

CHAPTER 3

DATA COLLECTION ON THE SUPPORT FOR LEARNING PROVIDED IN THE HOME, FOR THE GRADE TWO TSONGA CLASS

3.1 THE AIM OF THE DATA COLLECTION

The primary concern of this research was to examine the extent, level, form and content of the support for learning of the parents of the Grade Two Tsonga class from a Township school in the learning of their children and to examine the relationship between the parents' support for learning with the learning behaviours of the learners at school.

The support for learning in schoolwork is important, especially in the sense that children get motivated in learning so that their learning performance as well as learning behaviours improve. Seefeldt, Denton, Galper and Younoszai (1998, in McCarthey 2000:148) agree that parental involvement in their children's education can positively affect educational outcome.

The research was done in one particular Tsonga school in the Foundation Phase school and involved one class of Grade Two learners, and their parents.

3.2 THE RESEARCH DESIGN FOR DATA COLLECTION

3.2.1 INTRODUCTION

According to Selltiz (1976, in Mouton & Marais 1994:32), a research design is the arrangement of conditions for the collection and analysis of data in a manner that aims to combine relevance to the research purpose with economy in procedure. Research design can also be defined as a phase of study which includes sampling plans and data collection techniques (Sander & Pinley 1983, in Govender 1995:85), and the analysis of specific data or information with the view to solving a particular problem (Vorster & De Meillon 1991:209).

The research was both qualitative and quantitative. It was partly qualitative because it was non-experimental and data were collected verbally and through observation. The research was also quantitative because some data were collected through structured observation and a questionnaire which was coupled with semi-structured interviews.

3.2.2 QUALITATIVE AND QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH

3.2.2.1 Qualitative research

Babbie (1992:6) describes qualitative analysis as the “non-numerical examination and interpretation of observations, for the purpose of discovering underlying meanings and patterns of relationships.” The qualitative approach to design can be defined as a representation of facts in a narration with words (McMillan & Schumacher 1993:14). According to McMillan & Schumacher (1993:37), Patton (1990:13) and Tuckman (1988:383-389), qualitative designs are non-experimental and the data consist of words, that is, verbal description, rather than numbers.

According to Ary, Jacobs and Razavieh (1990:445), qualitative research designs are less structured by nature. This means that specific procedures which are followed are often identified during the research rather than specified ahead of time. Ary *et al.*, (1990:445) add that qualitative inquirers seek to interpret human actions, institutions, events and customs and in so doing, construct a “reading” of what is being studied in sufficient depth and detail so that one who has not experienced it, can understand it.

The purpose of qualitative research is not to discover how many and what kinds of people share certain characteristics. It is to gain access to the cultural categories and assumptions according to which one culture construes the world. Ary *et al.*, (1990:446) echo that how many and what kinds of people hold these categories and assumptions is not, in fact, the compelling issue. Qualitative research does not survey the terrain, it mines it. It is, in other words, much more intensive than extensive in its objectives.

In amplifying the process of qualitative research, Mouton and Marais (1994:160) argue that, for the qualitative researcher, **concepts** and **constructs** are meaningful words that can be analysed in their own right to gain a greater depth of understanding of a given concept. It is a frequent occurrence that qualitative researchers will conduct an etymological analysis of a concept as part of their description of a phenomenon. Such researchers will then interpret the phenomenon on the basis of the wealth of meaning of the concept. Qualitative researchers are more inclined to allow themselves to be led by meaningful sketches or by intuition.

The general characteristics of qualitative research include the fact that the approach is context bound, with the researcher immersed in the situation. The data collected rely more heavily on the researcher in person than on controlled clinical instruments. Opinions, feelings and perceptions are what the researcher wants to understand rather

than that which is quantifiable. “An articulate rationale for the use of qualitative methods is given so that sceptics will accept this approach. Data collection and analysis procedures are public, not magical” (Marshall & Rossman 1995:147).

According to Bogden and Biklen (1992:121), the general characteristics of qualitative research are that:

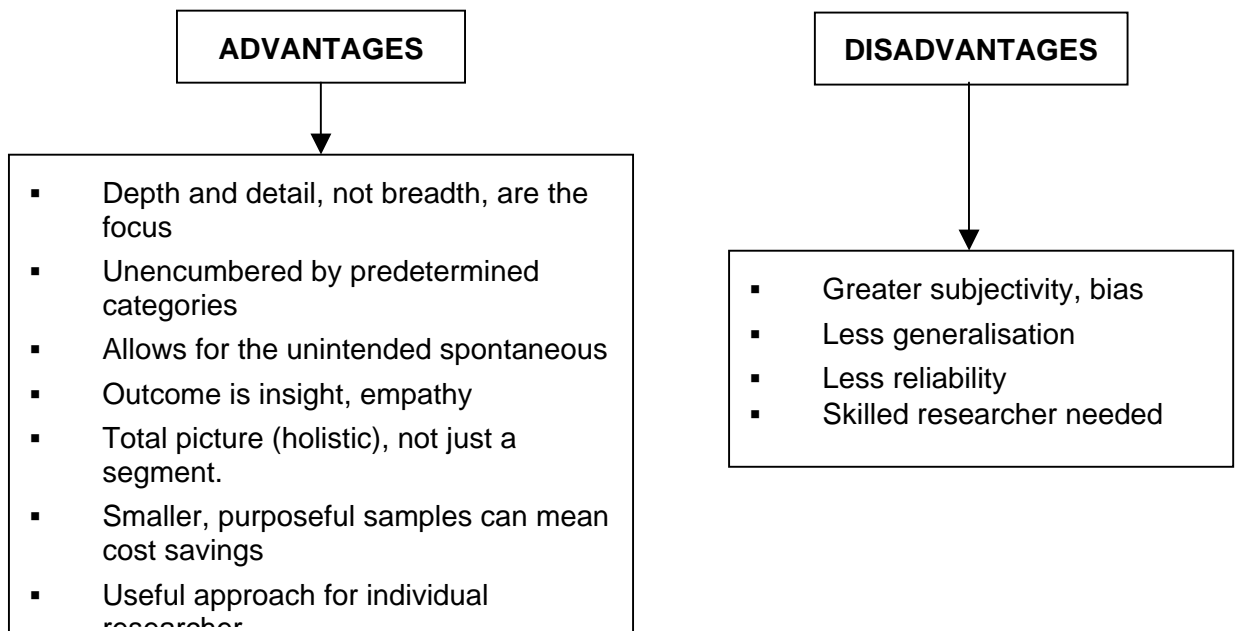
- The natural setting is the direct source of data and the researcher is the key instrument.
- Data are collected in the form of words, pictures and number.
- The process as well as the product is important.
- The data analysis is inductive, and the theory is constructed from the data.
- The perspective of the subject of a study is very important to the researcher.

Lippert (1994:205) adds that:

- Research questions are often not in the form of hypotheses but research goals.
- Implementation practices are evaluated.

Lippert (1994:205) outlines the advantages and disadvantages of the qualitative approach in figure 3.1:

FIGURE 3.1 ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF QUALITATIVE RESEARCH



3.2.2.2 Quantitative research

According to Makhanya (1997:109) and Goodwin and Goodwin (1996:71), quantitative study is a numerical method of describing observations or characteristics.

McMillan (1996:9) states that quantitative research generally derives from a logical-positivist philosophical position which holds that a single objective reality exists that can be discerned through scientific research. Such research strives to be value-free and deductive, to determine relationships (often causal) between variables, and to report outcomes in numerical, statistical form. It assumes that “there are facts with objective reality that can be expressed numerically. Consequently, there is a heavy reliance on numbers, measurement, experiments, numerical relationships and descriptions.”

According to McCracken (1988:17), quantitative projects require investigators to construct a “sample” of the necessary size and type to generalize to the larger population.

Quantitative researchers make use of numbers and statistical analysis to describe phenomena. Filstead (1979, in Makhanya 1997:109) and Mouton and Marais (1994:160) emphasise that quantitative researchers tend to translate their observations into numbers. Numerical values are assigned to the observations via counting and measuring.

Quantitative research attempts to generate knowledge from an objective detached perspective. It is predetermined and specific. Quantitative researchers can be both experimental and non-experimental, for example:

Experimental	Non-experimental
(a) True experimental	Descriptive (survey & developmental)
(b) Quasi-experimental	Correlational
(c) Single subject	Causal, comparative

The purpose of descriptive research is to generate knowledge that describes something. Goodwin and Goodwin (1996:34) outline the steps involved in this type of research as follows:

- Identify the target population
- Select the type of instrumentation needed
- Choose or construct the needed measures
- Collect data
- Analyse the data
- Report the results.

The purpose of correlational research is to determine the relationship between two or more variables. As in survey research, the investigator manipulates no variables. Variables are identified and measured as they exist.

According to Goodwin and Goodwin (1996:39), there are matters which require particular attention in this method:

- The variables to be related must be selected carefully as worthy of exploration and items on which the sample probably will vary.
- The sample of subjects must be carefully selected for the study, as it will frame the generalisability of the results observed.
- The researcher must strive to select or develop measures with good psychometric credibility in terms of validity, reliability and other crucial properties.

Correlational research has the following advantages:

- Since variables are not manipulated, they can examine a phenomenon, as it is, can address topics that would be impractical or even impossible using experimental methods, and can study directly non-manipulable variables.
- The relationship between a number of variables can be examined at one time.
- The correlational method allows for the preliminary identification of a relationship that may be cause and effect (Goodwin & Goodwin 1996:41).

Goodwin and Goodwin (1996:41) notice the following disadvantages of this method related to the advantages:

- The absence of variable manipulation often leaves the researchers with findings that are interesting but very difficult to explain and interpret.
- As the number of variables in correlational research increases, so does the cost of the research, particularly in the search for suitable measures and often in the amount of time required of subjects to respond.
- The temptation to view statistically significant correlational relationships as cause-and-effect linkages is often too strong to resist with researchers ignoring good practice in their interpretation of correlational research results.

The purpose of causal-comparative research is to identify possible cause-and-effect relationships in cases where experimentation is not possible. In this method, the subjects are not assigned to conditions by the researcher since they have already been “grouped by nature circumstances” into categories such as male-female, good-poor readers, high-low socio-economic status, etc.

Causal-comparative research has the following advantages:

- A causal-comparative method permits an examination of potential causes for outcomes that emerge from the environment as worthy of explanation after the fact.
- Variables that cannot be manipulated, due to ethical or feasibility reasons or both, can still be investigated as possible causes in a formal research undertaking.
- No manipulation of variables is involved and the outcome variable of interest typically is already available (Goodwin & Goodwin 1996:44).

The disadvantages of this method are as follows:

- The researcher lacks proactivity in identifying a causal relationship in that no manipulation or interventions occur.
- Some researchers believe that this type of research only flirts with cause-and-effect linkages, and encourage restraint by the researcher in reporting findings (Goodwin & Goodwin 1996:44).

In this study, the researcher used a small sample and collected data in a written form through structured observations and a very slight degree of intervention. The next section introduces the research instruments which were used to collect the data.

3.2.3 RESEARCH INSTRUMENTS

In order to gather data to construct a meaningful representation of the phenomena observed in the Grade Two class and at the homes of the Grade Two learners, the following instruments were developed:

- A questionnaire, for gathering information on how supportive African parents could be in the education of their young children in the home and at school.
- A semi-structured interview, addressing the dynamics of the support given by their parents to learners in a Grade Two Tsonga class. The questionnaire was used as a frame of reference for the semi-structured interview.
- An observation schedule on how the Grade Two learners behaved in respect of learning in class.
- Correspondence with the parents. This was in the form of five letters, containing rather bland information on classroom affairs and ending in a request. The purpose of the correspondence was to see which parents responded to the requests and whether the response pattern correlated with the learning behaviours of their children in class.

How the instruments were used will be explained in the discussion of the research methods.

3.2.4 RESEARCH METHODS

3.2.4.1 Introduction

According to Mouton and Marais (1994:161), the data collection process can be viewed as the overall scheme of scientific activities in which scientists engage in order to produce knowledge; it is the paradigm of scientific inquiry.

Before beginning the data collection, the parents of the Grade Two learners of the research school were invited to attend a meeting at the school. The meeting was held in one of the classrooms in the presence of the principal and the class teacher. Of the 39 families invited, only 29 families responded to the invitation. The principal introduced the researcher and the aim of the research was explained. The parents who were present were all willing to take part in the project. The parents who did not attend the meeting were sent letters informing them of the researcher's visit to their homes and the purpose of the research was highlighted.

Having obtained the parents' collaboration, the researcher used a number of complementary methods to obtain sufficient data to answer the research question. The research was four-pronged: questionnaire supplemented by semi-structured interviews, ethnographic description, an observation schedule, and an analysis of parent response patterns to correspondence from the school.

3.2.4.2 Questionnaire, extended into unstructured interview

(a) Definition, nature and characteristics of a questionnaire

According to Legotlo (1994:162); Baker (1988:16); and Guy, Edgley, Arafat and Allen (1987:229), a questionnaire is a data collection instrument containing a selected group of questions chosen because of their relevance and which are carefully worded for clarity. Plug, Meyer and Gouws (1989:39) define a questionnaire as a series of questions that cover a single subject or a group of related subjects. According to Tuckman (1994:217), questionnaires can be used to measure interests, attitudes, opinions and personality traits, as well as to collect biographic information. Legotlo (1994:162) emphasizes that questions are generally viewed as a relatively economical, standardized way of gathering information for descriptive and explanatory studies. Fox (1967, in Dube 1997:62) states

that a questionnaire involves an impersonal approach where the researcher puts his questions on paper and submits them to the respondents, asking them in turn to write their answers on paper. Walker (1985:91) considers it a formalized interview or interview by proxy.

(b) The construction of a questionnaire

A questionnaire is designed to meet particular research objectives. It is, therefore, important that every question be formulated with due care. The questionnaire must not only be judged for general appropriateness, but every question must be appraised to determine whether the answer to it will conduce to arrival at the answer to the problem forming the subject of the research concerned. According to Kruger (1992:181) and Olivier (1989:101), the following requirements must be met when constructing a questionnaire:

- The questionnaire must be concise. No question should be included unless it supports achievement of the researcher's purpose. Questions must not contain any extras.
- Every item must be clear and unambiguous.
- Question terminology must be aligned with the respondents' vocabulary – technical jargon should be avoided.
- Instruments must be as clear as possible.
- Short items are preferable, because they are easier to understand.
- Questions must be objective. Leading questions must be avoided.
- Questions must proceed inductively, that is, they must guide the respondents' thoughts from the general to the particular.
- Questions may be grouped into categories. This will guide the respondent and concentrate his mind on specific issues.
- Provision must be made for appropriate code numbers to facilitate data processing.

(c) Types of questionnaires

There are two types of questionnaires, namely the closed or structured questionnaire and the open or unstructured questionnaire (Gay 1990:421-422; Ary *et al.*, 1990:195-196). Under the closed questionnaire the researcher may give five or ten options per question for the respondent to choose from. The open questionnaire, on the other hand, possesses greater flexibility. It allows the respondent more leeway, for instance in stating his position.

(d) Advantages of a questionnaire

In using a questionnaire the influence of the interviewer can be obviated to a great extent. The questionnaire also allows for greater uniformity and ensures that answers are more comparable. There are also other advantages which are, however, not directly relevant to this study. According to Gay (1990:421-422) and Ary *et al.*, (1990:195-196), a questionnaire has an advantage in that it allows for wide coverage at a minimum expense of time and money. Through it the researcher can collect data which cannot be collected any other way. He can actually reach people and places that are difficult to contact. When people cannot be interviewed personally, for instance, the questionnaire becomes very handy. The results that are obtained by means of a questionnaire have greater reliability, because the representative sample can be sufficiently large.

In this study the structured questionnaire was used to gather information from a small sample of African parents on how they are involved in the education of their children. The questionnaire enabled the researcher to obtain information about an area of involvement concerning which many of the respondents might have felt too unsure to venture information on account of their limited levels of literacy and lack of confidence regarding education generally. This does not refer to the parents' ability to read the questionnaire, but to have an understanding of what is required of them.

(e) Disadvantages of a questionnaire

The advantages of a questionnaire outlined above should not overshadow the fact that it has disadvantages as well. The questionnaire's simplicity may be very appealing to the researcher but it may also easily be misused. There may be a high percentage of questionnaires that are not returned. Lack of understanding or misinterpretation of some questions by respondents may lead to bias in the results, which is sometimes difficult to detect. The respondents' ability or willingness to provide information may further affect the validity of the results. If the respondents have little or no interest in a particular problem, they may answer the questions indiscriminately (Gay 1990:421-4222; Ary *et al.*, 1990:195-196).

(f) Construction of the Parental Involvement in Learners' Education Questionnaire (PILEQ)

The Parental Involvement in Learners' Education Questionnaire (PILEQ) (refer to Appendix A) was designed to involve 39 parents of the Grade Two learners in one class in the Foundation Phase in a Tsonga school.

In the construction of the PILEQ, the researcher had to give special care to the phrasing of questions because many of the respondents were illiterate. The parents would in any case not be required to read the questionnaire, but they could listen carefully and provide information since the questionnaire was read to them. The PILEQ was first constructed in English, then translated into Tsonga by the educator (teacher) and retranslated into English to control for accuracy of the translation. The PILEQ is a structured questionnaire containing two sections (refer to Appendix A).

Section A (questions 1-12) consists of biographical data concerning matters such as names, ages, number of children in the family, rank of child and marital status of the parents, and, in questions 13-27, the qualifications and work life of the parents.

Section B addresses the support for learning by parents in the learner's education at school (B1, questions 28-35) and in the home (B2, questions 36-63).

The researcher administered the questionnaire at the respondents' homes on different dates as per appointment. It was explained to parents that the questionnaire was not a test, and as such, there were no right or wrong answers. The instructions to be followed when responding to the items were explained to parents. The researcher noted responses. The questionnaire took approximately 60 minutes to complete because it was coupled with a semi-structured interview.

(g) Extension of questionnaire by means of semi-structured interview

(i) Aim and definition of interviews

The aim of an interview is to secure what is within the mind of the interviewee, uncoloured and unaffected by the interviewer.

According to Behr (1973, in Pather 1995:335), and Borg and Gall (1989:446), the interview as a research method in descriptive research is unique in that it involves the collection of data through direct verbal interaction with individuals.

(ii) Types of interviews

There are three types of interviews: first, the structured interview which lends itself to systematic treatment; second, the unstructured interview whereby the questions emerge from the immediate context and are asked in the natural course of events, with no pre-determination of questions or phrasing; third, the semi-structured interview in which the aspects to be interviewed are selected in advance, but the researcher decides the

sequence and wording of the questions during the interview (McMillan & Schumacher 1993:426).

(iii) Requirements of a semi-structured interview

Interviews, specifically, can help to expand the interpretation of information obtainable from questionnaires by probing for deeper underlying information. The question(s) for the interview should be as carefully planned and as accurately worded as the items in a questionnaire. Interviews should be considered as professional situations that demand equally, professional planning and conduct on the part of the interviewer.

Woods (1994:314) and Leedy (1989:149) outline the following practical steps as necessary for interviews:

- Set up the interview well in advance.
- Short and simple questions are preferable.
- The agenda of questions to be asked should be sent to the interviewees.
- Leading questions should be avoided as this might spoil the outcome and skill in discovering and extracting what is in the interviewee's mind.
- The more natural the interviewer is, the more chances of success there will be in the interview.
- The interview date should be confirmed with the interviewees.
- Give a reminder a few days before the interview date.
- Establish rapport and put interviewees at their ease.
- Responses should be noted, preferably verbatim.
- Meaning must be clarified and data analysed.

In addition, technical requirements of an interview include a video machine, for taping and playing cassettes; a TV for eye contact; and an audio player for playing cassettes and CD's (compact discs). Since these appliances were not used, the researcher could not record everything. Therefore, limited data could be expected because no technology was used.

(iv) Advantages of interviews

According to Pather (1995:335), the main advantage of an interview is its adaptability, whereby the interviewer can make maximum use of the responses of the interviewee and even change the interview situation. The method allows for immediate feedback and permits the researcher to follow-up leads to obtain greater clarity and additional data. Through this method, the researcher is able to elicit descriptions of experiences, behaviours, actions and activities that have taken place in the absence of the researcher.

(v) Disadvantages of interviews

The interview method is prone to subjectivity and possible bias. Pather (1995:335) notes that interviews are expensive and demand much time, that some interviewees can resent the questions and that the wrong information could deliberately be given. Moreover interviewing calls for thorough preparation and considerable practice.

(vi) The semi-structured interview on parental involvement in learners' education

This research involved parents of the Grade Two learners of the research school and their children at their homes. After having filled in the questionnaire with each parent, the researcher went more deeply into issues which appeared unclear. The purpose was to obtain more descriptive information, to provide qualitative understanding of quantitative data. A record of the interviews was kept in the form of written notes.

The interview was concluded and led into participant observation by the researcher of a facilitated learning event between the parent and his/her child, as then set up by the researcher. The Grade Two learner in the family was given a learning task related to work done at school on that day in numeracy or language. The purpose was to get parents involved, for example, in reading together with their children, doing numeracy tasks together and holding discussions on what should be done for the improvement of their children's education.

3.2.4.3 Ethnographic observation

(a) Definition of ethnographic observation

According to Spradley (1982, in Andereck 1992:48), ethnography is the research describing a culture. This means that to understand the behaviour, values and meanings of any given individual or group, the cultural context must be taken into account.

According to Walford and Massey (1998:5), a culture is made up of certain values, practices, relationships and identifications. Rather than studying people, ethnography means learning from people. Wolcott (1988, in Henning 1993a:111) declares that ethnography refers both to the research process and the customary product of that effort – the written ethnographic account. Walford and Massey (1998:5) emphasize that ethnography is a strategy especially well suited to the study of children's learning. Observation is a method used to gather a genuine report. According to Singh (1996:443), in this type of report the investigator is observing individuals and inferring attitudes from their behaviour.

Ethnographic observation takes place during the process of writing. According to Henning (1993b:114), it is in the write-up, rather than in the fieldwork, that the materials become ethnographic. Wolcott (1988 in Henning 1993b:114) emphasizes that ethnographic observations are, therefore, dependent on clear verbal formulation of data and of inference, both of which will enhance validity.

(b) Types of ethnographic observation

There are different types of observations. For example, we have what is called **just observing**, which is not scientific and not suitable for empirical and/or qualitative research. In this type of observation the observer tends to draw conclusions from his/her observations by merely looking at the events without considering any other forms of information and the issue is one of superficial assumption.

With regard to ethnographic observation, we have participant observation as well as non-participant observation, both of which can be systematic or not. Research is systematic when the researcher looks at the situation by means of questions, such as what, who, how and why. The results are analysed in terms of frequencies or patterns.

Researchers such as Saslow (1992:10) as well Shaughnessy and Zechmeister (1992:38), recommend systematic observation as an important tool of research when it serves a formulated research purpose; when it is planned deliberately; when it is recorded systematically and when it is subjected to checks and controls on validity and reliability.

(c) Requirements of ethnographic observation

According to Saslow (1992:10), systematic observation becomes empirical and/or qualitative research if the observers are able to answer questions such as the following before making their observations:

- What are they looking for?
- Whom are they going to observe?
- When and where are the observations to be made?
- How are the observations to be made?
- In what form are the observations to be recorded?

The role of the ethnographer is to set aside personal preconceptions and stereotypes about what is going on and then to explore the setting and the action as it is seen and experienced by the participants. According to Wolcott (1988 in Henning 1993a:113), the role of the ethnographer as an inference generating observer is emphasized as follows: “The culture of any society is made up of the concepts, beliefs and principles of action and

organization that the ethnographer has found could be attributed successfully to the members of that society in the context of his dealings with them.”

Hammersley (1990:1) outlines the following features of ethnographic observation:

- The behaviour of people is studied in the context of everyday living, rather than under experimental conditions.
- Observation and informal conversations are generally used to gather data.
- Data are collected in as raw a form as feasible.
- Ethnography usually focuses on a single setting or group.
- Data analysis involves interpretation of human actions, with qualification and statistical analysis playing a subordinate role.

(d) Advantages of ethnographic observation

- It enables the ethnographer to formulate better questions with regard to his research and to pursue the answers with greater sensitivity.
- It is a pure and honest approach with an innovating influence on theory.
- It is helpful in an understanding why things take place as they do.
- It builds an abiding awareness that each child and/or learner has significant cultural knowledge that influences his learning (Hult 1996:70).

(e) Disadvantages of ethnographic observation

Hult (1996:70) and Singh (1996:443) notice the following disadvantages of ethnographic observation:

- Lack of control over the environment.
- Lack of quantifiable data.
- Small sample size.
- Biased attention.
- Cumbersome and time-consuming procedures.
- Heavy reliance on the assumed objectivity of the researcher.
- Attention on circumstances corresponding to the expected pattern only.

(f) The ethnographic observation of this research

The ethnographic observation of this research was executed in two sections; namely, with parents during the semi-structured interview and with learners in the classroom.

▪ **Ethnographic observation with parents**

According to Saslow (1992:13), observations are used to summarize the characteristics of different groups of people or to estimate their feelings and attitudes about issues. This

research applied overt observation with the researcher as observer-as-participant during the execution of a learning task (based on the class-work of the morning at school) by the learner under the guidance of the parents. As the observer was also the researcher and the designer of the learning task, she clarified what was needed in the learners' tasks.

The observation took place during the months of May and June of the practical research year, after the filling in of the questionnaire at the learners' homes. The researcher explained and read the task to the parents, with which they were then required to help their child. The activity was recorded in detail by the researcher. In the beginning of each task, the researcher was non-participating. Later, she participated and noted specifics in a systematic participation. There was no interpreter.

▪ **Ethnographic observation in the classroom**

Through the method of participant observation, the researcher is known to the participants and participates in some of the activities being researched. According to Goodenough (1984, in Lombard 1994:129), during the participant observation the researcher has to be willing to display whatever it is one has to know or believe in order to operate in a manner acceptable to the members of the particular group and to do it in any role that they accept for any of themselves.

In this study the researcher participated in the classroom activities. The persons involved in the research process were obviously fully aware of the researcher and she interacted with the participants as indicated by the situation of the moment.

The ethnographic observation with learners took place during the months of May and June and continued in September to December of the practical research year. The researcher was always sitting in the back of the classroom so as to avoid unduly attracting the attention of the learners. The classroom consisted of three rows of three tables each. At each of the front tables there were five learners and at the middle and back tables, four learners each. All in all there were 39 learners.

At first the learners and their educator were a bit nervous about the researcher's presence even though they were aware why she was present. To avoid being regarded a stranger, the researcher took part in some of the lessons.

The main purpose was to observe how the learners behaved in class; for example who raised their hands when questions were asked; after how long did the learners respond to questions; which learners always responded to questions and what was their attitude

towards learning. Finally, the observations would be related to the data on the parents in an effort to understand the influence of the parents' actions on the learning of their children. The researcher observed the learners as a group in a classroom and kept detailed field-notes.

Ethnographic observation was not the only form of observation which was executed in the classroom. The data were extended by means of systematic observation using a behaviour schedule.

3.2.4.4 The Learners' Behaviour Schedule

(a) Definition of a schedule

Schedules are structured forms, which systematically record particular points, for example, behaviours that are noted every few minutes.

According to Friederichs and Ludtke (1975, in Wium 1994:32), the observation schedule is the plan that says "what" and "how" to observe. Such a schedule defines the number and kinds of observation units, the especially relevant dimensions of these units, and illustrates the language to be used in observing. It is important to note that although the schedule is in some instances referred to as a screening instrument, it is regarded as more concise than a screening and consists of various characteristics of an assessment. The different issues covered in the schedule designed for the Grade Two learners will be presented in (f) below.

(b) Types of schedules

Two extreme types can be observed, namely yes/no with regard to occurrence, frequency and intensity, and scales with any number of points. Many forms of behaviour cannot be described in terms of yes/no, but the more scale points there are, the more information is gathered.

In this study a five-point scale (1-5) is used in a descriptive manner. The following values were given to each numerical and these will be discussed in (f) below:

5 > Very good performance	(best)
4 > Good performance	(good)
3 > Above average	(fair)
2 > Below average	(poor)
1 > Poor performance	(poorest)

(c) Requirements of a schedule

The schedule must be very clearly defined. It must be consistent and simple to understand. The structure must be specific, not open to different interpretations.

According to Olechowski and Khan-Svik (1995:183), the activities in the schedule must be varied and spaced in such a manner as to establish a rhythm that will be meaningful. Transitions between activities must be smooth in order not to disturb the flow of events. Rules and procedures for participation must be established and maintained, as must be the logistics of learner movement.

Wium (1994:32) adds that the schedule has to be reliable and effective. If it has got to be applicable in a classroom context it must not be too time-consuming or lengthy. The items included in the schedule must be presented in an easily understood language and not be too technical to be observed.

Merriam (1992:105) suggests the following points in recording data while observing:

- Pay attention
- Look for key words in people's remarks that will stand out later.
- Concentrate on the first and last remarks in each conversation.
- Mentally play back remarks and scenes during breaks in the talking or observing.

Once the observation is completed, the researcher should incorporate pieces of data remembered at later times into the original field notes.

(d) Advantages of a schedule

- The researcher may observe and interact closely enough with the participants being observed.
- The researcher is able to record behaviour as it is happening while observing.
- The researcher is able to ask the participants what they were thinking with regard to specific behaviours witnessed in class.
- The researcher is able to gain access to the emotional reactions of the group introspectively; that is, in a real sense it permits the researcher to use himself/herself as a data source (Denzin & Lincoln 1998:89; Erlandson, Harris, Skipper & Allen 1993:95; Merriam 1992:103).

(e) Disadvantages of a schedule

Denzin and Lincoln (1998:88) and Merriam (1992:103) notice the following disadvantages of a schedule:

- Subjectivity and interaction are assumed. The interdependency between the observer and the observed may bring about changes in both parties' behaviours. The question is not whether the process of observing affects what is observed, but how the researcher can identify those effects and account for them in interpreting the data.
- The researcher might miss things while observing because he/she might be concerned about the effects he/she will have on the scene.

(f) The Learners' Behaviour Schedule used in this research

Appendix B contains the structured schedule, which was filled in on a daily basis for a period of twelve weeks. The schedule was always completed at the end of the school day. The reason for a period of a twelve consecutive weeks was that the researcher wanted the learners to get used to or to be desensitised to the situation.

Each learner had a nametag in his/her back. The learners were informed about the reason for the researcher's presence, that is, that she came from the University of Pretoria under the Department of Education as a visitor. At first the learners were not free but as they got used to the researcher, their behaviours normalised.

The researcher observed the behaviours of the learners while teaching and learning were taking place. The first week was scheduled for observation and note-taking only. From the second week of observation onwards, the researcher could begin to participate and ask a few of the learners some questions based on what was being taught. The behaviours of the learners were noted on the schedule.

The observation of the learners' behaviours covered the following:

- | | |
|----------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| ▪ Interest in task | ▪ Correctness of response |
| ▪ Attention to task | ▪ Group behaviour |
| ▪ Confidence | ▪ Execution of instructions |
| ▪ Restlessness in movement | ▪ Reading competence |
| ▪ Skill displayed | ▪ Self-initiated remarks/suggestions |
| ▪ Knowledge displayed | ▪ Amount of effort exerted |
| ▪ Speed at work | ▪ Knowledge displayed |
| ▪ Obedience | ▪ Response to questions |
| ▪ Motivation | ▪ Self-initiated questions |

Five categories of qualitative evaluation were used, namely:

Best	Good	Fair	Poor	Poorest
5	4	3	2	1

The categorical guide (best, good, fair, poor & poorest) will aid the researcher to know each learner's learning behaviours with significant difference from general classroom learning behaviours, and as to whether there were any influences coming from the homes as well as from the school which might be the cause of such a behaviour.

Eventually, the results of this behaviour schedule will be triangulated with the data of the parents in an effort to understand the effect of the parents' actions on the learning behaviours of their children.

3.2.4.5 Correspondence with parents

(a) Definition and aim of correspondence

Communication between the school and parents is the foundation of a solid partnership. The National Standards for Parent/Family Involvement Programs (1996:10) view correspondence as a means of creating effective and positive relationships between parents and teachers. According to MacLeod (1996:123) and Overett and Donald (1998:353), correspondence with parents is a two-way sharing of information vital to learner success.

Parents should not only be seen as primary educators, but are also involved and engaged in the formal education of their children. The aim of correspondence with them is to have them working more closely with the school for the sake of their children and for the educators too. It helps the parents to understand how they could be more supportive of their children's work, which could yield beneficial effects for their children's education. Hornby (1999:69) adds that this does not only lead to more effective professional practice, but it also makes parents feel that an active interest is taken in their children.

Baker (1996:109) emphasizes that when correspondence is conducted with parents, the following questions should be taken into account:

- What types of tasks are learners expected to do?
- Is there any problem solving being done in class?
- Which problems seem the most difficult?
- Are there any parents who would like to contribute to the subject being covered?

For this research, the purpose of correspondence with parents was to find out operationally which parents of the target group would demonstrate involvement in the learning of their children by responding to correspondence from the school and whether their involvement had a positive influence on the learning behaviours of their children.

(b) Types of correspondence with parents

According to Hornby (1995:71), parents need to feel that they can contact the school at any time when they have a concern about their children. They all need to have effective channels of communication with the teachers who work with their children on a day-to-day basis. Therefore, educators need to develop effective written and oral communication skills and ensure that a wide range of communication options is open to parents.

Examples of communication are the following:

- The newsletter, which is easily produced and can address current concerns and interests and can as well inform a select group of parents of the happenings that impact on their children's lives.
- Spontaneous notes which can be written on the spur of the moment to be carried home by the learners.
- Parents' meetings which give parents and teachers time to talk about individual children.
- Individual consultations between the parent and the teacher which probably provides the single most important opportunity for parents to find out about their children's progress and how best to help them.

In a school where some parents are illiterate, it is especially important to use a variety of communication types.

(c) Requirements of correspondence with parents

MacLeod (1996:129) outlines the following guidelines in connection with correspondence with parents:

- The emphasis should be on doing things with parents rather than doing things for them. This means that parents and educators must work in collaboration with one another so that both have a part in the resource used to support the work.
- Families and communities should be seen as equal contributors, not just in terms of providing knowledge, but of understanding and using knowledge in the education process. It is the process of understanding that will open up opportunities in their children's learning.
- Parents and children will need to be given a greater awareness of what their own capabilities as learners are and a greater awareness that what they learn can give

them more power to influence the decisions that affect their lives. This implies that parents and children should be given opportunities to learn to be self-reflective and to learn how they can deliberately construct learning situations to their own advantage.

In a disadvantaged community the school would do well to create an awareness in the parents that very simple resources, available to everyone, could be utilized in the learning of their children.

(d) Advantages of correspondence with parents

According to Van Vuuren (1990:91), the following advantages should be taken into account when correspondence is conducted with parents:

- When parents are treated as partners and given relevant information by teachers, they would put into practice the involvement strategies they already know are effective, but have been hesitant to contribute.
- Meaningful comments or messages to parents will preserve good relations.

In addition to Van Vuuren's points, the following should be added:

- When there is a frequent and effective correspondence with parents, their involvement will improve their attitudes towards the school and they will become more positive.
- The more the parents become involved in school matters, the higher the learner achievement (Hornby 1995:70).

The above-mentioned points are relevant to this research. As mentioned in (a) above, the purpose of correspondence with parents in this research was to find out operationally which parents of the target group would demonstrate involvement in the learning of their children by responding to correspondence from the school, and whether their involvement had a positive influence on the learning behaviours of their children.

(e) Dangers to be avoided in correspondence with parents

- Long messages might not be understood and become meaningless to parents.
- Too many suggestions at any one time might confuse parents.
- Meaningless comments could demotivate parents.

The researcher tried to avoid these threats in her correspondence with parents by sending short, simple and straightforward, meaningful and understandable messages with her requests (refer to Appendix C).

(f) The use of correspondence with parents in this research

Correspondence with parents took place during the months of October and November 1998, taking the form of one letter per week for five weeks. This happened during the second period of observations with the learners. Simple and straightforward letters were developed in English (refer to Appendix C). Each letter contained a request and the parents' responses could, therefore, be noted operationally, as an indication over time of the measure of collaboration with the school.

The letters were translated into Tsonga by the educator for the sake of the parents, and translated back into English to control for accuracy of the translation. These letters were given to learners to deliver to their parents. The responses of the parents in the form of the number of objects requested which were sent to school and the promptness with which the request was carried out, were recorded by the educator.

The research consisted of four methods. It was hoped that looking from so many angles, it would be possible to achieve triangulation of the findings of the sub investigations.

The findings of the various components of the research will be fully discussed in the next chapter, after which an effort will be made to achieve an integrated understanding.

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