), 79-101. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10901027.2016.1165760>
- Spitzman, E., & Balconi, A. (2019). Social justice in action: A document analysis of the integration of social justice principles into teaching. *Journal of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning*, 19(5).
- Spjeldnes, S., Koeske, G., & Sales, E. (2010). Teacher support as a buffer between interparental conflict and child social skills. *Early Child Development and Care*, 180(3), 335-346. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03004430801908327>.
- Stanworth, M. (2019). Girls on the margins: a study of gender divisions in the classroom. In *Classrooms and Staffrooms* (pp. 147-158). Routledge.
- Statistics South Africa. (2019). *General Household Survey 2018*. <https://www.statssa.gov.za/publications/P0318/P03182018.pdf>
- Stets, J. & Carter, M. (2011). The Moral Self. *Social Psychology Quarterly*, 74(2), 192-215. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0190272511407621>
- Stets, J. E., & Serpe, R. T. (2013). Identity theory. In *Handbook of social psychology* (pp. 31 -60). Springer.
- Stonkuvienė, I., & Purvanėckienė, G. (2022). Kitchen utensils for girls, cars for boys? Gender stereotypes in preschool education in Lithuania. In *Edulearn22 Proceedings* (pp. 8428-8428). IATED.
- Straus, S., & Waldorf, L. (Eds.). (2011). *Remaking Rwanda: State building and human rights after mass violence*. Univ of Wisconsin Press.
- Strydom, H. (2011). Sampling in the quantitative paradigm. In A.S. De Vos, H. Strydom, C. B. Fouche, & C. S. L. Delpont (Eds.), *Research at grassroots: For the social sciences and human service professions*, 4th ed. Pretoria, pp. 222-234. Van Schaik.
- Taylor, P. & Medina, M. N. (2013). Educational research paradigms: From positivism to multiparadigmatic. *International Journal of Meaning-Centred Education*. 1. <https://doi.org/10.13140/2.1.3542.0805>.

- Thanh, N.C. & Thanh, T.T. (2015). The interconnection between interpretivist paradigm and qualitative methods in education. *American Journal of Educational Science*, 1(2), 24 -27.
- Tuckman, B. W., & Harper, B. E. (2012). *Conducting educational research*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.
- Tzuo, P., Yang, C., & Wright, S. (2011). Child-centered education: Incorporating reconceptualism and post-structuralism. *Educational Research and Review*, 6(8), 554-559. <https://doi.org/10.5897/ERR.9000069>
- UNESCO. (2003). *Gender and education for all*. <http://uis.unesco.org/sites/default/files/documents/world-atlas-of-gender-equality-in-education-2012-en.pdf>
- UNICEF. (2023). *Gender Equality: Global Annual Results Report 2022*. <https://www.unicef.org/reports/global-annual-results-report-2022-gender-equality>
- University of Pretoria. (2013). Code of Ethics for Research. [http://www.up.ac.za/media/shared/6/ZP_files/Education/Ethnics/code ethnics research-rt429-99.zp39020.pdf](http://www.up.ac.za/media/shared/6/ZP_files/Education/Ethnics/code%20ethnics%20research-rt429-99.zp39020.pdf)
- UNWomen. (2020) *Expert's Take: To change peoples' behaviour, connect with them first*. UNWomen. Retrieved from [http://eca.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2020/2experts-take-to-change-peoples behaviour-connect-with-them-first](http://eca.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2020/2experts-take-to-change-peoples-behaviour-connect-with-them-first) Accessed on 2 January 2023.
- Van den Brink, M., & Benschop, Y. (2014). Gender in academic networking: The role of gatekeepers in professorial recruitment. *Journal of Management Studies*, 51(3), 460-492.
- Van der Gaag, J., & Putcha, V. (2015). *Investigating in Early Childhood Development: What is Being Spent, And What Does it Cost?* Brookings Global.
- Varpanen, J. (2019). What is children's agency? A review of conceptualizations used in early childhood education research. *Educational Research Review*, 28, 100-288. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.edurev.2019.100288>

- Vollet, J. W. (2017). *Capturing peers', teachers', and parents' joint contributions to students' engagement: An exploration of models.* (Doctoral dissertation, Portland State University).
- Walker, J., Pearce, C., Boe, K., & Lawson, M. (2019). *The Power of Education to Fight Inequality: How increasing educational equality and quality is crucial to fighting economic and gender inequality.* Oxfam.
- Wall, S., Litjen, I. & Taguma, M. (2015). Pedagogy in early childhood education and care (ECEC): an international comparative study of approaches and policies. *Research brief*, July 2015., OECD.
- Warin, J. (2019). Conceptualising the value of male practitioners in early childhood education and care: Gender balance or gender flexibility. *Gender and Education*, 31(3), 293-308.
- Warin, J., & Adriany, V. (2017). Gender flexible pedagogy in early childhood education. *Journal of gender studies*, 26(4), 375-386.
- Warrington M. & Kiragu. (2012). "It makes sense to educate a boy": Girls "against the odds" in Kajiado, Kenya. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 32(2):301-9.
- Waters, G. M., Tidswell, G. R., & Bryant, E. J. (2022). Mothers' and fathers' views on the importance of play for their children's development: Gender differences, academic activities, and the parental role. *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, 92(4), 1571-1581.
- Watson, A. (2017). "Male Delivery": a critical investigation of what boys have to say about the influence of male teachers on literacy engagement and achievement. *Educational Review*, 69(1), 102-117.
- Webster, C., & Siankata, I. (2016). *Gender equality in Norwegians school: A case study of Kvale and Norane Skule.* Sognog Fjordane University College
- Weylandt, M. (2018). Views of Namibia's economy darken sharply; youth more likely to consider emigration. Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 202, <http://afrobarometer.org/publications/ad209-providing-basic-public-services-remains-challenge-namibians-government>

- Wieselmann, J. R., Roehrig, G. H., & Kim, J. N. (2020). Who succeeds in STEM? Elementary girls' attitudes and beliefs about self and STEM. *School Science and Mathematics, 120*(5), 297-308.
- Williams, J. (2014). *Understanding poststructuralism*. Oxon: Routledge.
- Wingrave, M. (2018). Perceptions of gender in early years. *Gender and Education, 30*(5), 587-606.
- Wright, B. L. (2022). When Blue and Pink Are Not Enough. *YC Young Children, 77*(4), 36-43.
- Wyse, D., Hayward, L., & Pandya, J. (Eds.). (2015). *The SAGE handbook of curriculum, pedagogy and assessment*. Sage.
- Xu, Y. (2020). Does the gender of a practitioner matter in early childhood education and care? Perspectives from Scottish and Chinese young children. *Children & Society, 34*(5), 354-370. <https://doi.org/10.1111/chso.12371>
- Xu, Y., & Waniganayake, M. (2018). An exploratory study of gender and male teachers in early childhood education and care centres in China. *Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education, 48*(4), 518-534.
- Xu, Y., Warin, J., & Robb, M. (2020). Beyond gender binaries: pedagogies and practices in early childhood education and care (ECEC). *Early Years, 40*, 1-4
- Yin, R. K. (2012). Case study methods. In H. Cooper, P. M. Camic, D. L. Long, A. T. Panter, D. Rindskopf, & K. J. Sher (Eds.), *APA handbook of research methods in psychology, Vol. 2. Research designs: Quantitative, qualitative, neuropsychological, and biological* (pp. 141–155). American Psychological Association.
- Youdell, D. (2011). *School Trouble: Identity, Power and Politics in Education*. Routledge.
- Zaki, H. M. (2013). The effects of culturally relevant early childhood development (ECD) on gender relations and women empowerment. The American University in Egypt.
- Zhao, T. (2022, December). How Gender Stereotypes Impact Students' Academic Achievement. In *2022 2nd International Conference on Modern Educational*

Technology and Social Sciences (ICMETSS 2022) (pp. 911-918). Atlantis Press.

Zimmermann, C. R. (2018). The penalty of being a young black girl: Kindergarten teachers' perceptions of children's problem behaviors and student–teacher conflict by the intersection of race and gender. *The Journal of Negro Education, 87*(2), 154-168.

Zuber-Skerritt, O. (2018). An educational framework for participatory action learning and action research (PALAR). *Educational Action Research, 26*(4), 513-532.

Zuze, T. L., & Beku, U. (2019). Gender inequalities in South African schools: new complexities. In *South African schooling: the enigma of inequality* (pp. 225-241). Springer, Cham.

8 APPENDICES

8.1 APPENDIX A: LETTER TO THE GAUTENG DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



The Director
Gauteng Department of Education
17 Simmonds Street
Johannesburg
2001

Dear Sir/Madam

RE: REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO DO RESEARCH IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION CENTRES

I am a student studying through the University of Pretoria. I am currently enrolled for my PhD in the faculty of Education. I hereby wish to apply for permission to conduct research in three early childhood education centres. My research project will involve teachers at the ECD centres. My research topic is: **“Challenging teachers’ perceptions and pedagogical practices regarding children’s gender identity in ECD centres.”**

The purpose of this study is to develop an awareness programme for promoting gender equality in early childhood care and education after exploring teacher’s gender identity perceptions and pedagogical practices in registered ECD centres. The research will involve the observation of teachers with children, interviews with the teachers and group discussion sessions with the teachers. The teachers will remain anonymous during the interview. During the observation, I will take photographs of the teacher and the child(ren), but their faces will be blurred. The interviews and discussions will be audio recorded, and therefore, no participant's face will be visible.

I will be a passive participant who will engage with audio recordings and take field notes. I wish to observe the teachers for a month.

The information obtained will be password-protected and visible only to the supervisors and researcher. All data collected will only be used for academic purposes. At the end of the study, all the data will be securely stored in the archives at the University of Pretoria. All participants will be treated with the strictest confidentiality and will be used solely for this research initiative only. We would also like to request your permission to use your data anonymously for future research purposes, as the data sets are the intellectual property of the University of Pretoria. Further research may include secondary data analysis using the data for research purposes. The confidentiality and privacy applicable to this study will be binding on future research studies. In order to avoid the spread of the virus due to COVID-19 pandemic and achieve anonymity, the interviews will be conducted as an online text-based interview. For the observations, all COVID protocols will be adhered to in line with the national guideline and the University of Pretoria guideline. Please note that since this is a voluntary participation, there will be no reward or monetary payments to any participant. I hope that the research findings will make a creditable contribution to enhancing gender equality.

Should you require any additional information or if you have questions and concerns regarding the data collection you may contact my supervisor or me on 0826552286 or at the following e-mail address: singh.reni@gmail.com

Yours sincerely

Renisha Singh

PhD Student (Department of Early Childhood Education)

University of Pretoria

Pretoria 0002

Republic of South Africa

Mobile: 0826552286

Email: singh.reni@gmail.com

Professor K Bipath

Supervisor

Department of Early Childhood Education

University of Pretoria

Pretoria 0002

Republic of South Africa

Email: keshni.bipath@up.ac.za

+27 12 420 5632

8.2 APPENDIX B: SAMPLE OF PRINCIPAL'S CONSENT LETTER



Dear Principal

INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH PROJECT

I am Renisha Singh, a doctoral student at the University of Pretoria. The title of my research study is: **Challenging teacher perceptions and pedagogical practices regarding children's gender identity in ECD centres**. The purpose of this study is to develop a framework for promoting gender equality in early childhood care and education by exploring teacher's gender identity perceptions and pedagogical practices in ECD centres. The research will be conducted under the supervision of Professor Bipath, Department of Early Childhood Education, University of Pretoria.

To this letter, is attached a copy of the semi-structured interview schedule and the non-participant observation schedule to be used during the interview and observations processes for your information. The research will involve observation of teachers with children, online interviews with the teachers and online group discussion sessions with the teachers. The teachers will remain anonymous during the online interviews because all cameras will be turned off. During the observation, I will take photographs of the teacher and the child(ren), but their faces will be blurred. The online interviews and discussions will be audio recorded and therefore, no participant's face will be visible.

The aim of this research is not to pass judgement but to acquire new and insightful information on this topic, to describe how teachers' pedagogical practices and perceptions enhance gender identity in ECD centres, to describe what are teacher perceptions and pedagogical practices regarding the gender identity of the young child, to describe why teachers' perceptions and pedagogical practices influence gender identity and to give theoretical and practical description of the framework for

gender identity. I kindly invite your teachers to participate in this study. Your teachers' participation and that of your centre in this research is entirely voluntary and that you are free to withdraw from the study at any time without any consequences or explanation. Participation by your teachers and your school will remain completely confidential and anonymous. This will be ensured through the use of aliases, and no personal or school information will be reported in the findings. The recordings and transcriptions of the data will be stored under password protected and visible only to the supervisors and researcher. All data collected will only be used for academic purposes. All data collected will be securely stored in the archives at the University of Pretoria.

We also would like to request your permission to use any data collected, confidentially and anonymously, for further research purposes, as the data sets are the intellectual property of the University of Pretoria. Further research may include secondary data analysis and using the data for teaching purposes. The confidentiality and privacy applicable to this study will be binding on further research studies.

In order to avoid the spread of the virus due to COVID-19 pandemic and achieve anonymity, the interviews will be conducted as an online text-based interview. For the observations, all COVID protocols will be adhered to in line with the national guideline and the University of Pretoria guideline.

The research requires the Department of Education to grant permission for the study to be conducted. All protocols were followed in attaining ethnical permission to do the research, including permission to be granted by the Ethnics Board of the University of Pretoria. In addition, the name of your centre and the names of the participants will not be mentioned or identified by anyone during the research process or in the final research report. Confidentiality and anonymity will be guaranteed by assigning numbers to participants during the transcription phase. No participants names or personal information will be revealed in the findings or the final report.

If you are willing to permit the teachers to participate in this research study, the researcher will ask the participants for consent to audio-record the interview and focus group discussions to facilitate the transcription of data in terms of ease and accuracy. We would also like to request your permission to use your data, confidentially and anonymously, for further research purposes, as the data sets are the intellectual

property of the University of Pretoria. Further research may include secondary data analysis using the data for research purposes. The confidentiality and privacy applicable to this study will be binding on future research studies.

You and your participant teachers may ask questions at any time before and during participation and if you have any concerns regarding the data collection procedures, please inform me or my supervisor. Your teachers will be given the opportunity to verify their expressed views and the transcriptions of the interviews. Please note that since this is a voluntary participation, there will be no reward or monetary payments to any participant.

Please sign the attached consent form, indicating that you are aware of and support the teachers at your school participating in the research.

Kind Regards

Renisha Singh

Email address: singh.reni@gmail.com

0826552286

Supervisors

Prof Bipath

Email: keshni.bipath@up.ac.za

+27 12 420 5632

Permission for research

I, _____, hereby give my permission to Renisha Singh, to include selected early childhood educators from my school to participate

in the research entitled: Challenging teacher perceptions and pedagogical practices regarding children's gender identity in ECD centres.

Signature: _____

Date: _____

8.3 APPENDIX C: SAMPLE OF PRIMARY TEACHER CONSENT LETTER



Dear Sir/Madam

REQUEST TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

My name is Renisha Singh and I am a doctoral student at the University of Pretoria. The title of my study towards my doctorate degree is: **Challenging teacher perceptions and pedagogical practices regarding children's gender identity in ECD centres**. The purpose of this study is to develop a framework for promoting gender equality in early childhood care and education by challenging teacher's gender identity perceptions and pedagogical practices at ECD centres. The research will be conducted under the supervision of Professor Bipath from the Department of Early Childhood Education at the University of Pretoria.

I kindly invite you to participate in this study. There are various parts to this research including one or two group online interviews, one or two questionnaires, weekly reflective journaling, observation and participation in the awareness programme.

The aim of this research is not to pass judgement but to acquire new and insightful information on this topic, to describe how teachers' pedagogical practices and perception enhance gender identity in ECD centres, to describe what are teacher perceptions and pedagogical practices regarding the gender identity of the young child, to describe why teachers' perceptions and pedagogical practices influence gender identity and to give a practical description of an awareness programme for gender identity.

The participation that is requested from you involves responding to a set of questions that you will be asked during an interview. The on-line interview duration is 30-40 minutes. The research will involve observation of teachers with children, online interviews with the teachers and online group discussion sessions with the teachers. The teachers will remain anonymous during the online interviews because all cameras will be turned off. During the observation, I will take photographs of the teacher and

the child(ren), but their faces will be blurred. The online interviews and discussions will be audio recorded and therefore, no participant's face will be visible. In addition, the interview will be audio-recorded to make it possible for me to revisit the conversation after our interview. The purpose of the audio-recording is to make the transcription of the data valid and authentic. All information will be password protected and visible only to the supervisors and researcher. All data collected will only be used for academic purposes. At the end of the study, all the data will be securely stored in the archives at the University of Pretoria.

Participation in this study is voluntary and you may withdraw from participation at any time without any negative consequences and the confidential data collected may still be used in the research. Please be assured that all information will be treated with the strictest confidence and your personal particulars, as well as the name of the ECD centre will not be divulged to any person. This information will be made available to the Gauteng Department of Education and your input will enhance gender identity equality at ECD centres.

You may ask questions before or during the time of participation. If there are any concerns regarding the data collection procedures, please notify me or my supervisor. Please note that since this is a voluntary participation, there will be no reward or monetary payments to any participants. As a participant, you will have the opportunity to access and verify the recorded views and the transcriptions made. During the observations, I would like to take photographs of the teacher with the children, which may be used in the presentation of the research findings. However, the faces of the teacher and children will be blurred on the photographs so that the anonymity as well as the confidentiality of the participants will be respected.

We would also like to request your permission to use your data, confidentially and anonymously, for further research purposes, as the data sets are the intellectual property of the University of Pretoria. Further research may include secondary data analysis and using the data for teaching purposes. The confidentiality and privacy applicable to this study will be binding on future research studies.

In order to avoid the spread of the virus due to COVID-19 pandemic and achieve anonymity, the interviews will be conducted as an online text-based interview. For the

observations, all COVID protocols will be adhered to in line with the national guideline and the University of Pretoria guideline.

Please indicate by signing, your understanding of the information shared above, the purpose being to give your consent to participate. Should you require any additional information, you may contact me at 0826552286 or at the following email address; singh.reni@gmail.com

Your assistance with my research will be much appreciated.

Kind Regards

Renisha Singh (PhD student, University of Pretoria, South Africa)

Renisha Singh

Supervisor

Professor Bipath

Department of Early Childhood Education

keshni.bipath@up.ac.za

+27 12 420 5632



Permission for research

I, _____, hereby give permission to Renisha Singh, to include me as a participant in her research entitled: Challenging teacher perceptions and pedagogical practices regarding children's gender identity in ECD centres.

Signature: _____

Date: _____

8.4 APPENDIX D: PARENTS' LETTER OF CONSENT



Challenging teacher perceptions and pedagogical practices regarding children's gender identity in ECD centres.

Dear Parent/s

Request for you child(ren) to participate in a Research Project

My name is Renisha Singh and I am a doctoral student at the University of Pretoria. The title of my research study is: Challenging teacher perceptions and pedagogical practices regarding children's gender identity in ECD centres. The purpose of this study is to develop an awareness programme for promoting gender equality in early childhood care and education by exploring teacher's gender identity perceptions and pedagogical practices in registered ECD centres. The research will be conducted under the supervision of Professor Bipath in the Department of Early Childhood Education at the University of Pretoria.

Your child is kindly invited to participate in the research as a participant. As part of my research, I am expected to observe teachers. Your child(ren) will be part of a group in the class while the teacher is teaching. As the researcher, I will be observing the teacher and how the learners are responding to teaching and learning in the classroom. Your child(ren)'s participation in this study is completely voluntary and all discussion in the group will be kept confidential and anonymous. During the observation, I will take photographs of the teacher and the child(ren), but their faces will be blurred. Furthermore, it is your right to withdraw your child(ren) from being involved. Your child(ren) will not be disadvantaged in any way. You can be assured that your decision will be respected. No children's names or personal information will be reported in the findings and in the final report.

The data collected through his/her involvement will be anonymous and confidential, through the use of aliases and photo editing. All information will be password protected and visible only to the supervisors and researcher. All data collected will only be used

for academic purposes. At the end of the study, all the data will be securely stored in the archives at the University of Pretoria.

Following due ethical research protocol, I will take extreme care to respect the rights and dignity of our young research participants. Learners will be asked to participate before any research lesson begins. Any learners not wishing to participate may leave the class and will be supervised for the duration of the lesson by a staff member. Any child experiencing distress or discomfort, however mild, at any stage of the lesson, will be invited to leave without penalty. Please note that since this is a voluntary participation, there will be no reward or monetary payments to any participants.

We would also like to request your permission to use your data, confidentially and anonymously, for further research purposes, as the data sets are the intellectually property of the University of Pretoria. Further research may include secondary data analysis and using the data for teaching purposes. The confidentiality and privacy applicable to this study will be binding on future research studies.

In order to avoid the spread of the virus due to COVID-19 pandemic and achieve anonymity, the interviews will be conducted as an online text-based interview. For the observations, all COVID protocols will be adhered to in line with the national guideline and the University of Pretoria guideline.

If you are willing for your child to participate in the research study, please complete the attached consent form. All data generated will only be used for academic purposes. You may ask questions before or during the time of the child(ren)'s participation. If you have any concerns regarding the data collection procedures, please notify me or my supervisors.

Yours in education

Renisha Singh

E-mail address: singh.reni@gmail.com

Contact number: 0826552286

Supervisor: Professor K Bipath

Department of Early Childhood Education

keshni.bipath@up.ac.za

+27 12 420 5632

Permission for research

I, _____, (name of parent) hereby give my permission to Renisha Singh to include my child _____ (name of child) as a participant in the research entitled: Challenging teacher perceptions and pedagogical practices regarding children's gender identity in ECD centres.

Signature: _____

Date: _____

8.5 APPENDIX E: SAMPLE OF ORAL LEARNER ASSENT SCRIPT



Good morning children



I would like to watch lessons in your class. We are not here to give you marks or test you, or do anything difficult or scary! We just want to watch Mrs/Ms/Mr _____ teach the lesson and watch how you learn while she teaches you!

Nobody has to be here today, and if you would rather like to leave, you can join Mrs/Ms/Mr _____ class in the hall. If you feel sad or scared at any time, you can put up your hand and a teacher will take you to the hall. You won't get into trouble.

During the lesson I will walk around and look at your work. I would like you to try and ignore me. This might be a bit difficult. I will not talk to you so try to pretend that I am not here.

If you are happy to be here for this lesson, please draw a circle around the picture of the smiley-face. If you don't want to do this, just draw a circle around the frowny face.

(sample of faces)

Box A: Happy face	Box B: Angry face
 A yellow circular smiley face with two black dots for eyes and a wide, upward-curving black mouth.	 A red oval-shaped angry face with two black dots for eyes, slanted downwards, and a downward-curving black mouth.

Is everybody comfortable and ready to start? Would anyone like to leave before I start?
Let's go...



8.6 APPENDIX F: SAMPLE OF SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR ECD TEACHERS



Section A: Demographics

1. Age?
2. Gender?
3. Highest qualification or ECD qualification?
4. Position at ECD centre?
5. Number of years of experience in teaching at an ECD centre?
6. Years of experience at respective ECD centre?
7. Years of ECD centre existence?
8. Number of children at ECD centre?
9. Fee per child?
10. Number of staff members at ECD centre?
11. Location of ECD centre?

Section B: Gender identity

These interviews will be on line and semi-structured. Therefore, the questions may be addressed in difference sequence for each interview. In addition, the interviews are likely to follow different interest directions and will therefore include questions that cannot be anticipated here. The first interview will consist of mostly these questions and the subsequent two interviews will revisit the questions and topics discussed in the first interview.

Question 1: How do you believe that children develop their gender identity?

Question 2: Do your beliefs on gender identity influence your teaching practice?

Question 3: What are your pedagogical practices regarding gender identity?

Question 4: What is the teacher's role in influencing gender identity?

Question 5: Why do teacher perceptions influence gender identity?

Question 6: How do your teaching practices influence gender identity?

Question 7: How does the school policy influence gender identity?

Question 8: How does the curriculum influence gender identity?

Question 9: How does your discipline style influence gender identity?

Question 10: Is there a difference in your classroom management between girls and boys? How is there a difference in your classroom management between girls and boys?

Question 11: What type of gender equity programme is implemented in the classroom?

Question 12: Have you experienced any challenges from peers in relation to gender identity in children? (If so, what happened?)

Question 13: Have you experienced any challenges from parents in relation to gender identity in children? (If so, what happened?)

Question 14: Where do you believe your understanding of gender identity has come from?

Question 15: What are earliest memories of being aware of gender?

Question 16: Did you ever feel that you were forced into certain gender roles and if so, by whom/what?

Question 17: Can you recall any significant scenarios that you feel may have helped to develop your understanding of gender?

Question 18: What factors do you think influences a child's gender identity?



8.7 APPENDIX G: SAMPLE OF NON-PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION SCHEDULE



The following questions will be used as a guide when observing the participating centres that I do not deviate from the focus of the study:

Interactions with child(ren)

1. How does the teacher address children in the classroom? Are children addressed by their names or using gendered terms such as boys or girls etc?
2. Is the teacher doing anything to expand the children's understanding of gender?
3. Does the teacher appear to group children according to gender?
4. Does the teacher make any comments about gender?
5. What does the teacher do to recognise and acknowledge gender roles?
6. What is the teacher doing to teach anti-bias education?
7. Is there any segregation in the class between boys and girls?
8. Do children receive an equal amount of attention in the classroom?
9. Is there any difference in interaction between boys and girls with the teacher?
10. Does the teacher's criticism and praise differ between boys and girls?

Physical environment

1. Does the classroom have gender related books?
2. How do the posters depict stereotypical gender roles?
3. How does the artwork depict stereotypical gender? Are there any photos that depict gender?
4. Are the bathrooms or the classroom labelled by gender? Is there a unisex bathroom?
5. Does the play area have an assortment of costumes?

6. Do activity areas promote stereotypical gender roles?
7. Do educational resources reflect gender roles?