Practitioners' perceptions of play-based pedagogy on the holistic development of young children

by

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DECLARATION

I declare that the thesis, which I hereby submit for the degree Philosophiae Doctor at the University of Pretoria, is my work and has not previously been submitted by me for a degree at this or any other tertiary institution.

Signature 9 March 2022

Student No: 19303620

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'The author', whose name appears on the title page of this dissertation, has obtained, for the research described in this work, the applicable research ethics approval. The author declares that she has observed the ethical standards required in terms of the University of Pretoria's Code of ethics for researchers and the Policy guidelines for responsible research.

Signature: Date: 9 March 2022

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to:

My family who has supported and believed in me throughout this arduous process. You taught me to work hard for the things that I aim to achieve. Thank you for the unconditional love, encouragement and inspiration throughout this journey.

My husband, Vusumuzi William Ntshangase, who supported me with motivating words of encouragement in my ‘down’ moments upon which he endured and tolerated my inadequate attention during my busy schedules to complete this work.

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ABSTRACT

South Africa has made remarkable progress in trying to improve early childhood education by introducing the National Curriculum Framework (NCF) in 2015. The NCF encourages practitioners to engage young children in play-based activities to improve their physical, social, emotional, and cognitive development, as core developmental skills. This study aimed at investigating the perceptions and experiences of practitioners towards the implementation of play-based pedagogy in early childhood centres. The primary research question was, 'How do practitioners perceive and utilise play-based pedagogy for child holistic development?'.

The study followed the social constructivist theory to focus on the practitioners' experiences and views of play-based pedagogy and its impact on the development of young children. The qualitative approach was used to collect information through semi-structured interviews and lesson observations from five participants in the Mpumalanga Province. Purposive sampling was used to obtain participants who were experienced, conversant, and enlightened about the play-based pedagogy to gather rich and valuable information. Data was constantly compared step-by-step and source-by-source to interpretatively explore patterns and themes. Themes and sub-themes emerged, and they assisted the researcher to analyse the data and ultimately derived the findings and recommendations.

Through this study, the researcher observed that practitioners are partially implementing play-based teaching and learning in their classrooms. They have not yet fully embraced the concept of play-based pedagogy and its significance to teaching and learning in the early grades. Most early childhood classrooms, especially grade Rs, appear to adopt a more formal and academic approach to teaching and learning rather than an informal and exploratory approach.

Although practitioners displayed very strong understanding and perceptions on the importance of play-based pedagogy (PBP) on holistic child development, unavailability of resources, especially outdoor equipment, was cited as the major impediment for the implementation of play-based teaching and learning. The lack of support from centre managers and principals was hinted at as another contributing factor that hampered the implementation of play-based pedagogy by practitioners. Therefore, the researcher proposed that for the successful implementation of play-based pedagogy,

capacity-building training sessions should be planned for both principals and centre managers. Practitioners should be supported through ongoing professional development programs on play-based pedagogy. All capacity-building programs should be aligned and augmented with the National Curriculum Framework and the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement so that there will be uniformity and coherence in the implementation of play-based teaching and learning. The Department of Basic Education must ensure that all centres are appropriately resourced with the necessary outdoor and indoor play equipment to assist and encourage practitioners to explore a variety of resources in their daily planning for teaching and learning. Finally, the capacity-building programs should encourage and promote transformation in teaching and learning from a traditional teaching approach to a more social-constructivist approach.

KEYWORDS:

Early Childhood Development Centres; Early Childhood Development; holistic development; Play-based pedagogy; young children

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Abbreviation	Name
CAPS	Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement
ATP	Annual Teaching Plan
DBE	Department of Basic Education
DoE	Department of Education
ECC	Early Childhood Centre
ECDC	Early Childhood Development Centre
ECD	Early Childhood Development
MDoE	Mpumalanga Department of Education
MKO	More Knowledgeable Other
NCF	National Curriculum Framework
NELDS	National Early Learning Development Standards
PBP	Play-Based Pedagogy
PGR	Phenomenological Grounding Research
SCT	Social Constructivism Theory
SLP	Scripted Lesson Plan
SMT	School Management Team
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
ZPD	Zone of Proximal Development

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Play-based pedagogy (PBP) is perceived as a method of teaching and learning that supports and enhances the holistic development of young children within an educational learning environment (Hassinger-Das, Zosh, Hirsh-Pasek & Golinkoff, 2018). According to Solis, Khumalo, Nowack, Blythe-Davidson, et al (2019) many young children in South Africa are not exposed to play-based learning and user-friendly play environments in their centres. The learning environment plays a significant role in ensuring that young children are allowed to freely engage and explore their educational environment. Pyle and Danniels (2016) found that some education centres are hesitant to introduce and engage young children in play-based activities. According to Fleer (2015) play-based activities are activities that encourage young children to become involved in activities that are fun, stimulating and aids in child development. UNICEF (2018) agree that play-based activities develop the child holistically. Therefore, practitioners need to be respectful and take cognisance of a child's creativity and culture with the sole purpose of promoting physical, emotional, cognitive, and social development (Solis et al., 2019). Baumer (2013) further argues that the active engagement of young children in playful activities allows them to learn and participate with enthusiasm in social groups.

Play-based pedagogy depends on a complementary environment, which includes resources that allow for exploration, engagement, and access to information and knowledge to enhance young children's learning and development (Aubrey, 2017). McLean (2016) believes that young children's engagement with play-based activities enhances their understanding of basic social and physical skills, such as sharing resources and playing together (team spirit), to develop gross and fine motor skills. The researcher believes that conducive play-based environments should be created to provide maximised learning that enhances play and discovery skills. Play-based activities offer practitioners an opportunity to engage meaningfully and educationally with young children in classrooms. Ellison (2012) agrees that for the optimal social and physical development of the child, practitioners need to provide a supportive environment to encourage young children to participate in play-based activities. It is

therefore pertinent that the learning environment is appropriately resourced to encourage play-based teaching and learning; however, most South African early childhood development centres in rural areas are still poorly resourced (Ekeh & Venketsamy, 2021).

This research focused on practitioners' perceptions of play-based pedagogy on the holistic development of young children in the Mpumalanga province, Nkangala District, which included the following circuits: eMalahleni and Steve Tshwete.

1.2 BACKGROUND AND PROBLEM STATEMENT

South Africa has made remarkable advances and interventions to improve the early childhood development sector (DBE, 2015). One such intervention was the introduction of the National Curriculum Framework (NCF) for young children in 2015. This framework is intended to guide adults and practitioners on how young children need to be nurtured to develop holistically through an educational program. According to the DBE (2015), this framework promotes the development of young children through the implementation of various activities through play, discovery, exploration, investigation and meaningful involvement in teaching and learning. The framework further encourages practitioners to engage and encourage young children to become active participants in the learning process. Practitioners are allowed to implement different strategies to enhance the holistic development of young children through teaching and learning. Theme 2 in the NCF places emphasis on learning and development through play. This theme emphasises play and hands-on activities to promote active involvement in child development and developmental domains (DBE, 2015).

Play reinforces a variety of skills. According to Ellison (2012), the following skills are strengthened, reinforced and enhanced through play activities: creativity, good communication, sharing, teamwork, individual conduct in their community, and behaviour within the society. For this reason, the researcher believes that the importance of play in ECD cannot be over-emphasized since young children construct their knowledge of the world by interacting with objects and people, which primarily occurs during play-based activities (Moomaw, 2014). Aubrey (2017) argues that learning through play constitutes social, emotional, cognitive, and physical preparation for formal schooling. This argument is echoed by Hassinger-Das, Zosh, Hirsh-Pasek

and Golinkoff (2018) who state that formal learning in young children can be very informal and coincidental, which makes play a key methodology in their development.

Through a play-based teaching and learning approach, young children are allowed to develop and strengthen different core developmental skills which include social, physical, emotional, and cognitive. Despite the emphasis of the play-based approach in NCF, the incorporation of play in lesson planning and presentation is lacking in South Africa. According to Solis et al (2019) there are many reasons for the lack of implementation of play-based approach to learning. This can be attributed to the lack of understanding by practitioners and poor support from management (Solis *et al.,* 2019).

Since resources have a positive impact on teaching and learning, including holistic child development, engagement, playing and manipulation of resources should begin as soon as young children can grasp and hold objects (Whitebread, Neale, Jensen, Liu *et al..,* 2017). Therefore, the use of resources should be a continuous practice with young children because they are expected to use them to build, make, and construct structures, knowledge and meaning. According to Piaget, cited by Moomaw (2014), play is a significant activity in the early grades which offers young children the opportunity to develop certain development skills which are necessary for life. Moomaw (2014) further states that play is a way of life for young children who begin to explore, invent and understand their world. For this reason, Bergen (2018) states that young children need direct and immediate experiences that will allow them to be actively and purposefully involved in the play activity. The researcher has previously worked with young children and observed that some learners in grade one find it difficult to work as a team because their social and emotional skills were not well-developed during their informal schooling in early childhood education centres. The researcher further noticed that some young children were reluctant to play with others, always stood quietly in a corner or just refused to participate, despite them entering formal schooling at the required age. Furthermore, the researcher found that some children lacked fine motor coordination, and some were unable to even grip their pencils appropriately. This observation provided the researcher with motivation and interest in exploring the reasons behind children's under-developed developmental domains: social, physical, emotional and cognitive. According to Annual Report 2019/2020 on Early Childhood Development Centres (ECDCs), there are 32 000 ECD

centres that provide education to approximately 2,5 million children in South Africa. In the Constitution of South Africa (1996), every child has a right to access quality education. These centres are therefore responsible for providing all children with quality education and developmental programs; however, this is not the reflection in the country as many young children still access their formal schooling being ill-prepared for the readiness of school (Van Niekerk, Ashley-Cooper & Atmore, 2017). The ECD centres should be centres that promote and develop children holistically. In most instances, many practitioners are presenting teaching and learning using a formal school-based approach instead of play-based teaching and learning approach (UNICEF, 2018). Research by Fleer (2015) has found that play-based learning has a significant impact on the holistic development of young children. Play is a core way children learn and develop during their early childhood years and even beyond (Zosh, 2018). Play-based pedagogy promotes social, emotional, physical and cognitive developmental aspects in young children. These developmental aspects are very essential for school readiness and academic success (Wolfgang, Stannard, & Jones, 2010). The practitioners in centres are expected to ensure that all these developmental aspects are well nurtured for the holistic development of young children. The challenge that many practitioners face in centres is a lack of curriculum content and pedagogical knowledge to implement a play-based teaching and learning approach. Compounded with the lack of knowledge and skills in play-based pedagogy, the lack of appropriate resources in most rural centres has added to the neglect of play-based teaching and learning to promote the holistic development of young children. This study, therefore, focused on the practitioners' views and perceptions on play-based pedagogy and its importance and impact on the holistic development of young children in ECDCs.

1.3 RATIONALE

Learning is an integral part of the teaching and learning of young children (Pyle & Danniels, 2016). Practitioners are expected to effectively use play-based pedagogy as a requirement during the teaching and learning process. An understanding of the importance of play should influence centres and particularly practitioners in the deployment of play-based pedagogy (PBP) during child development. Provision of resources should be encouraged and should be the driving force behind teaching in centres. In my experience as an educator and subject advisor in Mpumalanga, I have noticed that many young children cannot perform basic physical activities, like running

and jumping. They often push each other and easily fall. This indicates weak muscle development. In the classroom young children struggle with good sitting posture, weak fine motor, like pencil grip, and weak balance, like struggling to walk on a balancing beam or straight line or stand on one leg. In my research, I have found that Bergen (2018) re-iterates the reasons for young children's poor developmental skills that it is due to the lack of play-based pedagogy in classrooms due to an increasing emphasis on academic skills in child development. It is through this observation that the researcher developed an interest in finding out how practitioner perceive and utilise PBP during their teaching and learning of young children in centres.

According to Pyle and Danniels (2016) since the 2000s there has been a shift towards recommending the use of play-based pedagogy (PBP) in early education curricula across different countries, including South Africa. In South Africa, the Department of Basic Education made a positive move by introducing a National Early Learning Development Standards (NELDS) in 2009. This was one of the steps taken towards the introduction of an approach leading to the holistic development of young children. In 2015, the National Curriculum Framework (NCF) was introduced as a guide and framework for the holistic development of young children using play. The NCF intended to assist practitioners in the design of contextual approaches to integrate play as the methodology of developing young children holistically (DBE, 2015). However, the researcher observed that play is still not yet appropriately incorporated into lesson planning and lesson delivery by practitioners in centres. Some young children still struggle with basic skills and are socially, cognitively, emotionally, and physically underdeveloped when they enter formal schooling (Grade 1).

Teaching in centres should be enjoyable. This is confirmed by Whitebread et al. (2017) who state that young children must play and have fun to learn. This intrigued the researcher to pursue the current study to determine practitioners' views on play-based pedagogy on the physical, emotional, social, and cognitive development of young children. The researcher's observation through the five years of NCF implementation has been that practitioners' pedagogical practices still highlight some gaps in the understanding of how PBP can impact the holistic development of young children. Although the NCF provides basic principles of play-based learning (DBE, 2015), most practitioners are not implementing this approach to teaching and learning in ECD centres. Learning through play is crucial for the holistic development of young

children. The NCF clearly articulates the importance of using play during teaching and learning. However, according to the researcher's observation, this critical play-based pedagogy is not getting the recognition it deserves. This study is significant because it will highlight the importance of play-based teaching and learning for the holistic development of young children. It will also provide practitioners with strategies of how to implement play-based activities to develop the different developmental domains.

1.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following questions were used to guide this study on practitioners' perceptions of play-based pedagogy on holistic development of young children:

1.4.1 Primary research question

How do practitioners perceive and use play-based pedagogy (teaching and learning) for the holistic development of young children?

1.4.2 Secondary research questions:

- What are practitioners' experiences of implementing play-based teaching and learning?
- What strategies can be used to support practitioners to implement play-based pedagogy in their centres?
- How do practitioners incorporate play-based pedagogy during the teaching and learning of young children?
- What forms of plays contribute towards the holistic development of young children?
- How do practitioners apply their knowledge and skills to assist young children to develop?
- How do play-based activities impact the holistic development of young children?

1.5. Aim and objectives

1.5.1 Aim

This study aimed to explore practitioners' perceptions of play-based teaching and learning.

1.5.2 Objectives

The objectives of this study were to:

- Explore the views and experiences of practitioners in implementing play-based pedagogy
- Determine what strategies can be developed to support practitioners in implementing play-based pedagogy
- Explore ways in which practitioners incorporate play-based activities into their teaching and learning
- Explore the forms of play that contribute to the holistic development of young children; and
- Understand the impact of play-based teaching on the development of young children.

1.5 CLARIFICATION OF CONCEPTS

1.5.1 Play-based Pedagogy

According to Baker, Krechevsky, Ertel, Ryan, Wilson et al. (2016) play-based pedagogy means to learn while at play and is distinct from the broader concept of play. Play respects young children's culture, creativity, and spontaneity in a way that promotes all domains of development (Baumer, 2013). Play-based pedagogy encompasses all methods and necessities that are considered to initiate learning processes (Mohamad & Baharuddin, 2017). According to Solis et al. (2019) the importance of play activities focuses attention on young children's emergent literacy and numeracy skills. Play also fosters the ability to collaborate and think creatively (Wolfgang, Stannard & Jones, 2010). Therefore, for this study, play-based pedagogy refers to the process in which young children are allowed to playfully explore, engage,

use available resources effectively and interact with those resources within their environment for their holistic development.

1.5.2 Pedagogy

Pedagogy is often referred to as the practice of the art, science, or craft of teaching, which includes the provision of learning environments for play and exploration (Whitebread et al. 2017). Pedagogy needs a systematic approach for the practice of playful learning and teaching (Mardell, Willson, Ryan, Ertel, et al., 2016). According to Wall, Litjens and Taguma, (2015) pedagogy helps practitioners to continually develop the necessary skills and knowledge, based on a shared understanding of when and how play can be supported. In this study, pedagogy refers to an approach that involves play as a teaching and learning method that looks at how young children learn, develop and interact through play.

1.5.3 Young children

A young child is a child who is between the ages of 0-9 years. These children are taught in the Early Childhood Education centre or in the Foundation Phase (that is 6-9 years). Any child between the ages of 4-5 years is often accommodated in an early childhood education centre. According to the DBE (2015) young children in the NCF are referred to as young children (babies) from birth to approximately 18 months, 'toddlers' between the ages of 18 to 36 months and 'young children from ages 3 to 4. The definition of a 'child' in the NCF supports the definition provided in the National Early Learning and Development Standards for Young Children Birth to Four Years (NELDS) (UNICEF, 2009). For this study, young children are those children who are between the ages of 4-6 years and who are accommodated in an ECD centre, both school and community-based.

1.5.4 Holistic development

Holistic development is an approach that incorporates learning and development (McLeod, 2018) and views the child in totality. Aubrey (2017) views holistic development as the development of a well-rounded individual where all aspects of development are embraced (physical, emotional, intellectual, and social). The growing body of world research emphasises the significance of focusing less on traditional milestones of academic development and concentrating more on the complete

development of the well-being of a child (UNICEF, 2018). In this study, complete development of the well-being of a child refers to the holistic development of young children, which incorporates the four developmental domains: physical, cognitive, emotional, and social.

1.6 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework is a collection of interrelated concepts (Simon & Goes, 2011). It guides the researcher and provides a structure showing how to define the study epistemologically, philosophically and analytically (Grant & Osanloo, 2014). Ravitch and Carl (2016) concur with this statement by stating that the theoretical framework assists researchers to situate and contextualise formal theories into their studies as a guide.

Akintoye, (2015) states that a theoretical framework supports the researcher in finding an appropriate research approach, analytical tools, and procedures for the research. This places the study into a social constructivist theoretical framework that believed that each practitioner's perceptions and views on play-based pedagogy were constructed through interaction with young children and their learning environment (Carolan, McIsaac, Richard, Turner & McLean, 2020). The theoretical framework consists of theoretical principles, constructs, concepts, and tenants of a theory (Grant & Osanloo, 2014). The researcher aimed to look at practitioners' perceptions on play-based pedagogy for the holistic development of young children**.** The researcher followed a constructivist approach because it views the child as a unique person with unique needs where interaction with adults, peers and resources are valued. Constructivism is a theory of knowledge (epistemology), which argues that humans generate knowledge and meaning from an interaction between their experiences and their ideas (Mogashoa, 2014). For this reason, the researcher believes that this theoretical framework is relevant to this study. The experience and ideas guide practitioners to strengthen young children's knowledge and understanding of concepts through interaction with their peers and the environment to promote their holistic development.

The relevance of these two strands, social and cognitive constructivism, in this study, rest on the fact that in cognitive constructivism, new knowledge is constructed through individual interaction of experiences and ideas. In social constructivism, knowledge is

explored alongside interaction with an adult and peers through cultural accommodation and assimilation.

Constructivism, according to Piaget (1964), is an approach used in education that sees human beings being capable of understanding information which they have constructed themselves (Ultanir, 2012). However, Vygotsky views the theory of constructivism as an approach that emphasises the use of language and physical signs to change social relations into psychological functions between the mind, symbolic mediation, and the environment (Topçiu & Myftiu, 2015). These two theorists reinforce the importance of interaction for socialisation and the construction of knowledge and ideas. The constructivist approach confirms that PBP requires young children to engage practically in their learning activities for their holistic development through social interaction, engagement, manipulation of objects and communicating with each other.

This approach, according to the researcher aligns appropriately with this study because the focus is on children's holistic development through play-based pedagogy and shared experiences. This experience encourages young children to interact with the environment, peers and available resources to strengthen their developmental domains. Social constructivism holds that all knowledge develops as a result of social interaction and language use processes (Bada, 2015). Furthermore, it is viewed as a shared phenomenon rather than an individual experience. Young children should actively participate in their learning processes as all young children are expected to construct their knowledge either formally or informally (Mogashoa, 2014). Fleer (2015) confirms that according to Vygotsky, young children construct their knowledge through interaction and play. In addition, development cannot be separated from social context and interaction. During the learning process, either through play or formally, young children begin to experience new concepts. These concepts are strengthened and interwoven into the young child's cognitive structure (McLeod, 2019). Through play-based learning and constructivism, new concepts are assimilated and accommodated into the children's schema. Similar to Piaget, Vygotsky also claims that young children are born with the basic abilities that, through interaction with the environment, they gradually develop, acquiring more effective mental strategies which are developed through play-based learning (Fleer, 2015; Mogashoa, 2014).

According to Vygotsky, both learning and development are collaborative activities that help children to develop their social and cognitive skills through teaching and learning (Wass & Golding, 2014 as cited by Ekeh, 2020). To support Vygotsky's views, Piaget (1964) believes that the classroom should provide a variety of activities to challenge young children to accept individual differences, increase readiness to learn and create opportunities to discover new ideas. The researcher believes that this is possible through the implementation of play-based activities. Piaget argues that children must construct new knowledge and grow through play-based learning experiences (Badakar, Thakkar, Hugar, Kukreja, et al., 2017). Furthermore, both theorists appreciate the essence of building knowledge by ensuring that a conducive environment is fostered with the relevant resources available at a young child's disposal. In addition, Piaget's theory strongly believes that a practitioner plays a vital role in teaching a child through interaction and instruction by involving the child in self-discovery as a pedagogy of learning (Thomas, Menon, Boruff, Rodriguez, et al., 2014). Piaget and Vygotsky both emphasise the importance and the role played by the child's environment for learning and the assistance from adults during learning for young children's holistic development, which was the focus of this study.

1.7 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In this section, the researcher elucidated the rationale behind the specific methods used in this study with an explanation of the research strategy that was employed.

1.7.1 The Interpretivist Paradigm

Interpretive research is a research paradigm that is based on the assumption that social reality is not singular nor objective but is shaped by human experiences and social contexts (ontology) (Nind & Todd, 2011). Hassan (2016) argues that the interpretive paradigm is underpinned by observation and interpretation, which are usually supported by an interpretivist who prefers a qualitative research method. Observation and interpretation are further explained by Morehouse (2011) as a way of gathering data. This was done by observing children performing certain activities and noting certain characteristics in natural settings.

This research was conducted from the viewpoint of the social constructivist theory since the researcher was keen to find out, among other things, practitioners' perceptions on play-based pedagogy on the holistic development of young children. The researcher's observation and concern weighed heavily on the fact that practitioners seem to be marginally infusing play-based pedagogy during teaching and learning even though the NCF gives strong emphasis to learning through play for holistic child development. The focus was on the perceptions of practitioners on play-based pedagogy as the strength of the constructivist theory. Creswell (2013) refers to constructivism as significant interpretations that participants provide about their personal experiences. The significance of the interpretations provided by participants made this approach the most suitable one since it produced a detailed interdisciplinary field, which encompassed a wider range of epistemological viewpoints, research methods, and interpretive techniques of understanding human experiences.

1.7.2 The Qualitative Research Approach

A qualitative research approach is an inquiry-based approach in which the researcher gathers the data in direct situations with selected participants (Aspers & Corte, 2019). This approach was given preference because data collection was conducted within the participants' natural settings (Creswell, 2013). Semi-structured interviews in a natural setting allowed participants to respond to questions according to their frame of reference compared to a confined structure of pre-arranged questions (Aspers and Corte, 2019). The relevance of this approach was because it uses interviews and observation to collect data which implied that the information gathered through it reflects personal views and perceptions of each participant (Ayres, 2019). Lesson observations were conducted where young children's participation during play-based activities was witnessed, including semi-structured interviews for each of the five practitioners. The idea was to ascertain the impact of play-based pedagogy on the holistic development of young children. All participants responded honestly and reliably concerning their own experiences. This approach was used to gather as much information as possible. The purpose was to gain more information on how play-based pedagogy is incorporated in play-based activities during teaching and learning and its impact on the holistic development of young children (Reiss, Tough & Whitty, 2010). This approach may easily derail the interpretation of what is observed, said, heard or understood (Creswell, 2013). To avoid this potential challenge of misinterpretation of

participants' responses, the researcher used pre-arranged questions for guidance during semi-structured interviews. Participants were allowed to engage practically and freely during interviews and classroom observations and insightful information was gathered. The researcher ensured that the situations were approached sensitively, and every endeavour was made to minimize discomfort among participants by creating a non-threatening environment for better, naturalistic responses (Mack, 2010).

1.7.3 Research design

Research design is the plan for connecting conceptual research problems to pertinent empirical research (Creswell, 2013). The research design articulates the data required, methods to be used to collect and analyse the data, and how the whole process of research design will answer the research questions. Semi-structured interviews and lesson observations were conducted and were analysed to generate the data required for this study. This design was given preference because of its in-depth approach and usefulness in testing whether the specific theory and model applies to the phenomenon in the real world (Ngozwana, 2018). The methods that were followed in this study are discussed below.

1.7.4 Research type

The qualitative phenomenological method is the approach that is most closely aligned with the objectives of this study. The qualitative methods are divided into five groups which are ethnography, narration, phenomenology, grounded theory, and case study (Crossman, 2020; Sauro, 2015). Phenomenology is a qualitative research method that seeks to understand how human beings experience a situation or phenomenon (Giorgi, 2012).

Creswell (2013) describes this method as the one that focuses on the commonality of a lived experience within a group to arrive at a description of the nature of a phenomenon. This method was more appropriate to this study as it uses a combination of methods, such as interviews, observations, and photographs to comprehend what was being observed (Maxwell, 2013). Through these methods, bias and preconceived assumptions about human experiences, feelings, and responses to situations were avoided (Sauro, 2015). The researcher relied on the participants' perceptions and experiences to provide insight into their innovations, motivations, and experiences (Kimberlee, 2019). This phenomenological, interpretivist research paradigm assisted

in gathering information from practitioners on play-based pedagogy. It also afforded the researcher with an opportunity to observe young children exploring various play-based activities during their teaching and learning process for holistic development.

1.8 DATA COLLECTION

Data collection is the process of gathering valuable information of interest in a standardised and established manner that enables the collector to find answers to the research problem (Kabir, 2016; Creswell, 2013). It forms an integral part of any research done in any field of study (Suri, 2011). It is fundamental for the data to be accurate to ensure the integrity of the research irrespective of the field of study or data preference (Naderifar, Goli & Ghaljaie, 2017). The researcher ensured the accuracy and integrity of data by selecting appropriate tools and instruments. Qualitative data is mostly non-numerical and descriptive or nominal in nature (Creswell, 2013). All data was collected in the form of words and sentences. These instruments with clearly defined guidelines were used to reduce the chances of errors during data collection (Naderifar, Goli & Ghaljaie, 2017). Data collection can mislead if not properly collected. Consequently, the following data collection process was followed to guard against invalid and unreliable data for this study.

1.9 DATA COLLECTION PROCESS

For the purpose of this study, the researcher followed purposive sampling to select participants. The researcher wanted to obtain participants who were conversant and enlightened about the play-based phenomenon which was the focus of this study (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Participants were pre-selected according to standards pertinent to the semi-structured interview questions of the study (Nieuwenhuis, 2013). The participants were practitioners who were currently teaching in grade R classes. This was done to provide rich data, views, and experiences about the play-based phenomenon (Creswell, 2013) and to bring different elevations of PBP knowledge, comfort, assurance, and a variety of values and attitudes (Francis, 2012).

To explore these different views, experiences, and perceptions of participants, semi-structured interviews were used. Semi-structured interviews were considered to encourage participants to communicate their perceptions, roles, and knowledge (Gill, Steward, Treasure & Chadwick, 2014) including that of the NCF. An interview schedule was developed and used as a guide to collect data which allowed the

researcher and the participants to pursue an idea and responses in more detail (Naderifar, Goli & Ghaljaie, 2017). The observation schedule was used to record everything the researcher observed during the data collection process. The success of data collection for this study relied on the purposive sampling method (Gill et al., 2014). The advantage of this method was that it allowed each sample to be selected to avoid the researcher's opinion from influencing the selection of the samples (Kabir, 2016).

1.10 DATA COLLECTION METHOD

The study used an interview schedule. The schedule was designed in a semi-structured format. To ensure proper collection of data, the observation method was also utilised. The semi-structured interviews, which were used as a guide, denote pre-arranged questions (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010) which also allow for the possibility for questions that were not determined prior (Maree, 2015). The observation schedule used assisted the researcher to note all the information deemed necessary for the study. All five lesson observations conducted included inside and outside the classrooms. That offered the researcher an opportunity to explore, investigate and witness different activities used by practitioners in various centres to holistically develop young children. This was carried out without any limitations on the scope of the research and the responses of participants (Creswell, 2013). All participants' views and opinions recorded were acknowledged for analysis purposes (Hammersley, 2014). The whole process was conducted after the permission was granted by the Provincial Department of Education in the Mpumalanga Province including the district, centres, practitioners and parents of children concerned. All semi-structured interviews were conducted within the location of all five selected centers to eliminate financial implications on the part of participants. Maximum participation was encouraged, and participants were encouraged to respond to the questions regarding their experience and knowledge of play-based pedagogy.

1.11 RESEARCH SITE

One community-based Early Childhood Development Centres (ECDC) and four school-based centres were the main focus for this study. The study was conducted in Mpumalanga province, Nkangala district, Steve Tshwete and eMalahleni Circuits as most of the researcher's observations and experiences took place. This selection was

mostly influenced by the NCF policy Theme 2 implementation, which encourages the use of play-based pedagogy in developing young children for holistic development.

1.12 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The researcher followed all ethical principles, as stipulated by the Ethics Committee of the University of Pretoria. Letters to the Mpumalanga Department of Education, district, and circuits of selected centres, heads or principals of identified ECDCs, practitioners, and parents of young children in the centres were issued, requesting permission to carry out the study. Data were only collected after letters of consent were received from all participating parties. Proper ethics like honesty, a harmless environment, agreement, privacy, and confidentiality, as defined by Brundrett and Rhodes (2013) were adhered to at all times in the study. Interviews, recordings, and observation schedules were done in accordance with the consent of all participating parties. Participants were guaranteed of their pure voluntary participation. Interviews were recorded willingly with the permission of the interviewees and all participants were assured of their right to privacy, confidentiality, and anonymity (Sandy & Dumay, 2011). All data collected from all participants were treated with high confidentiality (Brundrett and Rhodes (2013). This ethical approval is accessible from the University of Pretoria.

1.13 DATA ANALYSIS

According to Creswell (2013) data analysis includes the arrangement of data for scrutiny to display deeper understanding and diversity in analysis for clear meaning of collected information. Analysis of all data collected was done using verbatim transcription, organisation of themes, coding, and interpretation. The researcher systematically worked through each data content collected and interpreted the sequences of identified themes. The process of data analysis is well outlined in chapter 4, under 4.2.1 and 4.8.

1.14 CHAPTER OUTLINE

The study is outlined as follow:
Chapter 1: Introduction and Background

The researcher presented the introduction to the study supported by the background and problem statement which gave the overview including the rationale and research questions. The aims and objectives of the study were clearly outlined in this chapter to give a clear direction of the study. All key concepts were clarified, a brief discussion of the theoretical framework was given and data collection methodology and process were also presented in this chapter.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The chapter was engrossed in reviewing relevant literature. The researcher concentrated on the literature related to the phenomenon under investigation. This section further explored the study in a broader context by looking at the trends and debates in the literature that was based on practitioners' perceptions of play-based pedagogy on the development of young children. The chapter continued and explained the four developmental domains which play a vital role in developing young children. All discussions, arguments and explanations provided a clear understanding of different types of plays that are closely linked to the holistic development of young children.

Chapter 3: Theoretical Framework

This chapter discussed in depth the theoretical framework followed by the study. Over and above, the chapter explained the theory used and its relevance to the study. The social constructivism theory, as preferred for this study, is clearly outlined in this very chapter. This chapter further deliberated on the views of popular theorists, Piaget, Vygotsky and Brunner, in early childhood development.

Chapter 4: Research Methodology

This section presented a full description and discussion of the methodology and data analysis of this study. In this chapter, the sampling process followed for data collection and the instruments utilised thereof was explored. Data analysis as per the interpretative paradigm was drawn in this section of the study.

Chapter 5: Data Analysis and Results

The analysis and outcomes of the study was presented in this chapter. Data coding and profiling of participants were highlighted according to themes. The authentication of findings was supported by raw data from the participants.

Chapter 6: Interpretation of Findings, Conclusions and Recommendations

In this final chapter, the researcher highlighted the key findings and implications these findings have on the utilisation of play-based pedagogy to develop young children. The recommendations this chapter made highlighted how ECD centres can strengthen the implementation of play-based pedagogy in activities to support the holistic development of young children. To improve on the utilisation of PBP in centres, the chapter concluded with suggestions for further research.

1.14 SUMMARY

This chapter served as a framework for the study as the synopsis in this chapter included the rationale, background, research questions, and concept clarification. A literature overview, theoretical framework, and methodology were also considered and briefly explained. A brief description of the ethical considerations was also presented.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

In Chapter 1 the researcher presented an orientation of the study which included a discussion on the background, problem statement, rationale, research questions, and concepts clarification. Furthermore, the researcher presented a brief preliminary literature review, theoretical framework and the research methodology.

In this chapter, an in-depth literature review was presented on play and its importance to teaching and learning, different types of play, play-based pedagogy, growth, the philosophy of play-based history and global perspectives of play. Furthermore, this chapter also presented a detailed discussion on practitioners' views of play and play-based pedagogy on the holistic development of young children focusing particularly on the physical, social, emotional, and intellectual/cognitive development.

2.2 EXPLANATION OF PLAY

Play is a natural mode of learning through which young children engage and explore the world to enhance their development unconsciously. According to Zosh et al (2017) play is an integral part of children's everyday lives, which incorporates pleasure, exploration, and flexibility during child development. Fleer (2015) acknowledges that play is a powerful medium through which children develop and actively engage with the world around them (immediate environment) for conceptual and educational purposes. Aronstam and Braund (2016) agree that daily interactions, exploration, and engagement of their environment help young children understand the world around them. The researcher believes that play, in its nature, is a process of growth and development. A child's immediate environment has great potential to develop the child physically, socially, emotionally, and cognitively. The potential of play has been explored by different researchers in diverse contexts; for example, children find many objects to play within any environment where they find themselves, such as their home or early developmental centres (Pyle & Danniels, 2016).

During play, children get to understand the objects they play with and eventually derive meanings and thoughts, which contribute to the development of skills and capabilities, such as social skills, cognitive capabilities, and emotional understanding (Fleer, 2010). Brunner (2006) cited by Smidt (2011) supports the potential of play as a process and mode of learning, which suggests that play is not only an activity but aids in child development. Play brings joy and fun to children. Major (2016) and Hassinger-Das et al. (2018) agree that play is much more than just fun. It is an incredibly significant act where children develop and learn, whilst playing on their own (solitary play) and when they play with others (social play).

Play adds value to a child's development and this is achieved when children engage and explore play-based activities in the learning environment. Hassinger-Das et al. (2018) shares similar views with Fleer (2015) that play activities provide young children the opportunity of interacting socially with their peers. During this interaction, they are learning from each other (peers). Furthermore, the activity constructs the meaning of their world through exploring and engagement. Despite the importance of play-based learning, Solis et al. (2019) state that many young children in South Africa are not exposed to learning through play. Both the Department of Basic Education [DBE] (2015) and Danniel and Pyle (2017) recommend that play needs to be utilised during child learning and development. Play needs to be perceived as an activity for a child to take seriously (Christian, 2012). This will encourage children to engage and explore their environment, thereby, learning and developing. Different definitions describe playing as a supportive activity, which assists in a child's development in the environment to which they are exposed. It is crucial to understand how young children learn and develop through play by ensuring that resources are available, and the environment is conducive for their development.

2.3 EXPLANATION OF PLAY-BASED PEDAGOGY

Learning through play generates joy and fun that amplifies children's interest and motivation, which leads to their enhancing development and growth (Whitman, 2018). Therefore, play-based pedagogy (PBP) can be perceived as an approach that allows young children to engage, explore, experiment, and experience different life skills using available resources within their environment to enhance their developmental domains: social, physical, emotional and cognitive. Weisberg, Hirsh-Pasek and

Golinkoff (2013) view PBP as an approach that involves playful and child-directed activities with a degree of adult guidance and scaffolded learning assistance. UNICEF (2018) defines PBP as children's initiative, decision-making process, and a self-choice activity that controls their experience. According to Baker, Krechevsky, Ertel, Ryan et al. (2016) PBP is an effective approach where the practitioner recognises that young children learn through an active, hands-on, and playful environment. Whitebread et al. (2017) view play-based pedagogy as a concept that emphasises the importance of tactile stimulation and the use of resources for young children's perpetual development. Baumer (2013) describes PBP as a joint-play that promotes the holistic development of children. Solis et al. (2019) authenticate PBP as an approach that allows young children to develop by exploring their curiosity, ownership, and enjoyment through the utilisation of stimulating resources. The paragraphs below will explore the growth, philosophy, and proponents of PBP.

2.3.1 The Growth of Play Pedagogy

Play is a defining feature of human development. PBP involves free and guided play teaching and learning activities. Learning through play is central to quality early childhood pedagogy, education, and development. According to Zosh et al. (2017) educators and trailblazers in early education like Maria Montessori, Stanley Greenspan, Friedrich Froebel, Rudolf Steiner, to mention a few, have recognised that the way to teach a child is through engagement and interaction with nature and the environment, which is supported by their interest and practical experiences that they have gathered during the process of development. Since early 2000, there has been much emphasis placed on the use of PBP in the early years of child development in ECDCs (Pyle & Danniels, 2016). Young children learn through solitary, cooperative, and creative play when they drop, bite, and hit objects (Whitebread et al., 2017). Hassinger-Das et al. (2018) concur with Fleer (2015) that PBP is crucial for the holistic development of young children. Since time immemorial play activities for young children have continued to be an integral part of an educative-developmental program, but in a more sophisticated atmosphere, however, political impacts have created more debate than hospitable environments (Wright, 2011). The creation of a hospitable environment in centres gives young children an opportunity to interact with others which assists them with the development of social and emotional aspects (Millei &

Kallio, 2018). These aspects prepare young children to share the space with others and accommodate each other.

During the pre-industrial era – 1850 to 1900s, humankind's concerns have been to provide education, skills, and competencies right from birth to adulthood. In the absence of formal schooling, games and play remained the primary vehicle of trust in the development of young children (UNICEF, 2018). According to Gastrow and Oppelt (2018) human understanding of play benefits young children in the development of science and technology. Kelly, Boulin, Laranjo, Lee-Sarwar, Chu, et al. (2019) confirmed that play ideas were exchanged among a broader population with the improvements in communication channels, research, and publications. According to the researcher, as play pedagogy grew, so did the strengths and number of hypotheses, theories, and discourses on play and play pedagogy.

According to DBE (2015) from a curriculum perspective, play is placed under a regulated framework defined in time, place, nature, and resources. This perspective focuses on each child and their progress. The researcher, therefore, believes that play activities are an integral part of teaching and learning as it is articulated in the National Framework. Despite, play being mandated in the ECD policies, Solis et al. (2019) and Squires (2017) have identified that most South African young children are not exposed to play-based teaching and learning in their education centres. They also state that these centres are not child-friendly and conducive to encouraging play activities. For this reason, many young children are deprived of the true freeness of play-based teaching and learning. In order for teaching and learning activities to be incorporated in the play-based approach, it needs to encompass free-choice, spontaneously unpredictable and directed, controlled, and supported by resources and an adult who is a practitioner (Fleer, 2015).

Traditional perspectives tend to be limiting and reductive to the child's choices in defining and experiencing learning through play (UNICEF, 2018). Post-developmental theorists emphasise the socio-cultural situatedness of learning in play, where the child is viewed as an active participant in their cultural community (Baumer, 2013). According to Pellegrini et al. (2012) an educational or pragmatic perspective of play-based teaching and learning has far-future development of the child's social, educational, and economic goals. Therefore, Early Childhood Development Centres

(ECDCs) are pioneers for ensuring the holistic development of young children through their planned teaching and learning activities. These centres should be improved centres with the necessary resources that will develop young children holistically by adopting a play-based approach (Hassinger-Das et al., 2018). The researcher is of the view that most ECD centres operate within the educational-pragmatic perspective and are more curriculum-connected rather than play-based. The researcher, therefore, agrees with Solis et al. (2019) that many young children are not exposed to play-based teaching and learning since ECD centres are curriculum-driven. Fleer (2015) articulates that the capacity to engage in play activities and the play itself positively impacts the child's holistic development.

A play-based approach focuses on understanding children's choices, meanings, and intentions in a highly compressed, air-tight manner. Kaushik (2019) states that there are versions of the play perspective in the pragmatic, idealism, humanism, post-developmental, and critical perspectives. In the latter, play is perceived as a mode of existence. The central principle of these perspectives is that children have inner abilities and potentials, which can be exposed through play (Dunphy & Farrell, 2011). These abilities and potentials of the young child encourage them to engage in play-based activities. Research by Wolfgang, Stannard & Jones (2010) state that as children get involved in the play activity, they become so engaged that their mood and spirits are uplifted. . It is therefore imperative that practitioners take into consideration the kinds of activities that are planned for young children (Zosh et al., 2017).

In contrast to the scientific approach and its repertoire of rules and regulations Isaacs et al. (2019) suggest that play should be conducted using the knowledge of the practitioner. Wolfgang, et al. (2010) state that a practitioner's main job should be to organise the environment; plan play activities and resources; plan alongside children; and observe play and assess play. A more embracing strategy would be to adopt play as liberal, one that should be anchored in the pedagogy of play that fosters play-based approach and it results in the child's spontaneous development (Squires, 2017).

2.3.2 The Philosophy of Play-based Pedagogy

PBP is an approach that involves both the child and an adult becoming involved in the teaching and learning activity. Children are encouraged to choose their play resources and activities, while an adult facilitates and guides the process. The concept of PBP

and the importance of tactile stimulation and the use of resources for young children's perceptual development are highly emphasised (Ardiel & Rankin, 2010). Philosophically, it means the systematic and critical development of fundamental skills that arise in everyday life and through the practice of other disciplines, such as core skills, caregiving, curiosity, ownership, and enjoyment, are crucial (Solis et al., 2019). In essence, the concept of philosophy is not without variations. Nonetheless, philosophy is about how one thinks of or about reality and attitude, and concurrently about how one behaves and the reasons one exploits in justifying both their attitude and behaviour (Tomasello, 2018). It would be reasonable to assume that there would also be a multiplicity of the conceptualisations of philosophy in PBP.

It is of concern for practitioners' views and interpretations of play pedagogy as a forerunner, to a methodology of holistic development of the child. Pyle and Danniels, (2016) states that developing a strong argument for the methodology and the philosophy of PBP has always been with humankind. The philosophical function of PBP is to understand how learning through play can become a central role in ECDCs (Baumer, 2013). As a project, PBP aspires to transform how practitioners, policymakers, and the government think about play and PBP. It further seeks to build strategic capabilities for individuals and ECDCs that wish to adopt, adapt, and sustain PBP in their space. Research around PBP focuses on systems, structures, and strategies that would catalyse transformation towards play-based learning, its deployment, calcification, and objectification in ECDCs (Isaacs et al., 2019). The four main points of this research focused on:

- Practitioners' views and incorporation of play during teaching and learning (play and PBP) that encourages learning through play
- The adaptation of PBP to address different developmental disciplines, age levels, and cultural contexts
- The different cultures of the centres that promote learning through play and the experiences, resources, and available space including the environment; and
- Empowering practitioners to increase utilisation of play-based pedagogy for learning through play strategy.

2.3.3 Advantages of Play-based Pedagogy in early grades

Through play-based activities, young children discover and develop their interests, abilities, learn new skills, and build their vocabulary (McLeod, 2019). Therefore, the process of holistic child development cannot supersede the rapport between play and play-based learning (Mardell, Willson, Ryan, Ertel et al., 2016). According to Hassinger-Das et al. (2018) PBP maintains the exploratory nature of free play while also incorporating developmental scaffolding (guided play) activities by an adult to support children's mastery of a specific learning goal. The researcher believes that young children can develop much-needed life skills through play-based activities when they are given enough opportunities while young, especially access to a conducive environment and resources that support their holistic development.

The environment should allow young children to initiate and embrace play as an instrument of engagement and self-actualization (Vogt, Hauser, Stebler & Rechsteiner et al. 2018). The play-based approach to teaching and learning creates a greater space where young children develop holistic skills, like sensory-motor, symbolic and construction, communication, sharing, and critical thinking that fosters creativity and imagination (Wolfgang, Stannard & Jones, 2010). These skills make play-based pedagogy critical for young children's development since they learn to solve problems, get along with others, and develop their fine and gross motor skills (Solis et al., 2019).

The rationale for employing the play-based pedagogy in ECD is that early learning needs to be based on playful activities even though the understanding of play itself varies (Pyle & Danniels, 2016). PBP holds great value in developing young children in the early years by encouraging pre-literacy and language skills, creativity, and imagination (Weisberg, Hirsh-Pasek & Golinkoff, 2013). Learning while playing emphasises the role of the practitioner as the one who ensures that play-based learning is properly facilitated for the holistic development of children (Gasteiger, 2015). The development of young children requires this important methodology, supported by pedagogical resources, during play-based learning from an early age (Hassinger-Das et al., 2018). The importance of implementing PBP for young children's holistic development becomes a necessity, especially for differentiation of learning in centres (Wood, 2009). Play pedagogy teaches young children how to behave and constitutes social preparation for formal schooling (Squires, 2017).

Weisberg, Hirsh-Pasek and Golinkoff (2013) agree with Squires (2017) that PBP is an important pedagogical approach to support academic and social outcomes. Therefore, PBP is regarded as an activity that enhances a child's holistic development through a range of play-based activities, which promotes areas like numeracy and literacy Sarkar (2020). Young children voluntarily engage in purposeful play-based activities, for example imaginative, constructive, creative, physical, solitary, and cooperative to name a few, for their development (Ali, Hussain & Constantino, 2018). Play, in an overall perspective, is viewed as a child-centered directed activity with minimal adult interference for the maximum and holistic development of young children.

2.3.4 Play-based Pedagogy and Holistic Development of a Child

PBP and holistic child development both emphasise the child's engagement and creative learning as beneficial towards the development of young children. According to Sarkar (2020) holistic child development refers to the development of physical, emotional, social, and cognitive abilities in a child to be ready for the demands and challenges of everyday life. According to Solis et al., 2019, some young children lag in their developmental domains (cognitive, physical, emotional, and social development) due to poverty, poor health, malnutrition, and an un-stimulating environment, which detrimentally hinders their potential holistic development. According to UNICEF (2018) a child's holistic development is mainly enhanced by a well-arranged and stimulating environment that promotes learning through play to support the implementation of curricular goals and objectives.

During play-based activities in the classroom, young children show a keen interest in the play activities and become enthusiastically motivated to participate. Their participation in play-based activities has a positive effect on the growth and development of the various domains (Bubikova-Moan, Hjetland & Wollscheid, 2019). According to Fleer (2015) when children are engaged, relaxed, and motivated by the play-based activities and the age-appropriate resources they show a keen interest in learning and become socialised in the classroom. The researcher believes that if practitioners invest their time in carefully planning play-based activities this will enhance and motivate young children to have a positive attitude towards school. Furthermore, these activities will strengthen and develop young children's social,

cognitive, physical and emotional domains. The following paragraphs present a discussion of each of the developmental domains.

2.3.4.1 Emotional Development

Practitioners' interaction with young children helps develop some common actions in young children, like smiling, laughing, crying, sulking and pouting (Cekaite & Andrén, 2019). According to Whitebread et al. (2017), emotional development refers to recombining, expressing, and managing feelings at different stages of life, and having empathy for others. Culture also plays an important role as young children learn to express their feelings through learned emotions by smiling, showing excitement, embarrassment, and pride (Hearron & Hilderbrand, 2010). Some emotions predominantly take place in the child's immediate environment, like home and Early Childhood Development Centres (ECDCs). Similar to cognitive development, emotional development should be considered from a bio-ecological perspective that highlights the mutual inclusion of the dynamic systems and functional theory when developing young children (Samuelson, Jenkins & Spencer, 2014). The socio-ecological milieu, where the child develops, is inundated with transitional experiential feelings, expressive behaviour, psychological patterning, social contexts, and physical contexts that impact the child's emotional development (UNICEF, 2018).

In this regard, the child seeks feelings of security, trust, and enjoyment. Henceforth, individuals design and shape their emotional functioning to serve their self-efficacy and co-adaptive needs. The home and the ECD centre should be concerned about developing emotional competencies skills. Some of those skills include realising that the self and anybody else may display emotions disproportionate to their inner feelings (Jones, Bouffard & Weissbourd, 2013).

2.3.4.2 Social Development

Young children need the opportunity to engage and interact with others to learn and be sociable. According to Whitebread et al. (2017), social development is the process of learning skills and attitudes that enables a child to interact and engage harmoniously with others. Louw (2014) further describes social development as the growth of a child's relationship with other people and how the child behaves. In social development, children learn and develop empathy, whilst also perfecting their skills in

listening, sharing ideas, expressing themselves, negotiating, engaging, reaching compromises, and considering other people's perspectives (Mraz, Porcelli & Tyler, 2016). As children immerse themselves in the world of others, they learn the benefits and risks of trust, how to handle and deal with those who cannot be trusted, and build friendships based on trust and experiences they have created with others. As children socialise through play, they learn to balance autonomy and interdependence, thus reinforcing the skills and dispositions of collaboration (Project Zero & Reggio Children, 2001; Paley, 1990; Frost et al., 2012).

2.3.4.3 Physical Development

For their physical development, young children should be supported by well-structured physical activities, as these can offer a substantial benefit to the child when implemented in a responsible and developmentally appropriate manner. According to Otto, Visser and McKee (2018) physical development is how the body increases in skill and becomes more complex in its performance. These skills need a combination of physical and mental abilities to understand the world (Whitebread et al., 2017). Louw (2014) further indicates that physical development influences a child's cognitive, personality, and social development. Physical development influences cognitive development, which stimulates the development of brain neurogenesis (the process by which new neurons are formed in the brain) and synaptogenesis (the process of brain development) through exploratory and locomotive movement of the child's body (Louw, 2014).

Physical skills are essential for memory development, performing movement, and kinaesthetic development of young children (development of both fine and gross motor skills) (Santrock, 2017). Therefore, it can be concluded that physical development relates to the growth and skill development of the body's senses, the brain, and muscles. The more physical activity a child engages in, the better the brain develops, and their memory is improved (UNICEF, 2018). Memory is a fundamental capacity that cements emotional, social, physical, and cognitive functioning (Pathman & Bauer, 2020). The active body and mind create and prepare a pathway for formal and informal child development. The importance of all four developmental domains is equally important, therefore no particular domain is overemphasised as each of the domains complement one another.

2.3.4.4 Cognitive Development

Young children do not only develop physically, socially, and emotionally during early childhood, but they are also developing cognitively. Cognitive development is the construction of thought processes that include remembering, problem-solving, and decision-making from childhood through adolescence and in adulthood (McLeod, 2018). During the development of thought processes, young children engage, explore and explain, observe, and interact with their immediate environment (Whitebread et al., 2017). The play-based approach to teaching and learning provides an excellent environment for fostering young children's in-depth cognitive development (Bergen, 2018). According to Mardell et al. (2016) this environment permits how children perceive, think, and understand their world through the interaction of inherited and learned skills. The development of the cognitive domain helps to improve a child's psychological development through information processing, which contributes to brain development (Archana & Sreedevi, 2021). Inadequate implementation of play-based teaching and learning in ECD centres will deprive young children of the prospect to develop cognitively. Figure 1 below represents the four developmental domains discussed above and their relatedness, which is shown by the two circular arrows at the centre. The two circular arrows also show the non-static nature of the relationship among the four domains. Related play types are also indicated next to each domain to show the link.

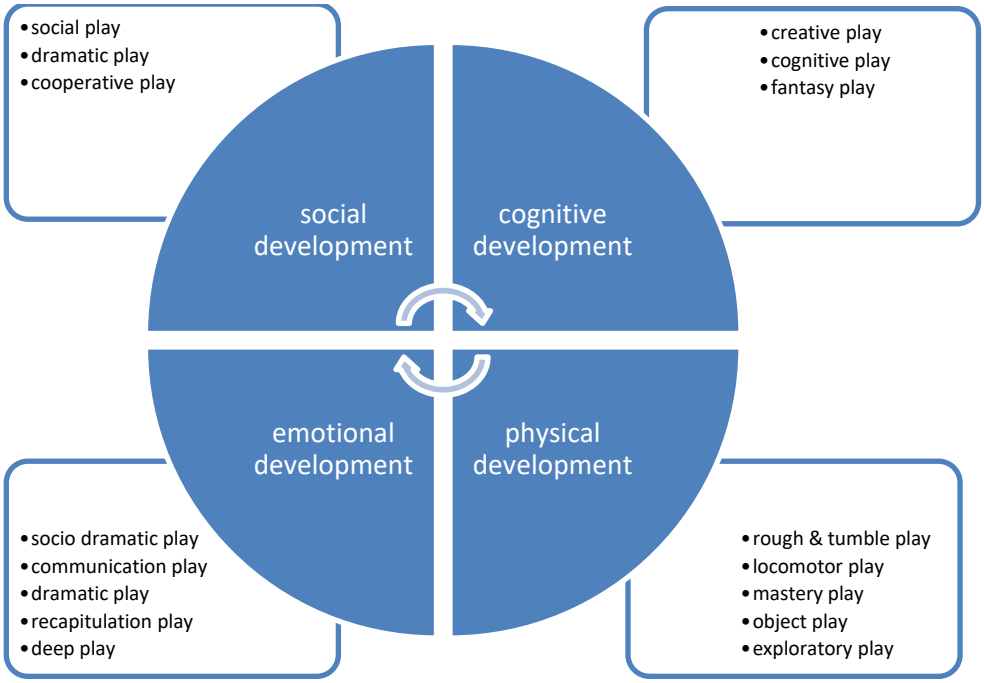

Figure 1: **Relating play types with domains of holistic development (Adapted from Bandura, 1977)**

2.3.4.5 Global Perspective of Play

Studies conducted in Sweden and Denmark on the views of teachers on how young children learn indicate the significance of engaging young children in their learning and development (Broström, Johansson, Sandberg & Frokiaer, 2012). This literature indicates that there is an increasing focus on quality provision in early childhood education to support the development and learning of young children. In recent decades, the understanding of how young children develop has changed considerably. The practitioners are of the view that children learn by seeing how others act and support a group-oriented approach where interaction is awarded great freedom (Khalil, Aljanazrah, 2022). This is because the main focus is for the children to acquire certain knowledge and skills which also advance to knowledge and understanding of being part of the teaching and learning (Khalil, Aljanazrah & Hamed, 2022).

Children explore and learn by actively interacting with their environment. Studies in Sweden and Denmark concur with studies conducted in Greece and Russia that the younger children interact and engage in their environment through play, they begin to strengthen and enhance their developmental domains (Rauf & Bakar, 2019). In

Sweden and Denmark, play-based as a concept is viewed as an act where children enter into fiction and pretend plays. During play, children are more autonomous because they have an inner base for control, as they decide what to play and how to play (Gastrow & Oppelt, 2018). Children are perceived as active participants and "co-constructors" in their learning and development (Whitebread et al. 2017). Play and play-based learning, especially role-playing are viewed as necessary for the development of abstract and cognitive thinking (Dzamesi & Van Heerden, 2020). The concept of play refers to the enrichment of children's learning and development through meaningful learning experiences (Hassinger-Das et al, 2018). These studies created the platform for young children to freely experience learning through play and also an opportunity to discover their competency through a play-based approach (Solis et al., 2019). Children are seen as independent individuals who can choose their activities if given a variety of resources to choose from (Dunphy & Farrell, 2011). The learning environment plays a crucial role in child development if a conducive environment is created. A conducive learning environment allows for interaction during learning.

The use of different activities is perceived as critical for child development. These activities are used daily during teaching to positively benefit child development. Play is regarded as an important resource for the development of young children. The impact that play-based learning has can be observed when children begin with formal schooling. Play-based learning and development transform from the teacher-centered method of teaching to a child-centered way of learning and development of young children (Whitebread et al., 2017).

In Ghana, the use of play-based teaching has received more commitment from the government and ensured that curriculum facilitation of children's learning through play-based pedagogy is emphasised (Dzamesi & Van Heerden, 2020). They further indicated that studies conducted in this African country show that kindergarten teachers of young children are ill-prepared to implement the recommended play-based pedagogy successfully. The reasons cited for this unpreparedness refer to the inadequate content coverage of play-based pedagogy during teacher training (Agbagbla, 2018). Lack of in-service training is also viewed as a contributing factor to the unreadiness of play-based teaching in Ghana (Abdulai & Batimah, 2018).

Furthermore, overcrowding and unavailability of resources are highlighted as adding factors to the non-utilisation of play-based learning (Agbagbla, 2018). However, the challenge that Ghana has is not only peculiar to them but is also common in the South African context as some centres do not have necessary play equipment and as well children are overcrowded in their classrooms (Solis et al., 2019). Although the curriculum in Ghana emphasises learning through play, teachers and practitioners are not yet well informed on how to incorporate play into their pedagogy in classrooms (Dzamesi & van Heerden, 2020). This problem seems to be common even in South Africa. The incorporation of NCF during teaching and learning in centres is still a challenge (Solis et al., 2019).

In South Africa, practitioners mostly prefer structured and predictable play (Aronstam & Braund, 2015). Although play pedagogy is mandated in the national curriculum framework (DBE, 2015), this mandate is not always translated into practice (Solis et al., 2019). Practitioners are still found to be more concerned with keeping order and discipline than focusing on using play to develop young children (Jensen, Kvalsvig, Taylor, Sibisi, Whitebread, et al., 2021). As a result of the challenges regarding curriculum matters, lack of knowledge of play-based pedagogy, resources and support has forced practitioners to resort to the traditional teaching approach. Play-based teaching and learning do not take place in most South African early childhood centres (Jenson, et al, 2021). Most teaching and learning take place through a didactic teacher-directed approach (Solis et al. 2019). Ekeh and Venketsamy (2021) state that practitioners in ECD centres need to carefully consider incorporating play-based pedagogy into their classrooms and general practices. The utilisation of play-based teaching and learning develops engaging, organising and interaction skills among learners which will assist them to become socially, emotionally, physically and cognitively mature (Whitebread et al., 2017). The current situation in South Africa is that there is still a gap in the incorporation of play-based teaching and learning in centres due to various factors. Rahman (2014) believes that it is important to establish intervention programs like in-service training for practitioners to enhance the quality of teaching practices and also give assurance and support for the effective implementation of the curriculum focusing on play-based pedagogy. The importance of play therefore cannot be separated from children's play, learning and development (Pyle & Danniels, 2016).

The development and introduction of the National Curriculum Framework in South Africa intended to reinforce the utilisation of play in early childhood classrooms. This was driven by the fact that the development of young children in grade R classes has taken the direction of formal schooling, viewed as “watered down grade 1”, instead of being play-based. Young children should not be deprived of the opportunity of learning and development through play (DBE, 2015).

2.4 FORMAL AND INFORMAL PLAY

It is important to distinguish between the types of play to understand the effects of play on a child’s development. Pyle and Danniels (2016) indicate two play types, namely free and guided plays. Each type has its significance for young children’s development and growth. During free play, children should have the freedom to explore their environment and resources. Practitioners and other caregivers should accommodate the unique needs of each child towards their development. According to Hassinger-Das et al. (2018); Zosh (2017); Pyle and Danniels (2016), free play, also known as informal play, refers to an unstructured, voluntary, child-initiated, or child-led activity, with no structured rules. This form of play allows children to develop through exploration and engagement. A young child’s imagination is triggered by the various objects they encounter in the environment (Irvin, 2019). Pyle and Danniels (2016) further explain that free play, as an activity, comes naturally (informally) from a child’s natural curiosity, love for discovery, and enthusiasm. Free play activities include creative engagement using blocks, and moulding clay and dolls, among other things (Whitebread et al, 2017).

Zosh (2017) expands the definition of free play as an activity that develops motor skills (fine and gross), increasing the child’s growth and health. Constructive learning is more likely to happen in free play if the young child shows interest and enthusiasm towards the activity. Hassinger-Das et al. (2018) and Zosh (2017) affirm the definition of free play, adding that it is a pedagogical tool through which children can invent and learn in a positive and conceptually rich manner. Through free play, children spontaneously engage and interact with the world around them to receive enjoyment, excitement, and creativity, which helps them to develop holistically. Children develop holistically through play, especially when they are guided and encouraged to explore and engage with the resources in their environment (UNICEF, 2018). According to

Fleer (2015) young children begin to acquire social, emotional, and cognitive skills through play. Therefore, practitioners must encourage and allow children to become involved in free play.

Pyle and Danniels (2016) advocate for guided play. Guided play is defined as a play in which children's activities are scaffolded by a knowledgeable adult, allowing children's actions to lead towards the goal of learning (Zosh, 2017). Pyle and Danniels (2016) and Hassinger-Das et al. (2018) all view guided play as a formal and structured activity with some level of adult guidance, involvement, and supervision. During guided play (formal play), the young child still takes the lead in the activity (Fleer, 2015) but according to Pyle and Danniels (2016), adult intervention is a prerequisite to enhance the discovery approach to learning and development.

Guided play creates an environment in which young children play within a structured learning context created by an adult for meaningful learning and development (Siraj-Blatchford, 2019). The advantage of guided play is that it is taking place within a structured learning environment, where activities are well-planned and assessed. These activities provide young children with multiple developmental and feedback opportunities (Pyle & Danniels, 2016). Lillard, Lerner, Hopkins, Dore, Smith and Palmquist (2013) believe that free play or guided play both have the same intent and are of equal importance to the young child's development. They further emphasise that both types of play encourage fun, engagement, exploration, flexibility, and skills.

It is further iterated that when children are involved in the play, they draw strength and courage from the process of engaging, exploring, and discovering the world around them through their immediate environment (Bruner, Vygotsky & Piaget as cited by Smidt, 2011). Fleer (2011) states that play should not be too academic or formalised. It should be both formal and informal to ensure balance in child development while preparing for formal schooling (Dunphy & Farrell, 2011; Squires, 2017).

2.4.1 Types of Play

Children enjoy a variety of play-based activities; particularly because play encourages free (informal) and guided (formal) learning, which are crucial for the holistic development of young children. Children who appreciate playing are likely to be excited about formal schooling in the future (Whitebread et al., 2017). According to Hassinger-Das et al. (2018) different types of play offer young children the potential to

increase intrinsic motivation to learn, especially if the play activity is integrated into a formal learning context.

Young children develop holistically through play without realising that when they are playing, they are learning (UNICEF, 2018). Developing while playing is a natural component of play activities. Lillard et al. (2013) believe that communicating during play enhances the natural interaction in a child's life. Since play and child development are natural components of children's play activities, communication skills learned during these activities serve as a basis for later development in society (Dunphy & Farrell, 2011).

This is evident in young children in different societies in the world. Squires (2017) agree that media is inundated with video clips of children all around the globe showcasing a variety of intelligent activities. Garcia (2017) states that the principles of play include fundamental strategies used by teams to adapt to any tactical situation with a clear objective of enabling optimal performance. Figure 2 below and subsequent paragraphs aim to give clarity to the different types of play young children participate in. The different types of play are closely linked to play-based pedagogy and the developmental domains (physical, emotional, social, and cognitive) to enhance the holistic development of young children.

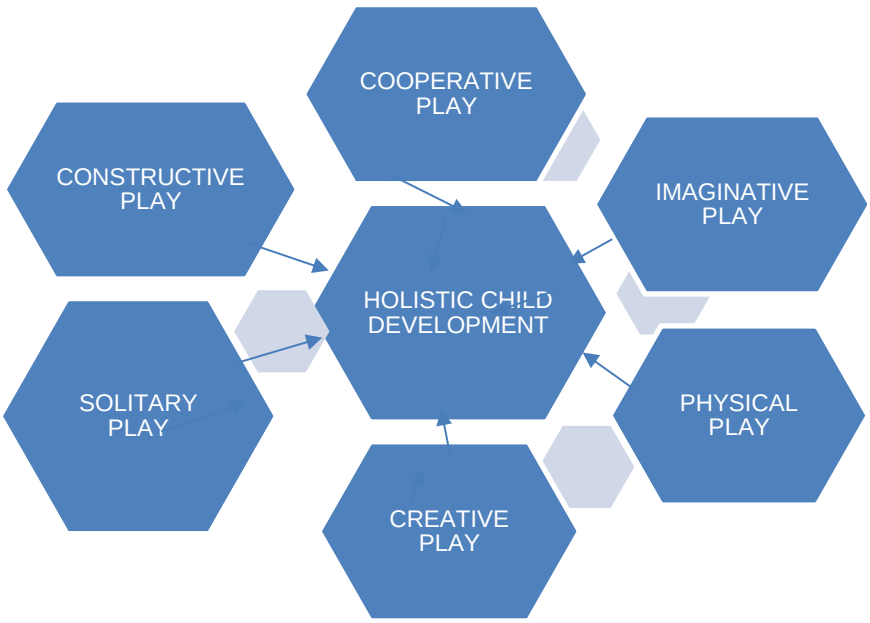

Figure 2: **Types of plays for development of young children**

2.4.1.1 Imaginative Play

Children engage in play for different determinations either formally or informally (planned or unplanned). When children play, they become deeply involved by using their imaginations to try new ideas, which is encouraged by fantasy, supporting resources and the environment. According to Davis (2011), imaginative play is where young children fantasise, imitate and do symbolic play often referred to as role-play. Role-play includes expression of feelings and ideas, imaginative play alone, wearing clothes, and pretending that they are doctors, nurses, mothers, police, etc., as part of their imaginative play (Ali, Akhtar, Constantino & Hussain, 2018). McMonagle (2012) describes the imaginative play as the type of play that develops self-expression and allows young children to interpret what is observed or done using their experiences as terms of reference.

Figure 3: ***Pixnio.com***

Experiences, feelings, and interests are mostly expressed and showcased during this type of play, which enhances the development of emotional, cognitive, and social skills as children develop critical thinking (Davis, 2011). McMonagle (2012) and Whitehead et al. (2017) support the development of imaginative skill by signifying that language, narrative and self-expression skills, teamwork and emotional regulation develop through imaginative play. Vital skills are developed during imaginative play that contribute to a child's holistic development. When children develop their imaginative skills, they learn to share things with others, give each other turns and accommodate others, which is part of growth to a holistic child (Ali et al., 2018).

2.4.1.2 Constructive Play

Children develop an understanding of concepts and their world by handling concrete material. Constructive play is the manipulation of play elements, using concrete material or resources available in the child's immediate environment to construct different objects (Davis, 2011). Available resources include stacking, assembling, disassembling blocks, sorting, or moulding (McMonagle, 2012). A wide range of resources assist with the development of skills and behaviours, like gross and fine motor skills, which gives a child an idea of how to manipulate resources, and the ability to construct structures (Squires, 2017). During this play, young children are not concerned about the end product of what they have constructed or built, but what is more interesting to them is the process (Ali et al., 2018). The process promotes concentration, which gives children support to start and finish what they have started building (Squires, 2017).

Figure 4: Adapted from UNICEF.org

I observed that practitioners appear to be more concerned and focused on the theory-based approach as opposed to the play-based approach. The incorporation of constructive play in learning activities can positively impact the holistic development of young children. More free or unstructured play activities, and guided or structured play need to be encouraged to ensure that this type of play maximises critical thinking development in young children.

2.4.1.3 Creative Play

Presenting young children with creative opportunities contributes positively to their holistic development. Daniels (2018) describes creative play as a stimulating way for young children to learn about the world around them. Vogt et al. (2018) advocate for creative play to be a wide range of activities like water play, drawing, painting, music, drama, problem-solving, and reading, which are positive contributors to child development. Through creative play, young children grow emotionally , socially, cognitively, and physically (Squires, 2017) and can share their thoughts, feelings and ideas (McMonagle, 2012). There is a relationship between constructive and creative play; when children construct, they physically allow their creativity to lead them (Squires, 2017). It is constructive skills that stimulate creativity and enthusiasm to learn about the world (environment) around them (Daniels, 2018). Children get a chance to share their thoughts, feelings and ideas during creative play (McMonagle, 2012). Thus, creative play and its learning trail attest to be the powerful pathway for the holistic development of young children (Squires, 2017). Therefore, it matters to expose young children to a creative environment to intensify opportunities for their holistic development.

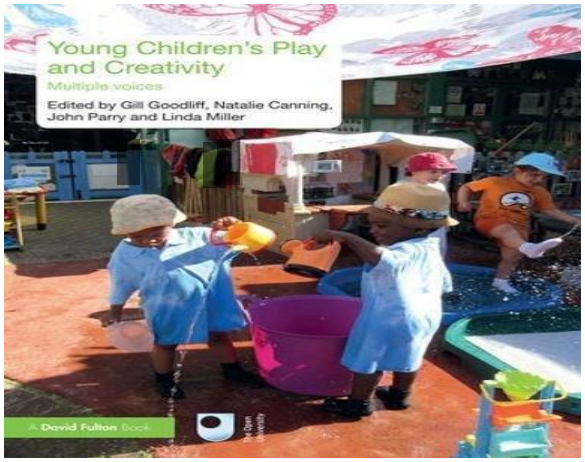

Figure 5:: Adapted from Taylorfrancis.com

2.4.1.4 Physical Play

Physical movement allows children to use their energy to sharpen their balance and motor skills development. According to Otto, Visser and McKee (2018) physical play develops young children's body movement and coordination skills, including spatial orientation and senses. Physical play uses physical movement which offers young children's prospects to use their energy and develop gross motor skills, like learning to jump or walk through the hoola-hoop and fine motor skills, like holding and touching objects (Otto, Visser & McKee, 2018). The development of connections between the nerve and the brain to improve a child's fine and gross motor skills occur during physical play (Berk, 2021). The ideal physical play incorporates play with social interaction and problem-solving (Louw, 2014). Social interaction and problem-solving skills refer to; climbing and play using the body only, doing snake-like movements, rolling, running, jumping, and balancing on beams (Santrock, 2017). These are essential physical coping skills that manifest during physical play to empower children to cope with their environment and life in general as they grow up (Whitehead et al., 2017).

Adapted from Yourtherapysource.com

The creation of a safe and secure environment during this play benefits children with the attainment of self and physical confidence (McMonagle, 2012). Each child needs self and physical confidence skills to help them to read, write properly, balance, grip (pencils and pens), and have strong eye-hand coordination, to mention a few. It then becomes crucial to know and understand the importance and impact of physical play in child development. Generally, if children enjoy their physical play, they are more likely to keep on doing it, and their confidence and motor skills will improve.

2.4.1.5 Solitary Play

Independence in play is one of the skills that individuals need to develop to familiarise themselves with the immediate environment. Development of other skills, like social and interaction skills, begins during solitary play. According to the National Curriculum Framework (NCF), this is the play that occurs when the child is playing solo or with their immediate sibling, a peer, parent or practitioner (DBE, 2015). During this play, children play creatively by exploring new ways of playing and improving their concentration capabilities to better understand their world (Eitel, 2017; Raja, 2019). Solitary play serves as a foundation of young children's many different skills for their holistic development, which stretches up to adulthood (Davis, 2018). In this play, children enjoy playing alone as they learn how to entertain themselves at an appropriate physical and cognitive developmental level (Farquhar & White, 2014).

Figure 6: Adapted from nanopdf.com

When children play by themselves, they need the provision of a well-suited stimulating environment (with age-appropriate resources) to maximise their development (Chan, 2013). The NCF encourages a stimulating environment since children must first understand their space and others before they engage or learn to play with others (DBE, 2015). Playing solo is necessary and ordinary as it gives children time to imagine, discover, develop creativity, explore and create things like structures (Danniels & Pyle, 2018). Early childhood development encompasses a growing awareness and exploring movement within the small world; the child's immediate environment (DBE, 2015) using comparable toys or doing parallel activities with others nearby but not disturbing each other (Davis, 2018). Each type of play develops skills that the child needs to graduate to a more advanced type of play (Farquhar & White, 2014). Interaction between the child and the play resources is equally important during solitary play for an adult to observe the following: how long the child concentrates and creatively uses the same resource, and the reaction thereof towards the resource being played with.

2.4.1.6 Cooperative Play

Children learn better when they cooperate, discuss, and mingle with others. Collaboration, a skill needed for social needs and cooperation, is achieved by working and playing with others. An indication of this skill is when children begin to play with others cooperatively (DBE, 2015). At this stage, children use their sense of touch as a skill to identify what an object feels like and what they can do with the object while engaging their senses to determine the smell, sound, and taste of the object (Zerwas, 2014). Cooperative play accommodates different ages and settings because it is based on team-building rather than competitive activities, which contributes to the development of healthy relationships among children (Lyons, 2017).

Figure 7: Adapted from Pinterest.com

It is much more fun to play with each other than it is to play against each other, simply because some friendships get strengthened during the process of cooperative play (Davis, 2018). Watching other children play alone and with others form part of this play (DBE, 2015). The quality of personal relationships of children with others is improved during this play and reduces the child's stress levels when in day-care centres, home, or at play (Zerwas, 2014). A well-designed cooperative play activity that emphasises fun and enjoyment allows children to experience the heart-felt happiness that comes from being part of an inclusive community (Lyons, 2017). The inclusivity accentuated in this play helps children to improve on physical, social, emotional, and cognitive skills and good listening and speaking skills that play a key role in formal schooling (DBE, 2015). From the discussion above on the different types of plays, it becomes evident that play opportunities do not happen accidentally. They need to be appropriately planned, with relevant resources under specially selected developmental activities in a conducive environment for a child's development to take place.

2.5 PRACTITIONERS AND PLAY-BASED PEDAGOGY ON CHILD DEVELOPMENT

PBP is regarded as an approach where a practitioner and a child become actively involved in various play-based activities. It is important to know that maintaining a good relationship with a child creates a conducive environment for holistic child development as they freely participate in activities. According to Voko, Duci and Tahsini (2014) holistic development is an approach to learning that emphasises the importance of the physical, emotional, social, and psychological well-being of children in early childhood. The holistic approach requires practitioners to be well informed of the content knowledge and the pedagogy to scaffold and direct learning on specific learning aspects within the environment (Siraj-Blatchford, 2019). According to Danniels and Pyle (2018), practitioners understand PBP as an approach that encourages the facilitation of child-centred teaching and learning. A study by Voko et al. (2014) revealed that practitioners in education centres are faced with immense pressure to achieve academic excellence. Therefore, implementing PBP in classrooms poses a challenge.

Nicolopoulou (2010) approves that some parents compel practitioners to disregard PBP in education centers and focus primarily on academic achievement compared to the effectiveness of self-exploration, skills, and values. Ashari and Baharuddin (2018) observed the practice of education centers in their study. Their study revealed that practitioners preferred books and other activities over PBP. They further indicated that the focus is solely on outstanding academic performance achievements, such as examinations and standardised testing, overlooking the role played by 'play' for holistic child development.

Although practitioners are aware of the advantages of PBP, implementation in the classroom can be challenging due to the pressure of completing content (syllabus) and the lack of play resources (Ashari & Hushairi, 2019). Bubikova-Moan et al. (2019) agree, adding that PBP makes learning rich and meaningful. PBP has become part of the policy and curriculum framework for young children (DBE, 2015). It has been embodied in practitioners' daily practices as it is perceived as a complementary aspect towards holistic child development with early childhood pedagogy (Aldhafeeri, Palaiologou & Folorunsho, 2016). Danniels and Pyle (2018) are in support of PBP

that benefits the child with the practitioner who understands the role of play while facilitating teaching and learning through PBP. Therefore, it is compelling to set up centres with relevant and age-appropriate resources that will inspire children to interact, engage, and explore resources for their learning and holistic development.

It is valuable for practitioners to use PBP to connect a child's development with their expected developmental domains for effective holistic development. In holistic development, effective learning is viewed as experimental and explorational (Whitehead et al., 2017). Experimental and explorational development involves studying growth and development patterns to draw guidelines for each step and normal development (Varun, 2018; Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2019). According to Morrow (2011); Voko, Duci and Tahsini (2014) holistic child development refers to a dynamic process that refers to the sequence of physical, emotional, social, and cognitive changes which occur from birth to the beginning of adulthood. Each child develops uniquely (Whitehead et al., 2017). Hence provision for an environment that will provide young children with an opportunity to imagine, explore things, and socialize is essential (Goldstein, 2012).

It may as well be a challenge to embed play-based approach for the child when the practitioner is anti-play-based or has no experience of what it is to be play-based competent in a teaching or facilitation environment. For ECDCs to comply with a play-based learning environment, they must be engaging, creative, and beneficial for the holistic development of children. In the many forms of play-based participatory research, practitioners act as agents of a play-based approach to teaching and learning. The safer the environment, the greater the space within which young children will develop their sensory-motor, symbolic and construction innovation, play (Wolfgang, Stannard & Jones, 2010).

2.6. SUMMARY

The above chapter two reviewed literature focussing on the play, types of play, PBP, growth, and the philosophy of play-based history. This chapter then proceeded into a discussion on how practitioners view play and PBP about holistic child development, which focused on physical, social, emotional, and intellectual development. The literature reviewed indicates that PBP is indeed an old practice because activities and play cannot be disconnected as they are instrumental in holistic child development.

The popularity of PBP should be understood as a campaign to rethink, restructure, and implement PBP in early childhood development. Learning attempts to encourage engagement, exploration, and experimentation. Politics, curriculum, and professionalisation of play-based approach and the diversity of apprenticeship of practitioners in early childhood development have become fodder for diverse views on the content and processes of holistic child development. The study intends to improve how practitioners view and implement PBP during teaching and learning to advance child holistic development, especially in South African ECDCs.

CHAPTER 3

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

3.1 INTRODUCTION

In Chapter 2 a literature review was presented that discussed practitioners' views on play-based pedagogy and the developmental domains, which contributed to the development of young children. The development of young children requires a comprehensive combination of different skills like emotional, social, physical, and cognitive. Using this background, chapter 3 discusses a theoretical framework that seeks to link the literature review with the methodological design of the research.

3.2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

A theoretical framework is a structure that holds and supports a concept of a research study by introducing and describing the theory behind the research problem (Simon & Goes, 2012). It guides the researcher and provides a structure to define the study epistemologically, philosophically, and analytically (Grant & Osanloo, 2015). Ravitch and Carl (2016) concur with this statement that the theoretical framework assists researchers in situating and contextualising formal theories into their studies as a guide. It also provides guidelines on how to accumulate data for a particular study. The researcher used the Social Constructivist Theory (SCT) of Vygotsky as a guiding lens for the study. This theoretical framework provided the researcher with a clear sense of the structure, appropriate research approach and procedure for data collection (Akintoye, 2015). The approach and procedure served as a guide that formulated a logical perspective of concept construction (Osanloo, 2014). That created an opportunity for the researcher to get a clear understanding of how play-based pedagogy is incorporated during teaching and learning for the holistic development of young children. For this study, the researcher used the social constructivist theory as it appeared as the most suitable one for this research.

3.3 SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIVIST THEORY

Vygotsky's social constructivist theory is based on the idea that cognitive determinations are the products of social interactions (Thomas et al., 2014). He developed the social constructivist theory to emphasise the collaborative nature of learning through social interactions (Schreiber & Valle, 2013). The interest was in investigating and understanding how adults and young children learn in a social environment (Knapp, 2019). According to Vygotsky, learning has its basis in interacting with other people (social interaction) which is a critical aspect that plays an important role in child development (Zhang et al., 2010). Vygotsky believed that parents, caregivers, peers, and the culture at large are responsible for developing advanced psychological functions in child development (Arasomwan & Mashiya, 2021). The utilization of collaborative learning theory is rooted in his idea of Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) (McLeod, 2018).

The ZPD is explained as the space between what a child can do without any adult assistance and what a child can do with adult guidance including peers (Wolff & Holmes, 2011). Collaborative learning is significant for the development of critical thinking skills. It suggested that children retain more information when working interactively (Whitebread et al. (2017). The holistic development of young children which includes physical, social, emotional and cognitive skills, gets supported as children learn how to play harmoniously with others while unconsciously learning and developing (Zhang, Olfman, & Firpo, 2010). The interaction is grossly supported by Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory through the understanding of the process of human development as being shaped by the interaction between an individual and the environment (Schreiber & Valle, 2013).

In constructivism, individuals create and construct knowledge and meaning of a particular concept from their experiences (Knapp, 2019). It is based on observation and scientific study of how people learn to gain their understanding and knowledge of the world and personal experiences (Mohamad & Romli, 2021). As children experience the world and reflect upon those experiences, they build their representations and incorporate new information into their pre-existing knowledge (schemas) (Arasomwan & Mashiya, 2021). Pittaway, Aïssaoui and Fox (2018) confirm that SCT is an interpretive structure that enables individuals to explore their

environment which usher meaning that supports their knowledge and experience. Constructivism transforms children from being passive recipients of information to active participants (McLeod, 2019). In this study, the researcher focused on different activities, such as creative and physical play activities, that children participate in to develop holistically (Bada & Olusegun, 2015). The emphasis in constructivism is on personal experiences of constructing knowledge (what is happening within the minds or brains of individuals) whereas in social constructivism the emphasis is on social interactions and culture (what is happening between people as they join together to create realities) (Amineh & Asl, 2015). Although both constructivism and social constructivism theories concentrate on experience and social interaction, they differ in philosophy. The researcher opted for SCT for this study to focus on children's social interaction and how they communicate with each other within the learning environment. In this study, the social interaction emphasis is playing which is guided by play-based pedagogy (PBP) under the administration and guidance of a practitioner in early childhood centres (ECC) (Whitebread, 2017).

Child development requires active engagement and exploration of resources available in their environment. This study focused on the incorporation of PBP in the teaching and learning of young children which allows them to explore and engage for their holistic development (Davis, 2011). In SCT a social group of children constructs things and objects independently and collaboratively, creating a culture of sharing of objects and shared interpretations and understanding (Churcher, Downs, Tewksbury, 2014). This clarifies that knowledge develops as a result of social interaction and language use which makes social constructivism a shared interpretation and experience activity (Walker & Shore, 2015). Centres, therefore, become one of the crucial learning and development environments that presents a conducive learning context for holistic child development.

3.3.1 Importance of Social Constructivist Theory in Child Development

Social Constructivist Theory teaches that knowledge generally develops as a result of social interaction and language usage (Creswell,2013). This means knowledge is not only gained by observation of the immediate environment and the world the child may grow up under, but also from interactions (Walker & Shore, 2015). This theory maintains that cooperative play by young children provides an opportunity to engage

in a social learning process (interactive learning) that is beneficial to everyone involved (Moore, Edwards, Cutter-Mackenzie & Boyd, 2014). The interactive learning approach supports practical-based approaches like PBP (Davis, 2018). The SCT is as well the way of learning through the senses which causes the brain to develop an understanding of the immediate environment (McLeod, 2019). The study focused on young children's engagement, exploration and discovery for their holistic development using a play-based approach. The relevance of this theory to the study can never be overemphasized as the social constructive learning process collaborate well with the nature of play-based development and the process is beneficial to everyone involved (interaction) (Thomas, Menon, Boruff, Rodriguez & Ahmed, 2014). Children develop knowledge from interaction with the environment, each other, and society at large (Mishra, 2014). Children's society in this study refers to ECC and the environment denotes the classroom where play-based pedagogy is practiced. The environment becomes beneficial to child development if it allows engagements, exploration, teamwork and interaction or collaboration to support the construction of child's development (knowledge and experience) (Thomas et al., 2014).

The SCT promotes discussion and debates over the interpretation of constructed structures which positively contribute to the development of social, emotional and cognitive aspects. In a social constructivist classroom, children are encouraged to use their prior knowledge and experiences to help them form and reform interpretations of what they are engaged with or exploring (McLeod, 2019). The practitioners guide and support children while constructing their knowledge without interfering much with what they construct (Bada & Olusegun, 2015). SCT demonstrates effectiveness on holistic child development through PBP by encouraging democratic interactions among children which include social engagements and exploration of resources. Popular theories in early childhood development are Piaget, Vygotsky, and Brunner. Although there are some different views by these theorists, the development of children is the epicentre of their theories. Constructivism according to them is grounded by the idea that children actively construct, engage, and develop their knowledge through experience. In constructivism, young children are encouraged to interact, using their ideas and experiences to pursue their instinct and create their knowledge and strategies for understanding and learning (Davis, 2018). The following paragraphs unpack each of these theorists' views on SCT.

3.3.2 Piaget's Cognitive Constructivist Theory and its Relevance to Play

Jean Piaget, born in 1896 in Switzerland, was a Swiss psychologist who was known for his work on cognitive child development. His interest was the development and the thinking of young children in the 1920s. Through his interaction with young children, he developed assumptions about children's intelligence (Badakar, Thakkar, Hugar, Kukreja, Assudani & Gokhale, 2017). He discovered that children think differently from adults; they actively build up their knowledge about their world through active involvement and how they develop a concept or idea (McLeod, 2018). Piaget paid attention to the process of qualitative development of knowledge and continuous engagement of young children through play (Ültanır, 2012).

Piaget believed that the development of young children is determined by existing cognitive competence which stimulates what children are capable of learning (Mooney, 2013). He viewed a child as an expected scientist who investigates the world to widen understanding (Xu, 2010). It is on this basis that practitioners in this study are expected to not lead from the front but ensure that they provide resources for children to learn freely without adult interference. He believed in the process of assimilation and accommodation. Assimilation and accommodation require an active child, who will actively discover learning (Ahmad, Hussain, Batool, Sittar & Malik, 2016). Piaget's cognitive theory seeks to describe and explain the development of thought processes and mental state including the manner the child understands and interacts with the world (Simatwa, 2010; McLeod, 2019). Theories of development provide a framework for thinking about human growth and learning (Morin, 2020). The steps proposed in this theory, as outlined by Börnert-Ringle and Wilbert (2018) are:

- sensorimotor stage: birth to 24 months - cooing
- preoperational stage: 2 to 7 years - manipulation
- concrete operational stage: 7 to 11 years; -toys and reality
- formal operational stage: 12 years and above

The focus of this study is on the preoperational stage (5 to 6 years). This is the stage where young children explore their world by manipulating resources within their environment. The development and growth of young children depend on both exposure and adult guidance. McLeod (2020) advocates that intelligence changes as children grow, and the relationship between the child and the practitioner influences

the child's cognitive development making interaction an essential capacity for children to go through the different developmental stages.

The different stages have different types of intelligence, and the way children develop. The preoperational stage focuses on toddlers, who are the heartbeat of this study. Children play and think symbolically during this stage, this is dominated by how the world appeals to them, which explains how a child constructs a mental model of the world (Babakr, Mohamedamin & Kakamad, 2019). Piaget never believed that intelligence was a fixed trait. He regarded cognitive development as a process, which occurs due to biological maturation and interaction with the environment (McLeod, 2019). Piaget did not relay his theory to education but most researchers have elucidated how features of his theory have been and can be applied to teaching and learning (Campo & Baldassarre, 2019). Features such as discovery learning, children learn best through interaction; and actively exploring, which is appropriate to PBP and contributes to holistic child development. Piaget's theory of constructivism argues that an individual produces knowledge and constructs meaning based on new and previous experiences gained during play activities (Ahmad, Hussain, Batool, Sittar & Malik, 2016).

Piaget believed in learning through play, and he viewed it as an integral part of the development of intelligence in children which makes engagement and a playful environment more crucial to encouraging cognitive and language development (Wardle, 2015). Play is critical for supporting children to reach important social, emotional, and cognitive developmental milestones. Piaget accentuated constructive (uses of objects like blocks, Legos, modelling clay), fantasy (role-playing, or make-believe like driving a car, superhero) and functional play (use of bodily movement with or without objects like running, sliding, jumping) for cognitive development (Leong & Bodrova, 2015). His interest in describing and explaining the nature of human knowledge was different from philosophical theories as his scientific theory was based on sixty years of systematically collected evidence.

3.3.3 Young Children and Piaget's Types of Knowledge

Piaget did not only believe in play-based learning, he also emphasised that knowledge is a genetic function that is produced by a person through actions (Bakakar et al., 2017). He proposed three types of knowledge, namely: physical, social and logico-

mathematical knowledge (McLeod, 2018). The following paragraphs unpack each of this knowledge and its relevance to play.

3.3.3.1 Physical knowledge

Physical knowledge refers to the knowledge obtained through the use of perceptual skills (Ültanır, 2012). According to Campo and Baldassarre (2019), Piaget was of the view that for the development of physical knowledge, young children need to be actively involved with their immediate environment. Active involvement refers to engagement, exploration and discovery of the world (McLeod, 2019). This creates opportunities for young children to explore and make interesting discoveries, like putting together a puzzle that will depict a picture of an animal; thus, helping young children develop their physical and social skills while playing together. This type of knowledge requires actions that are supported by play-based teaching and learning approach. The creation of a conducive environment becomes a crucial enabler for the acquisition of this knowledge (Bada & Olusegun, 2015). Thomas, et al. (2014) confirm that the environment allows children to touch, feel and observe objects and also gives them a clear understanding of the different properties of each of those objects. It is through this knowledge that young children experiment and gain knowledge that objects like marbles can roll and glasses break if dropped on the floor (Mishra, 2014).

Children physically explore and construct these objects to gain physical knowledge using play-based learning (Amineh & Asl, 2015). The knowledge of construction is built over time through the process of active interaction and engagement with the environment (Zhang *et al.,* 2010). The physical knowledge develops perceptual skills like fine motor skills of grasp, holding and manipulation of objects like paintbrushes and scissors and gross motor skills like the ability to crawl and balance (Mcleod, 2019). These perceptual skills are needed and mostly utilised in grade 1 when formal schooling begins. Churcher et al. (2014) emphasized that physical knowledge assists young children to discover objects using their properties to understand differences and similarities. It is through play-based teaching and learning so that relevant skills are successfully achieved.

3.3.3.2 Social Knowledge

This kind of knowledge is learned through observation of the physical attributes of objects within the environment (physical world) (Ashari & Hushairi, 2019). According

to Walker and Shore (2015), social knowledge is the knowledge collected through small groups like a family or classroom or a constant body of knowledge like networks. Smorti and Fioretti (2019) define the characteristic of social knowledge as the product of the group sharing and contributing knowledge about an object through their relationships with one another. The social knowledge shared in a classroom requires children to socially engage with each other through play. Practitioners in centres are expected to create an environment that supports the development of this knowledge. This is the knowledge that encourages language development as children socialize during interaction and engagement (play). It is the responsibility of practitioners in centres to guide young children towards their development using social knowledge. This is because social knowledge is the collective knowledge produced through relationships and connections within a particular group (McLeod, 2019). Piaget argued that children construct schemes of social reaction similar to how they construct schemes relating to the world of objects (Ahmad et al., 2016).

The implementation of PBP during child development has a crucial role because social knowledge is formed and shaped during an ongoing relationship, collaborations and engagements of young children which happens during play (Babakr et al., 2019). A child gradually constructs more and more consistently organized patterns of social actions if a conducive environment is created (Campo & Baldassarre, 2019). It is through socialisation that young children collaborate, explore, create relationships and develop language and social life skills such as teamwork and respect.

3.3.3.3 Logico-mathematical knowledge

Logico-mathematical knowledge is the knowledge that is constructed within the mind of the child (Kamii, 2015). In logico-mathematical knowledge, children develop the ability to differentiate objects according to colours and group them according to their attributes (Ahmad et al., 2016). In PBP, children are allowed to play and explore objects so that they develop assimilation and accommodation skills (Campo & Baldassarre, 2019). Piaget argued that because the number is a construct of relationships, knowing numbers is not an inherent trait but something that is constructed within the mind of a human being (Kamii, 2014). According to Owens and Tanner (2017) the brain builds neural connections which connect pieces of knowledge to form new knowledge. This implies that logico-mathematical knowledge is

constructed by each individual within his or her head to construct and develop knowledge. In the learning experiences and development of young children, constructive knowledge should be reinforced by using play as a method of teaching and learning. Logico-mathematical knowledge is passed through creative thinking. The utilisation of play activities underplays a supportive environment guided by an adult, like a practitioner, and requires creative thinking by both children and practitioners (Wardle, 2015). This creative thinking assists young children to construct their understanding and knowledge of the world, therefore, enhancing and strengthening their cognitive skills.

3.3.4 Vygotsky's Socio-Cultural Theory and its Relevance to Play

Lev Semonovich Vygotsky was one of the most influential seminal psychologists. He is best known for his sociocultural theory and believed that social interaction plays a critical role in child education (Wass & Golding, 2014 as cited by Ekeh, 2020). His socio-cultural focuses on the collaborative responsibilities between parents, peers, and practitioners for the development of higher-order functioning. Vygotsky believed in the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD); a teacher or practitioner assists the child to progress through scaffolding (Bergbauer & Staden, 2018). The ZPD looks at the gap between what a person can do on their own, and what they can achieve with assistance from an expert (Freeman, 2011).

Vygotsky also believed in the constructivist theory, which encourages children to integrate language development with their problem-solving skills (Erbil, 2020).

He views constructivism as an approach that encourages the use of language, physical signs, symbolic mediation, and the environment that inspires child development (Myftiu & Topçiu, 2015). Vygotsky, like Piaget, argued that social interaction is crucial for cognitive development and learning, which always occurs in a social context and cooperation with others who are more skilled; They are called More Knowledgeable Others (MKO) (Taber, 2020).

Vygotsky and Piaget view children as active participants in their development. They further agreed that cognitive development involves quality changes in thinking. They both believe that children can construct their knowledge of the world when provided with resources, guidance, and a conducive environment (McLeod, 2014). Vygotsky believed that learning and development are collaborative activities, and that young

children are cognitively developed in the context of socialisation and education (Taber, 2020). Piaget also believed that schools or centres must provide a variety of activities to challenge and increase readiness to learn by creating opportunities to discover new ideas (Campo & Baldassarre, 2019). These two theorists reinforce the importance of interaction for socialisation and the construction of knowledge and ideas.

Vygotsky is a culturalist and his theory emphasise the importance of play in early childhood development. He believed that play and proper planning of activities promote cognitive, social, and emotional development in children. Activities like role-playing and cooperation require clear planning and instructions to provide practice in ZPD (Bodrova, 2015). Vygotsky argues that such activities are crucial for cognitive development and must be socially guided and constructed by an adult (McLeod, 2019). Therefore, in all activities, he prioritized culture as a foundation for the information and development of specific capabilities like problem-solving (Bergbauer & Staden, 2011). He believed that practitioners could manage the learning environment by ensuring that essential resources are availed and prepared for the children to explore and learn (Tudge & Scrimsher, 2003 cited by Schunk, 2012).

Vygotsky's approach to child development is a form of social constructivism, based on the idea that cognitive functions are the products of social interactions (Kessel, 2018). He emphasized the collaborative nature of learning by the construction of knowledge through social negotiation. Vygotsky emphasized the collaborative nature of learning by the construction of knowledge through social negotiation. Vygotsky emphasises that cognitive growth occurs first on a social level, and then displays competent performance in their zone of proximal development (ZPD) (Freeman, 2011).

3.3.5 Bruner’s Constructivist Theory and its Relevance to Play

Jerome Seymour Bruner was an American psychologist who made significant contributions to human cognitive psychology and cognitive learning theory in educational psychology (Clabaugh, 2010). Bruner was concerned with how knowledge is represented and organised through different modes of thinking; he proposed three modes of representations namely: enactive, iconic, and symbolic representations (Jiang & Perkins, 2013). He believed that a child is an able being who can construct their ideas and build concepts based on previous and current knowledge (McLeod, 2014). His constructivist theory is based on the active participation of a child in the

process of learning, which links to Piaget's theory of child development (McLeod, 2018). This suggests that a child can learn any material if the instructions are appropriately organised (Zuliana, Retnowati & Widjajanti, 2019). Bruner's theory suggests that effective learning needs to include new material that will follow a progression from enactive to iconic to symbolic representation.

The most appropriate representation for this study is 'iconic' representation. This is because thinking is based on the utilisation of images or objects, which allows the child to use senses like smell, touch, and hear. Senses are the learning modes of young children. Given an appropriate environment and resources to explore, children manipulate them by using their senses. Bruner also emphasised the use of words or language for a child's progress and development (Metsämuuronen & Räsänen, 2018). Bruner's purpose in education was to facilitate the development of young children by encouraging them to use words to develop their thinking and problem-solving skills, which can be transferred to holistic child development (McLeod, 2018). Bruner's theory of constructivism emphasises that the most effective way to develop a young child is to guide and facilitate the learning process. Children are capable, they can construct their knowledge, organise and categorise information using their coding system, which is called 'discovery learning' according to Bruner (Zuliana, Retnowati & Widjajanti, 2019). Bruner and Vygotsky emphasise a child's environment for social development. 'Discovery learning' appeared to be the most effective theory of Vygotsky and Brunner as they cite the need for adult assistance through scaffolding, which is like ZPD (Bergbauer & Staden, 2018; Jiang & Perkins, 2013).

During discovery learning, children learn more and enjoy learning because they are more actively involved than being passive participants. Discovery learning tally with this study as children are expected to build and discover new experiences and knowledge during PBP. Bruner believed that all children could grasp complex information (McLeod, 2018). The theory of discovery learning allows children to construct their knowledge (Zuliana, Retnowati & Widjajanti, 2019). Child development according to Bruner is a continuous process where language forms the basis of learning and intellectual development (Fioretti & Smorti, 2019). Intellectual development includes the concept of discovery learning where children construct knowledge on their own (McLeod, 2019). He based his theory of learning on child knowledge of the world based on different modes (actions, images and pictures, words

and symbols) of reality they construct and on their culture as an aspect that they adopt and later adapt to their future use (the process of PBP) (Ardanaa, Ariawanb & Divayana 2017).

3.3.6 Young Children and Brunner's Developmental Stages

According to Bruner, child development is an ongoing process where language development is stimulated by social engagement (Fioretti & Smorti, 2019). It is during this process that young children advance reasoning and understanding (learning and cognitive development). The application of a play-based approach to teaching and learning is therefore pivotal in Brunner's theory. The activities such as social interaction activities, as proposed by Bruner, aids in developing and strengthening specific developmental domains which are social, emotional, and physical, in young children. Bruner's learning theory has direct implications for teaching practices (Lombardo & Meier, 2018). According to Jiang and Perkins (2013), Bruner proposed three learning modes, which are: enactive, iconic and symbolic. These modes assist in the planning and preparation of appropriate materials for learning which are also arranged according to the children's learning difficulty (Zuliana et al., 2019). The following paragraph gives a synopsis of each of these modes.

3.3.6.1 Enactive Stage

The enactive stage is the representation of knowledge through actions (Clabaugh, 2010). In McLeod (2014) it is confirmed that enactive mode includes direct manipulation of objects based on previous and current knowledge without any internal representation. The enactive representation is constructed through actions and it involves action-based information construction and storing it in an individual's memory (McLeod, 2018). In PBP children learn through play which assists them to store experiences in their memory for later use such as problem-solving (Metsämuuronen & Räsänen, 2018). Young children learn by doing physical actions (play) and it is through these actions that they form internal representation (thinking) (McLeod, 2018). In the enactive stage, children learn by discovering and using images holding a mental picture in their minds (experience) (Jiang & Perkins, 2013). This makes play the most crucial way of learning to young children as they understand things in terms of how they can be manipulated, used, or acted upon (Jiang & Perkins, 2013). In enactive mode, children learn by observing the environment, peers and adults, (incidental

learning). The incidental learning requires the practitioner to ensure that the environment is conducive, attractive and interesting.

3.3.6.2 Iconic Stage

An iconic stage, an internal representation of external objects in the form of a mental image or picture is created. The visual summary of image and diagrams develop during this stage and is called internal imagery (Mcleod, 2019). The use of pictures and diagrams for storytelling support language acquisition in child development (Metsämuuronen & Räsänen, 2018). This development depends on the mental representation of visual stimuli (pictures) which are found in a book or creative corner in the classroom (Mcleod, 2019). This mental representation becomes effective if the visual stimuli, objects and themes involved are well-established and easily recognized (Fioretti & Smorti, 2019). An introduction of the subject coding and robotics in centres is used as a stimulus that intends to develop computational thinking skills in young children. In this subject, resources like gears are used to represent models and diagrams and the success depends on the correct assembling of different gears. The child in this process is expected to imagine, explore and construct objects “trial and error” to form an iconic representation of learning (Kamii, 2014). All of this takes place during the play-based teaching and learning process.

It is at the iconic stage where the child learns to imagine and visually draw (in their mind) the pictures, images or representations of different objects (McLeod, 2019). The iconic stage precedes the symbolic stage. That means, for the children to learn, they need to engage, interact and explore resources within their environment (inside and outside the classroom) to develop visual concept representation (Cabahug, 2012). The concept of representation requires a well-resourced centre (inside and outside the classroom) to provide a conducive learning environment for the development of young children. The conducive environment reinforces the development of problem-solving skills to young children through play-based learning under the philosophy of inquiry and discovery learning (Ozdem-Yilmaz & Bilican, 2020). A child with a well-developed imagery representation and good problem-solving skills is believed to have the ability to solve most mathematical problems using iconic representations like stars. The application of the internal imagery gained during play-based learning can also be witnessed when the child represents a two-dimensional shape of a “triangle” without

explaining the concept of “triangularity” (Cabahug, 2012). The classroom plays a crucial role in this stage by creating a stimulating and resourceful environment for young children to develop this iconic imagery knowledge. The visual development of images helps children to develop and build good images of objects in their minds which gives them a better term of reference during their development process.

3.3.6.3 Symbolic Stage

Symbolic is the stage where information is stored in the form of a symbol and code such as language (Kamii, 2014). According to Lombardo and Meier (2018) symbolic representation is traditionally defined as the representation of a name or a symbol of the nation such as a flag. In the learning and development of young children, these symbols play an important role. They serve as stimuli that evoke a particular meaning to young children. This is more noticeable when children come across a symbol of a particular restaurant selling certain food, they easily read the symbol, understand, retrieve and give the name of that specific restaurant. Symbols are flexible in that they can be stored, manipulated, ordered and classified so the user is not constrained by actions or images (which have a fixed relation to that which they represent) (Jiang & Perkins, 2013).

In the symbolic stage, information is stored as symbols and language becomes a powerful symbol (Wolfgang, et al., 2010). It is at this stage that children store the information as verbal memory (Kamii, 2014). The representation of the world to young children is mainly through the play activities they get engaged in which incorporate language development, music and numbers, as a symbol system for their learning and development (Jiang & Perkins, 2013). The activities implemented during play-based teaching and learning include, among others, imaginative, constructive, creative, physical, solitary and cooperative plays which also include action songs (music) and rhymes (Whitebread et al., 2017). These are the activities that promote holistic development to young children because they allow them to socialize and communicate using actions and words. It is through communication, teamwork and interaction that children develop emotional tolerance (Wolfgang, Stannard & Jones, 2010). The development of emotional and social skills supports cognitive development. Therefore, the holistic development of young children depends on the physical, emotional, social,

and cognitive development of a child (Sarkar, 2020) which prepares them for the outside world.

This more-sophisticated mode is the last to develop and is more flexible than enactive and iconic which mostly takes place via a medium of language as information is stored in the form of codes and symbols (Metsämuuronen & Räsänen, 2018). The development of this symbolic mode depends on PBP. The exposure children get during play (indoor and outdoor), acting out of stories and construction of objects supports symbol imagination in their minds which encourages them to recall meanings and names of objects (McLeod, 2014). Constructivist theory suggests that children and even adults should tackle new material by progressing from enactive to iconic to symbolic representation (Zuliana et al., 2019). Bruner believed that the most effective way to develop a coding system is to discover it rather than being told by an adult which indicates that a very young child is capable of learning any material provided it is properly selected and organised to match the level of ability (Lombardo & Meier, 2018). The ability of young children to construct their knowledge goes hand in hand with constructivist theory.

3.4 DIAGRAMMATIC REPRESENTATION OF SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIVIST THEORY

Holistic development requires cognitive, physical, emotional, and social growth of a child therefore social and cognitive constructivism theory is deemed to be the most relevant theory for this study. The fact that each child is different and special, constructivism then supports the idea that each individual constructs their understanding of the world by creating rules and concepts based on individual experiences (Shah, 2019). Figure 8 below is the illustration of the constructivist theory for this study.

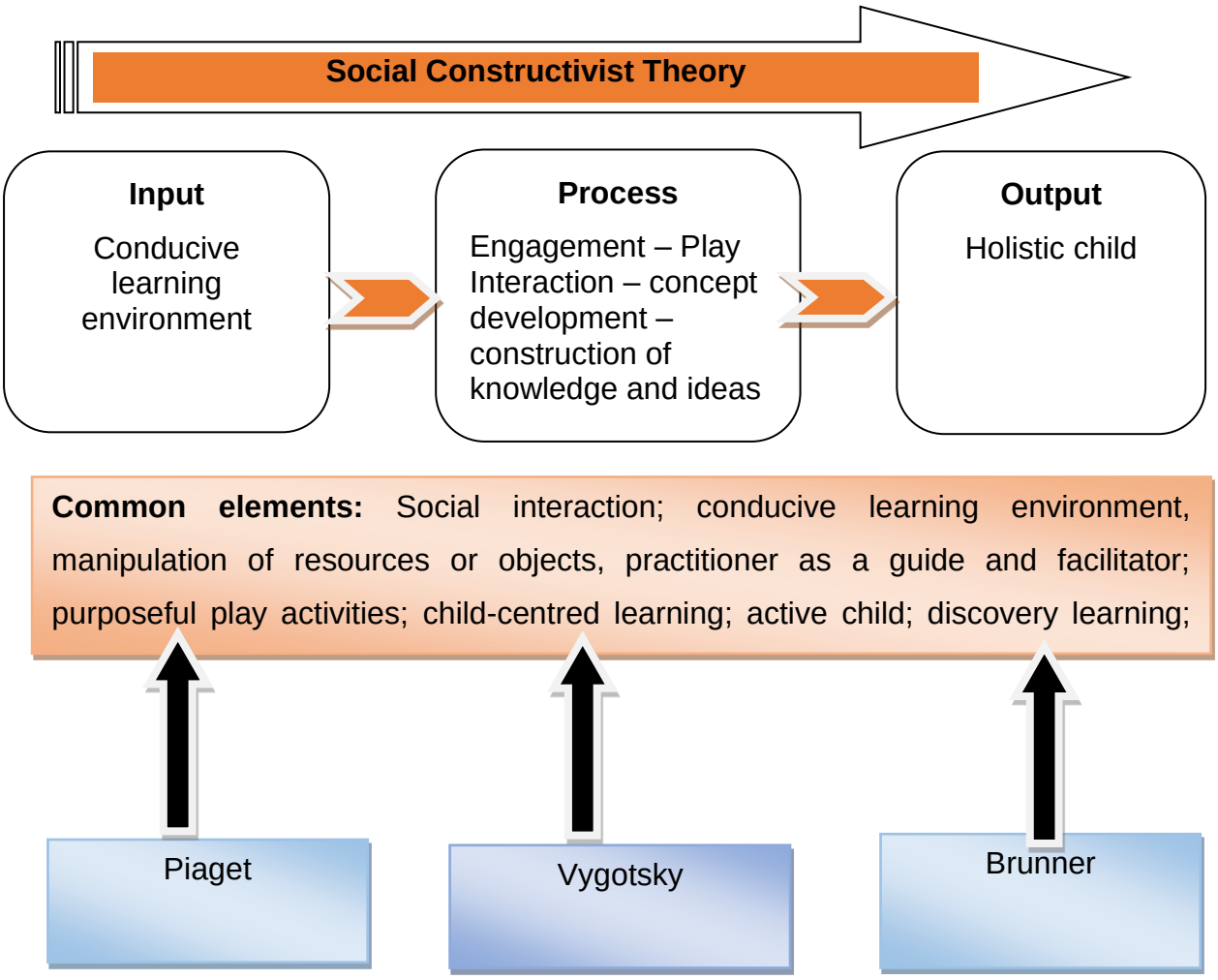

Figure 8: Social Constructivist theory

3.5 SCT AND THE RELEVANCE TO THE STUDY

Social constructivism emphasises the learning a child accomplishes through interaction with others and outside experiences. Cognitive constructivism is based on a child's developmental stages and individual learning styles. Social constructivist theory in this study has provided a detailed elaboration of practitioners' theories of play, and the problems they encountered in putting it into practice. It is argued that at the outset their theories were broadly constructivist because this is a dominant theoretical orientation in early childhood education. Constructivism is based on the idea that people actively construct or make their knowledge, and that reality is determined by your experiences as a learner. Learners use their previous knowledge as a foundation and build on it with new things that they learn. The constructivist approach views children as active participants in their learning.

Education is then much more than rote memorization; instead, it is integrating and assimilating knowledge to be further used and explored. Constructivist strategies seek to ignite a child's curiosity and love of learning. The constructivist approach supports collaborative, interactive and student-centered learning. Practitioners dynamically engage children with play activities to work collaboratively and develop more composite thinking skills.

3.6 SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIVISM THEORY AND PLAY-BASED PEDAGOGY

Child development necessitates interaction. According to Erbil (2020) constructivism has a strong impact on the teaching and learning process as dominant educational psychology. Mogashoa (2014) reaffirms that knowledge grows from social interaction and language usage; therefore, young children should actively participate in their development processes to construct their knowledge. Vygotsky's theory proclaims that young children construct their knowledge through interaction with the environment (Campo & Baldassarre, 2019; Mogashoa, 2014). Piaget agrees with Vygotsky, he believed that a practitioner plays a vital role in developing a child by promoting interaction and self-discovery as a pedagogy of learning (Mogashoa, 2014)). Both Vygotsky and Piaget appreciate the spirit of building knowledge through play, reinforced by Froebel and Montessori, who support the environment that promotes orderly and sequential developmental activities (Blaise & Edwards, 2014). Play is free self-expression, and its purpose should focus on pleasure gained by self-expression (Lee, 2018). In social constructivism, development is a process where children interact with their society and culture (Campo & Baldassarre, 2019). Therefore, the importance and the role played by the child's immediate environment cannot be overemphasized because social encounters assist with the construction of meaning and growth of understanding of a young child.

3.7 PHILOSOPHY OF PLAY IN RELATION TO THE FRAMEWORK

When children are absorbed in play they explore and discover their world. Among other things, young children discover their world by manipulating resources making them fit into their thinking or desired outcomes. This takes place because play is viewed as a way of learning by trial and error to cope with the actual world (Farquhar & White, 2014). Children learn best in a nurturing child-initiated play-based

environment that fosters self-confidence, trust, creative autonomy, and acceptance of individual differences.

The main philosophy is that play needs to encompass all areas of child development and education. The areas of development refer to the four developmental domains: physical, cognitive, social, and emotional aspects. This study focuses on the development of these four developmental domains using play-based pedagogy. Vogt *et al.* (2018) uphold that any interpretation of play-based pedagogy is intimately bound up with definitions of learning, orientation, and application in early years contexts. Philosophy for child development is said to be a systematic and progressive program that is designed for young children to work with, grow and stimulate higher-order thinking (Ndofirepi, 2011). Play philosophy is a way of learning for children, during which different play activities are employed to support their development.

Structured and unstructured play activities promote holistic child development and allow them to learn at their own pace, view themselves as thinkers, gain knowledge, and feel encouraged to make choices (Farquhar & White, 2014). Montessori believed that children have a natural desire to learn when provided with a well-enriched environment guided by well-trained and informed practitioners (Blaise & Edwards, 2014). The development of ideas and concept construction relies on the cognitive structure of the child. Cognitive structures are the basic mental pattern children use to process any information, which provides meaning and allows the individual child to expand own thinking beyond given information (Navaneedhan & Kamalanabhan, 2017). Therefore, children need to be encouraged to discover concepts on their own using their cognitive structure. Cognitive-based philosophy proclaims that children learn through active exploration in an environment, which is rich in material and provides opportunities to socialise (Farquhar & White, 2014).

Play-based pedagogy becomes an approach essential in supporting practitioners who consciously use it to support the conceptual development of young children so that theoretical knowledge is generated (Fleer, 2010). By researching the holistic development of young children, the researcher observes how practitioners incorporate play in their teaching to achieve holistic child development (Ridgway & Quinones, 2012).

3.8 AN INTEGRATED CONSTRUCTIVISM AND ITS CONTRIBUTION TO THE HOLISTIC CHILD DEVELOPMENT

Knowledge is constructed through communication, observation, collaboration, and interaction. Holistic child development demands the active involvement of young children in their development over interaction with the environment, resources, peers, and adults (Campo & Baldassarre, 2019). Constructivism as a theory of knowledge (epistemology) argues that humans generate knowledge and meaning through interaction between their experiences and their ideas (Mogashoa, 2014). De Vos et al. (2015) as cited in Ekeh, 2020 affirms that constructivism is the reality that can be personally constructed through active involvement for the social, emotional, cognitive, and physical development of the child. Therefore, the constructivist approach confirms that child development requires young children to engage practically in their development. Children in this study were observed on holistic child development using play-based pedagogy. Play-based pedagogy encourages young children to interact with their environment, resources, practitioners, and peers to develop. Therefore, social constructivism becomes the most relevant epistemology for the success of this research.

3.9 CONSTRUCTIVIST CLASSROOM AS ADVOCATED BY PIAGET, VYGOTSKY AND BRUNER

A constructivist classroom refers to the type of class that focuses on the active participation of children. A classroom is no longer a place where the practitioner becomes the only one who imparts knowledge to inactive children (Kumar, 2019). In a constructivist classroom, children are encouraged to be actively involved in their process of development. Learning is child-centered and accomplished through active discovery learning and inquiry (Brau, 2018).

The practitioner facilitates and guides the child while navigating and exploring (playing) the environment for their cognitive, social, physical, and emotional development. Children in constructivist classrooms learn to question things and to apply their natural inquisitiveness to the world. Constructivism promotes social and communication skills by creating a classroom environment that stresses collaboration and the exchange of ideas (Hackathorna, Solomon, Blankmeyer, Tennial & Garczynski, 2011). Children

learn how to clearly articulate their ideas as well as to effectively collaborate with others (teamwork) (Dagar & Yadav, 2016). This is crucial to success in the real world since they will always be exposed to a range of experiences in which they will have to cooperate and navigate among the ideas of others for their holistic development (Mugambi, 2018).

Classroom setting makes the most of a child's opportunity for development since it brings together children's variety of developmental levels (Zosh et al, 2017). Constructivist classrooms provide experience on the knowledge construction process under realistic contexts (classroom) through social experience (social interaction during play) (Whitbread et al, 2017). Table 1 below shows the difference between the traditional classroom and the constructivist classroom.

Traditional Classroom	Constructivist Classroom
Teaching begins with the parts of the whole. Emphasizes basic skills.	Teaching emphasizes big concepts, beginning with the whole and expanding to include the parts.
Strict adherence to a fixed curriculum is highly valued.	The pursuit of children's questions and interests is valued.
Materials are primarily textbooks and workbooks.	Materials include primary sources of material and manipulative materials.
Learning is based on repetition.	Learning is interactive and cooperative building on what the child already knows.
Practitioners disseminate information to students; students are recipients of knowledge.	Practitioners have a dialogue with children, helping children construct their knowledge.
The role of the practitioner is directive, rooted in authority.	The role of the practitioner is interactive, rooted in cooperation.
Assessment is through testing, correct answers.	Assessment includes children's works, observations, and points of view. The process is important with more focus on the product.
Knowledge is seen as inert.	Knowledge is seen as dynamic, ever-changing with the experiences.
Children work primarily alone.	Children work individually and in groups.

Table 1: Adapted from: Thomas and Brown (2011)

3.10 INTERACTION AND KNOWLEDGE CONSTRUCTION IN PBP

The study subscribes to the argument that the philosophy of play-based pedagogy will be unfruitful without the appropriate methodology. Practitioners differently interpret the presumed purpose of why play, what ought to be the substance or nature of play (content), and how to play ought to be in process, procedure, and activity (methods) (Zosh et al, 2017). The position of the study is on both impartiality and the profound involvement of both children and practitioners in PBP to ensure holistic development of the child (Fisher, Hirsh-Pasek, Newcombe and Golinkoff, 2013).

A crucial dimension of PBP is the question of the benefits of play on child development. In any classroom, the practitioner applies and encourages a range of different play activities to support PBP (Bergen 2014 cited by Bubikova-Moan, Hjetland & Wollscheid, 2019). Children need resources or real objects and a conducive environment to explore, figure out, experiment, engage, and communicate their development (Myftiu & Topçiu, 2015). Some children may be able to use more abstract symbols. Children need to be engaged in the lesson if they are to learn. Resources extend children's development through scaffolding if suitable activities are planned for holistic and multi-sensory learning and teaching (Blythe, 2013).

The critical factor in a child's cognitive development is their interaction with peers. Interaction offers opportunities for the child to have cognitive conflict, which results in arguing or debating with peers (Mogashoa, 2014; Morin, 2020). The most fruitful experience in a child's development is collaboration. A conducive environment and scaffolded activities create opportunities for interaction and different levels of development. This type of interaction requires children to consider another person's point of view (social and emotional development). Children are most challenged in their thinking when they are with peers because they are all on an equal footing and are free to challenge ideas as opposed to networking with adults (Farquhar & White, 2014).

The process of constructing knowledge of the world is not done in isolation but rather within a social context. The child is a social being and acquires a framework for interpreting experiences through social life (Fisher et al. 2013). There is no unique sequence for child development, it mostly depends upon the pedagogy applied during play activities, which is supported by the environment. The environment provides

numerous opportunities and choices for children to develop. Variability of teaching methods provides opportunities for children to construct knowledge in different ways (Campo & Baldassarre, 2019). Opportunities provide children with a chance to holistically develop emotionally, socially, cognitively, and physically.

3.11 SUMMARY

Children have control over the direction of their learning and must be able to learn through experiences of engaging, touching, moving, listening, seeing, and hearing. Socialisation with other children encourages cooperation and respect if children are allowed to explore different materials in endless ways and are given opportunities to express themselves within their immediate environment. PBP is a necessary and required method of how children learn and develop as they seem to learn better if they play. The next chapter looks at the research methodology utilised to respond to the research questions.

CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

4.1 INTRODUCTION

In chapter 3, the theoretical framework was discussed. It was argued that the philosophy and methodology of play-based pedagogy are mutually inclusive. Therefore, both the philosophy and methodology are key indicators for ensuring the holistic development of young children. The theoretical framework of this study, underpinned by the Social Constructivist Theory, argued that young children can engage, collaborate, and explore their learning environment within a social context. Through the different activities, the theorist believes that young children can effectively develop the different domains.

In chapter 4, the researcher presented the methodology for the study. The qualitative study within an interpretive paradigm aimed to prompt the views of practitioners on play-based teaching and learning for the holistic development of young children. This chapter further presents the research design, approach, paradigm, data collection and analysis methods. The chapter concludes with ethical principles.

4.2 RESEARCH DESIGN

A research design is a plan connecting conceptual research problems to related empirical research (Creswell, 2013). According to Hammarberg, Kirkman and de Lacey (2016), the research design articulates the data required and the methods that will be used to collect and analyse data. They further indicate that it gives clarity on how the whole process of the research design will answer the research questions. Peniel (2016) agrees by signifying that research design functions as an outline that gives the research a direction and permits the process to be trustworthy and relevant to the study's theoretical framework. Bradshaw and Stratford (2010) confirm it as a process followed to manage a study, which includes the period the data is collected and utilised for the study intended. The research design intends to provide an appropriate framework for the study. This framework was used by the researcher in this study to collect data.

The researcher used a semi-structured interview schedule to collect data from the practitioners. The observation schedule was also used to record lesson observations inside and outside the classroom. The design in this study gave the researcher a framework to follow when collecting data on the practitioners' understanding and views of PBP for holistic child development.

The design is concerned with establishing answers to the questions asked (responses) based on the phenomenon being researched (Hammarberg et al., 2016). Sileyew (2019) asserts that a good research design ensures that the data obtained helps to answer research questions more efficiently. Therefore, a well-informed decision on the research design was crucial for this study as it determined the process of data collection process on the perceptions of participants about PBP and its utilisation on the development of young children (Hammarberg et al., 2016). This was done to ensure that the rich and detailed first-hand experience of participants' understanding of the PBP is gathered (Jilcha, 2019). Aspers and Corte (2019) proclaim that the research design allows the researcher to ask questions that cannot easily be put into numbers to understand human experience. Creswell (2014) agrees that research design is a holistic approach that involves the discovery and unfolding of the model that occurs within a natural setting, which enables the researcher to develop a level of detail from high involvement in the actual experiences. A semi-structured interview schedule addressed that aspect as the researcher was able to probe further where necessary for well-enriched data.

The research design allowed the researcher to study the nature of PBP to respond appropriately to the questions posed in section 1.4 and lesson observation conducted during dada collection (Busetto, Wick & Gumbinger, 2020). The research design assisted the researcher in defining steps and procedures followed while conducting research, as well as for the interpretation of the data collected under the interpretative research paradigm (Lichtman, 2014). The steps and procedures in the research paradigm assisted the researcher to ground the research in a particular theoretical model relevant to the study and provided planning guidelines that gave order and direction to the research procedures (Ngozwana, 2018).

There are different types of qualitative research methods. According to Creswell (2013), qualitative research methods are divided into five groups, namely

ethnography, narration, grounded theory, case study, and phenomenology. The researcher opted for the phenomenological interpretivist approach because of its relevance to the study and it is a form of qualitative research that focuses on the individuals' lived experience within the world (Creswell, 2013; Maree, 2017).

4.2.1 The research paradigm

A research paradigm, as defined by Brad Wray (2011), is the practice of mutual beliefs and agreements shared between researchers on how problems should be understood and addressed. This means a paradigm is a guide to a research study (Mittwede, 2012). Johannesson and Perjons (2014) proclaim that the research paradigm is a universally recognisable systematic achievement that provides solutions to researchers using the same phenomenon but describing and interpreting it in different ways. Hassan (2016) further argues that a paradigm is a set of assumptions and perceptual orientations shared by members of a research community. Therefore, paradigms determine how members of the research community view and employ both the phenomenon and the research methods towards the research study of a particular phenomenon (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017).

Identifying the paradigm that guides and characterises the process of doing this research study was also crucial for the investigation. Each research study follows one of the research paradigms as a guide for creating research methodology and carrying out the research study legitimately and acceptably (Makombe, 2017). Many research paradigms emerge from one of two approaches to inquiry: positivism or interpretivism (Shah & Abdullah, 2013). According to Kivunja and Kuyini (2017), paradigms are important because they give beliefs and orders that determine what should be examined, how it should be studied, and how the study's results should be understood. They consist of the study methodology, approach, ontology, and epistemology (Hassan, 2016). Each paradigm provides a variety of approaches from which the researcher can pick. These methodologies are research approaches that aid the researcher in conducting a systematic investigation (Mittwede, 2012).

Based on the purpose and needs for this study, the researcher needed to apply an appropriate paradigm. That appropriate paradigm was an interpretive research paradigm. This paradigm was deemed the most suitable model in gathering the information from practitioners on play-based pedagogy because it provided the

researcher with an opportunity to observe young children exploring play-based learning during the teaching and learning process. Interpretive research is a paradigm based on the assumption that social reality is not singular nor objective but is shaped by human experiences and social contexts (ontology) (Azungah, 2018). According to Shah and Abdullah (2013) interpretive paradigm is mostly concerned with the understanding of the world from the subjective experiences of individuals. Therefore, the meaning of oriented methodologies such as interviewing or participant observation was used which rely on a subjective relationship between the researcher and phenomenon being researched (Brad Wray, 2011). Interpretivism emphasises that social reality is viewed and interpreted by individuals according to the philosophical positions they hold (Dean, 2018). Goldkuhl (2012) signifies that interpretivism refers to epistemologies and philosophies about how knowledge of the world is gained which rely on interpretation and understanding of the meanings of human actions. The advantage of using interpretive methods of research is that the responses are valid and close to the truth O'Donoghue (2018).

In the interpretive research paradigm, a participant significantly gives a good reflection of how people truly feel about the phenomenon in question which then provides an accurate picture of what the researcher set out to measure (Goldkuhl, 2012). The paradigm supported the study, as confirmed by Hassinger-Das et al. (2018), that during child development, practitioners create a conducive environment for children to develop different domains through an interactive learning process. Morehouse (2011) agrees that an interpretive paradigm allows researchers to shape both what they see and how they understand it. The researcher pursued to understand how PBP contributes towards holistic child development using the understanding and perceptions of practitioners of play-based learning. The participants provided their views and understanding of the PBP in holistic child development which included the four developmental domains which are physical, emotional, social and cognitive development. The understanding and views on PBP was drawn from the five practitioners who were identified from five ECDCs. Four of the ECDCs were school-based centres and one was a community-based centre. In all five centres that participated in the study, a brilliant understanding of PBP from participants, with different interpretations of play-based activities associated with the development of young children, emerged. The utilisation of the interpretivism research paradigm

assisted the researcher to have a clear understanding of how practitioners perceive and implement PBP in their centres during the teaching and learning of young children.

Consequently, an interpretive research paradigm had been carefully chosen for this study to gather information from practitioners on play-based pedagogy and to have an opportunity to observe young children exploring play-based pedagogy during the teaching and learning process. Classroom context plays an important role in holistic child development. A conducive environment creates a platform for interactive learning. Children make meaning through inferences by interacting with others and objects, interpreting what they play with, and then making judgments in the process (Creswell, 2013). On the other hand, interpretation makes meaning of collected data or information through inferences or judgments (Byrne, 2021). The responses were valid and close to the truth as each participant gave a good reflection of how they felt about PBP (O'Donoghue, 2018).

The study preferred this design because of its in-depth approach and usefulness in testing whether the specific theory and model applies to the phenomenon in the real world (Ngozwana, 2018). Qualitative research methodologies come in a variety of forms and proportions to allow the researcher to gather in-depth information and views. The study chose a qualitative approach taking into cognizance the fact that it is based on naturalistic inquiry, which allowed for the interpretation of the participants' personal experiences and knowledge of PBP.

4.2.2 Research approach

Since the researcher opted for an interpretivist paradigm, a qualitative research approach was followed. The research approach, as described by Aspers and Corte (2019), is a plan and procedure that consists of the steps of broad assumptions to detailed methods of data collection. Qualitative research is undertaken in naturalistic settings and it is interpretive (Cleary, Horsfall & Hayter, 2014). The natural settings allow participants to answer questions based on personal experiences rather than a confined structure of pre-arranged questions (Busetto, Wick & Gumbinger, 2020). Hammarberg et al. (2016) reiterate that qualitative research involves collecting and analysing non-numerical data, such as text and audio to understand concepts, opinions, and experiences. The researcher preferred to use the qualitative approach in a natural setting to allow participants to respond freely on their perceptions of PBP

and how it is applied in classrooms for teaching and learning purposes based on personal experiences (Busetto, Wick & Gumbinger, 2020). The approach also allowed for a better understanding through first-hand experience, truthful reporting, and quotations of actual conversations (Aspers & Corte, 2019). Hammarberg et al. (2016) confirm that the qualitative research approach is used to answer questions about experience, meaning, and perspective, which mostly come from the standpoint of the participant. This approach provided a more flexible approach as questions were easily adapted during the setting to improve responses (Busseto et al., 2020). The researcher was able to probe further where good information deemed could be elucidated (Cleary, Horsfall & Hayter, 2014).

There are some benefits of using qualitative research approaches and methods. One of the benefits is that it produces a thick, detailed description of participants' perceptions, feelings, opinions, views and experiences, and interpretation of their actions (Rahman, 2016). This is supported by Rahman (2016), who argues that the qualitative research approach (interpretivism) holistically understands the human experience in specific settings. The preference of this approach is based on its nature of using interviews and observations for data collection (Aspers & Corte, 2019).

4.2.2.1 Qualitative Research

Qualitative research relies on data obtained by the researcher from first-hand observations, interviews, questionnaires, focus groups, participant-observation, recordings made in natural settings, documents, and artifacts (Creswell, 2013). Qualitative research is used to gather in-depth insights into a problem or generate new ideas for research (Creswell, 2014). It aims at getting a better understanding through first-hand experience, truthful reporting, and quotations from actual conversations (Aspers, 2019). Through quality research, the researcher managed to understand how the participants understood PBP through their experiences on teaching through play and also gained information on how play contributes to the development of young children (Azungah, 2018). Qualitative research is defined as a market research method that focuses on obtaining data through open-ended and conversational communication (Kruth, 2015). Participants shared their PBP experiences through a semi-structured questionnaire in a free and convenient environment.

Teherani, Martimianakis, Stenfors-Hayes, Wadhwa et al. (2015) expound that qualitative research is multimethod in focus, involving an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of and interpret a phenomenon in terms of the meanings people bring to them (McLeod, 2019). Practitioners were allowed to bring their meaning and views of PBP as per their experiences and understanding. This permitted the researcher to understand the social reality of each practitioner on PBP as they were interviewed within their natural setting (Busetto, Wick & Gumbinger, 2020). The qualitative research approach assisted the researcher to gather experiential information, which guided the researcher in answering the research questions indicated in section 1.4. Research following a qualitative approach is exploratory and seeks to explain 'how' and 'why' a particular phenomenon or behaviour operates as it does in a particular context (Naderifar, Goli & Ghaljaie, 2017).

4.3 RESEARCH TYPE

A case study is a research strategy and an experiential investigation that investigates a phenomenon within its real-life context (Crowe, Cresswell, Robertson, Huby, Avery & Sheikh, 2011). Case studies are based on an in-depth inquiry of an individual or a group to explore the causes of underlying philosophies (Rebolj, 2013). The general purpose of a case study is to describe an individual situation or case in detail, identify the key issues of the case and analyse the case using relevant theoretical concepts (Cleary, Horsfall & Hayter, 2014). Case studies are good for describing, comparing, evaluating, and understanding different aspects of a research problem (Rashid, Rashid, Warraich, Sabir et al., 2019). In this study, the researcher investigated five practitioners, from five early childhood centres, on their perceptions of PBP and the role-play has on the development of young children. A case study may be descriptive or explanatory (Cleary, Horsfall & Hayter, 2014). To address the descriptive and explanatory aspects, the researcher used an interpretive approach to study PBP as a phenomenon (Rebolj, 2013). Participants were allowed to share their experiences on the implementation of PBP during the teaching and learning process in and outside classrooms.

4.4 RESEARCH METHODS

Research methods are the strategies, processes or techniques utilised in the collection of data or evidence for analysis to uncover new information or create a better understanding of a topic (Maree, 2017). There are different types of qualitative research methods, such as interviews, documents, focus groups and case studies (McLeod, 2019). According to Kruth (2015), the results of qualitative methods provide a deep understanding of how people perceive their social realities and most importantly, how they act within the social world. The researcher had quite a few methods for collecting experiential information from participants, ranging from the interviews to observations (Maree, 2017). A good example of a qualitative research method would be semi-structured interviews because it generates qualitative data through the use of open-ended questions (Aspers & Corte, 2019). Semi-structured interviews allow the participant to talk in some depth about the phenomenon being investigated and give them freedom of choosing their own words (Thomas et al., 2014). This helps the researcher to develop a real sense of a person's understanding of the phenomenon in question (Maree, 2017). Fairly, research methods assist the researcher to arrive at a resolution of the problem investigated.

The most frequently used research methods include observation, interviews, focus group experiments. Due to the nature of this study, the researcher focused on interviews and observation to obtain relevant and quality data for the intended phenomenon. The observation of practitioners during indoor and outdoor lessons was conducted to see child inferences of acquired knowledge and skills. The researcher needed to investigate how play-based pedagogy is interpreted in play-based lessons for the holistic development of young children (Pellegrini, Symons & Hoch, 2012). The researcher's observations and concerns weighed heavily on practitioners who seem to marginally infuse play-based pedagogy during teaching and learning, even though the NCF strongly emphasises learning through play for holistic child development. The study focused on the views of practitioners on play-based pedagogy as a strength of the constructivist theory. This made a qualitative method the most suitable strategy since it offered the researcher an opportunity to gather practitioners' views, understandings and experiences on the incorporation of PBP during teaching and learning (Kruth, 2015).

4.5 POPULATION AND SAMPLING

The 'population', in research, is clarified as the collection of all individuals, groups, or organisations that will participate in the study (Shatishprakash, 2020). It refers to all the people who are eligible to be included in a study (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014). The implication is that population denotes individuals from a certain group of individuals where a sample may be drawn from. For this study, the population was five practitioners from five ECDCs, four from school- and one from community-based, from two circuits, namely Emalahleni and Steve Tshwete, Nkangala District in the Mpumalanga Province, South Africa.

4.5.1 Purposive Sampling

Gentle, Charles, Ploeg and McKibbon (2015) define sampling as the selection of specific data sources from which data are collected to address the research objectives. Sampling is regarded as one of the important aspects of the selection. A good selection of the sample provides quality and authentic results (Nieuwenhuis, 2013). The study used purposive sampling. The researcher used purposive sampling to obtain participants who are conversant and enlightened about the phenomenon in this study (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Purposive sampling is when participants are pre-selected according to standards defined by a specific research question (Aspers & Corte, 2019). In this study, the pre-selected population refers to practitioners who are presently teaching and assisting with the development of young children in ECDCs.

Purposive sampling focuses on certain features of a population of interest that will best answer the research questions and will provide rich data about the phenomenon being researched (Creswell, 2013). That sample should bring different elevations of child development knowledge, assurance, and various values and attitudes towards play-based pedagogy (Gray & Ryan, 2016).

4.5.2 Research Site

In this section, the place where the research was conducted is described. The study was conducted only with the five selected early childhood centres. These research sites were only in this study to assist the researcher to gather valuable information on the perceptions of practitioners on the play as a pedagogy and the impact it has on

the development of young children. Only selected grade R classes from the selected centres participated in the study. The study was conducted at four school-based centres and one community-based centre. In South Africa, all public schools are categorised into five groups called quintiles (1-5). The four schools were selected based on the quintile grading of all South African schools by the Department of Basic Education. This grading is largely based on the demographic location of all public schools. Two of the schools are quintile 2, one is quintile 1, and the fourth one is quintile 3. The selection considered the experiences of participants to gather rich, in-depth information and understanding of play-based pedagogy (Creswell, 2013). The experience of participants was crucial for the success of this study. UNESCO (2018) confirm the importance of appropriate context and the influence it has on the behaviour and social context of the participants.

4.5.3 The Selection of Participants

Participants in this study were five Early Childhood Development Centres (ECDCs). Four of these centres were school-based and one community-based. In the five ECDCs, one practitioner per centre participated in this study. These were the well-experienced practitioners teaching in centres. All five practitioners had ten or more years of teaching in early childhood. A pre-selected criterion, relevant to the research question (Creswell, 2012) was set out beforehand to ensure quality and reliable data collection. The study was conducted in South Africa, Mpumalanga Province, Nkangala district, in the Steve Tshwete and eMalahleni Circuits. The selection was mostly influenced by the NCF policy Theme 2 implementation, which encourages the use of play-based pedagogy in developing young children for their holistic development. Interviewing all five well-experienced practitioners was fascinating. It allowed the researcher to understand how they apply their play-based methodology and knowledge into practice in the day-to-day context of their centres.

4.6 THE ROLE OF THE RESEARCHER

In every research, integrity is a big matter. As a researcher, I had to live up to that integrity by ensuring that my relationship with participants, who were experienced practitioners, was a pleasant one. The integrity of the research equals the integrity of the researcher. Therefore, the theme needed to explain the findings without being

biased to the potential participants (Naderifar, Goli & Ghaljaie, 2017). I made an effort to access the understanding and get the feel of the practitioners on play-based pedagogy on holistic child development. I safeguarded the participants and their data by adhering to the ethics, as stipulated by the University of Pretoria. As the study was qualitative, interpretivism was used to adhere to subjectivity (Cresswell, 2013). In order for the researcher to explore these different opinions, views, experiences, beliefs, and motivations of participants, semi-structured interviews were used (Gill et al., 2014).

4.7 DATA COLLECTION METHODS

Data were collected mainly through interviews and lesson observations. Interviews were conducted individually and face-to-face. This allowed the researcher to do follow-up questions when needed. An advantage of this approach is that it offers a whole explanation and investigation of the research focus without any limitations to the scope of the research and participants' responses (Creswell, 2013).

Data were collected over one month (March 2021) at the five centres. This allowed the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of practitioners' views in schools and the community. Permission was secured from the Mpumalanga Provincial Department of Education, district, circuit offices, centres, practitioners, and parents of the children who participated in the study.

The researcher used audio-voice recording throughout all interviews to ensure that all information shared was properly recorded and gathered for quality analysis. The voice recorder assisted the researcher in safeguarding and acknowledging all discussions. The discussions were recorded, and opinions and questions that arose from participants were acknowledged for analysis purposes (Hammersley, 2014).

During the interviews, the researcher gathered views, knowledge and information about practitioners' experiences of play-based pedagogy on holistic child development. Maximum participation was encouraged, and participants were urged to respond to the questions regarding their best experiences and knowledge of play-based pedagogy. The interviews were conducted at the premises of all five centres to minimise financial implications for the participants. Since this process was conducted during COVID-19 alert level 3 in the first term of the schools' academic year in South Africa, adherence to COVID-19 protocols and procedures of social distancing and gathering restrictions were followed. The temperature of participants and the

researcher was checked, hands were frequently sanitised, and masks were kept on at all times. All five interviews with one participant from each centre were conducted in well-ventilated areas.

4.7.1 Data Collection Instruments

The study used different data-gathering instruments. Interviews and observation sheets were used. The preference of the instruments was because of their relevance with the qualitative approach used in this study. The Figure 9 shows the data gathering process followed in the study. Semi-structured questionnaires were used during one-on-one interviews for the collection of appropriate and reliable data. This was done to allow the researcher to follow up on responses that needed clarity and to gain in-depth information on the play-based phenomenon. The collection of appropriate data needs tools and instruments with clearly defined guidelines for proper use to reduce the chances of errors occurring during the process (Naderifar, Goli & Ghaljaie, 2017).

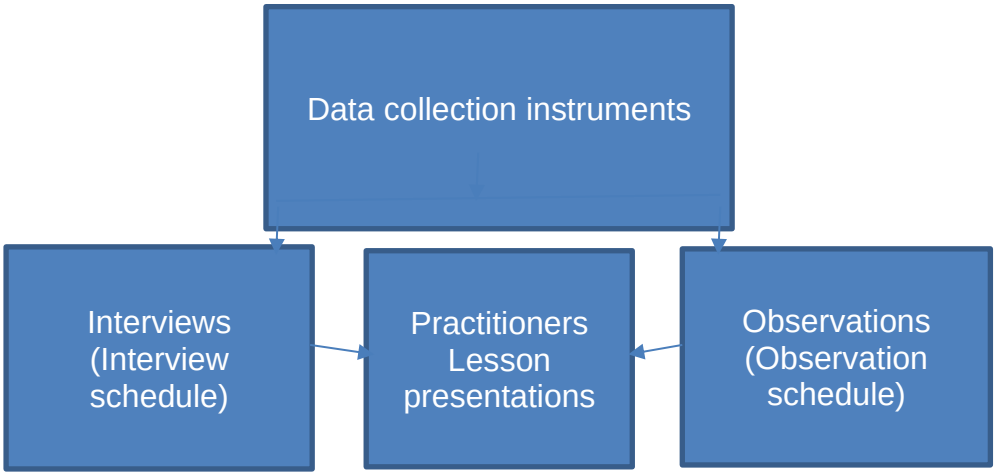

Figure 9: **Data collection instruments**

4.7.2 Semi-structured Interviews

The interviews suggest that the data collected is in the form of words and sentences. This type of data collection method is used in research to gather data directly from participants. Interviews allow for a wide range of data to be collected as the interviewer can follow up answers and delve deeper to get further details (Oltmann, 2016). An advantage of interviews is that the interviewer can follow up on ideas, probe responses, and explore motives and feelings, which questionnaires may never do (Bell, 2010). Interviews are a qualitative form of data collection as their results are rich

in data and carry meaning (Aspers & Corte, 2019). In an interview, the researcher is face-to-face with the participant, thus allowing a 'feel' of the opinions and views rather than just interpreting them from answers on a questionnaire (Hammarberg, Kirkman & de Lacey, 2016).

The semi-structured interview method was considered to encourage participants to communicate their views, perceptions, roles, knowledge of curriculum, and pedagogy of play (which is the heartbeat of this study), in developing young children holistically. This data collection method indicates that the researcher followed pre-planned questions, which also abled the researcher to probe them further where needed (Owen, 2014). This allowed the researcher to follow and fully understand practitioners' views and experiences on incorporating play-based pedagogy in their teaching, which may have not been possible if only set questions were asked. Less predetermined questions are more likely to let the interview develop to allow the interviewer and the interviewee to pursue an idea or response in more detail (Mason, 2010). One interview per practitioner was conducted at their centres. All interviews covered 10-30 minutes per person as the researcher had to first observe the lesson indoors and outdoors.

4.7.3 Observation

Observation is more than just the act of looking; it requires a careful and considered assessment of what is happening (Byrne, 2021). It is a type of qualitative research method that includes ethnography and research work in the field (Moser & Korstjens, 2018). Observational research allows the researcher to gather data in person, watch participants, and interpret what they perceive (Pellegrini, Symons & Hoch, 2012).

Observation gives the researcher the chance to see rather than just be told how participants act and react in the classroom environment (Wragg, 2011). Participant observations involve the researcher actively becoming part of a group for research, like sitting with a group of children, taking the role of a child learning in the classroom for that lesson (Summerfeldt, Ovanessian & Antony, 2020). This allowed the researcher to observe first-hand how children behave during a lesson and outdoor play without the fear of acting differently because they were aware that they were being observed.

The researcher visited each of the five centres selected and agreed to participate in the research project. Each of the centres was given a different day for the observation

process. Lesson presentations were only observed in the participating class for less than one hour per class. The observation included the whole class as this was group observation (guided by the lesson and the group preferences), and exploration and engagement with resources within their classroom (indoor). During the indoor activities, children were observed on how they manipulate, explore, and construct resources to develop their cognitive, emotional, and social domains. Outdoor activities were also observed to understand the physical domain, including social and emotional aspects, how they communicate (socialise), and demonstrate their emotional maturity when playing with others.

4.8 DATA ANALYSIS

According to Creswell (2013), data analysis includes the arrangement of data for scrutiny to display deeper understanding and diversity in analysis for clear meaning of collected information. The collected data was prepared and organised by transcribing the interviews verbatim, reviewed, and explored by identifying emerging themes or ideas (Moser & Korstjens, 2018). All the data that was collected was analysed organised in themes, coded, and then interpreted (Maher, Hadfield, Hutching & de Eyton, 2018). The data coding system was established into categories, and codes were assigned to the data by going through all five participants' responses and tagging them with codes. The researcher systematically worked through each theme and sub-theme identified from the data content collected. The main and sub-themes were linked to analyse data collected (Azungah, 2018). The findings and recommendations were finally drawn from the themes informed by the data collected. Figure 10 below gives the summary of data collection and analysis.

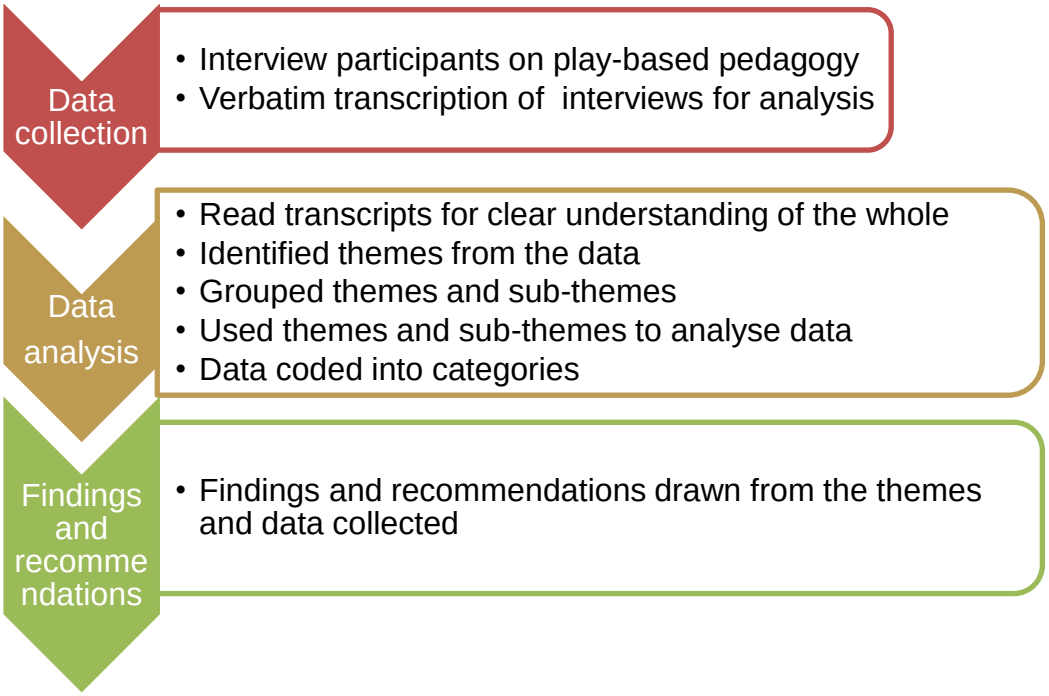

Figure 10: Data collection and analysis representation

4.9 DATA TRUSTWORTHINESS

According to Creswell (2015) validation of the research pursues to standardise the accuracy of the findings in a study. Validity relates to trustworthiness, dependability, credibility, transferability and conformability. The following paragraphs unpack each of these validity factors of trustworthiness. Trustworthiness was highly considered in this study. According to Pilot and Beck (2014), trustworthiness refers to the degree of confidence in data, interpretation, and methods that were used in research to ensure the quality of the study. To ensure trustworthiness, credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability were acknowledged (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). The following paragraphs give a synopsis of what the researcher has done to cater to the above-mentioned components:

4.9.1 Dependability

Dependability refers to the reliability and trustworthiness of the research findings and the degree to which research measures are recognised, allowing individuals to follow and critique the research process (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Polit and Beck (2014) define dependability in qualitative research as the stability of data over time and conditions. To authenticate the dependability of this research, questions, transcripts and voice audio recordings were analysed and checked by the researcher.

4.9.2 Credibility

In terms of reality, compatible findings were very crucial for the credibility of this study (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). This was because credibility essentially asks the researcher to link the findings of the study with reality to demonstrate the truth of the findings (Polit & Beck, 2014). To safeguard the credibility of this study the researcher used interviews and observations. The data was collected and verbatim transcribed to protect connection of practitioners' identity against their responses.

4.9.3 Transferability

In qualitative research, transferability is the degree to which the outcomes of a research study can be applied beyond the bounds of the research findings (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). The bounds of the research findings refer to similar situations or individuals where the findings could be applied to other contexts and studies (Polit & Beck, 2014). The degree of transferability in this study was explained under sampling (4.7). The data process was also clarified to provide findings that could be also applicable to other similar context and studies to cater for the transferability.

4.9.4 Confirmability

Korstjens and Moser (2018) view confirmability as the degree to which the findings of the research study can be confirmed by other researchers. Confirmability is concerned with establishing that the data and its interpretations of the findings are not creations of the researcher or their imagination but derived from the data (Tamarindo, Haven & van Grootel, 2019). Attention to confirmability was provided by using direct quotations from practitioners. The researcher was able to provide friendly relationships with the participants by being available to them to gather reliable information. Table 2 below clarifies the components of trustworthiness that were considered in this study supported by a summary of what was done in respect of those aspects.

TRUSTWORTHINESS COMPONENTS	WHAT WAS DONE
Credibility	Interviews and observations were used. The data was collected through recordings and verbatim transcribed.
Transferability	Purposive sampling was used. The data process was clarified.
Confirmability	Direct quotations from practitioners were used. A friendly relationship with the participants was ensured. Reliable information gathered.
Dependability	Questions, transcripts, and voice audio recordings were analysed

Table 2: Components of trustworthiness applied in this study

4.10 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

As stipulated by the Ethics Committee of the University of Pretoria, the ethical principles were strictly followed throughout this study. Letters to the Mpumalanga Department of Education, districts, and two circuit offices of the selected centres, centre managers and principals, practitioners, and parents of children in the centres, were issued requesting their permission to carry out the study in the selected centres. The study was only carried out after letters of consent were received, which granted permission from the participating parties. Only participants who returned consent forms participated in the study. Proper ethics, like honesty, a harmless environment, agreement, privacy, and confidentiality, as defined by Kamanzi and Romania (2019), were always adhered to. Participants were re-assured of information confidentiality during each introductory phase of the interview sessions. Interviews, recordings, and observation schedules were created with the consent of all participating parties. The researcher obtained permission from each participant to voice record the session.

This was also done before the beginning of each session. The purpose was clarified to state that it was solely to ensure that data is correctly and accurately collected.

Participants were guaranteed their pure voluntary participation in the study. Interviews were recorded willingly with the permission of the interviewees, and all participants were assured of their right to privacy, confidentiality, and anonymity (Sandy & Dumay, 2011). All the data collected from all participants were treated with high confidentiality (Ngozwana, 2018). Ethical approval obtained from the University of Pretoria was read and clearly understood by the researcher before fieldwork for full compliance.

4.10.1 Informed Consent

According to Creswell (2014), informed consent speaks to the importance of free participation by participants with their privacy being treated with the utmost confidentiality and protection. For this research, the participants were issued the consent form (appendix 1). The process of the study was well explained in the appendix including the assured protection of participants during the process. The ethical principles and the purpose of the research were clarified to the participants through the appendix 1 consent letter. In appendices 2 and 3, the researcher clarified the purpose of the study and gave assurance of confidentiality and protection of both the school-based and community-based centres' information. The researcher also sourced the approval of conducting a study in the Nkangala district from the Mpumalanga Department of Education (appendix 3).

4.10.2 Anonymity and Confidentiality

According to Gibson, Benson and Brand (2013), anonymity is one form of confidentiality that keeps participants' identities a secret. Confidentiality, on the other hand, speaks to keeping private what is said by the participants, which is something that is achievable through the researcher's decision of not sharing any parts of the data (Lancaster, 2017). This is the condition in which the researcher knows the identity of a research subject but takes steps to protect that identity from being discovered by others (Gibson *et al.,* 2013). The researcher ensured that these two important research ethics were upheld by being vigilant that the participants' identification is protected by using a coding system and letters of the alphabet for identification of each participant. This was done to give participants, who voluntarily agreed to participate in the study, the privacy they deserve. Confidentiality prevents the misuse of confidential information.

4.11 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY LIMITATIONS

A potential challenge of the qualitative interpretive approach could be the wrong or inappropriate interpretation of what is being observed, said, heard, and/or understood (Creswell, 2013). This was eliminated by using well-modified questions to avoid misinterpretations of the responses. Participants were allowed to engage freely during interviews and classroom observations for their insightful information sharing (Hardesty, Haselschwerdt & Crossman, 2019). Additional caution to this study was the formulation of the questions. The researcher also ensured that the situation was approached with the sensitivity it deserved to minimise discomfort among participants by creating a non-threatening environment for better naturalistic responses (Teherani, Martimianakis, Stenfors-Hayes, Wadhwa, et al., 2015). Participants were made to feel comfortable about having a limited understanding of play-based pedagogy and content. They may not necessarily have had enough exposure to it in terms of their teaching experiences and approaches.

4.12 SUMMARY

Chapter 4 has described the qualitative research methodology used in the study for data collection. The focus of the study was highlighted through the main and sub-questions. The research paradigm and its relationship to the research were elucidated. The research type was clarified, including the analysis method. Chapter 5 will focus on data analysis.

CHAPTER 5

DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

In chapter 4, the researcher presented the relevance of the methodology adopted for this study. The researcher discussed the validity of using an interpretivist approach, situated within a qualitative paradigm, to gain an in-depth understanding of the lived experiences of the participants and their views on play-based pedagogy. The researcher collected data from five (5) Early Childhood Development Centres (ECDCs). One (1) practitioner participated from each centre thus giving a total of five (5) participants.

This chapter focused on the data analysis and findings obtained from the five participants. The results of the study are presented below and discussed in detail. The researcher presented the data collected extensively and showed the relevance of play-based pedagogy towards the holistic development of young children. During the data analysis process, the researcher was able to establish patterns and trends, which assisted in verifying the findings that concurred with or refuted the literature in the study. This is presented in the literature control in chapter 6, where the researcher presents the arguments and findings and aligned them to the relevant literature.

5.2. MAIN RESEARCH QUESTIONS

For this study, the researcher developed both primary and secondary research questions to guide the study. These guiding questions assisted the researcher to identify themes and subthemes from the collected data.

5.2.1 The primary research question

How do practitioners perceive play-based pedagogy (teaching and learning) for the holistic development of young children?

5.2.2 Secondary research questions:

- What are practitioners' experiences of implementing play-based teaching and learning?

- What strategies can be used to support practitioners to implement play-based pedagogy in their centres?
- How do play-based activities impact the holistic development of young children?
- How do practitioners incorporate play-based pedagogy during the teaching and learning of young children?
- What forms of plays contribute towards the holistic development of young children?
- How do practitioners apply their knowledge and skills to assist young children to develop?

5.3 ANALYSIS OF THE RESEARCH SETTING AND DATA COLLECTION PROCESS

The research setting was explained in Chapter 4. 4.8. The participants of the study were all ECD practitioners. The study was conducted in the Mpumalanga Province. Mpumalanga is one of the nine provinces in the country, which the Department of Basic Education (DBE) considers to be a rural province. There are four education districts in this province, namely: Ehlanzeni, Bohlabela, Gert Sibande, and Nkangala. For this study and to ensure proximity, the researcher chose the Nkangala District since she provides support to teachers and practitioners in this district. This district has six municipalities, namely Dr JS Moroka, Thembisile Hani, Emakhazeni, Steve Tshwete, Victor Khanye, and Emalahleni.

For this study five (5) centres were selected. They were selected from two municipalities (which refers to the city or town or group of towns), eMalahleni and Steve Tshwete. Participants from three (3) circuits, eMalahleni (number 2), eMalahleni (number 3), and Steve Tshwete (number 1), agreed to voluntarily participate in the research. Table 3 below illustrates the names of the circuit, centres and number of participants who participated in the study:

Circuit	Name of centre	Number of centres (s) participated	School-based/ Community-based
eMalahleni 2	Sukumani	3	School-based
	Kromdraai		School-based
	Isibonelo		Community-based
eMalahleni 3	Merlinpark	1	School-based
Steve Tshwete 1	Aerorand	1	School-based

Table 3: Participating circuits and number of participants per circuit.

Within the three circuits, there are 99 ECD centres registered with the Mpumalanga Department of Education. Of these, 88 are school-based and 11 are community-based centres. The four participants in this study were all from school-based centres and one from a community-based centre. They were all grade R practitioners employed by the Mpumalanga Department of Education (MDoE). The researcher invited 10 centres, 5 school-based and 5 community-based centres. Due to Covid-19 lockdown, only 4 school-based and 1 community-based centre responded positively to voluntarily participate in the study.

5.4 CODING OF PARTICIPANTS

For anonymity and confidentiality, the researcher agreed to use codes to represent the participants and the centres. The use of pseudonyms, according to Maree (2015), protects the participants from being identified in the study. Tables 4 and 5 below represents the codes used in the discussion of the research findings.

PARTICIPA NTS	CODE
Practitioner A	PA
Practitioner B	PB
Practitioner C	PC
Practitioner D	PD
Practitioner E	PE

Table 4: Coding for practitioners

CENTRES	CODE
Centre 1	C1
Centre 2	C2
Centre 3	C3
Centre 4	C4
Centre 5	C5

Table 5: Coding for centres

5.5 PROFILE OF PARTICIPANTS

To provide a holistic picture of the participants and the respective centres, the researcher presented the profile of the participants and their centres. It is envisaged that the profile will give the reader a better understanding of the participants and the centres in which they teach. Profiling refers to the application of profiles, meaning the usage of profiles for the identification or categorisation of groups or individual persons (Lupton, 2020). Profiling includes thorough knowledge and understanding of the issue to be dealt with and representatives of the group that will be affected by the decision made at the study (Torres, Boccaccini & Miller, 2006).

It was important for the researcher to profile participants so that the reader can gain an understanding of each centre and the type of centre where participants are teaching. The profiles will provide the reader with information on the background of each participant to give insight into the teaching and learning environment and the practices of each practitioner (Gaffar, Deshpande, Bandara & Mathiesen, 2015). In this study, all participants were experienced grade R practitioners. They all directly interact with children daily. All five participants were qualified ECD practitioners with qualifications ranging from ECD Level 4 up to B.Ed degrees. The researcher was specific when she selected these participants. The selection criteria are discussed in chapter 4, section 4.9. Their selection was based on the experience they have in teaching young children, especially grade Rs. Their experience gave the study quality information that informed reputable data findings. The subsequent paragraphs unpack each practitioners' profile in the study.

5.5.1 Practitioners' profile

Full description	Code	Gender /Race	Age range	Qualification	Teaching experience	Grade teaching	Centre description
Practitioner A	PA	F-B	45	Level 5	18 years	R	Community-based
Practitioner B	PB	F-B	36	Diploma in ECD	12 years	R	School-based
Practitioner C	PC	F-B	31	Diploma in ECD	11 years	R	School-based
Practitioner D	PD	F-B	46	Diploma in ECD	20 years	R	School-based
Practitioner E	PE	F-W	43	B.Ed. in Pre-Primary Ed.	20 years	R	School-based

Table 6: Profiling of participants

Table 6 above illustrates the practitioners in each of the centres. Four (4) participants were Black female practitioners, and one (1) was a White female practitioner. The age average for all participants ranged between 31 – 46 years. All five participants had more than ten (10) years of teaching experience in a grade R class. These

practitioners were all very experienced and came with rich knowledge and experience of grade R teaching and learning. It was for this reason that the researcher purposively selected these participants as described in section 4.5.1. The paragraphs below present a synopsis of each practitioner.

5.5.2 Profile of Participant A (PA)

PA is a 45 -year-old female who has been teaching grade R classes for 18 years. This participant has been in the community-based centre since she started teaching. She was very keen and free in her responses during the interview. She loves working with children. This was evident when she stated, '*Teaching young children is my joy and pleasure. I know children. When the child is talking, I can see that today the child is not right even when he or she is drawing*.' She enjoys seeing children develop basic life skills and supporting them. She motivates children to learn to play and socialise with others. '*When I prepare my lesson, I need to make sure that I follow the same theme of the week and the type of play I am going to use*.' She displayed valuable experience and willingness for personal growth and development as she stated, '*My wish is to continue with my B. Ed* degree studies.'

5.5.3 Profile of Participant B (PB)

PB is a female grade R practitioner who is 36 years of age. She has been teaching in the school-based centre for 12 years. She was enthusiastic during her lesson presentation and interviews. She displayed a passion for play for the development of young children by signifying that '*It is right to play with these children because they gain something from us*.' She believes that children need to play to learn and all lesson plans must include playing for incidental learning. She confirmed by saying, '*All my lesson plans include activities of both formal and informal play. My children see the play activity as fun.'*

5.5.4 Profile of Participant C (PC)

PC is a female grade R teacher who is 31 years old. She holds a diploma in early childhood education. This was a very interesting participant as she displayed a good understanding of play-based pedagogy in her responses. Although she displayed a rich understanding of play-based teaching, she cited that, *'There are resource limitations at the school, especially outdoor equipment.'* She was very enthusiastic

during the interviews, which allowed the researcher to gather in-depth data on her experience of play-based teaching and learning.

5.5.5 Profile of Participant D (PD)

PD is a female practitioner who is 46 years old. She has a diploma in early childhood education and was currently doing her final year in B.Ed in early childhood education. This practitioner has been teaching for over 20 years in the Grade R class. She is very experienced and has used different teaching methodologies to develop the child. She was a willing participant and responded freely to the researcher's questions. She indicated that she has deep love and affection for teaching and learning, especially for young children. She works at a school-based centre, which has limited resources, especially play equipment. This was confirmed during the interview when she said, *'We do not have outdoor play and I mostly improvise when it is time for it.'*

5.5.6 Profile of Participant E (PE)

Participant PE is a 43-year-old white female practitioner who holds a B.Ed. degree in pre-primary education. She is based at a fairly new (three years old) school but has been teaching grade Rs for 20 years. She was willing to participate and displayed a good understanding of play-based learning, which she incorporates very well in her lesson preparation. She is teaching at a school that is fairly well equipped with outdoor equipment and play activities. The participant indicated that she tries various teaching and learning approaches in her class. She is very keen on play-based teaching and learning. In her response, she stated that for play-based teaching and learning, the schools must have appropriate play equipment. She said, '*in my school, most of their outdoor equipment is recycled material.' 'All recycled materials are sourced from the nearby businesses.'* 'We use old tyres and wood/timber cut-offs to assist children to explore and learn.' She further acknowledged that by saying, *'I ask for some material from businesses around, which helps me during my lessons on manipulation of objects, learners feeling (sensory-motor skills) or objects and perceptual development.'*

The researcher presented the profile of the participants to provide the reader with the various contexts in which they teach young children. It also highlights the years of experience and a personal statement from each of the respondents.

In the next section below the researcher presents the profile of each of the centres that were purposively selected for this study. For anonymity and confidentiality, codes were used to represent each centre.

5.6 PROFILE OF ECD CENTRES

Centres	Code	Number of practitioners	Number of children
Centre 1	C1	3	115
Centre 2	C2	2	78
Centre 3	C3	2	86
Centre 4	C4	1	43
Centre 5	C5	1	38

Table 7: Biographical information of centres

Above table 7 represents the biographical information allocated to centres. The table indicates the number of practitioners and children in all five centres that participated in the study. The researcher observed outdoor equipment for each centre during lesson observation. Equipment was observed during outdoor play activities with children (Appendix 5: observation schedule). The following paragraphs unpack each centre, considering the outside view and equipment available.

5.6.1 Profile of Centre 1 (C1)

Centre C1 is a community-based centre situated in a semi-urban area. Around this centre, there are several informal settlements. The centre was a donation to the community by the local power station in 1999. The centre accommodates young children from the informal settlement and surrounding areas.

Figure 11: Centre C1 and its surroundings

The centre is built using very strong building materials to ensure the safety of all children. The centre accommodates approximately 115 children. There are three grade R classes with three (3) practitioners. Each class has approximately 39 children. This is a community-based centre situated in a semi-urban area with a lot of informal settlements. It accommodates children from informal settlements and surrounding areas. It has enough outdoor equipment, which is also well-maintained. Children are using this outdoor equipment daily at alternative times. Figure 12 below give a display type of outdoor equipment available in C1:

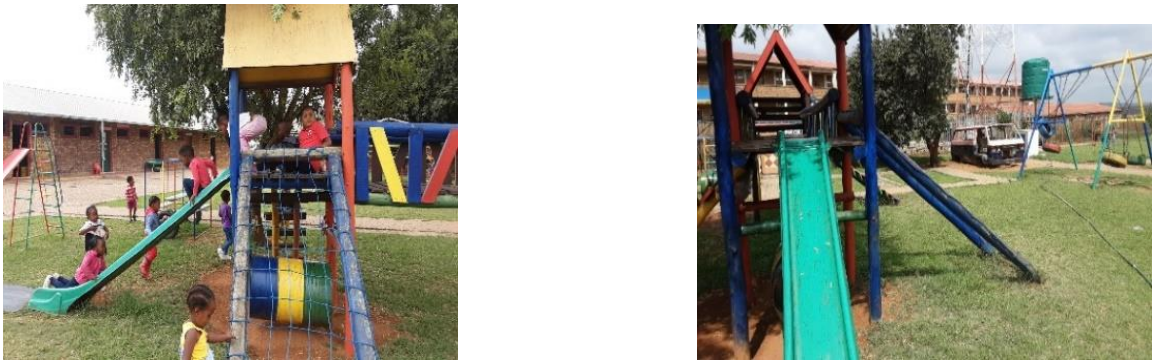

Figure 12: Outside view of C1 with its equipment

5.6.2 Profile of Centre 2 (C2)

Centre 2 (C2) is a quintile 2, school-based centre in a semi-urban area with no informal settlements nearby. The school was built in 1985 and is well-fenced with two grade R classes. Each class has 34 children. There is a practitioner in each class and they both have a diploma in ECD. It has a proper structure (bricks) for all other grades except grade Rs who are using mobile classes. Figure 13 below shows surroundings.

Figure 13: Centre C2 and its surroundings

Outdoor equipment is available although the painting is a bit dull and not attractive enough for young children. Following is the supporting picture, Figure 14, of outdoor equipment in this centre:

Figure 14: Outside view of C2 with its equipment

5.6.3 Profile of Centre 3 (C3)

Centre 3 (C3) is a quintile two (2) school-based centre in a township, which is 35 km outside town. The school is 45 years old but in good condition with a proper structure and fencing. It has two grade R classes with 43 children in each class. The centre has limited outdoor equipment. Although the centre is in the middle of proper structures, most of the residents are unemployed. Children use ordinary grade 1 furniture (desks), which is not suitable for a Grade R child. All 86 children share this equipment shown in Figure 15 below:

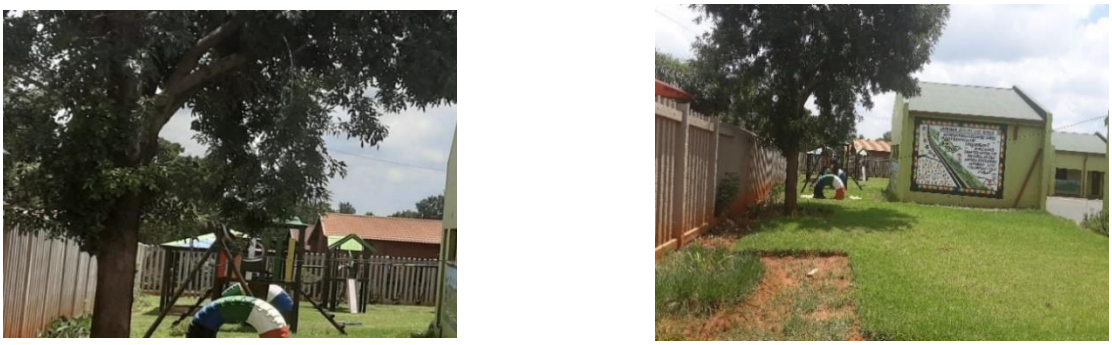

Figure 15: Outside view of C3 with outdoor equipment

5.6.4 Profile of Centre 4 (C4)

Centre C4 is a school-based, quintile two (2) centre, in a semi-urban area and surrounded by informal settlements. Most children come from informal settlements. There is only one grade R class with 43 children. This centre has a proper building

structure; however, the surrounding fences were damaged. There is a lack of appropriate outdoor equipment (Figure 16) to cater for 43 children in the school. This centre experiences break-ins almost every term or school holiday. This makes it difficult for the school and the practitioner to have or keep attractive equipment in the schoolyard.

The practitioner tries to provide a conducive learning environment in the class by displaying relevant resources. Below is the picture, Figure 17, of the outdoor equipment, which is in a condition that compromises the safety of young children. The big tree hanging above the equipment poses a health hazard. The safety of young children in centres is very important, especially because they are still at the exploring stage and want to try every piece of equipment or toy in front of them. Unfortunately, exploring and engaging is their way of learning and developing at this stage.

Figure 16: The surroundings of C4

Figure 17: Outdoor equipment available at C4

5.6.5 Profile of Centre 5 (C5)

Centre 5 (C5) is a quintile three (3), school-based centre situated in a semi-urban area. This is a fairly new (three-year-old) school with proper structure and fencing. It is fairly well-equipped with outdoor equipment. There are 38 children in a class. This school has proper grade R furniture (chairs and tables). The classroom is attractively decorated, and the outdoor equipment is colourfully painted. Most of their equipment is made from recycled materials like old tires. These tires are sourced out from local businesses. Every piece of equipment looks safe for young children to play with and is well taken care of. The pictures below, Figure 18, give a representation of what the school's outdoor equipment looks like.

Figure 18: The outdoor equipment at C5

5.7 THEMES AND SUB-THEMES

After the researcher had followed Creswell's (2014) steps in data analysis (see section 4.8) the following themes and subthemes were identified. Table 18 below represents the themes and sub-themes. These themes and sub-themes were used to present the findings of the study. Verbatim quotes were used to highlight the actual voices of the participants.

THEMES	SUB-THEMES
PRACTITIONERS' VIEWS OF PLAY-BASED PEDAGOGY.	Practitioners' knowledge of play-based pedagogy
	Practitioners' interpretations of play-based pedagogy
PRACTITIONERS' IMPLEMENTATION OF ACTIVITIES FOR HOLISTIC CHILD DEVELOPMENT	Social developmental activities
	Emotional developmental activities
	Physical developmental activities
	Cognitive developmental activities
SUPPORT REQUIRED BY PRACTITIONERS TO IMPLEMENT PLAY-BASED PEDAGOGY	Resources and a conducive environment
	Training and Development of Practitioners

Table 8: Themes and sub-themes

5.7.1 THEME 1: Practitioners' views of play-based pedagogy

Several researchers such as Fleer (2015); Hardesty et al. (2019) and Baker *et al.* (2016) have emphasised the importance of a profound understanding of play-based pedagogy if it is to be implemented effectively to strengthen the developmental domains of young children. Since this study focused on play-based pedagogy, the researcher posed the first question to the participants of their understanding of play-based pedagogy. The purpose was to gauge their understanding of this pertinent concept that has been articulated in the National Framework Policy for Early Childhood Education. According to Hassinger-Das et al. (2018) and Whitebread et al. (2017), they both agree that an understanding of play-based pedagogy is vital when implementing this approach in the teaching and learning of young children. Fleer (2015) states that every early childhood education practitioner is required to engage young children in play-based learning. Two sub-themes emanated from this coding of

the data under the main theme: 'Practitioners' understanding of play-based pedagogy" These are:

- Practitioners' knowledge of play-based pedagogy; and
- Practitioners' views of play-based pedagogy

5.7.1.1 Sub-theme 1: Practitioners' knowledge of play-based pedagogy

Sound knowledge of play-based teaching and learning is fundamental to every practitioner who works with young children in an educational environment. Fleer (2019) explains that play-based pedagogy focuses the teaching and learning through play. Young children are taught these fun-loving playful manner concepts of literacy and numeracy. The aim is to build and motivate young children's enthusiasm and passion for learning. Baumer (2013) agrees that a play-based approach to teaching and learning significantly enhances child development and the development of specific domains. The researcher asked the participants about their understanding of play-based teaching and learning. Their responses assisted the researcher to obtain the rich, depth, and scope of the practitioners' views of play-based teaching and learning. The responses obtained from the interviews of different practitioners are presented below.

PA revealed some understanding of what play-based teaching and learning are. She stated,

> '*Play-based learning is about introducing play activities in our teaching and learning. Lesson plans should include play-based activities, such as games to develop certain skills and it is important to include play in a lesson because it helps the child to understand better and will be able to remember.'*

According to PB, she understands play-based pedagogy as,

> '*Getting children to learn through play, having fun and is very different from formal learning because they learn through play, hence the teacher needs to include play when planning a lesson.'*

PC said that her understanding of play-based learning is based on ensuring that children are involved in activities that require them to engage by playing with each

other. According to her understanding, play-based learning can take place inside the classroom or outdoors. Furthermore, children need to play to learn in a formal and informal environment.

Both PD and PE agreed that play-based pedagogy is about including fun and games into daily teaching and learning. They stated that during these activities young children learn to socialise, interact, and learn from each other. Since children are very young in the ECD centres, it is important to avoid formal teaching and learning; therefore, play-based methods are important in the early years of teaching.

The voices of the participants indicate that they all had some understanding of what play-based pedagogy (teaching and learning) is. These comments confirm with Whitehead et al. (2017) who state that play is an integral component of children's everyday lives, which incorporates pleasure, exploration, and flexibility during child development. Play and learning bring joy and fun to young children, which in turn strengthen children's interest and motivation to explore and experiment to improve their learning. Weisberg, Hirsh-Pasek and Golinkoff (2013) reiterate that play-based pedagogy involves playful activities with some adult guidance and scaffolded learning assistance. All five practitioners mentioned the essence of the play in their responses, which indicates that they have good knowledge and understanding of play-based teaching and learning.

Hassinger-Das et al. (2018) state that play is a natural mode of learning through which young children engage and explore the world to nurture their development. This study intended to unearth this understanding among practitioners and its relevance to the development of young children. Aronstam and Braund (2016) supported by Pyle and Danniels (2018) emphasise daily interactions and exploration through play and engagement, which helps young children to develop and understand themselves and the world around them. The word 'interaction' was highlighted during the interview and to this PC responded, *'Children learn through what they see, through imitating, using toys, and through whatever is around them, basically exploring so "play" plays a very big role in that.'*

The understanding of play-based learning by PC concurs with the definition by UNICEF (2018) where they define play-based learning as children's initiative, decision-making process, and self-choice activity that controls their experience. The

rich conceptualisation of play-based by practitioners who participated in the study is clear and the importance thereof is the development of young children. This view concurs with what is articulated by the National Curriculum Framework that young children learn better when they play, and therefore, should be taught through a play-based approach (DBE, 2015). The holistic development of young children through play prepares them for formal schooling in grade one. Young children can develop necessary or much-needed skills, like fine and gross motor, if given enough opportunities to play and explore while still young.

The researcher probed further and asked the participants if they included play-based activities in their teaching and learning. The researcher aimed to delve into the practical understanding of play-based teaching and learning by each practitioner and how they incorporated that knowledge and experience into their daily lesson plans. All the participants indicated that they sometimes try to include play activities into their teaching and learning; however, many challenges hamper the implementation of play-based teaching and learning.

The response from PB on implementing play-based activities, she stated:

> *I try to include games for my children to play. These games usually take place inside the classroom. Some of the games that we play in the classroom are mind-games for example find a word that starts with the letter 'B'. As for outdoor play activities, there are very limited resources and we cannot take our children outside.*

PB further specified, *'It is right to play with these children because they gain something from us and if you include play, they enjoy the lesson, you can even take longer time, they will not feel it.'*

PE stated that they have dedicated time at their school to take their learners outside to play in the jungle gym. She stated that despite the school not being financially stable, they have used 'junk material' to construct their outdoor play centre.

Since various types of play are implemented in the early grades, the researcher focused on formal and informal play. Formal and informal play is an integral part of teaching and learning in the early grades. The researcher asked participants for their understanding of the formal and informal play. According to PA, she stated that

'Formal play is not a choice, but the learner must just follow the instruction or the rules like playing a board game, such as snakes and ladders or Dominoes. I believe formal play is similar to formal teaching where it is very structured, coordinated and well-planned, unlike informal play.'

PA's view is shared by PB and PD who also agreed that:

> Formal play is very different from informal play in early childhood education. They believe that this kind of play (formal play) is where the teacher has academically planned the play activities with a specific outcome in mind. This kind of play is when the teacher is the instructor who gives instructions and tells them (children) what to do. The teacher and children play together using concrete objects, like blocks and make-belief activities. The formal play is very educationally sound and constructive. Children have to formally learn through the play activity within a specified timeframe and the formal play activity is usually assessed by the teacher.

In contrast to formal play, PD stated:

> *The informal play takes place when the teacher asks her learners to go out onto the jungle gym and play. The children are given choices and the teacher merely watches that the children don't get hurt or injured. This type of play does not need to have specific goals or outcomes. The children can play with any of the resources available.,*

According to PE, she indicated that:

'Informal play is when children engage in play activities on their own, choosing games of their own choice, and playing with their peers. They play in social groups. During this play activity, the teacher is a mere observer and does not evaluate or assess the learners formally.'

According to PC and PE, they indicated that Formal play is:

> *'Constructive, rigidly assessed, planned at a particular time and session, and children are forced to do the planned activity. There is no room to change the planned activity. This kind of play does not allow for flexibility.*

> *This formal play cannot be randomly done in the class. It must be well-planned, thought of carefully, and well-coordinated with a specific outcome in mind.'*

The understanding and perceptions of formal play among the participants indicated they all had good knowledge of the difference between formal and informal play activities. However, some participants believed that formal play somehow imposes on what and how the child should play. There was clear evidence that all the participants displayed a good understanding of formal and informal play that is aligned to literature and scientific understanding. The participants' views are supported by Fleer's (2013) explanation of formal and informal play. Fleer (2013) explains that formal play, also known as guided play, is part of play-based learning in the early grades. She further stated that play creates an environment in which young children play within a structured learning context created by an adult for meaningful learning and development. Pyle and Danniels (2018) confirm that formal play is an adult-guided activity, which is structured and follows certain rules and plays an important aspect in child development.

Equally important is informal play, also known as free play. Pyle and Danniels (2018) explain free play as an activity that comes naturally (informally) from a child's natural curiosity, love for discovery, and enthusiasm. PE confirms this explanation by indicating that, *'free play is where the child can choose where to go and play and what activity or things they want to do, for example, when we have free play in the class, they can go to the fantasy corner, or block corner for constructive, or different tables of activities and they can choose what they feel like doing.'*

According to PA, PB, PC, and PD, their understanding of informal play is summarised below. They all believed that:

> *In play-based pedagogy, informal play is given preference because children play freely together with an adult. During informal play, children learn and understand social life skills informally, unlike writing work on the chalkboard and asking children to copy or write in their books. Some children may not understand how to formally complete an activity, however, through informal play, they will be able to participate and engage in an activity.*

Zosh (2017) concurred that free play is an unstructured play where children are allowed to freely engage and explore resources within their environment to develop fine and gross motor skills. The lack of understanding of the meaning of these two play types affects the full implementation of play-based learning, which deprives young children of their holistic development. If a practitioner does not have a clear understanding, differentiation, and incorporation of the types of play, play-based teaching and learning would be compromised. According to Hassinger-Das *et al.* (2018), play-based pedagogy maintains the exploratory nature of free play while also incorporating developmental scaffolding (guided play) activities by an adult to support children's mastery of a specific learning goal.

The responses concur with the study's theoretical framework which is based on the works of the three theorists: Piaget, Vygotsky, and Brunner. Brunner as cited by Smidt (2011) supports the potential of play as a process and mode of learning, which suggests that play is not only an activity but a way of developing and growing. Constructivism emphasises the role of the environment, interaction, exploration, and reflection, which could be done under the guidance of an adult to allow for self-discovery and development of young children (Pyle & Danniels, 2018). Play is a process in its nature. Children make sense of the social, physical, and material world, which gives them the ability to enquire, explore, generate, and modify their theories. The understanding of PBP was part of the focus of this study, and therefore, it was necessary that practitioners have a good understanding of the concept of play-based pedagogy; what it means, and how to implement play-based activities in an ECD classroom to support the holistic development of young children.

5.7.1.2 Sub-theme 2: Practitioners' interpretations of play-based pedagogy

To elicit the interpretations of practitioners regarding play-based pedagogy in early childhood centres, the researcher asked the participants, 'What are your views of play-based teaching and learning in grade R class?' The responses from the participants varied from centre to centre.

All participants PA; PB; PC; PD; and PE agreed that play is important in the early grades. They agreed on:

> *Learning through play is an important activity. Play-based learning is an activity that stimulates young children to learn. It is through play-based learning that children are motivated to learn basic literacy and numeracy skills. It is very important that play-based teaching and learning is a planned activity in schools.*

This agreement concurs with Major (2016) who indicated that play is an incredible act where children develop and learn while having fun. Major (2016) is supported by Solis et al. (2019) who state that play needs to be utilised during early learning to enhance holistic child development. The play takes place in an interactive manner, which is what is encouraged during child development (Hassinger-Das et al., 2018).

To support this statement, PC stated, '*children need to play to learn in any environment. Most learning takes place through play then we must allow children to play in our centres. In my view play is a necessary part of teaching and learning in the early grades. I am of the view that without play-based teaching and learning, the school will not be fun for young children*.'

PA indicated that *'In my view and experience, the play has been an important part of teaching and learning of small children. They enjoy playing and having fun. I often notice that my learners are always eager to play. In my view, if teachers do not include play in their daily planning, then they should incorporate play as a means of teaching and learning. We as teachers must make this place exciting and fun-loving*.'

In her response to the views of play-based pedagogy, PD emphatically stated, '*According to my view, schools must be centres for fun and learning. We must include games that children enjoy. I believe that most children learn by playing with each other and with the learning materials we have in our classes. I also know that there is much research on play in the early grades. Therefore, we must be well-acquainted and knowledgeable about using play as a teaching approach.'*

From the responses of the participants, the researcher agrees that all the participants viewed play as an integral part of teaching and learning. Play-based teaching and learning are encouraged in the policies set out by the NCF (DBE, 2015). It is through play activities that young children can develop their physical, social, emotional, and cognitive skills. According to Christian (2012) and Fleer (2012), play-based teaching and learning are crucial in the developmental activities of young children.

Whitebread *et al.* (2012) viewed play as a natural mode of learning through which young children participate and discover the world to nurture their development. When young children play, they interact, and when they interact, they socialise, and also learn to understand each other (tolerance and accommodation). Researchers, such as Fleer (2019) and Pyle and Danniels (2018), viewed play as an integral part of young children learning to share and accommodate others into their social circles. For this reason, Aronstam and Braund (2016) believe that the importance of daily interactions, exploration, and engagement of young children to support their understanding of the world around them (environment) mainly takes place in social interaction and communication.

The researcher believes that play, in its nature, is a process and has a great potential of developing a child physically, socially, emotionally, and cognitively, supported by the child's immediate environment. The potential of play has been explored by different researchers in diverse contexts, for example, children find many objects to play within any environment they find themselves in, like home or early development centres.

5.7.2 THEME 2: Practitioners' implementation of activities for holistic child development

Young children develop by participating and engaging in different play activities. For this reason, practitioners in early grade centres are required to carefully plan and prepare their teaching and learning activities. The successful implementation of these play activities depends on the availability of resources in the centres. To elicit information on the types of activities teachers use in their classrooms, the researcher asked participants, 'what type of activities do you use to develop the child's emotional, social, physical, and cognitive aspects?' This question assisted the researcher to collect valuable information on the implementation of play activities during teaching and learning in centres. The information and knowledge of the lived experiences of the participants assisted in the identification of the second theme of this study.

The importance of play-based activities in the development of young children can never be overemphasised. This is supported by Ellison (2012) who states that play reinforces creativity, communication, teamwork, and construction of own knowledge of the world by interacting with objects and people. Aubrey (2017) and Hassinger-Das et al. (2018) agree that play significantly contributes to the social, emotional, cognitive,

and physical development and preparation of young children for formal schooling. Four sub-themes emerged from this theme, namely social, emotional, physical, and cognitive developmental activities. These themes link to the developmental domains of young children. There are different types of activities that are linked to these developmental domains.

The paragraphs below give more details on the type of activities each of these developmental domains has, which contributes to holistic child development.

5.7.2.1 Sub-Theme 1: Social developmental activities

It is of great importance that young children learn to socialise and participate with other children within a group. Social skills teach young children to become friendly, tolerant, and accepting. The importance of social skills cannot be overemphasised, therefore, practitioners must have comprehensive knowledge and understanding of the importance of social skills. For this reason, practitioners in the early grades must be able to develop activities that can engage young children to participate in social activities. Mraz, Porcelli and Tyler (2016) state that if children can communicate what they need and want, and if they can fruitfully engage with other children, then their self-confidence and self-esteem are heightened. Whitebread et al. (2017) concur with Mraz, Porcelli and Tyler (2016) by stating that social development is the process whereby young children learn skills and attitudes that empower them to interact and socialise with others, thus building on their self-concept, self-esteem, and self-confidence. During social development activities, children learn and develop empathy and the skill to negotiate (Mraz, Porcelli & Tyler, 2016).

The researcher believes that to assist children to develop socially, practitioners should create opportunities where children are given opportunities to form relationships and interact with others. During that interaction, children learn the language. When children learn the language, it indicates mental growth, which leads to understanding. Understanding and comprehension are the most critical skills in child development. Learning, as a whole, requires a child to have a strong comprehension skills. This is mostly taking place during interaction inside and outside the classroom, with the practitioner or with their peers. Activities, like morning rings, storytelling, make-believe corners, and book corners, contribute to the development of this skill. Children in a book corner can talk to do picture reading, even if they have not yet learned to read

words. A make-believe corner makes children want to imitate others, which mostly involves talking. The more children engage in play activities with their peers, the better their language acquisition. A child with strong language skills finds it easy to socialise. Children develop creativity, intelligence, and confidence if they can socialise. Interaction with adults and peers creates a massive number of developing prospects for young children. These socialising skills add huge value to the academic performances of young children as they need well-developed language skills to learn and understand what they are learning. Social developmental activities assist in teaching cooperation, taking turns, trying different roles and personalities, how to lead and follow, and most importantly teaching responsibility. Thus, make social developmental activities are very important for the holistic development of young children.

To gather information on how practitioners assist young children to develop socially, the following question was asked during interviews, what kind of play activities do they give children for their social development?' Various responses were given by participants, which includes:

To this question, PA responded, '*I give them the activity that will help them to socialise. Some of the socialisation activities that I provide for my learners are working in pairs, working in small groups, and working as a class group. Examples of the activities that I give learners are puzzles, games that include 4 players, for example, I ask them questions and they answer me, I talk to them when they play with the puzzles, they also ask each other.'*

During these activities, children learn to take turns when talking to each other and sharing ideas or working together. According to Whitebread *et al.* (2017), examples of social activities are greeting, shaking hands, playing with each other and sharing their toys and teaching aids with their peers, and inviting friends and their children for a playdate. The researcher believes that these activities will develop and promote social skills among young children. Another important social skill, according to Mraz, Porcelli and Tyler (2016), is interaction skills. Interaction includes singing, listening, and speaking. This is affirmed by PB who stated, '*Social activities are activities where the teacher engages and participate in communication with the learners. During communication, learners listen to the teacher before speaking. To promote these*

skills, I always engage my learners in singing, clapping, coral reading, and dancing activities. This involves them working together with their peers.'

PC, PD, and PE concur with the above statements by indicating that:

> *Social developmental activities include activities done in the morning, like during the morning ring, and when children do rhymes and games; this makes them talk, discuss, ask, and answer questions based on the weekly theme. They further indicated that children sometimes engage in make-believe play activities, like "in and out of the window"; and "riverbank", which encourages them to socialise with other children.*

The pictures below illustrate group discussions with the teacher in the classroom (5.6). The theme table (5.7) encourages learners to communicate their thoughts and ideas about the theme to their peers in the classroom. The researcher found both the discussion group and the theme tables very useful in the development of social skills among learners. It was observed that learners walked freely to the theme table with their friends and started talking about the items on the theme table.

Figure 19: Discussions and talks between the practitioner and learners

Figure 20: A theme table

The practitioner informed the researcher that she had observed that the discussion group in the mornings encouraged the passive learners in the class to start talking. She also found that children became more and more confident as the months progressed. She also found that the children developed good basic vocabulary and started to participate actively in the discussions. PA cited that, *'Playing helps children develop social skills with others by sharing experiences, which falls under discussions.'*

It is crucial to assist young children to develop their social skills. Social skills are a fundamental life skill, and this must be well-developed in young children as they grow into teenagers, youths, and adults. During social developmental activities, structured plays are utilised. Structured plays or formal plays (Pyle and Danniels, 2018), are activities like 'Simon says', where children are given instructions and they carry them out. Collaboration and problem-solving are some examples of social development activities. During problem-solving children learn to work together with the same goal of 'building the structure' by putting their minds together. PB, PC, and PA further agree that:

> *The social development of young children takes place during their free play. They interact with each other, share the space, take turns, and role play at the 'make-believe' corner. They further mentioned that young children learn to solve problems, support each other like 'building a structure together at block corner, by bringing together different brains or minds.*

These responses re-assure the reader that play is related to a child's social development where they learn to relate to each other and situations. Children learn skills to get along with others, express and manage feelings, have empathy for others, and resolve social conflicts that seem to surface during play (Whitebread et al., 2017). During free play (informal play), children should be given the freedom to explore several resources. Pyle and Danniels (2018) state that practitioners should accommodate the unique needs of each child towards their social development. The researcher believes that developing social skills in young children is vital for healthy relationships throughout life. As children grow, they learn about social roles, values, and behaviour. It is the role of each practitioner in centres to ensure that healthy social skills are well-developed. According to Mraz, Porcelli and Tyler (2016), healthy socialisation includes three important things: generosity, helpfulness, and taking turns; where generosity means being able to share with others and learning to respect each other's rights and possessions. Whilst helpfulness involves being friendly, independent, considerate, and taking turns to form the basis of courtesy and thoughtfulness allowing others to have their turn.

Below is a list of different kinds of activities and games, as recommended by Dewar (2009 – 2021), that practitioners may use in their classrooms to develop social skills among early grade learners in ECD centres:

ACTIVITY	EXAMPLE
Turn-taking games	Children take turns rolling the ball back and forth.
Music-making and rhythm games	Draw a circle and put a picture of a sleeping person or choose one child to sleep inside the circle. Give children a simple song, like ‘now is the time to go to school, go to school, go to school’ they round the circle singing, waking up the sleeping person. Children can use instruments or clap hands to wake the person up. This game encourages cooperation and supports individual behaviour
Attention and self-control game	This game can use ‘Simon says. Children can stand in a circle, with one child in the middle of the circle giving instructions. When Simon says do a certain action, they will do it, but if Simon did not say it, they will not move. For example, ‘Simon says stand on left foot’ children do that. However, saying ‘stand on the right foot, the children standstill. Anyone who missed it, will join the one in the centre, and continue like that until all children are in the centre then game over. This game develops memory, focus, and attention.
Pretend play game	Children pretend to be a family of no-human animals. For example, they dress up as chefs and pretend to be baking cakes. This game teaches children to lead, be calm, and get along with others.
The toddler ‘name game’	Children are seated in a circle, give a ball to a child, let him/her choose another person in a circle, say his/her name and throw the ball to him/her, the next child follows the same procedure. Talking is encouraged for socialisation and language development.

Table 9: Social skills development games

5.7.2.2 Sub-Theme 2: Emotional Developmental Activities

Emotional development activities are those activities that spark essential conversation, which leads to deeper understanding. According to Whitebread et al. (2017), these are the activities that support healthy relationships that strengthen empathy, sharing, and kindness. During these activities, children are seeking the feeling of security, trust and at the same time, enjoyment (Pathman & Bauer, 2020). Practitioners are expected to be very observant and be there during emotional developmental activities. This will assist in figuring out or finding out what the child is going through in life or how is he or she feeling at that moment and be able to offer needed support. This is confirmed by Whitebread et al. (2017) who agree that emotional development denotes recombining, expressing, and managing feelings at different stages of life and having empathy for others.

Practitioners' responses confirmed that children develop their emotional skills through engagements with resources, such as puppets and other toys available in their environment and corners, like a fantasy corner. Whitebread et al. (2017) state that children develop their emotional skills in the context of their relationships by watching, imitating, and responding to the social behaviours of others, and also learn from the ways others respond to their emotions. Practitioners' interaction with young children helps develop some common actions in young children, like smiling, showing excitement, embarrassment, and pride (Hearron & Hilderbrand, 2010). When disentangling the different perceptions of practitioners on emotions, the following responses came up:

PA stated, '*I easily pick it up if the child is not happy especially when the child is talking, I can see that today this child is not happy or right, even when the child is drawing something*.'

PE supported PA and further stated, '*emotional play activity is where we put out things, like puppets, things where the child can talk or pretend to be something or someone else and emotional development can take place there*.

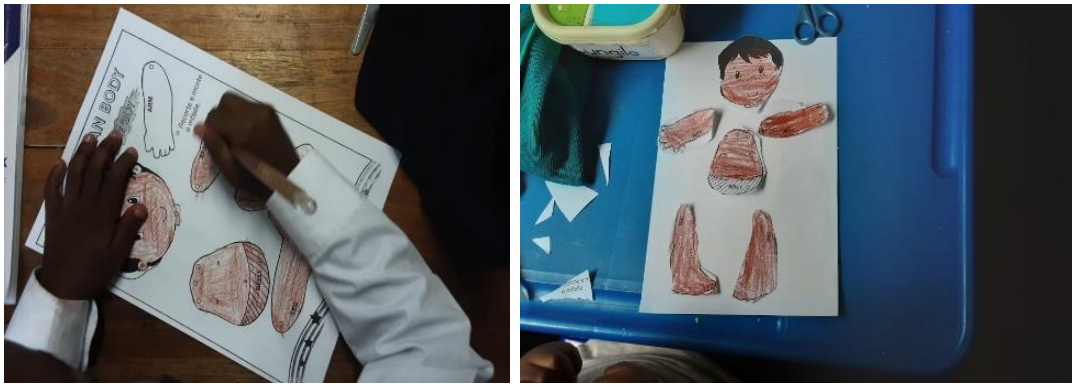

Figure 21: Drawings showing emotions

The above pictures support the responses by participants on the use of drawings to build children's emotional skills. PA confirmed the use of faces by stating. *'In the emotional activity, I use faces so that I can see the reaction of the child and in make-believe.'*

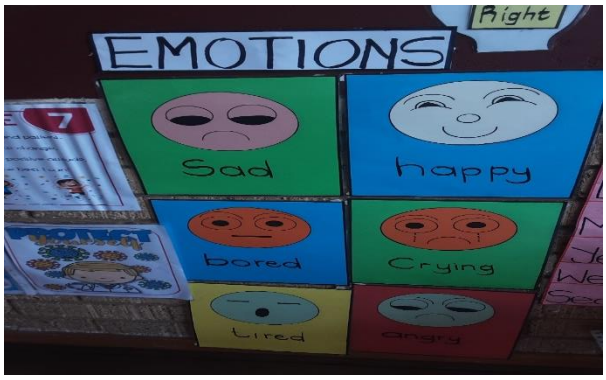

Figure 22: Faces displaying different emotions

PB, PC, and PD agreed with experiential feelings for emotional development by articulating:

> *Storytelling does reveal feelings and emotions. The use of Bible stories during the morning ring, as well as assist in revealing how the child feels at that particular day and moment. When children retell or tell their own stories, singing songs, and a child does not want to participate, it may also say a lot about how the child feels. The use of an emotional chart where children use that emotional chart to show how she or he feels; sad, happy, or angry.*

PE shared her strong views and perceptions on emotional development activities by indicating, '*The fantasy corner develops their emotional social skills, which is very important because now they are in the area that simply says the fantasy corner is a house where there are different dolls and handbags. The child interacting with the fantasy corner is emotional; the child might be going through something that we are not aware of and when they are playing it comes out, where they might even hit the doll or throw things around.'*

Participants display children's emotional developmental activities as per their experiences and preferences, but the fact is that they are all mostly driven by expressions, which reveal their inner feelings, like happiness or sadness (Tai, Norela, Nabilla & Nurul, 2021). An interpretation of these emotions by practitioners is crucial. It would serve as a platform to build and support the development of the emotional skills of young children. It is important to understand how young children develop emotional competence through PBP.

The researcher thinks that practitioners are considered crucial socialisers of emotions by ensuring that they provide children with experiences that promote emotional development and competency. Venketsamy, Smart and Hu (2021) state that the learning environment has an impact on the emotional development of young children. The environment should be inviting and conducive to teaching and learning - basically the environment must be a 'happy place' for learners. To create an emotionally conducive learning environment the researcher agrees with Venketsamy, Smart and Hu (2021), who state that practitioners should create happy corners, fantasy corners, dressing-up corners, nature tables, drawings, and emotional charts. These become powerful tools to encourage the emotional development of young children. Children with strong emotional character easily control their emotions and subsequently cope with challenging situations and experiences in life (Hearron & Hilderbrand, 2010). Izuogu (2019) echoes that when children engage in play-based learning, they learn about the world and lived realities, experiential feelings, and expressive behaviour that impact their emotional development. Below is a list of games and activities that practitioners may use in their classrooms for the emotional development of young children:

ACTIVITY	EXAMPLE
Emotion's game	Children make emotion masks. Ask them to pick one mask and demonstrate the feeling shown on that mask. Ask the child how does he or she feel after demonstrating. This activity teaches children to control their own emotions and accumulate vocabulary as they will be speaking.
Class check-in game	Let children talk about their feelings, what happened yesterday or last night at home. Is he or she happy with what happened, how does it make him or her feel? This activity helps to develop acceptance, manage their feelings, and tolerance. Children understand that it is fine to get angry and also talk about it. They learn to sit still and listen to others talking and also empathise and sympathise with them.
Imaginative play game	Children role-play using dolls at the fantasy corner. Let children pretend to be rescuing a doll from danger. This teaches caring for one another.

Table 10: Emotional development games

5.7.2.3 Sub-Theme 3: Physical Developmental Activities

Physical activities for the development of young children are those activities that strengthen muscles and make bones muscles work a bit more than normal (Otto, 2018). These muscles can be strengthened by engaging young children to do

activities, like jumping, climbing, and catching and throwing objects. Developing a good physical foundation from a young age includes healthy bone mass and density (Santrock, 2017). Physical development can help maintain a healthy weight and the development of strong bones, muscles, and the heart (Pathman & Bauer, 2020). A physically well-developed child usually excels academically. Louw (2014) agreed that physical development influences cognitive development, which stimulates the development of the brain. According to the researcher, she subscribes to the saying 'active mind in healthy body' attests to the importance of physical development accompanied by relevant activities to enhance this development. Otto, Visser and McKee (2018) refer to an active child as one whose body intensifies in physical skill, which turns into more intensive performance. The skill of combining physical and mental capabilities to understand the world is crucial and much needed for holistic child development (Whitebread et al., 2017). Louw (2014) agrees that physical development and the development of all other domains (cognitive, social, and emotional) influence a child's growth and development.

The above background and responses below give a clear understanding of participants' views on the importance of different physical developmental activities needed for young children to be engaged. PA stated: *'I often take my children outside to play on the jungle-gym, ropes, ladders, and other equipment that ensures the children are in constant movement. Inside the classroom, I give them plasticine and playdough to manipulate to develop their finger muscles. This is an important activity to help children with handwriting. Well-developed finger muscles will help the child to get a firm pencil grip and it will help in the coordination of handwriting.'*

In response to how practitioners physically develop young children, PB said, 'The *physical development activities I use with my learners when they are doing the writing, I begin with small muscle development. I start by giving them colouring activities, playing with beads and toys, and pinching activities. These are activities that help to develop the muscles in the fingers.'*

From the feedback of both PA and PB, the researcher noted that there is much emphasis on small muscle development. Practitioners appear to have the knowledge and understanding of the kinds of activities that are needed for children to develop their muscles. According to Santrock (2017) the agree that physical development of

the finger muscles is an important development structure for young children since schooling is about writing. Children spend a large amount of time in school writing, taking notes, and transcribing. Most fine motor development can take place inside the classroom. The responses from the participants above highlight some of the activities, practitioners get children to participate in. Furthermore, according to the researcher, the use of drawing develops fine (small) motor skills.

PC agrees with PA and the use of outdoor equipment. She stated, '*In our centre, we too take our children to play outdoors. Our outdoor equipment is similar to a gym. We have equipment that learners use for jumping, climbing, rolling, hopping, skipping, balancing, and many others.'*

The photographs below show children involved in different activities during play-based learning outdoors. All of these activities are carefully planned by the teachers for the physical development of the children.

Figure 23: Using tyres to develop balance

Physical development influences cognitive development, which stimulates the development of the brain's neurogenesis and synaptogenesis (2.3.6.3) supported by exploratory and locomotive movement of the child's body (Louw, 2014). According to Santrock (2017), performing kinaesthetic movements are essential for memory development. For this reason, the researcher believes that it is of utmost importance that every ECD centre is equipped with outdoor equipment. According to Whitebread et al. (2017) balancing activities are extremely important for the development of different parts of the body. These include strong legs, body muscles, coordination of motor skills, and eye-hand coordination. The researcher believes that all children should be allowed to go outside and play on the swings, slides, and balancing beams to enhance their physical development. The outdoor equipment is also important for the development of perspective and orientation among young children. According to

Louw and Louw (2007) and Santrock (2017), through physical activities on the outdoor equipment young children begin to learn mathematical concepts, such as up, down, left, right, top, bottom, high, and low. A sound knowledge through physical activities assists young children to understand directionality.

According to the researcher, teaching handwriting can be very complicated during the first year of formal schooling. A physically well-developed child with good fine and gross motor skills will experience minimal difficulties in handwriting. That is one of the important barometers that practitioners can use to determine the child's readiness for formal schooling. Physical development activities also assist in the early identification of any physical challenges a child may have so that earlier intervention could be initiated.

PB, PD, and PE reinforced the importance of physical developmental activities by stating:

> *'Physical development of a child is when children are taken outside where they can run, jump, climb on the ladder, roundabout, slides, and tyres to help them develop physically. The use of balls, hoola-hoops, skipping ropes, balancing beams, go under, go through, or go over, is very important.'*

This signifies the importance of keeping an eye on the child's physical well-being and motor development by monitoring growth, fitness, and physiology (Tai *et al.,* 2021). The encouragement of motor development through age-appropriate physical activities cannot be overemphasised. The following pictures demonstrate some of the activities that can be done during outdoor play for physical development:

Figure 24: Examples of different physical activities for outdoor play

5.7.2.4 Sub-Theme 4: Cognitive Developmental Activities

Young children need to develop socially, emotionally, physically, and over and above, cognitively, to be regarded as well-rounded holistic individuals. To elicit the kinds of activities that enhance cognitive development, the researcher posed the following question to the participants: 'What kinds of activities do you engage your children in to develop their cognitive abilities?'

The responses of the participants, all indicated various kinds of activities they engage their learners in. Some of the activities included story-telling, recall, memory games, and brain-gym. Regarding cognitive development, PC stated, '*Cognitive development helps children to jog their thinking skills by using puzzles as they have different pieces with different sizes that need to be put together.'* According to PE, '*Teachers must actively engage young children to think, they must not be idling. Their brains must be activated and it is our job to ensure that these children are thinking all the time in the class. I use different kinds of activities to keep their brains busy. For example, different pieces of puzzles, cutting out shapes, word search, and complete the story.*' Cognitive development is the construction of thought processes (jogging of the mind), which includes remembering, problem-solving, and decision-making from childhood throughout adolescence to adulthood. To achieve holistic cognitive development, young children need to engage, explore, and interact with the environment (Whitebread et al., 2017).

The researcher believes that it is the practitioners' responsibility to ensure that they create an environment where the child is mentally stimulated; and given the freedom to ask questions about the world and the processes that govern thereof (Tai *et al.,* 2021). PA also stated '*In cognitive developmental activities I give them puzzles and blocks to construct structures, and most of the time they use them*.' PC re-iterated that: '*Cognitive development helps children to focus and think as to where and how to put puzzle pieces together and make one piece and that is where you get to see the potential of the child*.'

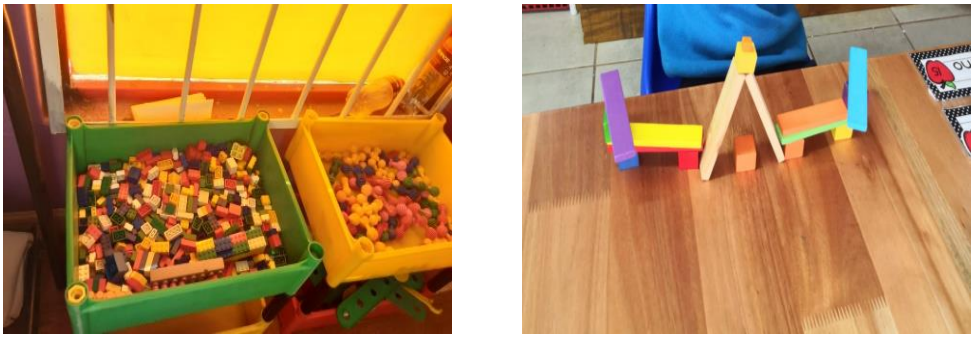

Figure 25: Construction blocks can be used for cognitive development

Figure 26: Puzzles to 'jog' the mind

When children play with blocks, they learn to take turns and share resources (social development). Children develop vocabulary (cognitive development) during sharing as they communicate or talk. The foundation for mathematical skills is established, like counting, geometric patterns, balance, and knowledge of space and shapes, to mention a few. Their knowledge of colours gets developed, including shapes, sizes and position, problem-solving, and decision-making, as a structural building needs those skills. Bergen (2018) states that in play-based pedagogy, this in-depth cognitive development needs to be nurtured for holistic child development. There is clear evidence from the data collected that all the participants had a good understanding of the importance of cognitive development and the appropriate activities needed in early

grades. PB, PD, and PE exhibited similar views and perceptions on how cognitive development benefits young children:

> *They all emphasised the use of blocks for the cognitive development of young children. They even showed examples of children identifying 'big or small', 'long or short', counting blocks, and building structures, which also form part of vocabulary and language development. They also indicated that using 3D objects, such as boxes, containers, and cones helped young children understand mathematical concepts in the topic 'Space and Shape.' They all agreed that their classrooms contain different kinds of resources, for example, picture books, magazines, puzzles, and a variety of games that can help to stimulate young children cognitively.*

Below is a list of some of the games and activities the practitioners may use in their classrooms for the cognitive development of young children:

ACTIVITY	EXAMPLE
Symbolic thought game	Children are given blank papers, without lines, to draw pictures, then use those pictures to tell their stories. This activity helps to develop language, thinking, and reasoning skills, as they think before they start drawing. Their minds are provoked, and they start imagining. Those imaginations become thoughts that are represented in the form of pictures or drawings, which are then be spoken about.
Bingo counting game	Children pretend to be picking up fruits from the tree to fill up their baskets. Anyone who fills up the basket must shout 'bingo'. Children will use their imaginations. The child must be able to tell what makes him or her say or think the basket is full, and how many fruits are in the basket. That will spark discussion and they will start comparing picked-up fruits with each other. It will help with basic mathematics concepts like 'full/ empty/half/ less/few', the one with more and can justify, becomes a winner. The concepts and basic operation of addition and subtraction are spontaneously developed as they compare the fruits. Children's thinking and reasoning skills are encouraged. Children have to use their imaginations during this activity, imagine the full, empty, or half full basket.
Sort and stack game	• Children are given stacking blocks, coloured counting sticks, or bottle tops with different colours. This will depend on the availability and accessibility of resources in the classroom. Children must be timed and be given clear instructions. For example, draw three or four circles on the floor or counting mat, place colour coded papers in the circles to represent intended colour sorting, then ask children to put or stack correct colours in the correct circle. This activity assists in developing and improving fine motor skills, thinking and reasoning, hand-eye coordination, colour recognition, sorting skills, inquisitiveness, and memory.

Table 11: Cognitive development games

5.7.3 THEME 3: Support required by practitioners to implement play-based pedagogy

Play-based pedagogy is an integral part of teaching and learning. The researcher has found, through the literature review, the significance of both formal and informal play. To understand the participants lived experience of implementing play-based pedagogy, the researcher asked the question, 'What support do practitioners need to implement play-based pedagogy effectively for holistic child development?' All the participants in this study responded very eloquently. Two sub-themes emanated from this question. They were:

- Resources and a conducive environment; and
- Practitioner development and training

5.7.3.1 Resources and a conducive environment

Resources are an integral part of teaching young children in ECD centres. The researcher noted that in most centres, the resources practitioners had in their classrooms were mainly made by them or the community. There were very few resources that were 'factory-made'. Most of the cognitive development activity resources were made by teachers, for example, colouring activity sheets, picture puzzles, and board games. The researcher also found a variety of 'junk/recycled material' in the classroom, which was used in the teaching and learning for the various developmental activities.

All participants indicated that they have been using recycled materials in their centres. The photographs below show some of the recycled materials that are used for social, physical, emotional, and cognitive development. According to PD, she stated, '*these pieces of cut-off planks (figure 27) have been used as puzzles, stepping stones, balance beams, tracing around a shape, and several other activities.'* The beads in (*figure 28*) are used for fine motor skill development. '*The children in my class enjoy threading beads in "10 strings", which I later use in mathematics.'*

Figure 27: Recycled material

Figure 28: Learners stringing beads

According to the researcher, using recycled resources, like the cut-offs, can assist young children with structural construction, making or threading beads for patterns, identifying different 3D objects, and holding and touching them, which also develops their fine and gross motor skills. Practitioners need to support perseverance by encouraging young children to trail through and complete a structure or task. Furthermore, allowing time and space for creative independent and teamwork, from stacking of blocks to the construction of structures, is very important in child development. The practitioner should create a stimulating environment by using available resources, which develops curiosity and promotes contextual knowledge that will advance other critical academic skills (Whitebread et al., 2017).

Resources are needed for children's play and prompting their interests. The provision of varied resources encourages exploration. Play leads to holistic child development because if they do not play, they do not learn (UNICEF, 2018). It is through play that children display and learn how to socialise and manage emotions. The provision of resources and allowing children to use their imaginations and manipulatives are developmental (Honeyford & Boyd, 2015). Children like to be praised for their efforts, even if they did not finish the tasks. Praise encourages and motivates them to not stop

trying, exploring, and engaging, as that is part of their development. The picture below illustrates some of the resources the researcher observed in the centres. All the children were engaged in different corners within and outside the class. Some were cutting out shapes and joining them to create a picture. Others were moulding play-dough.

Figure 29: Different resources used

Although some centres have extremely beautiful resources, the researcher also noted that certain centres did not have the appropriate resources for their children. The photos below were very discouraging to see in some centres. The success of play-based pedagogy relies on a practitioner's creativity and innovations in the classroom to develop and use resources. Although creativity is not so common to everyone, wherever it is used or applied, it creates a platform for the development of young children.

PA specified, '*Sometimes we use broken toys and they do not positively benefit the child*.'

Figure 30: Limited and broken resources for 39 children

PD concurs with PA by citing similar frustrations due to limited resources: '*The school does not support me, most of the time I improvise, like outdoor play we do not have,*

what we have was the donation, I mostly improvise using those playing equipment I have.'

Figure 31: Outdoor play equipment used by 43 children

As a result of the lack of appropriate resources, practitioners are forced to focus on traditional teaching and learning. There are no opportunities for some learners to use outdoor equipment to develop their social, physical, emotional, and cognitive skills. The focus on 'book' utilisation and lack of play resources put pressure on completing content (syllabus) (Ashari & Hushairi, 2019). Goldstein (2012) argues that every ECD centre should make provision for an environment that provides young children with an opportunity to imagine, explore things, and socialise, including outdoor equipment, should be encouraged.

Some participants expressed their dissatisfaction with the unavailability of resources, especially because they displayed knowledge of play-based pedagogy. The following responses speak to that dissatisfaction. PD voiced, '*I even feel like I am cheating these children because I know what must be done, but there are no resources*.' According to Lyons (2017), who agrees with Goldstein (2012) that a well-resourced centre offers young children an opportunity to holistically develop and allows some fun learning and encourages creative thinking. PE aligned herself with the above response by indicating, '*It is important to understand why things like fantasy corner equipment and sandpit, toys and water things are important for the children to have or use. They are usually more expensive, so it tends to be a problem for the management of a school when it comes to money*.'

She suggested that '*there is always cheap things to use, like recycled material from shops and nearby workshops, and children can use them for construction of resources like toy houses, teach shapes and do patterns*.' The picture below shows cheap recycled resources that can be easily accessed from nearby workshops.

Figure 32: Recycled resources available at no cost

PA and PC concur with PE, who specified:

> *'For practitioners to be more active and willing to go out with the kid and explore things, they need to improvise because kids are not the same and they do not learn the same way. Some need resources to understand certain concepts, like play dough to form numbers. Therefore, there is a need to explore options and be creative. The involvement of parents to assist with recycled resources also came out as an option for improvisation.'*

Play-based teaching and learning require a conducive environment and play resources that support the development of young children. Thus, it makes the environment part of resources in the teaching and learning of young children. The use of these resources gives more valuable and significant direction to the practitioner than teaching without any resources. Piaget believed that the environment determined a child's cognitive development for the acquisition of capabilities (Mascolo, 2015). The availability of corners, like fantasy, block, creative, and reading corners, to mention a few, is very important. This is because children learn by exploring, experimenting, and engaging, and the presence of these corners and an allowing environment supports their development through play-based learning.

All the participants agreed that the implementation of play-based pedagogy in their centres must ensure that the environment is conducive and inviting (Venketsamy,

Smart & Hu, 2021). According to PA, she stated, *'I follow the theme for that particular week then decide which play activities and resources I will use because it must be in line with the day's work so that the child can easily learn and understand. I make sure that I prepare all my resources and make the class look attractive and appealing to my children.*' PB mentioned, '*I plan my theme a week ahead and ask my children to bring pictures and any material that is related to the theme. When they come to school, together we set up the theme table and make a theme chart*.'

The photos below represent the theme tables, which the researcher observed that had been set up in Centre A:

Figure 33: The use of themes as supporting resources

According to Venketsamy, Smart and Hu (2021), the learning environment develops a healthy, conducive atmosphere where education is easily attained. Children happily play their lives away in the open-minded play pedagogies of their early years of education (Stirrup, Evans & Davies, 2017). Bubikova-Moan, Hjetland and Wollscheid (2019) concur that play and a conducive and inviting learning environment contribute to holistic child development, especially to developmental areas, such as social, emotional, physical, and cognitive). It is fundamental to achieve an inviting learning environment to create positive emotions towards learning, ensuring a more effective holistic child development (Venketsamy, Smart & Hu, 2021). That means making learning an adventurous experience, which is reinforced by Piaget, Vygotsky, and Bruner. Vygotsky's propositions are based on a combination of different plays, like dramatic, creative, and social plays, emphasizing the zone of proximal development (ZPD) and the more knowledgeable other (MKO) (Bodrova & Leong, 2015). PD, as well, concurs with the statement when she said, *'When we learn about the story, I first tell them the story then dramatise it using them (children) as characters and they can imitate characters from the (told) story.'*

5.7.3.2 Sub-Theme 2: Training and Development of Practitioners

The data collected and coded indicated that all five practitioners who participated in the study had qualifications in early childhood education. Their qualifications range from ECD Level 4 to B.Ed. in pre-primary education. They also displayed knowledge of play-based learning during the interviews when asked about their understanding of play-based pedagogy. Urban (2010) defines a practitioner as someone that has the personal characteristics, knowledge, and skills necessary to provide assistance and also facilitate child development. Knowing how and when to intervene in child development requires knowledge, experience, and skill on the side of a practitioner. Trained or qualified practitioners assist them to manage their work with confidence and passion (Stirrup, Evans & Davies, 2017). Knowledge and information improve planning and implementation, creativity, and understanding of each child (Goldstein, 2012).

A practitioner who understands children knows how to prepare learning and a conducive environment that takes full advantage of child development (Aldhafeeri, Palaiologou & Folorunsho, 2016). As much as some responses indicated a lack of resources, especially outdoor equipment in centres, practitioners' development and qualifications are equally important. Although practitioners are aware of the advantages of play-based learning from their training, implementation in the classroom can be challenging if there are no relevant resources or outdoor play equipment. Goldstein (2012) discovered that practitioners in education centres are faced with the immense pressure of achieving academic excellence. Practitioners' responses on their training and development confirmed their training:

PA, PB, PC, and PD confirmed that they have a diploma in ECD in the form of Levels 5 and 6. Of the four, two of them were assisted by the Department of Education to obtain those qualifications, PA and PD. They displayed interest in furthering their studies (if they can get an opportunity) to gain more knowledge on how to teach young children as they wish to continue and do B.Ed. in ECD.

There is an indication of some determination of furthering their studies. PA detailed*, 'I have completed my diploma. My wish is to continue with my B. Ed, but because of financial challenges because as time goes on the Diploma will lose value.'*

Another participant, PE detailed, '*I did my B.Ed. in Foundation Phase, Early Childhood Development, so my degree was very play-based and how the child develops from baby up until 10 years of age, so that is my area of expertise.'*

PE further displayed a lot of fortitude for knowledge acquisition when she indicated, '*I usually go to any course or every course that I can, so I never feel that you are too old to learn anything so if then there is a course or anything, I go*.'

Throughout the process of data collection, there was no mention of any in-service training attended and no mention of the NCF from all five participants. For practitioners to comply with play-based teaching and learning, they need knowledge of the curriculum and framework for the ECD. The DBE (2015) emphasised play-based learning for young children. This requires necessary resources inside and outside the classroom supported by practitioners' clear understanding of play-based teaching and how it works. Only one practitioner, PE, indicated '*I also had had a mentor who showed me a lot of ways and why they do certain things and how to incorporate play, to take simple things like a feather and develop it into a science lesson, putting up things where the child can interact and learn through*.'

PA also specified, '*I need support or assistance like I mostly need assistance from the Department of Education.'*

Findings from the above themes indicate a need for continued professional development of participants in ECD centres, especially in the implementation of play-based teaching and learning. Although the participants had good knowledge and understanding of play-based teaching and learning, there was a consensus from all participants that they needed more support and ongoing professional development in planning activities. They also highlighted the need for subject advisors to visit their schools and guide them in the planning of activities, both for formal and informal play-based teaching and learning.

PD indicates that:

'She would like to know the value of each of the outdoor equipment and how it is educationally sound for young children. Her main concern was avoiding accidents. The researcher believes that the envisaged professional development will

exponentially strengthen teaching and learning in ECD centres when practitioners are well-capacitated and upgraded in their qualifications.'

5.10 SUMMARY

This chapter has given a detailed data analysis and interpretation on the perceptions of practitioners on play-based pedagogy for holistic child development. Themes and sub-themes that emerged from the collected data were used as guiding concepts to analyse data. During the interpretation of data, literature was also reviewed. All information gathered from practitioners from participating centres and observation thereof was scrutinised based on themes and sub-themes. All the interpreted data was examined without any miscellaneous information, thus it provided trustworthiness. The perceptions of practitioners of PBP and the impact it has on holistic child development, availability, and utilisation of resources were clarified through responses and observations, supported by photo voices. The next chapter will focus on the research findings and recommendations.

CHAPTER 6:

INTERPRETATION OF RESEARCH FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study was to investigate the perceptions and understanding of practitioners on play-based pedagogy on the holistic development of young children. To achieve this purpose, the researcher explained, discussed, and analysed the perceptions of practitioners on PBP and its impact on the holistic development of young children.

The literature study presented in chapter two provided the background to the study and key concepts were explained regarding the understanding of play-based pedagogy. This chapter concluded the study with the findings gathered through semi-structured interviews and lesson observations during the data collection process with the participants. The study finally provided the conclusion and recommendations on the importance of play-based pedagogy for the holistic development of young children.

Play-based pedagogy contributes significantly to young children's physical, social, emotional, and cognitive development as articulated by several researchers in the literature review in the chapter (Chapter 2). It impacts how children's fine and gross motor muscles develop to engage in activities (physical), how they learn to interrelate and react to each other (social/ emotional), and finally, it strengthens their cognitive abilities through decision making, problem-solving, communication and the completion of activities.

6.2 SUMMARY OF THE STUDY

In chapter 1, the researcher provided the background, rationale, research questions, objectives, theoretical framework, and outlined the research methodology and design used in the study. Furthermore, the data collection process was clarified, including the appropriateness of the research population and site. An explanation of how the data was analysed was given and ethical considerations were explained.

In chapter 2, the researcher offered the context of the literature that was reviewed for this study. This was done to provide a broad and rich understanding of the context of

the study conducted. The philosophy of play-based pedagogy and its proponents, thereof, were discussed. The different types of plays and their contribution to the development of young children were also explored and deliberated on. In addition, this chapter discussed in detail the four developmental domains: social, emotional, physical, and cognitive development, indicating how these developmental domains contribute to holistic child development. These elements created a clear conceptual understanding of play-based pedagogy, how it contributes to the development of young children and the need for exploring it during teaching and learning.

Chapter 3 elucidated the theoretical framework of the study. The researcher then went on to discuss the theoretical framework that guided this study. The theoretical framework assisted the researcher to clarify the understanding and views that practitioners have regarding play-based pedagogy and how it is incorporated into teaching and learning, both in and out of the classroom. This is where the understanding and views of practitioners on play-based pedagogy, and how it is incorporated into daily teaching and learning in and outside the classroom, was clarified. The social constructivism theory (SCT) was used to do this. This theory aided the researcher in gathering practitioners' knowledge and understanding of play-based pedagogy (PBP) on holistic child development, using their experiences as a source of information. Creswell (2013) agreed that the SCT enables an individual to explore their environment with the aid of their experience and knowledge. The knowledge and experiences, that practitioners have gained during their training and actual implementation, were gathered through semi-structured interviews conducted with practitioners, as well as the observation of play-based activities in and outside the classroom. The SCT transforms young children from being passive recipients of information to active individuals who develop by engaging and exploring resources within their environment. The views of Piaget, Vygotsky, and Bruner on the SCT, formed the basis of this study; Piaget believed that young children need to take a leading role and that practitioners need to ensure that a conducive environment is created for them to explore and develop; Vygotsky's SCT supposed that social interaction plays a critical role in child development; and Bruner supported these two theorists, by further stating that young children can construct and build concepts based on past and present knowledge. All three theorists encourage minimal adult

involvement and support free engagement and an exploratory environment for holistic child development.

For this study, chapter 4 focused on the research methodology. The researcher discussed the qualitative research approach followed in the study. Interpretivism was used as a suitable paradigm for the study. The interpretivist paradigm allowed the researcher to select participants who had essential experience regarding the concept being researched. Therefore, the researcher used semi-structured interviews, lesson observations, and field notes, to collect relevant data. Through the use of interviews, the researcher was able to probe questions further, where necessary, to the participants. The probing of some questions assisted the researcher in getting a clearer understanding, views, as well as perceptions that practitioners have regarding play-based pedagogy and its benefits to holistic child development. This is the chapter that further discussed the credibility, transferability, and authenticity of this study.

In chapter 5, the findings and the analysis of the data collected were presented. The profiles of participants, who are practitioners and centres, were outlined and discussed. In addition, the data analysis process was discussed. The data collected from the interviews with practitioners was interpreted, and the lesson observations and field notes were deliberated on. All the findings were organised into themes and sub-themes. Through the themes and sub-themes, the researcher created discussions based on each practitioners' responses, lesson observations, and field notes.

6.3 INTERPRETATION OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

The interpretation of the research findings was guided by the questions asked during the semi-structured interviews, observations done and compiled field notes. The primary question: "How do practitioners perceive and use play-based pedagogy (teaching and learning) for the holistic development of young children" provided rich data on practitioners' perceptions throughout the study. This primary question directed the designing of workable recommendations on knowledge and understanding of PBP by practitioners and how to incorporate play into teaching and learning to develop young children. The findings, which emerged from the secondary questions, revealed many links to the primary research question. These relations contributed to the richness of data and analysis across the themes and sub-themes that emerged. The secondary questions were attended to by presenting findings that focused on the

contribution made by play and play activities towards holistic child development. The following secondary questions were used to gather in-depth information to understand PBP:

- What plays contribute towards the holistic development of young children
- What are practitioners' experiences of implementing play-based teaching and learning?
- What strategies can be used to support practitioners to implement play-based pedagogy in centres?
- How do play-based activities impact the holistic development of young children?
- How do practitioners incorporate play-based pedagogy during the teaching and learning of young children?
- What form of plays contribute to the holistic development of young children?
- How do practitioners apply their knowledge and skills to assist young children to develop?

The data analysis process highlighted some of the key concepts, which were evident during the literature review and data collection process. Table 12 below displays the relation across the themes and sub-themes, which link to the research questions, to provide quality and valuable interpretations and recommendations:

THEMES	SUB-THEMES	RELEVANCE TO THE RESEARCH QUESTION
Practitioners' understanding of play-based pedagogy	Practitioners' knowledge of play-based pedagogy	Main question
	Practitioners' views of play-based pedagogy	Secondary question 1
Practitioners' implementation of activities for holistic child development	Social developmental activities	Secondary questions 3 and 4
	Emotional developmental activities	
	Physical developmental activities	
	Cognitive developmental activities	
Support required by practitioners to implement play-based pedagogy	Resources and a conducive environment	Secondary question 2
	Training and development of practitioners	

Table 12: Links between the themes and sub-themes with relation to the research questions.

The following paragraphs provide a summary of the findings, which are aligned to the identified themes and sub-themes in this study.

6.3.1 Practitioners' knowledge and views of play-based pedagogy

The success of play-based pedagogy depends on practitioners' knowledge and understanding of its implementation during the teaching and learning of young children. Practitioners perceived play-based pedagogy as one of the key methods that play a vital role in child development. In addition, play supports the holistic development of children, which includes physical, emotional, social, and cognitive development. The South African National Curriculum Framework for young children emphasises the importance and value of play in child development. A general understanding is that young children learn better through play. Some responses

indicated that the 'formal' teaching environment has the potential of unconsciously ignoring play as part of learning to young children. School-based centres seem to be advocating for 'formal' teaching in classrooms. As discussed in Chapter 5, practitioners are more focused on completing the curriculum through a formal academic process (traditional teaching and learning) and do not see play as an integral part of teaching and learning.

It was evident from the data collected that some participants experienced certain challenges during the teaching and learning process in their classrooms. The pressure from the managers and principals to complete the 'syllabi' or Annual Teaching Plans (ATPs) was cited as a reason. The confusion is somehow caused by two policy documents: the NCF and the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS). The content outlined for grade R children in CAPS seem to be advocating a more formal approach to teaching and learning rather than a play-based approach. Although the NCF encourages play-based education, the resources the DBE has provided to schools give little opportunity for practitioners to engage in play-based teaching and learning. These resources include the prescribed workbooks which are commonly known as 'Blue books' or 'Rainbow books', - are often used as the core materials in most centres for teaching and learning. The activities in these books are mainly traditional, such as colouring, cutting and pasting, tracing over, and copying. Since practitioners are mandated to use these resources there has been confusion in the development, teaching and learning of young children using the play-based approach.

Although practitioners are always encouraged to use different resources when planning for their teaching – most practitioners avoid meandering outside of the DBE workbooks. It was noted that these workbooks seem to be compelling young children to do mostly formal work. Although the activities prescribed in the workbook mostly requires children to do formal writing, somehow, completion of these workbooks is made mandatory by some centre managers and principals. Principals believe that children need to finish all activities specified for each term in the DBE workbook as evidence of teaching and learning. These activities are closely monitored by School Management Teams (SMTs) and officials from the Department of Education (national, provincial, and district), which in turn, compels practitioners to ensure that they complete all activities designed and allocated for each term. A detailed review of these activities to be more play-based is recommended and scripted lesson plans (SLP) are

also suggested. The SLPs will guide practitioners and create opportunities to apply and implement skills and knowledge gained during training on early childhood development using play-based pedagogy in centres.

All practitioners who participated in the study confirmed that they are qualified grade R practitioners. The training practitioners went through, as per their responses from the interviews, emphasised play as one of the methods for the teaching and learning of young children. The incorporation of play activities in the lesson planning was clearly articulated in responses. However, for practitioners to implement what they have studied and learned, they need supporting resources in and outside the classroom. A cause for concern is the unavailability of resources in some ECDCs and an environment that lacks stimuli for play-based learning. The use of workbooks, especially in school-based centres, leaves little room for play-based activities. This makes the grade R classes look like a 'watered-down' grade 1 class. Young children start formal writing before they develop their motor skills (fine and gross motor). The poor development of such skills leads to poor handwriting. Furthermore, underdeveloped hand-eye coordination, which is nurtured at the centres, affects children's reading skills (which is the movement of the eyes from left to right, and up and down).

The NCF was developed by the DoE and it is a useful framework that supports and encourages play as a way of developing young children. Theme 2 of the NCF and the CAPS, which also contain the content to be taught in grade R class, need to complement each other. De-prioritisation of play in centres deprives children of an opportunity for holistic development. Centres are encouraged to prioritise play during teaching and learning to ensure that children develop and get ready for formal schooling. In addition, holistic child development requires a conducive environment that encourages engagement and exploration of available resources through different play activities. Exposing young children to a playful learning environment allows free and keen participation. Free and keen participation stimulates a love for learning and gives children an opportunity to develop.

6.3.2 Implementation of play activities for holistic child development

The play embraces communication, innovation, and confidence. Different play activities, such as physical, emotional, social, and cognitive, spark critical thinking,

creativity, and interaction in young children. These play activities connect to holistic child development and subsequently, life in general. It is through play that children learn to socialise (live and play with others), control, and understand each other. All these play activities build on one another.

Social developmental activities play an important role in child development. The activities linked to social child development requires practitioners' comprehensive knowledge and understanding of teaching young children. The use of corners like fantasy, creative, book, to mention a few, add value to the development of young children. In these corners, children learn to play and talk with others, take turns in using resources, and in that way, they learn to socialise. These corners need to be well-resourced for maximum benefit to children. Lesson plans have to integrate social developmental activities.

Emotional developmental activities are equally important in holistic child development. Practitioners are encouraged to interact with young children. Understanding activities, like role-playing, watching different facial expressions where different emotions are demonstrated, like sad, excitement, and embarrassment, is vital. Storytelling is encouraged as it also reveals some emotions and improves listening and speaking skills. A child's reaction towards a story allows the practitioner to guide the child on how to understand and manage emotions. Lesson plans must accommodate such activities to ensure that they form part of teaching and learning in centres. Children with strong emotional character can control their emotions and easily survive within the circumstances of life.

In physical developmental activities, children learn and develop crucial skills. Physically active children usually excel in their academic performances. Physical activities, like slide play, body balancing, and swings, are essential in holistic child development. These activities help with memory development. A child with well-developed motor skills experiences less difficulty with directionality and handwriting. Centres and practitioners must ensure that these physical activities are planned for, but more importantly, carried out as planned. However, precautionary measures must be taken for the safety of children within centres and play equipment must be safe and of quality to safeguard young children.

A combination of social, emotional, and physical play activities supports cognitive development. A supportive learning environment is needed for cognitive development. Cognitive developmental activities include, among other things, assembling puzzles, block construction, board games, like 'snake and ladders', reading of books, and storytelling. Participants displayed well-informed knowledge of cognitive activities and even indicated that they include them in their lesson planning. Through cognitive activities, children also develop understanding, knowledge application, and the creation of structures. In addition, thinking and reasoning, reading, and focus are the most important skills in cognitive development. Participants displayed an understanding of these skills and stated that they only require supporting resources and environment to implement. These skills help the child to make sense of and organise their world. Understanding their world would give them knowledge and skills to cope with life's challenges. All four developmental domains (social, emotional, physical, and cognitive) are interrelated, and support the development of each. These skills lay the foundation for the development of literacy and numeracy, which are critical for success in formal schooling and life in general.

6.3.3 Supporting strategies for play-based pedagogy in child development centres

For young children, play is an essential strategy for learning and developing. It is the centres and practitioners' responsibility to create an environment that promotes exploration, engagement, and interactive learning, for young children. Early years play is the most memorable activity for children. Globally, play-based learning has taken a centre stage in child development. During play, children learn how to plan and also follow those plans through, like planning to draw a family. They plan who should be in the family picture and draw representative pictures of their family members. The following are some of the strategies indicated by participants during data collection:

- Inclusion of play activities in lesson planning supports play-based learning
- Centres need to value child development by creating play friendly and safe learning environment; and
- Practitioners need to guide and direct activities in the form of instructions and some activities need to be child-directed (free play activities) to develop different skills.

Pyle and Danniels (2017) confirm that each playing strategy develops a specific skill, which in the end, will produce a holistically developed child. The participants agreed that some activities need guidance and direction and some only require a child to think, make decisions, and then create. The diagram below clearly indicates the range of strategies and the recommended actions thereof:

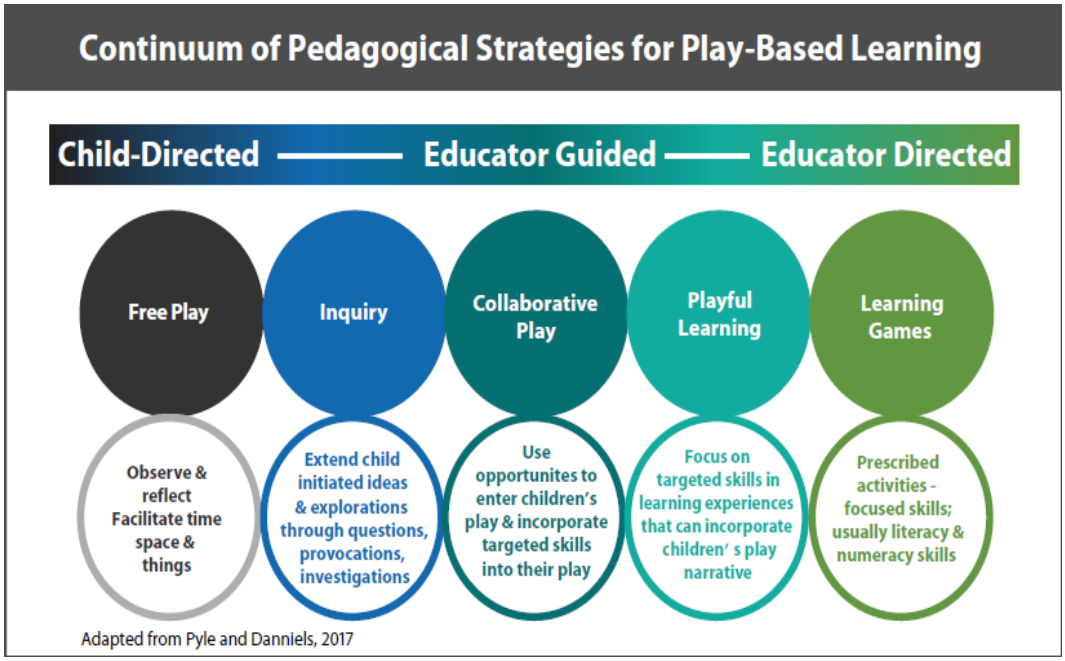

Figure 34: Pedagogical strategies for PBP (Pyle & Danniels, 2017)

These strategies are supported by relevant resources. The resources need to be in good condition for proper utilisation. From the participants' responses, it came out sharply that the shortage and poor state of available resources in centres contribute to poor child development. They stated that although they know what to do and how to carry out some of the activities and always try to improvise, the unavailability of resources prevents them from executing their work as planned.

All participants mentioned the importance of incorporating play in their lesson planning. Unfortunately, that is mostly on paper (lesson plans) due to the absence of supporting resources. The availability of resources encourages practitioners to apply their knowledge and experiences to motivate children to participate in their development. Children learn and develop best when they fully commit to an activity. Therefore, principals and centre managers must ensure that practitioners have the necessary resources for both indoor and outdoor play activities.

Practitioners are aware of the advantages of play-based learning from their training. That was indicated in their responses on the level of their qualifications. Therefore, it means participants that have the necessary knowledge and an understanding of PBP. However, implementation, as perceived by participants, poses a challenge due to the lack of resources, especially outdoor play equipment. Although play strategies are indicated in lesson plans and complement the NCF, practitioners' responses indicated non-compliance. This is mostly due to the limited resources in centres. Compliance with the NCF has to be monitored by the Department of Education (DoE). This includes national, provincial, and district officials. Play-based activities develop young children holistically and need to be respected to promote physical, emotional, social, and cognitive development. The orientation of principals, SMT, especially in school-based centres, and centre managers on the NCF and the importance of play in child development, cannot be overemphasised. This training can assist principals, SMTs, and centre managers in understanding and will provide them with the knowledge on the importance of play-based pedagogy. This may encourage centres to buy resources for the proper execution of planned activities.

6.4 NEW INSIGHTS: VALUE OF THE LITERATURE, THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS AND RESEARCH APPROACH AND FINDINGS FROM THE EMPIRICAL STUDY

An empirical study is a report on the results of a study that uses data obtained from actual observation. It is used to authenticate the concept/s researched to increase human knowledge to advance various fields (Aspers & Corte, 2019). The new insights that emerged in this study are unpacked according to the importance of literature, the theoretical framework, the research approach, and the findings.

6.4.1 Importance of literature review

A review of available literature on play-based pedagogy as outlined in Chapter 2. The researcher reviewed the literature to gather rich information and get an understanding of 'play-based' as a concept. This review further assisted the researcher to keep the focus on the concept researched and also planning how the study will unfold. The literature study revealed a variety of literature that is available to address the importance of play-based pedagogy and its benefit on holistic child development. The available literature supported the recommendations that emanated from this study on

the implementation of PBP in the teaching and learning in centres. This study provided an agreement with other studies already conducted on the perceptions of practitioners on the utilisation of play-based pedagogy and play activities in centres. The implementation of theme 2 from the framework (NCF) linking it with related policies, like CAPS, requires some consideration. In addition, the secondary questions in this study discovered the need for play resources or equipment in centres to holistically develop children. The training of managers, principals, and SMTs also demands urgent attention to support and fully implement PBP in centres. This literature study was necessary to correctly place the findings within the context of available literature.

6.4.2 Value of theoretical framework

The theoretical framework guided the researcher to properly position and contextualise available theories to accumulate appropriate data for this study. Most of the attention was given to the practitioners' perceptions of PBP. The PBP concept appeared familiar to practitioners (5.9.1 and 5.9.2). The training received by practitioners seems to have emphasised the importance of PBP and its contribution to child development (5.9.3.2). The study followed the Social Constructivist Theory (SCT) with the aim of sourcing out practitioners' views and perceptions on PBP and how they implement it during teaching and learning. The diagram representing the SCT for this study is well-outlined in this document under section 3.4. The study focused on the input, referring to a conducive environment; process, meaning play interactions; and knowledge construction and output, which denotes the holistic child.

The researcher needed to find out the perceptions of practitioners on PBP and its impact on the holistic development of young children. Holistic child development is currently a challenge, especially in the early years of formal schooling. The development of gross and fine motor skills creates some difficulty when it comes to pencil grip and handwriting. Some children start with their formal schooling having not fully developed some of the necessary skills. This requires grade 1 educators to first develop skills, like fine and gross motor, directionality, and balancing, before starting with the relevant work. Therefore, the researcher needed to find out if these skills are allowed to develop in centres. All plays and play activities have a specific contribution to child development. Tolerance, teamwork, and communication are some of the skills that are developed by play-based learning for young children. This is done by allowing

children to engage in a social constructive learning process, which is a collaborative nature of play-based development that is beneficial to everyone involved (interaction). A common understanding of the importance of PBP and the NCF between centres and practitioners is important. This understanding will help centres to improve their support to practitioners and children by ensuring that they get the necessary resources to achieve expectations.

6.4.3 Capability of the research approach and theoretical paradigm

The study adopted a qualitative approach. A natural setting in this approach allowed the researcher to gather valuable and rich data. The interpretive research paradigm was given a preference in this study. This choice was guided by the benefits this paradigm has in gathering information from practitioners' experiences and practically observing the implementation of play activities in natural settings. This approach facilitated the process of authenticating and validating the research questions asked during the data collection process in pursuit of the clarification of practitioners' perceptions on play-based teaching and how play benefits young children for holistic development.

6.5 CORROBORATION OF THE RESULTS (LITERATURE CONTROL)

This section presents the verification of literature and insights obtained. This literature verification advanced from the emerged themes and sub-themes to indicate the agreement and disagreement with the available literature on the importance of play-based pedagogy and practitioners' views and understanding on child development. These themes and sub-themes are discussed in chapter 5 and is summarised in this chapter under 6.3.1 to 6.3.3. In table 8, the researcher indicates the findings in the form of themes and sub-themes and the literature to show how the findings link with what is empirically researched, together with the insight gained from the study.

Main themes and sub-themes	Interpretative elucidations from the study	New Insights	Significant literature
• Practitioners' views of play-based pedagogy. • Practitioners' knowledge of play-based pedagogy. • Practitioners' interpretations of play-based pedagogy.	• Children learn through play and it is play-based teaching and learning that contribute to the holistic child development of young children. • Play-based learning stimulates young children towards their learning and development.	• Findings support the literature by indicating that play plays an important role in the development of children. • Children need stimuli (resources) to develop • Play builds confidence and self-esteem. • New vocabulary is gained through play. • Problem-solving skills get developed in play. • Children learn to collaborate, to be independent, and understand their space (of development). • Thinking and reasoning skills get developed during play.	Aldhafeeri et al. (2016); Baumer (2013); Fleer (2013); Hirsh-Pasek et al. (2018); Solis et al. (2019); Pyle and Danniels (2018); Aronstam and Braund (2015); Whitebread et al. (2012); Fisher et al. (2008); Samuelsson and Carlsson (2008); Major (2016); Hassinger-Das et al. (2018); Solis et al. (2019); Wolfgang, Stannard and Jones

			(2010); Zosh (2017); DBE (2015).
• Practitioners' implementation of activities for the holistic development of young children. • Social developmental activities • Emotional developmental activities • Physical developmental activities; and	• Listening and speaking, discussion, and interaction during free play activities help children learn to socialise. • Imitating and interaction develop some common actions like smiling, excitement, embarrassment, and pride. • Catching, throwing, running, swings, climbing skipping ropes, and balancing	**Social Developmental activities:** • Literature supports that communication is the key to social development. • Children learn how to socialise with others and make friendships – this is linked to the themes in the CAPS policy. • Values and behaviour are learned.	Mraz, Porcelli and Tyler (2016).

• Cognitive developmental activities.	are some activities that assist with physical development. • Interaction, engagement, and exploring their environment like putting together puzzles, building structures, and reading, help develop remembering, problem-solving, and decision-making skills. • Roleplaying characters build children's emotions and language.	• Children learn to share, respect (other people's rights and their belongings- what is mine and what is not mine) and to be considerate in their conduct. • Self-confidence is developed and assists in allowing others to have their turn. • Sense of helping others also gets developed, which is complemented by cooperation. **Emotional Developmental activities:** • Children develop their emotional skills through interaction and imitation. • Control of emotions like excitement, anger, and frustration are developed.	Whitebread et al. (2017); Hearron and Hilderbrand (2010); Samuelsson, Jenkins and Spencer (2014); Izuogu (2019).

		• Plays activities like sand play, drawing, swings, slides, all help children to manage and develop strong emotions. • Practitioners need to consistently avail themselves to children (interaction, creation of relationships) to support their emotional development. • The use of morning rings and storytelling moments helps develop young children's emotions. They get to speak, act out or even draw about how they feel. **Physical Developmental activities:** • It is very encouraging to the practitioners to implement their understanding and knowledge of	Otto, Visser and McKee (2018); Whitebread et al. (2017); Santrock (2017); Pathman and Bauer (2020).

		play-based pedagogy if resources are available, both outdoor and indoor equipment. • The incorporation of play activities in lesson planning, including outdoor play activities and their implementation is encouraged to holistically develop young children. • Physical development positively contributes to the cognitive development of young children, a healthy mind in a healthy body improves a child's academic performance. • In physical development activities, children are actively interacting, engaging, and exploring, which assists in the development of body parts	Whitebread et al. (2017); Bergen (2018); Bubikova-Moan, Hjetland and Wollscheid, (2019); Solis et al. (2019); Aubrey (2017); Silva (2019); Pyle and Danniels (2016); Siraj-

		coordination, control, and movement **Cognitive Developmental activities:** • The use of stories, storytelling, and reading activities benefit young children in their cognitive development. They develop language and questioning techniques through their interaction and communication. • These activities help young children to increase their capacity to keep information. • Young children get to develop problem-solving skills, visual discrimination, matching, comparing, sorting, and organising skills through play-based teaching	Blatchford *et al.* (2019); Baumer (2013).

		and learning approaches. Practitioners use resources, like puzzles and blocks, to assist them to develop these skills. • The use of stories develops the ability to identify the truth and a lie, facts and fiction, and understand the cause and effects, • Mathematical skills like basic operations, addition, and subtraction, are developed using symbolic representation games and mathematical literacy, like many, few, more, less, take away, make bigger, is established and advanced. • Children also obtain analytical thinking skills.	

Strategies to support play-based pedagogy in early childhood centres. • Use of available resources and the environment as part of the strategy for play-based teaching and learning in centres. • Practitioners' training and development.	• An inviting and conducive environment gives children an opportunity to explore, interact, engage, and experiment with available resources, which enhance their development. • Knowing how and when to intervene in child development requires knowledge, experience, and skill. Knowledge improves lesson planning and skills application.	• Literature supports that play-based pedagogy requires a well-resourced centre and classroom for children to freely engage, explore, and construct for holistic development and an adverse situation can deprive and rob children of their holistic development. • Empirical studies agree to the importance of knowledge and accumulation of experience by practitioners that benefit children in their holistic development.	Pyle and Danniels (2016); Lyons (2017); Siraj-Blatchford (2019); Solis et al. (2019); Stirrup et al. (2017).

6.6 RESEARCH CONCLUSION RECOMMENDATIONS

This section pays attention to the research conclusion, which is based on the findings from the data collected and supported by the literature. The recommendations that emerged from the themes and sub-themes highlight the significance of play-based pedagogy in child holistic development, supported by practitioners' knowledge and experiences of its application in the classroom.

6.6.1 Creation of conducive and inviting learning environment

Early grade centres need to value young children and their development by ensuring that their teaching and learning are meaningful. To make teaching and learning meaningful practitioners need to be active advocates by creating a conducive and inviting learning environment (Venketsamy, Smart & Hu 2021). A conducive learning environment means the availability of necessary resources in centres and classrooms. The availability of resources will encourage and stimulate the young children with the zeal and enthusiasm to explore, experiment, engage, and construct.

Practitioners like Maria Montessori, Stanley Greenspan, Friedrich Froebel, Rudolf Steiner, agree to the fact that the technique to develop a child is through engagement and practical experiences gathered during the process of development. In support of the NCF, centres are expected to offer and make play opportunities available to young children for them to develop (DBE, 2015). The effective implementation of theme 2, which advocates holistic child development, in the NCF can improve the lives of young children in centres and classrooms. According to Ekeh and Venketsamy (2020) a child's holistic development is mainly enhanced by a well-arranged, stimulating environment that promotes learning through play. This was confirmed by Bubikova et al. (2019), who stated that the mindset of young children invests in a state that is conducive to learning and development (see section 2.3.6). Vygotsky and Piaget both reinforce that the construction of knowledge and understanding of the world is accelerated under the conducive environment (McLeod, 2012). This leaves centres with no option but to ensure that children receive the required resources for both indoor and outdoor activities. The contribution of these resources to child development can never be overemphasised.

6.6.2 Role of school-based principals and centre managers on the implementation of PBP

School-based principals and community-based centre managers are the highest-ranking managers in centres and are regarded as responsible leaders in guiding the development of young children. These leaders and managers are further accountable for monitoring and supporting the curriculum implementation of departmental policies. The role of these managers is to safeguard organisational performance, quality educational innovations, and children's education (Bipath, Tebekana & Venketsamy, 2021). Safeguarding quality education in this study entails buying resources, equipping educational corners, such as reading, fantasy, creative, block, and others, with necessary resources. It is their managerial responsibility to maintain equipment and re-supply consumable educational resources, like crayons and play dough, to support the implementation of PBP in their centres for children to achieve their full potential. The knowledge and understanding of PBP by managers are crucial for successful implementation in centres. This study highly recommends that:

- School-based principals and community-based centre managers be trained on PBP as a crucial method of holistic development of young children; and
- These managers must provide a quality wide range of resources to encourage play and exploration to young children.

6.6.3 The role of the South African Education Ministry: ECD Policy implementation

From the findings that emerged from the data collected in this study, it can be concluded that there is a casual implementation of the current framework (NCF) in Early Childhood Development Centres (ECDCs). The responses from participants confirmed that although their lesson planning included play-based activities, implementation or carrying out of those activities remains a challenge due to lack of support from the centres. The reasoning of inadequate supply of resources kept on resurfacing in participants' responses. In-service training was also mentioned by one practitioner who took it upon herself and initiated a self-hunting strategy of courses and training available and offered by independent organisations, which are also offered at costs. It is in this regard that this study recommends that the South African Education Ministry must ensure that:

- ECD officials from the national, provincial, and district offices, closely monitor the implementation of play-based learning and the utilisation of the NCF in centres
- The availability of play equipment (indoor and outdoor) is continuously audited, especially in school-based centres to support the implementation of the NCF in centres; and
- In-service training of practitioners on the NCF is carried out timeously in provinces and districts to ensure the continuous personal growth of practitioners.

6.6.4 Practitioners' skills and knowledge of PBP and practical application

From the data collected, coded, and analysed, there is no doubt that practitioners possess relevant knowledge and understanding of play-based teaching and learning in early childhood development. The inclusion of play activities in lesson plans is sufficient enough for the understanding of the play-based approach. Therefore, that indicates that practitioners are willing to put into practice the knowledge and skills they have regarding play-based learning if supported with necessary resources. Venketsamy (2022) articulates that continuous professional development of teachers and practitioners is viewed as an influential central factor for the efficiency of teaching and learning.

6.7 RESEARCH LIMITATIONS

The purpose of this study was to contribute to the utilisation of PBP by practitioners in centres and its implementation thereof. The utilisation of play-based learning in support of theme 2 from the NCF for holistic child development was the main focus of this study. This framework fully supports play-based teaching and learning but its full implementation remains a concern. The researcher intended to determine the perceptions, views, and understanding of practitioners' on PBP and the benefits it has on the development of young children. The study further explored different play activities that contribute to holistic child development. It is crucial to acknowledge that any research study is executed within confident settings, which may also give the command to probabilities and improbabilities.

Creswell (2014) indicates that any qualitative study carries strengths and weaknesses. This study followed a qualitative interpretivist approach, which has the potential of

posing the challenge of inappropriate interpretation of what is observed, said, heard, and understood (Creswell, 2015). To eliminate all these challenges, the researcher followed the semi-structured interview questionnaire. Participants were allowed to voluntarily engage in the process of data collection. Observation, as another data collection method used, was only limited to the participating classrooms. A voice recorder and field notes were utilised to safeguard inappropriate interpretation of individual responses. Although data was collected most reliably, access to sampled centres required extra vigilance as data was collected under level 3 of COVID-19 restrictions. The researcher observed all stipulated COVID-19 protocols throughout the data collection process.

6.8 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The findings in this study on 'Practitioners' perceptions of play-based pedagogy on the holistic development of young children' recommends certain possible areas for future research:

- Roles and responsibilities of school-based principals and community-based managers on the full implementation of play-based pedagogy in centres
- Involvement of the South African National Department of Basic Education, Provincial Departments of Education and Districts offices' officials on monitoring and support of centres on the implementation of the NCF
- Auditing of indoor and outdoor play equipment in school-based centres; and
- A review of the CAPS content about the NCF principles for professional implementation of play-based teaching in centres.

6.9 CONCLUDING REMARKS

This chapter concludes this study. All primary and secondary questions formulated in the first chapter were explored and purposefully achieved. This research study has displayed the importance of using play when developing young children. The study also emphasised the need to implement tailor-made policies developed by the department of education in South Africa to enhance the holistic development of young children in early childhood centres.

Practitioners' comparable perceptions, views, and understanding of PBP, what it means, and how it should be implemented during the teaching and learning process in centres, was highlighted. The participants positively viewed the benefits of PBP for the holistic development of young children. The unavailability of supporting resources in centres and classrooms was viewed by participants as the contributing factor to the failure of full implementation of PBP. Principals of school-based centres and community-based centre managers need to be advocates of PBP by ensuring that their centres are well-equipped with relevant resources and monitor its utilisation by both children and practitioners.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: PERMISSION LETTER TO PRACTITIONER

Appendix 1:

Practitioner letter of consent

Dear Practitioner

I am Nonhlanhla Patience Ntshangase, a PhD student at the University of Pretoria. The title of my study towards my PhD degree is "**Practitioners' perceptions of play-based pedagogy on the holistic development of young children".** The study aims to investigate practitioners' perceptions in the holistic development of young children and to make recommendations to reinforce the teaching and learning through play to young children.

I am working under the supervision of Dr. Roy Venketsamy, from the Department of Early Childhood Education at the University of Pretoria.

As one of the participants, I kindly invite you to participate in this study. There are two parts to this research, an interview (using a semi-structured interview questionnaire) and lesson observation. The interview will be scheduled as per your availability and will take place at a venue convenient to you. The interview should take approximately an hour.

The lesson observation will be an hour. The lesson observation aims to observe the practitioner presenting the lesson incorporating play-based pedagogy for the holistic

development of learners. Learners will be active participants during the lesson observation, together with the teacher. The practitioner and learners will be observed.

Your participation in this study is voluntary and confidential. You have the right to withdraw at any point during the research study without any consequences or explanations. You can be assured that your decision will be respected. Confidentiality and anonymity will be guaranteed always by using pseudonyms to the participants during the transcription phase. No participant names or personal information will be reported in my findings.

In participating in this research study, you will be asked for permission by the researcher to make audio recordings of the semi-structured interview. The purpose thereof is to make a transcription of data valid and authentic. The recording will be safely kept in passworded devices like hard drives and flash drives. Only my supervisor and I will have access to the audio recordings. All data collected will only be used for academic purposes.

You may ask questions before or during the time of participation. If you have any concerns regarding the data collection procedures, please notify me or my supervisor. As a participant, you will have the opportunity to access and verify the recorded views and the transcriptions of interviews made if needed.

Please indicate by signing your understanding of the information shared above, the purpose being to give your consent to participate.

Kind regards

_____

N. P. Ntshangase

E-mail address: npntshangase@yahoo.com

Contact number: 082 595 8264

Supervisor: Dr. R. Venketsamy

E-mail address: roy.venketsamy@up.ac.za

PERMISSION FOR RESEARCH
I, _____, hereby give permission to N. P. Ntshangase to include me as a participant in her research on "**Practitioners' perceptions of play-based pedagogy on the holistic development of young children"** Signature: _____ Date: _____

APPENDIX 2: PERMISSION LETTER TO PRINCIPALS

Dear Principal

My name is Nonhlanhla Patience Ntshangase and I am a PhD student at the University of Pretoria. The research I wish to conduct for my PhD thesis is "**Practitioners' perceptions of play-based pedagogy on the holistic development of young children"** The aim is to improve teaching and learning through play to holistically develop young children. The study will be conducted under the supervision of Dr. Roy Venketsamy, Department of Early Childhood Education, and the University of Pretoria.

I am hereby seeking your consent to approach practitioners in the centre to participate in this study. The interviews will take place after contact time and lesson observation will take place during contact time. I will be a silent observer in the centre without disrupting or interfering with the lesson. No learners will be recorded or harmed during lesson observation. Each prospective practitioner will be given a formal letter inviting him/her to participate in this study.

During the reporting phase of the study, pseudonyms and codes will be used. No personal information such as the name of the school or teacher will be mentioned in the study. I undertake to provide your office with a bound copy of the full research report on the completion of the study. Should any further information be required, please do not hesitate to contact me on 082 595 8264

Yours sincerely,

Nonhlanhla Patience Ntshangase

University of Pretoria

E-mail address: npntshangase@yahoo.com

Contact number: 082 595 8264

Supervisor: Dr. R. Venketsamy

E-mail address:

UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA

Faculty of Education
Fakulteit Opvoedkunde
Lefapha la Thuto

PERMISSION FOR RESEARCH
I, _____, hereby give permission to N. P. Ntshangase to invite practitioners from my centre to participate in her research study entitled "**Practitioners' perceptions of play-based pedagogy on the holistic development of young children"**

Signature: _____

Date: _____

APPENDIX 3: LETTER FROM MPUMALANGA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

education
MPUMALANGA PROVINCE
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

Ikhamanga Building, Government Boulevard, Riverside Park, Mpumalanga Province
Private Bag X11341, Mbombela, 1200
Tel: 013 766 5552/5115, Toll Free Line: 0800 203 116

Litiko le Temfundvo Umnyango we Fundo | Departement van Onderwys | Ndzawulo ya Dyondzo

Ms. N.P Ntshangase
PO BOX 13344
LERAATSFONTEIN
1038
npntshangase@yahoo.com (082 595 8264)

RE: APPLICATION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH: N.P. NTSHANGASE

Your application to conduct research study was received and is therefore acknowledged. The title of your study reads thus: **"Play-based Pedagogy in the Holistic Development of young learners: Practitioners Perceptions."** The aims and the objectives of the study may benefit the department in particular the ECD and curriculum in general. Your request is approved subject to you observing the provisions of the departmental research policy which is available in the departmental website and available on request. You are also requested to adhere to your University's research ethics as spelt out in your research ethics document.

In terms of the research policy, data or any research activity can only be conducted after school hours as per appointment with affected participants. You are also requested to share your findings with the relevant sections of the department so that we may consider implementing your findings if that will be in the best interest of the department. To this effect, your final approved research report (both soft and hard copy) should be submitted to the department as soon as you complete your research project. You may be required to prepare a presentation and present at the department's annual research dialogue.

For more information kindly liaise with the department's research unit @ 013 766 5476 or a.baloyi@education.mpu.gov.za.

The department wishes you well in this important project and pledges to give you the necessary support you may need.

MR. J.R. NKOSI
ACTING HEAD: EDUCATION

16/09/2019
DATE

MPUMALANGA
THE PLACE OF THE RISING SUN

APPENDIX 4: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

1. What do you understand by play pedagogy?
2. What is your view of using play to teach young children, please explain in detail?
3. Are you aware of the different types of play?
4. What do you understand by formal play?
5. Give an example so formal play
6. What do you understand by informal play?
7. Give examples of informal play that you use in your class
8. How often do you use to play as a form of teaching and learning in your class?
9. What kinds of play activities do you use in your class?

➢ Name a few different play pedagogy approaches that can be used in a classroom teaching

➢ What are your views as a practitioner in implementing play in your lesson?

10. How often do you plan your lessons using a play-based approach?
11. How do you think play-based learning helps in the development of the young child?
12. What kinds of play activities do you give children?

- Physical development
- Social development
- Cognitive development
- Emotional development

13. What training have you received in play-based teaching and learning
14. What kind of support do your school provides you with play-based learning
15. What support do you need to implement play-based learning?

APPENDIX 5: OBSERVATION SCHEDULE

OBSERVATION SCHEDULE

School_____

	YES	NO
The school has playground facilities		
The practitioner takes learners outside to play		
The school has a jungle gym		
The school has a slide		
The school has a swing		
The school has a sandpit		
Activities are planned in the planning files		
The classroom has corners like a fantasy corner		
Practitioner plans activities for:		
a. Physical development		
b. Social development		
c. Emotional development		
d. Cognitive development		
Children are aware they are learning through play		
Practitioners have a sound knowledge of the formal and informal play		
Practitioners are encouraging learners to play		
The classroom setting is very formal		
The classroom setting is very informal		
Play areas are safe and conducive		
Children are free to play under the supervision of the practitioner		
Practitioners show interest in learners playing		

Safety rules and precautions are taught to learners about play.		