

Exploring learning support amongst parents and teachers of Grade 1 learners in a low-income school

by

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Master of Education

Learning Support, Guidance and Counselling (Dissertation)

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ABSTRACT

Learning support plays an integral role in the learning process and cognitive development of children. In the South African milieu, there remains a lack of adequate evidence on how learning support is conceptualised and enacted in low-income contexts amongst parents and teachers, who are the main role players in learning, given the challenges that they face. The objective of the current study was to examine how parents and teachers of Grade 1 learners conceptualise learning support. This study also focused on the different forms of learning support provided by parents and teachers, noting how these forms of learning support might contribute to learners' cognitive development. A descriptive case study design was followed as the purpose of the study was to explore how parents and teachers subjectively perceive and provide learning support. Data were collected using semi-structured interviews from 12 participants, including two Grade 1 teachers, and 10 parents. Additionally, semi-structured observations were carried out with two Grade 1 classes. The data were then thematically analysed.

The findings of this study indicate that the participants held similar interpretations of learning support, describing it as a way of providing aid to the learner. The main research question of this study concerned how parents and teachers conceptualise and provide learning support. The results revealed that while the parents described learning support as being physically present and available when needed, in comparison, the teachers defined learning support as the provision of stimulating educational experiences aimed at promoting greater learning. It was further revealed that many of the parents utilised learning support techniques that were familiar to them, namely, assisting with homework, singing and reciting poems, and engaging in fun play activities. Parents that lacked time, knowledge, and experience in how to assist their children acquired additional support from their older children.

The Grade 1 teachers outlined the various ways in which they had to adapt certain lessons to accommodate the needs of their learners. These teachers adopted aural and visual support techniques, encouraging learners to verbally repeat what they had learnt. Furthermore, manipulatives such as beads and blocks were introduced to aid learners in applying certain mathematical concepts. To promote listening skills, a radio was used on a regular basis, and learners were encouraged to listen to the stories presented. In the classroom, further support came from peers, which encouraged positive reciprocal interactions amongst learners. Teaching assistants also provided additional support as teachers were given the opportunity to

work one-on-one with learners who required further learning support. The findings from the participant observations revealed that learners were excited to partake in lessons, and engaged constructively with the teacher and their peers, with many of the learners completing the task set by the teacher. The conclusions of this study reveal that parents and teachers hold strong beliefs that the learning support provided at home and in the classroom have the potential to contribute to learners' cognitive abilities, and have benefited these learners academically.

It was recommended that the benefits of peer, sibling, and teacher assistant support be recognised and promoted within the schooling environment. Furthermore, rural communities can be educated by their leaders on alternative creative approaches to support learners that are not reliant on abundant resources. A positive, real approach to learning support would be to encourage those individuals closest to the learner, namely, parents, siblings, peers and teachers, to assist in whatever way is suitable and familiar to them. This may include telling stories, playing, or merely engaging in conversation. Changes in government policy would involve amendments to South Africa's White Paper 6 policy, outlining the need for, and benefits of additional teacher assistants in low-income schools. This is necessary as the policy clearly states that all youth and adults have the capability to learn if provided the required support. The South African government could invest more capital in rural, low-income schools through the provision of better infrastructure and additional resources, such as libraries and playgrounds.

Keywords: Learning support, parents, teachers, cognitive development, low-income schools, South Africa.

DECLARATION OF LANGUAGE EDITOR

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To whom it may concern

The dissertation entitled, "Exploring learning support amongst parents and teachers of Grade 1 learners in a low-income school" has been edited, proofread, technically formatted, and reference control has been carried out as of 18 October 2022.

As a language practitioner, I have a Basic degree in Languages, an Honours degree in French and a Master's degree in Assessment and Quality Assurance. I have been translating, editing, proofreading, carrying out reference control, and technically formatting documents for the past 12 years. Furthermore, I am a member of the Professional Editors' Guild (PEG).

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

DBE	Department of Basic Education
DBST	District Based Support Team
DOE	Department of Education
FSS	Full-Service School
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
ILST	Institution Level Based Support Team
NCS	National Curriculum Statement
NNSSF	The National Norms and Standards for School Funding
SASA	South African Schools Act
SGB	School Governing Body
SIAS	Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support
SSRS	Special Schools as Resource Centers
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
ZPD	Zone of Proximal Development

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CHAPTER 1: BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

1.1 INTRODUCTION AND PROBLEM STATEMENT

Learning support is described as a significant part of a functioning learning environment. It centers on the ways in which an educator or tutor can aid pupils outside of the official provision of content or skills development (Bates, 2014). Numerous studies have established the need for, and importance of learning support, both at home and in the schooling environment (Bojuwoye et al., 2014; du Plessis & Meistry, 2019; Esterhuizen & Grosser, 2014; Nel et al., 2016; Swanki, 2017; van Rensburg, 2015). A fundamental part of learning from others is emphasised in Vygotsky's 'Zone of proximal development', which outlines how much more a child can achieve academically when learning with the support of a teacher, parent, caregiver, or peer (Goswami & Bryant, 2007). According to Bronfenbrenner's Bio-ecological Model, the interaction between individuals in the different microsystems produces the mesosystem/s, which in turn influences learners' ability to reach their optimal learning potential through support from key role players, caregivers, and teachers (Nel, 2016). However, learning support is not always provided, and this is particularly the case in rural communities in South Africa where low-resource schools deal with a number of issues. Some of these problems include a lack of qualified teachers, multi-grade teaching, unreasonable teacher-learner ratios, and teaching staff that have poor morale and a lack inspiration (Hlalele, 2014). This study therefore sought to explore what learning support, if any, is provided in the home and schooling environment in a low-income school in South Africa.

There are differing perspectives on the meaning of learning support. According to the Socio-Ecological Model, learning support is viewed as the potential learning ability of learners. This specifically refers to learners being able to grow at their own pace so as to attain a self-reliant level of learning and personal development (Dreyer, 2013).

Learning support in a remedial educational context is linked to a medical deficit model of diagnosis and labeling, suggesting that the learning support presented should be to manage learners' identified deficiencies (Yoro et al., 2020). For instance, the literature outlines that from 1948 to 1994, special needs education in South Africa was provided on a racial basis, the traditional medical approach was used, and learners were labelled and classified differently according to race, language, and disability (Yoro et al., 2020). In response, the South African Department of Basic Education (DBE) adopted the inclusive education approach in order to

address barriers to learning (Dalton et al., 2012). The inclusive approach does not label the learner, and the learning support provided is not based on race, language or disability. The value of inclusive education is in creating a sense of belonging for all learners, and ensuring that they all receive the same opportunities to achieve their maximum potential (Swart & Pettipher, 2016).

After South Africa's first democratic elections in 1994, there have been various changes to policies, including one important educational reform in the form of moving towards inclusive education (Mahlo, 2017). The intention of inclusive education is the enhancement of the quality of teaching and learning for all students (Yoro et al., 2020). According to the White Paper 6 Policy, constructing an inclusive education system requires that all learners, irrespective of race, gender, language, class, religion, disability, HIV/AIDS status, and culture, have the right to access education. It further acknowledges that all children can learn with the necessary support (DoE, 2001). Inclusive education recognises that all children can acquire knowledge, and that all they require is support to ensure effective learning (Yoro et al., 2020). Learning support, within the Inclusive Education Model, moves away from traditional remedial education, and requires schools to respond to learners who experience barriers to learning (Swart, 2016). According to the Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support (SIAS) Policy, support should no longer only focus on the diagnosis and remediation of deficits in individual learners through individual attention given by specialist staff. Rather, there should be a shift to a holistic approach (2014). Accordingly, an entire range of probable barriers to learning that a student may experience are considered, such as external barriers in the home, school or community, or barriers stemming from disabilities (Department of Basic Education, 2014). According to SIAS, support must center largely on the learning and teaching practice by recognising and addressing the requirements of the learner, teacher, and school (2014). Inclusive education focuses on all disciplines, and requires that teachers recognise, accommodate, and support children's different levels of learning abilities and requirements (Makoelle, 2016). Learning support, according to the Inclusive Education Model, encompasses perfecting the classroom conduct of learners, implementing a range of teaching approaches, separating the syllabus, and adjusting the classroom setting to meet learners' requirements (Yoro et al., 2020).

Several studies have acknowledged that the execution of inclusive education continues to remain a challenge (Donohue & Bornman, 2014; Engelbrecht et al., 2015; Ladbrook, 2009;

Ntombela, 2012; Swart, 2016). The challenge that teachers in rural areas currently face is that the provision of individual attention and support to a learner is not possible in a classroom with many learners (Mahlo, 2017). Further challenges involve a lack of support from caregivers regarding a child's learning. It is caregivers who are physically present with a child on a regular basis. They should therefore be the greatest provider of information concerning the child's physical, social, emotional, and cognitive abilities. However, not all caregivers have the knowledge and ability to regulate their child's development regarding school readiness (DeRousie & Durham, 2007). A study by Bayat and Madyibi (2022) highlights the reality that poor parents may lack the necessary capital to acquire learning resources for their home, and may instead prioritise other household needs. This, however, could be detrimental as a lack of educational toys and resources could affect a child's probability of attaining academic success. Existing research states that the quality of the learning settings created by families, schools, and the greater community is imperative to a child's development as children are inexperienced, and still developing the ability to think about their own thinking and learning. Learners therefore need support and diverse classroom experiences to develop these cognitive skills (Goswami & Bryant, 2007). Existing literature by Van der Linde (2021) recommends that future studies are needed that embrace the viewpoints of primary school pupils, as well as those of their parents regarding learning support as parents may possibly have greater awareness of learner engagement. In order to address the emerging gap in the literature regarding learning support, the present study intended to explore the various forms of learning support currently provided by parents and teachers in a low-income school in South Africa.

1.2 LEARNING SUPPORT IN SOUTH AFRICA

The South African Schools Act Amendment of 2011 stipulates that all children who are five years old and those who are turning six before June that year should start formal education (Basic Education Laws Amendment, 2011). Children entering formal schooling should have attained a range of skills, which include the ability to adjust to the additional educational, physical and motor demands; adequate socio-emotional development; and the ability to adapt to different methods of acquiring knowledge, language, and cognitive ability (De Witt et al., 2020). The primary objective of a school readiness assessment is to predict a young child's readiness for school admission, and to recognise preschool children who could effectively take advantage of further encouragement programmes, learning support, or retention (Amod & Heafield, 2013). The literature reports that 49% of children entering Grade 1 in the Gauteng

Province fail school-readiness assessments (van Rensburg, 2015). The results of another study indicate that there are four significant factors that affect school readiness: community, unpleasant experiences, educational factors, and family factors (Munnik & Smith, 2019). The study further outlined that the educational factors identified included a lack of motivation, barriers to learning, teacher support, and teamwork. Family factors included parental support, differences in nurturing practices, and caregivers' reading ability, which have been shown to exert an influence on school readiness (Munnik & Smith, 2019). To a great extent, a child's school readiness is determined by the setting in which he or she lives and develops, as well as the school's readiness for the child, the capability of the family, and community and peer groups to support optimum development of the child (High, 2008).

A study by Hall (2019) reports that South Africa has 11 252 schools in rural areas, with 3 060 secondary schools and 8 192 primary schools. Most of these schools are in the Eastern Cape, Kwa-Zulu Natal, and the province of Limpopo (Hall, 2019). People living in rural communities characteristically do not have access to facilities such as quality education, proper health services, transport, and electricity (Dube, 2020). One of the most prevalent characteristics of rural societies is poverty (DoE, 2005). In addition, further problems include food insecurity, the cost of education, and high illiteracy levels (Hlalele, 2014). The South African government's assurance of equal and impartial management, regrettably, has produced inadequate transformation in rural schools, which still lack basic services (water, sanitation, proper infrastructure), which affects access to, and the quality of education (Hlalele, 2014). The lack of facilities in rural regions puts learners in these schools at a disadvantage (du Plessis, 2014). There are numerous hardships that not only children, but also teachers face on a daily basis in rural South Africa, including travelling long distances to and from school (Anderson, 2018). The literature outlines that teachers are the first and most important link in the chain of support provided to learners, however, in South Africa teachers lack scientific (theoretical) knowledge on learning support in the classroom (Oswald, 2019). Recent research indicates that after 26 years of democracy, South Africa is still struggling to improve the quality of education and decrease the inequalities between the rich and the poor. In fact, learners attending payment-free schools have fewer resources in school, and have teachers with lower levels of expert knowledge (Wilson Fadji & Reddy, 2020). In relation to teachers' knowledge, Joorst (2010) recommends that teachers be given opportunities to share and deliberate over what they have learnt, and link new ideas and approaches in their own distinctive environment. This study highlights that although the Grade 1 teachers in a low-income school lacked resources, they

were still able to motivate learners by providing them with much needed support in unique and creative ways.

Mahlo (2017) outlines that if parents and caregivers assume responsibility for their children, teachers, in turn, will feel motivated to help the learners as they will realise that they have the parent and caregivers' support. Du Plessis and Mestry (2019) explain that the South African government has found it challenging to provide quality education services in rural areas, thereby resulting in a weakened quality of learning and teaching in rural areas. Furthermore, many South African teachers have not been taught to deal with the diversity of learners now starting school, or the larger number of learners per class, resulting in teachers becoming frustrated (Mahlo, 2017). Existing research has highlighted that although additional financial funds have been directed to full-service schools, this has not satisfactorily transformed into effective learning support services (Skosana, 2018). Teachers have outlined that the requirements of the curriculum, in conjunction with time limitations, their own lack of adequate knowledge, and overcrowded classrooms all operate as obstacles to significant support in the classroom (Oswald, 2019). The author further outlines that learners need to get the necessary support outside the classroom as there is insufficient time during school hours (Oswald, 2019).

1.2.1 Early childhood cognitive development

Learning starts at an early age, with brain growth being significant given that it is the foundation on which a child's imminent learning is constructed. If children do not grow appropriately when they are toddlers, it is more challenging for them to prosper in school and in later life (O' Conner, 2012). There has been considerable evidence provided by both local and international research outlining that the early years of a child's life are critical to his/her future development (Amod & Heafield, 2013; High, 2008). Early childhood education is important because it is a time when the child learns social and emotional skills, and a connection is made between the child, their parents, and the teacher (Bear, 2019). Ebrahim (2013) highlights that children are born ready to learn from their exchanges with the environment. This learning should start at home in a safe, health promoting environment, and thereafter progress to playgrounds and formal programmes that stimulate learning. However, only 20% of South Africa's underprivileged children under the age of five have admission to formal primary learning programmes (2013). A study has shown that early mental development has been associated with playschool cognitive and behavioural results (Hsiao & Richter, 2014).

The cognitive development of newborns can be enhanced when they are raised in a setting that is physically and socially inspiring, however, due to socio-economic limitations, many South African parents find it difficult to provide cognitively inspiring households for their children (Hsiao & Richter, 2014). A number of studies agree that inadequate parental involvement, insufficient motivation, and a lack of teamwork with other role players to nurture emotional and social skills in children hinder healthy development (Ngwaru, 2012; Ward et al., 2015; Ward & Wessels, 2013). However, early childhood experiences that are developmentally sound and emotionally supportive have positive effects on the child and the family, as children who are prepared to learn are likely to perform better academically (High, 2008). The support and involvement of parents in their children's learning has been shown to result in increased learner success, higher parent and teacher satisfaction, and an overall improved school climate (Durisic & Bunijevac, 2017).

1.2.2 The role of parents in learning support

Previous studies have highlighted that parents need to be accepted and empowered as partners in their children's education from the start. This allows them to engage with teachers regarding the barriers to their children's learning and, in the process, find solutions together (Pitt et al., 2013). Evidence concerning the learning situation in Eastern and Southern Africa highlights the fact that children spend more time outside of school than they do inside it. Thus, parents and caregivers can create occasions that contribute to their child's learning by shaping their learning environment and opportunities (O'Dowd, 2018).

Some parents have, for various reasons, failed to provide the necessary learning support essential for their child's cognitive growth prior to entering formal education. This has resulted in many learners showing a lack of interest in learning (Swanki, 2017). One of the reasons for this lack of support is that many parents and caregivers in South Africa face socio-economic challenges, which require them to leave their children with siblings or grandparents for extended periods of time. In many cases, these family members find it difficult to look out for the security of the children, particularly if they are uneducated and cannot help the children with homework (Mahlo, 2017). In rural homes, many parents often have lower levels of education, and are normally ill-equipped to meet the educational needs of their children. This results in these parents attaching a lower value to schooling, and learners receiving less support for learning (du Plessis, 2014). Existing research highlights that children from poorer communities enter formal schooling with a cognitive disadvantage because they lack access to

the various kinds of resources and stimulation that children from wealthier communities enjoy (van der Berg, 2011). Further research supporting this view emphasises that in socio-economically disadvantaged communities, barriers to learning are already present at an early age (Wildschut et al., 2016). While a few studies have highlighted the significance of learning support, very little has been said regarding the types of support provided by parents in a low-income school, as well as the observable influences thereof on cognitive development, hence the need for the current study.

1.2.3 The role of teachers in learning support

Educational support represents the role that educational support experts, namely, psychologists, school therapists, special tutors, and conventional teachers play in addressing the wide-ranging needs of learners (Arendse, 2010). The support that the learner receives must be planned in a way that exposes and deals with the variety of barriers to accessing the curriculum (DoE, 2001). Prior literature states that the teacher is the most significant form of support in an educational system. Through the proper supervision and direction, teachers can help learners attain their objectives and develop control of educational practices (Joorst, 2010). Educational support may be present in the provision of resources such as library facilities, and a variety of media and software programs (Joorst, 2010). However, not all schools have access to resources, and this affects how teachers impart knowledge and skills (Zide, 2013). The literature states that in order for teachers to identify a learning barrier and arrange for the necessary support, it is essential for that teacher to have the understanding and expertise to do so (Joorst, 2010). Educational support encompasses non-educational services for refining the quality and efficiency of any educational activity. This could refer to all human, material, or other resources utilised in aiding learners, teachers, or teaching activities and structures within the school. In this study, learning support refers to the assistance provided to the learner (Steyn & Wolhuter, 2008).

Teachers' lack of skill and experience, combined with insufficient resources, could possibly limit the application of support strategies in many schools (Joorst, 2010). Dreyer (2008) finds that the lack of support relates to contextual issues in school, which include unproductive teaching approaches, the teacher-learner ratio, and a lack of variation and support provided to learners. Children from poor and vulnerable communities have a higher chance of not having their educational requirements met as the absence of initial learning support influences how they acquire knowledge at school (Ebrahim, 2013). In the South African context, while there

is existing research on teachers' perspectives on learner support, inclusive education, and parental involvement in education, there still remains a gap regarding the various forms of learning support provided by parents and teachers in a low-income school. This prompted the researcher to conduct this study. Furthermore, the current study also incorporated the observed influence of cognitive development.

1.3 PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study was to explore the different forms of learning support provided by parents/caregivers in the home, and by Grade 1 teachers in a low-income school in South Africa. The researcher also sought to explore some of the observable indicators of cognitive development among learners that might be linked to their experience of learning support.

1.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The research questions that guided this study are as follows:

1.4.1 Primary research question

- How do the parents and teachers of Grade 1 learners conceptualise and provide learning support?

1.4.2 Secondary research questions

- How do parents in low-income contexts provide learning support for their children in Grade 1?
- How do teachers of Grade 1 learners in low-income contexts provide learning support for the children?
- How does learning support at home and school contribute to cognitive development?
- What are the observable qualitative influences of learning support on cognitive development among Grade 1 learners in a low-income school?

1.5 CLARIFICATION OF CONCEPTS

1.5.1 Learning support

Learning support comprises the provision of additional support to young learners to overcome obstacles to learning, and to promote educational success. This may include creating conducive

learning environments, the provision of learning materials, or just being there to assist with homework (Bojuwoye et al., 2014). In this study, the following learning support structures were explored in the home environment: play activities, educational resources (books, puzzles, and encouraging free play), and parental assistance with homework. The following learning support was explored in the school environment: the provision of extra classes, additional library books, group activities, class discussions, and alternative methods that emerged in the course of this study.

1.5.2 Cognitive development

Cognitive development is described as “the change in mental, thinking and reasoning ability patterns involved in learning, attention, memory, language, thinking, reasoning and creativity” (De Witt, 2009, pp. 55-56). In this study, the researcher observed Grade 1 learners around the age of seven to determine how they listened to instructions, explained answers, and communicated their views (Esterhuizen & Grosser, 2014). These are a few of the key cognitive development indicators that the researcher paid attention to in the classroom and on the playground in terms of whether they were at the appropriate development for their age, and not necessarily changes over time or as a result of an intervention.

1.5.3 Low-income schools

These schools lack many of the essential physical resources necessary for learning, and have an underdeveloped infrastructure for sanitation, water, roadways, transportation, electrical energy, and Information and Communication Technology (ICT) (du Plessis & Mestry, 2019). The National Norms and Standards for School Funding (NNSSF) was intended to improve impartiality in the finance of education by grading each school into one of five quintiles (Dyk & White, 2019). This grading is based on the unemployment and literacy rates of the community in which the school is located, with a Quintile 1 ranking representing a poor/improvised school, and Quintile 5 representing an affluent school. A low-income school is therefore ranked as Quintile 1.

1.6 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The outcomes of this study shed light on the various types of learning support currently provided by parents and teachers in low-income schools. The findings also highlight what is lacking in terms of learning support from parents and teachers, and provide recommendations

for improvement. This study could help lessen the gap in literature regarding learning support for Grade 1 learners at home and in school. In addition to describing the different types of learning support provided by parents and teachers, the study aimed to understand how the participants' conceptualised learning support. This was done to address knowledge gaps, and recommend future interventions. This study also provides suggestions regarding policies that are needed for the provision of learning support within a low-resource context.

1.7 RESEARCH DESIGN

A descriptive case study design was adopted for this study as the researcher explored learning support within a specific school and home context. This was achieved using two data sources, namely, semi-structured interviews and observation (Baxter & Jack, 2010). One of the advantages of a descriptive case study design is flexibility, this design allowed the researcher to obtain rich, detailed data through open-ended questions in the interview process (Cope, 2015). In this study, the participants were motivated to freely express their views concerning learning support with research questions that centred on the 'how', 'why' and 'when' of the phenomenon under study. Another advantage of this design is the use of multiple data sources, an approach that enhances data credibility (Patton, 1990; Yin, 2003). The aim of this study was to describe how learning support was provided by teachers and parents of Grade 1 learners in a low-income school. The researcher intended to approach only one school and explore one learning area; therefore, a single case study was conducted. However, a limitation of this design is the issue of reliability and validity as the use of a case study as a scientific method might be questioned (Flyvbjerg, 2006). In quantitative research, the researcher uses statistical methods to establish the validity and reliability of the research outcomes. Alternatively, in qualitative research, the aim is to design and include methodological strategies to ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings (Noble & Smith, 2015). A factor that may have contributed to the credibility of this study was the knowledge, experience, and qualifications of the researcher, as she was the major instrument in the collection of data (Singh, 2017). In support of this notion, the researcher is currently a foundation-phase educator with a Master of Social Science (Psychology), and has previous training in research. Her supervisor has a Doctorate in Psychology, with extensive experience in the supervision of postgraduate students.

1.8 RESEARCH PARADIGM

According to Johannesson and Perjons (2014), a research paradigm can be defined as a set of universally held opinions and principles within a research community about ontological, epistemological, and methodological concerns. The two most established research paradigms are positivism and interpretivism (Johannesson & Perjons, 2014).

An interpretive paradigm was used to guide this study as the aim of the study was to understand and interpret what the participating individuals were thinking about or the meaning that they attached to a particular context (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). Interpretive approaches rely on natural methods such as interviewing, observation, and the analysis of texts. In this study, semi-structured interviews and observation were used to study the topic at hand (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006). In this approach, great effort was made to understand the viewpoint of the individual and their understanding of the world around them (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017).

In this study, the aim was firstly to explore the different views of parents and teachers on learning support through semi-structured interviews. The researcher also observed the likely contribution of any support provided to the children's cognitive development. The advantage of the interpretive paradigm is that one explanation of the phenomenon is not chosen or preferred as the existence of multiple knowledge sources is accepted as each researcher has a varied perspective on the issue (Rehman & Alharthi, 2016).

1.9 STRUCTURE OF THE STUDY

Chapter 1: Introduction

Chapter one provides a contextual background for the learning support provided to young children in South Africa, beginning with the Apartheid era up until the country's current democratic status. The rationale and purpose of the study are discussed, where after common terms are briefly defined. Thereafter, the research questions, research design, and the aims and objectives of the study are discussed.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Chapter 2 provides a review of the literature on learning support. The different types of learning support are discussed. This includes a discourse on the global perspectives covering the

contexts of various parts of Africa, America and Asia. The importance of learning support and the influence thereof on cognitive development among Grade 1 learners are further explored.

Chapter 3: Research methodology

Chapter 3 presents the research methodology that was used in this study. An interpretivist research paradigm was used as the aim of the study was to describe and interpret various types of learning support provided by teachers and caregivers both at home and in school. A detailed description of the purposive sampling design is summarised. The uses of the semi-structured interview are discussed, outlining the structural and developmental reasons for the selection of this instrument. The data collection procedure and thematically analysed data processes are also outlined. The data editing and coding processes are then described and categorised into themes.

Chapter 4: Research Findings

Chapter 4 presents and discusses the findings from the data collected. The major themes are comprehensively outlined in relation to the objectives of the study. The related literature is cited to critically engage, and to support or refute the perceptions that the participants had regarding the concept of learning support.

Chapter 5: Summary of the findings, conclusions, and recommendations

Chapter 5 presents a summary of the results of this study. Conclusions are thereafter drawn from these findings. The implications thereof are then explored, recommendations are made for ways in which the findings can be used to enhance the provision of learning support both at home and in the school. The limitations of the research are also stated, after which further research suggestions are made.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter 1 outlined the rationale of the study, the research questions that provided guidance, and the research design. Chapter 2 is a presentation of the literature review, which explores the meaning of learning support, the learning support provided by parents within the home environment, government-based learning support in South African schools, and the learning support provided by teachers in low-income schools. The review examines the influence of learning support on cognitive development, highlighting the challenges faced by low-income schools. The conceptual frameworks of this study are also discussed in this chapter.

2.2 LEARNING SUPPORT

The literature defines learning support as any activity that strives to enhance teaching and learning. This can be achieved through accompanying or extra class instruction, support group work, and promoting learning and note-taking skills (Mashau et al., 2008). In the context of this study, learning support is recognised as any form of service, assistance, or guidance given to learners to promote barrier-free learning (DoE, 2001). Barriers to learning denotes any hindrance that prevents learner from gaining access to educational provision, and that may add to a break down in learning (Erradu, 2012). These barriers may be extrinsic, outside of the learner, or intrinsic, obstacles located within the learner (Erradu, 2012). Extrinsic barriers are those that are not within the learners themselves, but rather situations outside of themselves or created by others. These include the learner's home environment, upbringing, and socio-economic status (Mahlo, 2011). Intrinsic barriers are those within the learner, and include physical, sensory, physiological, and learning or intellectual impairments, singular or multiple (Mahlo, 2011).

Furthermore, the idea of learning support acknowledges and promotes learners' ability to develop at their own pace towards a maximum level of independence in learning (Mahlo, 2011). Learning support can also be described as the actions taken by a school to support learners who have difficulties in learning. This is done through specific activities, facilities, assessment tools, and learning resources (Thomas & Whitten, 2012).

According to Bouwer (2005), individuals from the various systems to which the learner belongs need to work together in the process of teaching and learning to achieve such independence. Existing research clarifies that the need for learning support appeared when importance was placed on inclusivity in conventional schools (Kriel & Livingston, 2018). After the 1994 democratic elections, changes to the education system in South Africa led to policy reviews with regard to inclusive education (Kriel & Livingston, 2018). The White Paper 6, which was published in 2001, strove to support the national curriculum in encouraging education for all learners (DoE, 2001). According to the Inclusive Education Policy, all learners must be placed in conventional classrooms, regardless of their abilities (DoE, 2001). The Department of Education (2001) clearly states that, “All children, youth and adults have the potential to learn within all bands of education and they all require support” (p. 24). The Inclusive Education Policy in South Africa outlines that all teachers are required to cater to diversity in their classroom (Mahlo, 2017). The White Paper 6 policy also called for supporting educational structures, systems, and learning practices that meet the learning needs of all learners (Oswald, 2019). A study conducted in 2016 argues that policy makers need to create preventative and intermediation programmes to boost the quality of parent-child, teacher-student, and peer-peer relationships as this could lead to a better academic capability and results (Jelas et al., 2016). Their study provides empirical evidence of the need for learning support, which will in turn influence a young person’s affective, behavioural engagement in school in diverse ways, as well as their academic accomplishments (Jelas et al., 2016).

The home and school are regarded as primary environments where learning support is expected to emerge as these are the places where children spend most of their time (Wilson Fadiji & Reddy, 2020). There are many challenges that adversely affect education in South Africa; these include a lack of infrastructure and resources, teachers who lack the essential skills to teach, and learners who are given little motivation to learn from their communities and families (Dirks, 2013). Research indicates that 36% of the 19.5 million children in South Africa are under the age of six; and roughly four million of these reside in impoverished households (Hall et al., 2016). Children who reside in the poorest settings often have few opportunities for growth and development as poverty restricts caregivers’ capability to become involved with their children, resulting in children receiving less encouragement and parent-child interaction (Ashley-Cooper et al., 2019). Furthermore, income poverty is unfavourably connected to reduced access to a widespread range of services, thereby jeopardising the child’s right to schooling, nourishment, health care, and safety (Ashley-Cooper et al., 2019).

The Ministry of Education in New Zealand set up The Learning Support Action Plan, which encompasses the following priorities: the provision of learning support coordinators in schools; screening and early identification of learning support requirements; establishing early intervention; flexible support for neuro-diverse children and young individuals; and improving schooling for children and young individuals in danger of disengaging (Ministry of Education, 2015).

The next section will explore learning support as it pertains to learners' home environment.

2.2.1 Learning support: home

According to UNICEF, the process of learning does not start when a child walks through the front doors at school, nor does it end when the child leaves school - learning takes place all the time, throughout life (2009). When young children enter formal schooling, they take with them their family and community values, practices, understanding, hopes, and behaviour. Likewise, when they return home, they bring back new forms of information, practices, and behaviour (UNICEF, 2009). It is therefore evident that children learn from both of these environments, home and school, being assisted in their learning by teachers, family members, neighbours, and others (UNICEF, 2009).

Learning starts at a young age as childhood is a swift period of brain development. There is an increase in synapses and connections between regions of the brain, with the brain reaching 90% of its total weight when the child reaches the age of five (Dubois et al., 2013). O'Conner emphasises that initial brain growth is significant as it is the 'groundwork' for young children's ongoing learning (2012). Thus, should children not be guided in the proper manner when they are young, it is further challenging for them to be successful in school and later life (O' Conner, 2012). Research reveals that parents are regarded as learners' key educators, and therefore they play a crucial role in their children's educational experiences (Maluleke, 2014). Ebrahim (2013) indicates that when children are born, they are prepared to learn from their experiences with their surroundings. Moreover, depending on the motivation they receive from the brain activity linked to language, memory, and higher cognitive functions, children develop swiftly (Ebrahim, 2013). When parents work together with their children in various learning activities, bonding between parents and children increases and they are able to spend more time together (Bhamani et al., 2020).

In this dissertation, the word parent is used in a wide-ranging and general manner to suggest any caregiver accountable for caring for, and supporting a learner. According to the South African Schools Act (No. 84 of 1996) (SASA), as amended, a parent is defined as:

- (a) The biological or adoptive parent or legal guardian of a learner;
- (b) The individual lawfully entitled to custody of a learner; or
- (c) The individual who agrees to live up to the duties of a person referred to in paragraphs (a) and (b) towards the learner's education at school.

Parenting encompasses all the activities that involve raising a happy, healthy child who becomes an accomplished student. Unlike the teacher, whose influence on the child is restricted, parents generally maintain a life-long commitment to their children (Durisic & Bunijevac, 2017). Existing South African literature outlines that a stable and emotionally supportive family life has been associated with many positive results. These include higher rates of school attendance, better school accomplishments, a reduction in behaviour problems, and higher levels of self-esteem and self-confidence among children and youth (Richter & Rama, 2012).

In South Africa, the Department of Basic Education (DBE) has striven to get parents involved in their children's schooling through the introduction of the School Governing Body (SGB) (South African School Act 1996). The main stakeholders in the SGB are the parents, and their responsibility is the governance of the school (Tsebe & Scherman, 2020). However, not all parents get involved. Some do not participate due to a lack of confidence, which arises from a lack of education (Mncube 2009). Alternatively, other parents simply do not view their involvement in their child's schooling as being their role, but rather that of the teachers and the principal (Scherman & Tsebe, 2020).

Despite numerous socio-economic hardships, many African countries acknowledge the value of involving parents in their children's education (Ndebele, 2018). Recent research reveals that in Zambia, and in many other African countries, school admission has improved radically over the past 50 years (Simweleba & Serpell, 2020). It should be added, however, that admission to school does not guarantee that children will learn (Bold et al., 2019). Furthermore, research has highlighted the significance of parental participation as an essential element of the teacher-learner-school endeavor where parents actively assist in their child's classroom, connect with teachers regarding their child's strengths and weaknesses, and assist in school projects and

homework (Sapungan & Sapungan, 2014). There are various simple ways in which parents can be more supportive regarding homework, including providing space and learning materials, interacting with teachers concerning instructions regarding homework, and monitoring the completion of homework (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2001; Ndebele, 2018). Homework teaches learners to work independently, and allows them to develop a sense of responsibility (Janusheva et al., 2018). Homework also assists in developing higher cognitive processes, allowing learners to solve problems, and think creatively and critically (Janusheva et al., 2018). Sousa and Skandera (2003) find that homework is the groundwork for learners' future success as it helps them to develop good behaviours and academic discipline, and prepares them for studies later in life, which in turn will prepare them to function as adults.

However, for learners living in a poor, rural community, parental involvement has been found to be lacking as parents are more concerned with day-to-day life than with their child's educational goals and schooling (Msila, 2012). The poorer the family, the less likely they are able to provide home solutions for educational weaknesses. A study by Matshe (2014) reports that there are many barriers that hinder parental involvement such as time, a lack of skills, and poor communication channels. Moreover, it is also difficult to escape a low-resourced, under-financed public school system (Msila, 2012). Several factors cause impoverished children to be more vulnerable to educational failure, including parents with a low level/lack of schooling, exposure to bad educational experiences, homelessness, lack of time and resources, abuse and neglect, and dangerous neighbourhoods (du Plessis, 2014; du Plessis & Mestry, 2019). Many parents in these communities have attained incomplete or have no formal education, and struggle to educate or equip their children with the simple skills required to make them ready for formal schooling (Labuschagne, 2015). Parents with partial, or no education at all, frequently struggle to stay well-informed regarding additional improvements in education (Mncube, 2009). More so, partially or uneducated parents find it challenging to work together with the school, with teachers, and to support their children with homework and extra undertakings (Skosana, 2018). Many uneducated parents find the language spoken by teachers to be complicated and difficult to understand (Skosana, 2018). Additionally, the poor quality of education provided in rural schools results in some of the parents being unwilling to devote time and effort. Parents are also unsure about the quality and value of their children's schooling, leading to lower learner admission and higher drop-out rates (du Plessis & Mestry, 2019). This study uncovers the diverse viewpoints of parents, and highlights the different forms of learning

support that parents provide amidst a lack of resources and, in many cases, a low level of education.

2.2.2 Government-based learning support in South African schools

After the first democratic elections in South Africa in 1994, the government attempted to undo the inequalities that had been inflicted on the country, and provide equal and fair education for all learners (Conway, 2017). The South African Education Department outlined the State's obligation in providing basic learning support and teaching support infrastructure, furniture and equipment, and the ability to provide and enable a teaching and learning environment for all learners with disabilities (DoE, 2001). These services included the training of learning support teachers, a focus on multi-level classroom teaching, collaborative learning and teaching, and the development of learners' strengths and proficiencies, rather than concentrating on their deficiencies (DoE, 2001). Support frameworks for schools, teachers, and learners in South Africa, as conveyed by the different policy documents, comprise the formation of District-Based Support Teams (DBST), Institution-Level Based Support Teams (ILST) (also referred to as school-based support teams), Full-Service Schools (FSS), as well as Special Schools as Resource Centres (SSRC) (Nel, 2016). Research reveals that the duty of the DBST is to "provide a coordinated professional support service that draws on expertise in further and higher education and local societies, targeting special schools and specialized settings, selected full-service and other primary schools and educational organizations" (Nel, 2016, p. 3).

In the school environment, the teacher needs to offer support in a regular location, thereby reducing the probability of separating learners with difficulties from their fellow peers, as well as minimising stigmatisation (Naidu, 2007). However, Engelbrecht (2016) highlights the many challenges present in the successful functioning of inclusive education in South Africa, revealing that support schools are not available in all provinces and, where available, these are limited to a certain number of learners. In other research, teachers have reported their experiences of inclusive education in their classrooms as difficult, further noting the lack of formal support structures (Engelbrecht et al., 2003; Nel, 2016; Walton et al., 2014).

2.2.3 Learning support: teachers

The White Paper 6 Policy in South Africa states that all learners with diverse needs must be included in one classroom. Prior to the introduction of this policy, support for learners was the

concern of specialised professionals who were proficient and could provide the necessary support (Mahlo, 2011). Teachers did not regard it as their duty to aid these learners as they were not trained to do so. However, currently, teachers are required to adjust the surroundings, their approaches, the curriculum, and instruction methods in a manner that lessens learners' external and internal barriers to learning (Mahlo, 2011).

In the classroom, the teacher is the initial and most significant link in the chain of support in ensuring quality learning for learners (Oswald, 2019). The support that a teacher offers a learner is within the margins of their understanding, skills, and resources (Nel et al., 2016). Learning support at school can be in the form of a classroom talk where the teacher involves the children, causing them to be more interactive, thus creating learning opportunities (Langeloo et al., 2019). The literature reports that primary school learners regard the main sources of support as teachers and peers (Bojuwoye et al., 2014). The different forms of support received include extra class instructions; advice on how to meet their social, emotional, and academic needs; and nutritional support (Bojuwoye et al., 2014).

The role of a teacher includes that of a tutor, guidance counsellor, acquaintance, communicator, programme instructor, translator, and resource designer (Swanki, 2017). Of all the occupations that centre on the growth of learners, teaching is viewed as one of the most multifaceted careers due to the fact that when educational policies change, the demands placed on teachers' increase (Mahlo, 2017). One significant educational reform was the introduction of the White Paper 6 Policy, which states that all learners, regardless of race, gender, language, class, religion, disability, HIV/AIDS status, and culture, have the right of admission to schooling, further declaring that all children can learn with the appropriate support (DoE, 2001). The learning support that a learner receives in the classroom creates an encouraging learning environment, makes the learner more self-assured, and centers on learners attaining results and getting acknowledgement from their teachers (Crombie et al., 2003).

Low-resource schools lack many of the essential physical resources necessary for learning, as well as basic infrastructure for sanitation, water, roadways, transportation, electrical energy, and ICT (du Plessis & Mestry, 2019). The findings of a study in South Africa show that learner accomplishment in rural schools has become really poor and varied, dependent on the rural school attended (Du Plessis & Meistry, 2019). The study further outlined the various challenges that rural schools encounter, including the employment and retention of qualified teachers, the reluctance of teachers to work or reside in rural areas due to the shortage of professional

opportunities, and teachers having to do several tasks without appropriate reimbursement (Du Plessis & Meistry, 2019).

Consequently, the major challenge that schools in rural districts encounter is teachers who are not adequately trained and do not have the necessary understanding or skills to utilise what is offered in the classroom to encourage young learners and support learning (Labuschagne, 2015).

Proper teaching prescribes that teachers be familiar with how to rephrase their subject knowledge into effective teaching, and then apply this in the classroom (Bold et al., 2017). In the literature, a set of abilities and routines in the classroom have been discovered that are regularly connected with improvements in student learning. These include organising programmes and, in particular, introducing themes and learning results at the beginning of the class session. Thereafter, learners' understanding is appraised at the end of the lesson, with the teacher regularly checking that the learners understand the lesson by asking questions, and permitting learners time to examine and rehearse what they learnt, either independently or in groups (Mujis et al., 2014). It has been stated that for productive teaching and learning to occur, teachers need to have achieved some tertiary education, coupled with experience (Chinooneka & Mupa, 2015). In a surprising turn of events, the Department of Education (2012) found that teachers who had been recently trained and had less experience were more effective than more experienced teachers. While previous literature has focused on the role of the teacher in learning support, these studies highlight the support provided to learners in a full-service school, or with intermediate learners. They did not adequately reflect how Grade 1 teachers in a low-income school provide support (Conway 2017; Joorst 2010). Therefore, the current study was intended to explore the unique and creative forms of learning support provided by teachers lacking the necessary resources, focusing on Grade 1 as this is considered an important grade in the basic education pathway.

2.3 LEARNING SUPPORT AND COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENT

A young child's ability to acquire knowledge relies on the condition and workings of their brain; therefore, emphasis is placed on the child's cognitive development (Ebrahim, 2013). Cognitive development can be defined as how human beings acquire, organise, and learn to use knowledge (Gauvain & Richert, 2016). Cognitive skills can include lower-order skills for remembering information, as well as higher-order skills that involve the ability to catalogue,

categorise, organise, evaluate, think critically and imaginatively, and assess data (Brewer, 2001; Fisher, 2005; Sangwan & Chhikara, 2003; Wegerif, 2006).

A recent study has found that a nurturing home setting, together with early parenting participation, can improve a child's cognitive development, educational successes, and mental health (Drago et al., 2020). Bojuwoye et al. (2014) highlight that teachers encouraging learners to work in groups, and introducing the 'buddy system' are regarded as forms of learning support that inspire and improve learners' confidence.

Support for learning is significant as it has a major impact on learners' attitudes, behaviour, and performance at school (Swanki, 2017). Existing research highlights that in order for young learners to achieve better results academically, and to attain significant skills, their cognitive development ought to be persistently supported from Grade R (Esterhuizen & Grosser, 2014). This support has to start at a young age as the initial few years of a child's life are the foundation for all motor, psychosocial, and emotional and behavioural abilities (De Witt et al., 2020). These years encompass various relationships, events, and experiences that influence a child's abilities and school readiness (De Witt et al., 2020).

When parents become actively engaged in assisting their children with homework, it not only improves the children's educational outcomes, but also adds to a higher quality of education (Ikechukwu, 2017). The literature outlines that parents are a child's first teacher as it is they who aid in the development of values and in the formation of the child's identity (Narain, 2005). Furthermore, parents provide their children with the necessary guidance, support, and encouragement (Narain, 2005). Children spend a great deal of time at home, and are intensely affected by the family. Parents lay the foundation for the child's education, upon which teachers can then further build. Therefore, both teachers and parents have to collaborate with one another for the benefit of the child (van Wyk & Lemmer, 2009). When parents assist their child in practising their spelling, reading, and arithmetic, the child's learning is enhanced (van Wyk & Lemmer, 2009).

In the schooling environment, quality teaching is necessary for actual foundational development to take place, regardless of the facility in which the child is placed. A qualified teacher can offer a learning setting in which a child can progress adequately and holistically (Atmore, 2012). According to the literature, there are two characteristics of cognitive development that are significant for school readiness (Bierman et al., 2008). The first

characteristic comprises the learner's educational understanding, which is reliant on the quality of motivation in the home environment, the learner's experience in a crèche or primary school, and their capability to acquire new knowledge in a formal learning setting (Bruwer et al., 2014). The second characteristic includes executive functions, which involve the child's working memory, inhibitory control, and cognitive flexibility (Bruwer et al., 2014). Research has shown that a learner with a strong working memory will be able to follow guidelines and keep instructions in mind while concluding learning tasks (McClelland et al., 2007). A young learner entering formal education in Grade 1 must meet many expectations, including the ability to work independently, complete learning tasks, follow a stringent class schedule, and obtain literacy and mathematical skills (Li-Grining et al., 2010). Learners from poorer settings are regularly deprived of pre-school motivation within the home environment, and of having the opportunity to attend a good school (Li-Grining et al., 2010; Piotrkowski et al., 2000). Moreover, learners from these disadvantaged backgrounds are at intensified risk of not passing their subjects at school, which has severe and long-term implications (Bruwer, 2014). Wang and Wang's (2015) study emphasises that the learning process is inseparable from the child's cognitive development. However, in the South African context, there have been few studies that have set out to determine the viewpoints of both parents and teachers of Grade 1 learners, as such evidence is critical in encouraging further learning support. Hence the need for this study, which focused on interventions, specifically, the types and ways of providing support. This study concentrated on the perspectives of both parents and teachers, and in addition encompassed observations of the Grade 1 learners in the classroom and on the playground.

2.4 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORKS

2.4.1 Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Model

Learners' environmental contexts should be taken into consideration when examining developmental outcomes. Therefore, this study used Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Model, and Vygotsky's Sociocultural Approach to Cognitive Development. These models were used as a lens to gain greater understanding of the likely contribution of learning support to the cognitive development of Grade 1 learners in a low-resource school (Bronfenbrenner, 1994, 2005; Lloyd & Fernyhough, 1999).

There are five interrelated types of environmental systems, ranging from smaller, proximal surroundings in which the person directly interacts, to bigger, distal surroundings that indirectly

affect development (Ettetal & Mahoney, 2017). Starting from the inlying level to the outermost, these structures include the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). The existing literature describes the microsystem as the innermost structure involving the interaction between family, peers, childcare, and schools. Bronfenbrenner (1979) discovered that family performs a very significant role in a child's well-being and academic learning. This aligns with the purposes of the proposed study, which aimed to explore the interaction within the home and school environments with regard to learner support (Berns, 2012; Nel, 2016). The genuine relationships that develop between a child and a parent permit the parent to be more helpful and involved with their child in learning activities in the home environment (Lavee & Benjamin, 2015). Thereafter when the learning process takes place, the child will have the chance to do well academically (Lavee & Benjamin, 2015). The microsystem also consists of the learner's school as a close surrounding in which the child exists (Gestwicki, 2007). It is also imperative that teachers start an active relationship with their learners, and realise that they are a part of a family system as understanding family dynamics allows teachers to comprehend the requirements of the child more effectively (Son & Morrison, 2010).

A child's education is not only dependent on the teacher's role as parental participation also plays an important role. It is therefore crucial that parents and teachers form healthy relationships that focus on good communication (Knopf & Swick, 2008). When parents become more involved in their child's schooling, teachers and school managers also increase the possibility of realising quality transformation in education (Sapungan & Sapungan, 2014).

The exosystem is the subsequent level that follows, which encompasses the microsystems in which learners are involved. However, at this level, learners do not have direct associations, including their parents' work activities (Ettetal & Mahoney, 2017). The exosystem also extends to community institutions, and it is imperative that the school establishes a partnership with the community so that the basic needs of the family are met (Lavee & Benjamin, 2015). The community plays a significant role in that it provides resources in the form of food, shelter, childcare, clinics, medical and legal services, as well as emotional assistance, all of which allow people to live productive lives (Lavee & Benjamin, 2015).

The macrosystem encompasses the larger developmental systems, and consists of cultural values, customs, societal influences, as well as laws and national policies (Nel, 2016; Niehaus, 2012). In the present study, the Education White Paper 6 (DoE, 2001) was viewed as central

as it impacts the different kinds of support that teachers can provide to learners (Nel, 2016). Moreover, prevailing cultural practices and belief structures around a learner's accomplishments are influenced by what parents and teachers select and hold in high regard, and how they sort out their everyday schedules to attain their objectives (Amatea, 2009). A better understanding of how the participants conceptualise learning support could lead to discovering knowledge gaps. Addressing these gaps could then provide opportunities for further intervention to improve the ways and methods of providing the necessary support.

The chronosystem includes the fluctuations or consistencies that transpire over a period of time, not only in learners' characteristics, but also in the surroundings in which they live. The chronosystem comprises both normative and non-normative life transitions (Drew, 2022). Normative life transitions include events such as matrimony, the birth of a child, and graduation; while non-normative life transitions may include events such as winning the lottery, parental divorce, or an accident (Drew, 2022). Research reveals that a divorce can have devastating effects on the development of a child, and acts as a risk factor in clinical depression in adulthood (Bohman et al., 2017). This model thus assisted in this study to bring to focus the developing child and their educational environment, together with the main role players, parents and teachers, and their contribution to learning support. Existing literature delineates that for inclusive education to be effective, it is essential for teachers to recognise the connections and interrelationships amongst the individual learner and the various other systems linked to the learner (Nel et al., 2013). Bronfenbrenner's ecological approach reveals how the microsystem, like the home environment, is linked with the mesosystem (e.g. the school, teachers, and other schooling workforce), as well as broader society in deciding the amount of contentment and serenity that people experience as they go about their lives (Mahlo, 2013). The Ecological Theory can be utilised to clarify changes in individual understanding, skills and capabilities, and the role of support systems in directing and building the individual (Mahlo, 2013). Bronfenbrenner's theory outlines that when the systems all collaborate, they direct and aid the learner's growth and learning (1979). A real collaboration is vital as a means to discern the general growth and development of a child, and to acknowledge each system's influence on the child's learning (Lavee & Benjamin, 2015).

2.4.2 The Vygotskian Sociocultural Approach

Vygotsky developed the Sociocultural Approach to Cognitive Development, which assumes that cognitive development varies across cultures. Therefore, the environment in which

children develop influences how and what they think (Lloyd & Fernyhough, 1999; McLeod, 2008). Sociocultural approaches highlight the analysis of real-life problems in common settings, such as the classroom, and the observation of the ways in which learners use new learning strategies and practise newly acquired skills and concepts introduced in school (Lloyd & Fernyhough, 1999). Vygotsky developed the concept of ‘scaffolding’, referring to the brief support that individuals receive from more educated others (such as caregivers, teachers, and peers) during their development. He also created the concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), referring to the difference in what people can accomplish by themselves and what they can accomplish with the support of others (Vygotsky, 1978; Warithorn, 2013). The literature indicates that primary childhood learning should centre on making a variety of social occasions and scaffolding school encounters available to learners. Learners need this so that they can develop the necessary cognitive skills required to cope with Grade 1 (Van Rensburg, 2015). In a perfect environment, a child’s caregivers, teachers, and more mature peers can nurture healthy cognitive development by providing them support. This can be done by exposing them to a wide array of encounters and activities that fall within their ZPD (Morelli, 2021). Introduction to such encounters, along with suitable encouragement, enquiring, and amendments (so as to match demands to the children’s proficiency level) will create the best conceivable ecological settings necessary to aid a child’s development (Morelli, 2021).

2.5 CONCLUSION

This chapter began with the definition of the concept of learning support. While various definitions have been outlined, only a few studies focus on the South African context. Thus, this study sought to fill the gap by exploring the different types of learning support currently provided by parents and teachers of Grade 1 learners. The various extrinsic and intrinsic barriers to learning were also highlighted. A brief description of the South Africa’s White Paper 6 Policy was provided, introducing the concept of inclusive education, which states that both youth and adults have the ability to learn if given the required support. While the South African government’s aim was to include diverse learners in one classroom, teachers often face challenges that hinder their ability to provide the necessary support. Learning support within the home environment was thereafter explored, stressing the importance of learning at a young age. This chapter also described what learning support is currently provided by schools and parents, and the challenges that socio-disadvantaged parents face, which restricts them from

providing the necessary support to their children. South African government-based learning support was then described, detailing the support structures provided at district level and within the school setting. Lastly, the influence of learning support on cognitive development was discussed; and the two conceptual frameworks, Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Model and the Vygotskian Sociocultural Approach were explained.

The following chapter provides the research design and methodology employed in this study to gather the sought after data.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter will focus on the research paradigm, the research methodology, and the research design that was applied in this study. A comprehensive account of the sampling process, data collection, and data analysis will be further provided. The ethical considerations of this research will be outlined, in addition to exploring the additional steps taken by the researcher to minimise errors and to verify the findings.

Table 3.1: Summary of Chapter 3

Epistemological paradigm	Interpretive
Research methodology	Qualitative.
Research design	Descriptive case study.
Research sites	A low-income school.
Research participants	Two Grade 1 teachers, ten Grade 1 parents.
Data collection	Semi-structured interviews and semi-structured observation.
Data analysis method	Thematic analysis.
Quality criteria	Credibility, conformability, dependability and transferability.

3.2 EPISTEMOLOGICAL PARADIGM

The word paradigm was first used by the American philosopher Thomas Khun (1962), and refers to a philosophical way of thinking (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). In educational research, the word is used to refer to a researcher's 'worldview' (Mackenzie & Knipe, 2006). An interpretive paradigm guided this study as the research focused on the reality and perspectives of the key participants, namely, parents and teachers, who own their experiences (Thanh & Thanh, 2015). Researchers following an interpretative paradigm do not question ideologies, but rather accept them (Scotland, 2012). In this study, a qualitative research methodology was selected using semi-structured interviews to explore the different interpretations of a few participants, in this case, parents and teachers. This was done as the purpose of this research

was not to generalise, but rather to discover the meanings that the applicants gave to the social conditions under examination (Phothongsunan, 2010). One of the strengths of the interpretative paradigm is that it is a natural approach that relies on human communication in its attempt to understand the complex nature of the social world; thus it cannot be reduced to the relationship between a small number of variables (Phothongsunan, 2010). This paradigm allows the researcher to study the participants' personal reality and viewpoints, thus enabling participants to assign meaning to the happenings in their lives. This, in turn, leads to circumstances where knowledge is interactively constructed between the researcher and the participant (Conway, 2017).

3.3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The term 'qualitative research' refers to any type of research that yields results not attained through statistical processes or other methods of quantification (Rahman, 2016). Qualitative research is the methodical investigation of social phenomena in a natural setting (Teherani et al., 2015). These social occurrences may include how people experience certain aspects of their lives, how individual persons and/or groups behave, how a specific organisation operates, and how interactions shape relationships (Teherani et al., 2015). A qualitative research approach was used in the study as the aim was to explore how parents and teachers subjectively perceive and give meaning to their view of the world in terms of learning support (Cropley, 2015). Unlike quantitative studies in which certain variables are controlled and others are compared, this qualitative study produced a reflective awareness of the concept of learning support through the opinions, reasons and motivations of a few participants (Reid & Mash, 2014). The data in this study were collected in the words of the participants, which lent itself to investigating what, how, when, and where the participants provided learning support (Berg, 2009). Through the qualitative research process, the researcher actively worked to reduce the distance between themselves and those being interviewed (Abawi, 2008). Qualitative researchers work to discover the participants' inner experiences, and try to interpret how meanings are formed through and within culture (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). In this study, the researcher attempted to gain a better understanding of the participants' experiences of providing, and the meaning they assigned to learning support.

3.4 RESEARCH DESIGN

Case studies in the field of psychology were one of the first types of research to be conducted, dating back to the middle of the 19th century (Rebolj, 2013). Currently, case studies are mainly used in the social sciences, as well as in the fields of education, management, public administration, and social work (Rebolj, 2013). A descriptive case study design was adopted in this study in order to explore learning support within the school and home context. A qualitative case study is a method of research that allows for the examination of a phenomenon within its milieu through an assortment of data sources (Baxter & Jack, 2010). In this study, two data sources used included semi-structured interviews and semi-structured observation (Baxter & Jack, 2010). According to Yin (2003), a case study design is present when: (a) The research questions centre on ‘how’, ‘why’ and ‘when’; (b) When the researcher cannot influence the behaviour of the individuals involved in the phenomenon under study; (c) The researcher wants to cover the participants’ backgrounds because she believes they are pertinent to the phenomenon under study; or (d) The limitations between the phenomenon and context are unclear. In this study, the goal was to describe firstly how and when learning support, if any, is provided by the teachers and parents of Grade 1 learners in a low-income school, and thereafter how it might contribute to cognitive development. The researcher approached only one school and explored one subject; therefore, a single case study was adopted.

3.5 SELECTION OF THE PARTICIPANTS

In this study, purposeful sampling was used as information-rich cases were required (Palinkas et al., 2015). Participants who were well informed about or experienced in the phenomenon under study, learning support, were carefully selected (Cresswell & Clark, 2011). Three low-income schools with two or more Grade 1 classes were identified in Pietermaritzburg, KwaZulu-Natal, mainly on the outer edge of the city. Two of the principals were hesitant to participate in the study as it was the end of the year and the teachers were busy with assessments. The one remaining principal was contacted telephonically, and she agreed to allow her staff members to participate in the interviews. The identification process involved selecting participants who were suitable and fit the criteria required. The school had more than two Grade 1 classes, however, two teachers fit the criteria, which included having over five years of teaching experience. Once the teachers were selected, the researcher requested that each teacher purposively select five learners with parents who engaged consistently with the

teachers from each Grade 1 class. The learners would be observed for 30 minutes in the classroom and 30 minutes on the playground during their lunch period to assess their cognitive abilities. Thereafter, the respective parents of those learners were selected to be interviewed and were telephonically contacted by the teachers. While all of the parents were contacted to partake in the interview, it was only the respective mothers who agreed and were available. Despite the fact that a relatively small number of participants was selected, the aim was to increase the depth of understanding regarding learning support and cognitive development (Palinkas et al., 2015).

A sample of 12 participants was selected, including two Grade 1 teachers, and 10 parents of Grade 1 learners. The sample consisted of Black women of different ages and literacy levels. Observations were conducted in the classroom and on the playground of two Grade 1 classes.

Table 3.2: Breakdown of the sample

Participant No	Participant Role	Race	Age	Literacy Level	Relationship to child	Number of children caring for
P1	Educator	Black	57	Honours Degree	Educator (18 years)	In Class – 30
P2	Educator	Black	48	Diploma	Educator (7 years)	In Class – 32
P3	Parent	Black	35	Grade 12	Mother	2
P4	Parent	Black	38	Grade 11	Mother	2
P5	Parent	Black	27	Grade 10	Caregiver	1
P6	Parent	Black	29	Grade 12	Mother	2
P7	Parent	Black	31	Grade 12	Aunt	7
P8	Parent	Black	27	Grade 10	Sister	3
P9	Parent	Black	45	Grade 2	Mother	3
P10	Parent	Black	31	Grade 8	Mother	2
P11	Parent	Black	28	Grade 9	Mother	4
P12	Parent	Black	40	Grade 7	Mother	4

3.6 DATA COLLECTION

Qualitative data are generally non-numerical, but commonly expressive or nominal in nature. This data is manifested in words and sentences that occasionally capture the feelings, emotions or subjective perceptions of a participant in relation to a particular phenomenon (Kabir, 2016). The aim for all data collection is to record quality documentation that is transformed into rich data analysis, and allows for the construction of a substantial and dependable response to queries that have been posed (Kabir, 2016). In the present study, data were collected through semi-structured interviews and semi-structured observation.

Prior to starting the data collection process, the researcher presented all participants with a letter confirming that the study was approved by the Ethics Committee of the University of Pretoria's Faculty of Education. The researcher also confirmed that permission was requested from the KZN Department of Basic Education to conduct research in the Msunduzi Municipality, as well as from the principal of the school. Participants were reminded that their involvement was on a voluntary basis, and they were free to ask any questions. The parents of the learners observed were also participants in the interview process, therefore, prior to the observation process, parental consent was also obtained.

Observation was the first process of the data collection. As the teachers were busy with assessments, this allowed the researcher to observe the two Grade 1 classes for 30 minutes each in the classroom and on the playground. The Grade 1 learners in each class were informed of the study, and the 10 learners who met the criteria relating to cognitive development were identified by their teachers and were given assent forms to complete. The criteria for inclusion comprised learners who excelled academically and also those learners who experienced learning difficulties. The researcher read out the assent form in English and thereafter it was translated into IsiZulu by a translator, where after learners were given the opportunity to ask questions. The Grade 1 learners completed the assent forms themselves. Appendix F, the observation template, outlines the different abilities for which the researcher looked, which included the ability to partake in the lesson, and the ability to communicate with fellow learners. Some of the other points of observation included whether the Grade 1 learners were able to follow instructions, and complete the task set by the teacher. The observation was for a period of 30 minutes and the learners were initially conscious of being watched, but thereafter continued with their work. During recess, the Grade 1 learners were also observed, and the relevant field notes made. The researcher observed whether the learners were able to use gross

and fine motor skills in play activities (e.g. hop, skip and jump) with ease, and follow the rules of a game.

In qualitative research, observation is sometimes used as an additional means for verifying the research findings (Jamshed, 2014). The literature reveals that observations can be used to triangulate data, meaning that the results derived from the observations could be validated against what was learnt from the participants during the interview process (Kawulich, 2012).

The two Grade 1 teachers were interviewed first. Although the services of a translator were made available, the teachers declined this service and agreed to have the interview in English. Prior to the actual interview, the participants were reminded that their involvement was completely voluntary, and their limited confidentiality was assured. The participants were given consent forms and briefed on their rights to refuse participation in the study or to drop out at any point without consequence. Although no monetary incentive was provided, refreshments were provided to the participants who were eager to participate in the interviews.

A well-made semi-structured interview should make sure that data are reported in crucial areas while still giving the participants the flexibility to bring their own personality and perspective to the discussion (Barrett & Twycross, 2018). The participants were informed that the interview session would be recorded and, in addition, the researcher would take notes. All of the participants were informed about the benefits of tape-recording the interview. It was explained that the average person speaks very fast and, therefore, it is difficult to capture the spoken word accurately (Wyse, 2014). An audio or visual recording provides an impartial and true narration of the interview, which provides greater perspective and an all-inclusive depiction of the situation (Sullivan, 2012). The tape recorder also allows for the development of a rapport between the researcher and participant as the researcher can make eye contact with the participant and focus on the interview instead of taking notes (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006).

The interviews were held in the teachers' respective classrooms and lasted over 20 minutes each. Thereafter, the remaining ten participants, the parents, and caregivers agreed to have the interviews in the school library. The principal agreed to this arrangement, and set up a quiet area in the library. The researcher again reminded the participants that their participation was entirely voluntary, and that their limited confidentiality was assured. The participants were given consent forms and briefed on their rights to refuse partaking in the study or withdraw at any time. During the interview process, a translator was used with the parents and all sessions

were recorded. The interview process was very relaxed, and the participants were given the opportunity to express themselves freely. The interviews were recorded; however, pertinent notes were also made. The interviews continued for between 10 minutes to an hour, after which the participants were thanked and informed that feedback would be given to them in the form of a summary of the dissertation. Although many of the parents were educated, and the concept of learning support was explained, many of the participants gave one-word answers and declined to clarify further. Nine of the participants required a translator, while the remaining three conversed adeptly in English. The female translator had received a Grade 12 education that included both isiZulu and English as subjects. She conversed confidently in both languages, and translation occurred smoothly during the interview process, allowing the researcher to take notes in English. The translator was not given any training prior to the interview; however, a briefing session was conducted prior to the interview process.

3.7 DATA ANALYSIS

The data were thematically analysed with the purpose of finding common themes. Thematic analysis is a flexible and appropriate method for analysing qualitative data and for looking for ways to comprehend encounters, thoughts, or behaviours through a dataset (Kiger & Varpio, 2020). Thematic analysis is described as a method of analysing qualitative data that involves probing through a dataset to recognise, analyse, and report recurring patterns (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Since qualitative studies are inherently interpretive, the biases, values and judgements of the researcher need to be recognised and considered in the presentation of the data. It is therefore necessary to create and maintain a reflexivity journal (Creswell, 2013). In this study, the researcher maintained a reflexivity journal that recorded in detail the process involved in searching for patterns in the data. There are six phases in this type of thematic analysis, which are further presented in the following sections.

3.7.1 Familiarising oneself with the data

The first step in the thematic analysis process is the researcher becoming well acquainted with the complete dataset. This involves vigorous and frequent reading of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In a qualitative study, the dataset could possibly contain interviews, focus groups, recorded observations, field notes, journal entries, and in some cases, photographs and videos

(Nowell et al., 2017; Thorne 2000). In this study, notes were made based on the semi-structured interviews, and field notes from the observations of the Grade 1 learners. All of the interviews were recorded. The transcription was outsourced to a second-year university student who had previous experience transcribing recordings. Checking the transcripts against the original audio recordings for accuracy was a good way for the researcher to become familiar with the data (Kiger & Varpio, 2020). The literature outlines that it is important for the researcher to gain a sense of the complete data, and this can only be achieved by reading the transcripts several times (Vaismoradi et al., 2013). Handwritten notes that were taken during the interview process were cross-checked against the transcribed data. This allowed the researcher to read and check through the data, to double check the accuracy of the notes, and to become familiar with the data. The recorded copy of each interview was stored on a separate disc to serve as a second witness should information need to be confirmed. Hard copies were thereafter printed to allow for the analysis process to begin. Kiger and Varpio (2020) explain that while it might be appealing to begin coding and probing for themes immediately, the process of acquainting oneself with all the information will offer a valued direction to the raw data, and is the foundation for all further steps.

3.7.2 Generating initial codes

After step one is complete and the researcher has become familiar with the data, the researcher can begin to record all latent information/items of importance, as well as questions and links between data items and other introductory concepts at the start of the coding process (Kiger & Varpio, 2020). A code should be precise and defined in such a way that it does not overlap with other codes, and also be able to fit within a bigger coding structure or frame (Kiger & Varpio, 2020). Once the coding structure or frame is well-defined, the researcher then applies the same code to the complete dataset, making notes of possible patterns or influences that could inform future theme development (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Coding may be done manually or with the support of a computer (Kiger & Varpio, 2020). The literature outlines that a particular excerpt can be labelled with several codes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In this study, subsequent to the transcription of all the recorded data, initial codes were generated. The same questions were put to all participants, allowing the participants' views on the concept of learning support to become evident. During this step in the analysis, the researcher recorded how the codes were developed from observations, making notes in the margins of the hardcopies, thereby starting

the course of forming an audit trail to support the dependability of the researcher's explanations and analysis (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Nowell et al., 2017).

The coding structure can either be inductive, which outlines relevant issues raised by the data alone; or deductive, directed by specific theories or theoretical frameworks (Attride-Stirling, 2001; Braun & Clark, 2006). The current study was manually coded, and the coding framework was inductive as the researcher started with no codes, however, she developed codes once the data were analysed. Some of the initial codes developed included 'learn by saying things', 'we sing together', and 'kids help each other'.

3.7.3 Searching for themes

The third step includes the analysis of the coded and organised data excerpts to look for possible themes of larger importance (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Braun and Clarke (2012) use the following analogy to explain codes and themes, stating that if the complete analysis is seen as a house, the initial codes are the bricks and tiles, and the themes are the walls and the roof. In this study, the researcher worked repeatedly through the entire dataset, and initially found many codes that provided answers to the research questions. According to existing literature, themes do not merely arise from the data, but are created by the researcher through analysing, linking, matching, and charting out how codes relate to one another (Varpio et al., 2017). Themes should be independently significant, but also fit together to form a rational, analytical story (Braun & Clarke, 2014). The hardcopy of each transcript was analysed with an idea of some of the initial codes, however, as the researcher worked through the rest of the transcripts, new codes were generated, while some were modified (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). The aim was to code each segment of the text that seemed to address one of the research questions (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). Although some codes may not seem to belong anywhere, the literature highlights that is imperative not to leave out any data or codes without considering all of the excerpts in the fourth phase of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In this study, the researcher noted possible themes in the dataset, which included auditory learning through singing, speaking out loud, and listening to the radio.

3.7.4 Reviewing themes

Step four involves a two-level analytical process of refining and reviewing themes. Researchers may decide to join two themes or divide a theme into two or more themes, or abandon the selected theme completely (Clark & Braun, 2013). Information within each theme should have

enough cohesion and consistency, and information between themes should be appropriately distinctive to validate separation (Attride-Stirling, 2001; Braun & Clarke, 2006). In this study, the researcher made notes in the reflexivity journal regarding the themes selected and those rejected (Singh, 2017). It was throughout this phase that the researcher revised the coded data extracts to decide if a comprehensible pattern was apparent, and to ensure that the themes reflected the participants' views (Nowell et al., 2017). The researcher noted that after reviewing the various themes, one of the apparent themes was that parents provided learning support in the form of assisting with homework.

3.7.5 Defining and naming themes

Step five involves the researcher generating an explanation, as well as relating a description of each theme, and in the process stating its significance to the broader research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In this study, the researcher analysed the entire dataset thoroughly to make certain that all appropriate data related to each theme were arranged and presented in order (Singh, 2017). During this step of analysis, the researcher checks for overlapping regions between themes, classifies sub-themes, and also restricts the range of what each theme involves or includes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). During this phase in this study, the researcher wrote down a thorough analysis of each theme so that each theme fit together to form a story. This involved a lot of organising and reorganising so that the data were reflected in a meaningful manner (Nowell et al., 2017). The themes were named thereafter.

3.7.6 Producing a report

The final step includes writing up the concluding analysis and interpretation of the results (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Step six involves bringing together a coherent description and (rich) data excerpts to convey to the reader a comprehensible and trustworthy narrative about the information. In doing so, the researcher contextualises the data in relation to prevailing texts (Braun & Clarke, 2013). In this study, the themes were further examined with the aim of providing clear answers to the research questions, whereafter the report was written. In Chapter 4, the main trends, patterns, and themes will be discussed in a logical manner.

3.8 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

When conducting any type of research, it is crucial that the researcher abides by certain ethical standards. These standards support the aims of the research, such as knowledge, truth, and

avoidance of error (Resnik, 2015). The researcher's level of attention to ethical conduct (those actions taken during research activity that are either personal or professional) has both improved and developed in reaction to society's belief in greater responsibility (Haggerty, 2004; Held, 2006; Zegwaard et al., 2017).

3.8.1 Informed and voluntary consent

Denzin and Lincoln (2011) denote that the basis of ethical research is informed consent. In the current study, the participants were fully informed before the interviews that their consent should be provided freely (voluntarily) as they knew what was being requested of them, how the data were to be used, and what (if any) concerns there could be (Fleming & Zegwaard, 2018). The participants were also informed that participation was a personal choice, and that withdrawal was acceptable at any time throughout the research process without any consequences (Arifin, 2018). Prior to the interview process, the researcher first met with the teachers and informed them of the study. The services of a translator were made available, which they both declined. The consent form was read out in English by the researcher, after which each teacher signed a form. The parents of the learners observed were also participants in the interview process, therefore, prior to the observation process, parental consent was obtained. The researcher read the consent form in English to the parents prior to the interviews, and to the learners prior to the observation process. In each case, this was thereafter translated into IsiZulu by the translator. The participants were given the freedom to ask questions. None of the participants declined participation.

3.8.2 Anonymity and confidentiality of the information shared

It is very important that the participants' identity be kept confidential; this must go further than just concealing their names to also include the avoidance of utilising any self-identifying reports and information (Fleming & Zegwaard, 2018). Anonymity denotes the process of collecting data without obtaining any private, identifying information from the participants (Allen, 2017). The researcher used pseudonyms in this study so that information could not be traced back to any of the participants. The researcher also used the services of a translator, who also signed a confidentiality contract. The participants were all assured that the recordings, transcriptions, and field notes would be safely stored. In terms of this, the electronic data of this study will be kept on a password-protected, virus-free computer in a lockable office at the University of Pretoria. The research team, namely, the student researcher and supervisors, are

the only ones who will have access to this electronic data. The electronic data will then be destroyed seven years after completing this research by a research team member.

3.8.3 Beneficence and non-maleficence

The provision of anonymity and confidentiality are essential steps in protecting the participants from potential harm (Fleming & Zegwaard, 2018). In this study, the participants were assured that the research process and the questions being asked would not place them in any danger/harm. In fact, when taking in account the probability of harm, the methods applied should be in descending order: to eradicate, separate, and lessen the risk, with the participants being fully knowledgeable regarding potential risks (Fleming & Zegwaard, 2018). In the consent and assent forms, the parents, teachers, and learners were briefed that observing the children would not affect them in any manner. The participants were also informed about the benefits of the study, including the ability to reflect on the meaning of learning support and how they might enable learners to develop cognitively, which can be applied in their daily lives. No monetary incentives were offered; however, each participant was thanked for their valuable contribution and was assured of a summary of the research results.

3.9 CREDIBILITY, CONFIRMABILITY, DEPENDABILITY AND TRANSFERABILITY

It is vital that as qualitative research becomes more documented and valued, it is conducted in a rigorous and systematic manner to produce significant and worthwhile findings (Nowell et al., 2017). In the current study the criteria of trustworthiness, credibility, confirmability, dependability, and confirmability were emphasised.

3.9.1 Credibility

Credibility addresses the alignment between the participants' opinions and the researcher's representation of them (Tobin & Begley, 2004). The issue of credibility starts early in the research process, from the selection of the context and the participants, to the approach selected and then to the gathering of data (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004). To ensure internal credibility in this study, triangulation was employed. This includes the use of several approaches to data collection, which comprised interviews and observation in this study (Carter et al., 2014). A total of 12 participants were interviewed so as to obtain individual perspectives and encounters that could be corroborated using other methods, thereby offering a rich picture of the approaches, needs, and behaviours of those under inspection (Shenton, 2004). In this study, the

interviews were all recorded, with the consent of the participants, to act as a second witness should information need to be verified. The knowledge, experience, and qualifications of both the researcher and her supervisor have also added to the credibility of this study. The researcher is a qualified foundation phase educator with experience in the field of research, while her supervisor is a senior lecturer with a doctorate in Psychology.

3.9.2 Confirmability

Confirmability focuses on whether the researcher's explanations and results are undoubtedly derived from the data, needing the researcher to validate how assumptions and explanations have been reached (Tobin & Begley, 2004). In this study, all data acquired from the interviews and the field notes from the observations were typed out and reviewed by the researcher's supervisor. In reporting the results of this study, verbatim expressions from the participants were included. An audit trail detailing the research process was kept throughout the study (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). The data collected from the research process and the reflexive diary will be kept safely according to the Faculty of Education's requirements for additional examination by other researchers (Miya, 2020).

3.9.3 Dependability

In order to attain dependability in qualitative research, researchers must ensure that the research method is rational, traceable, and clearly documented (Tobin & Begley, 2004). Dependability also denotes an assessment of the research results, interpretations, and recommendations by other researchers. This is achieved by validating the steps taken and directing a review audit of the study (Tanveer, 2008). In this study, the researcher documented the research process in great detail and abided by it in an attempt to improve dependability (Miya, 2020). The outcomes of this study were also deliberated with the researcher's supervisor, and suggestions for further examination were made (Miya, 2020).

3.9.4 Transferability

Transferability denotes the generalisability of an analysis (Nowell et al., 2017). Research results are considered transferable or generalisable only if they fit into new contexts outside of the actual study context (Thomas, 2010). In qualitative research, transferability is considered a major challenge due to the subjectivity of the researcher as the key instrument. However, transferability can be improved through detailing the research methods, contexts, and

assumptions underlying the study (Thomas, 2010). In this study, transferability was improved by ensuring that a rich, thick account of the narrative and the research process was provided to allow the reader to evaluate whether the outcomes are transferrable to other surroundings (Korstjens & Moser, 2017).

Table 3.3: Data collection methods as they relate to the research questions

Data collection method		Research question
1.	Semi-structured interviews	1. How do the parents and teachers of Grade 1 learners conceptualise and provide learning support?
2.	Semi-structured interviews	2. How do parents in low-income contexts provide learning support?
3.	Semi- structured interviews	3. How do teachers of Grade 1 learners in low-income contexts provide learning support for their children?
4.	Semi-structured interviews	4. How does learning support at home and school contribute to cognitive development?
5.	Observation	5. What are the observable qualitative influences of learning support on cognitive development among Grade 1 learners in a low-income school?

3.10 CONCLUSION

Chapter 3 began with a summary of the research paradigm, methodology, and design associated with qualitative data collection and analysis. The chapter outlined the descriptive case study utilised in this research; how the participants were purposively selected for the case study; how the data collected were thematically analysed; as well as the research ethics that were applied. These approaches were described in detail in order to support the dependability of the outcomes of this research. Chapter 4 will present an analysis of the findings.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter 4 focuses on the main themes that were developed from the raw dataset. These themes were used to provide a coherent account of the participants' views and experiences of the concept of learning support. The primary purpose of the study was to explore the way in which the parents and teachers of Grade 1 learners conceptualise learning support. The participants provided greater awareness of the different forms of learning support provided at home and in the school environment, demonstrating how this support aided the children's cognitive development. Furthermore, learners were observed within in the classroom and on the playground with the aim of exploring some of the observable influences one would expect from better or poorer learning.

In the following paragraphs, each theme is reflected on in detail, encompassing quotations from the participants together with the findings from the relevant literature to corroborate various viewpoints and explanations. To ensure anonymity, the participants are referred to as P1 to P12, with a brief description, when directly quoted. In the following section, the themes that emerged from the dataset are presented.

Table 4.1: Themes of the study as they relate to the research questions

Themes	Subthemes	Research Questions
1. Physical presence and availability.		How do the parents and teachers of Grade 1 learners conceptualise and provide learning support?
2. Creative support with home and schoolwork.	2.1 Singing and reciting poems.	How do parents in low-income contexts provide learning support for their children in Grade 1?
	2.2 Play.	
3. Auditory and visual learning support techniques.		How do teachers of Grade 1 learners in low-income

Themes	Subthemes	Research Questions
		contexts provide support for the children?
4. Support from siblings, peers, and teacher assistants.		How do the parents and teachers of Grade 1 learners conceptualise and provide learning support?
5. Poverty and the provision of learning support.		How do the parents and teachers of Grade 1 learners conceptualise and provide learning support?
6. Positive academic outcomes arising from learning support.		How does learning support at home and school contribute to cognitive development?
7. Observations of cognitive development.		What are the observable qualitative influences of learning support on cognitive development among Grade 1 learners in a low-income school?

4.2 PHYSICAL PRESENCE AND AVAILABILITY

The first theme identified describes how the participants interpreted the concept of learning support. While most of the participants regarded learning support as a way of helping their children, some of the parents felt that their physical presence and availability may well be considered a form of learning support. A study by Munnik and Smith (2019) echoes this finding, revealing that a parent's availability and capability to demonstrate sincere and accommodating behaviour, and to answer to the child's needs, were found to be the strongest facilitator of learning. Many of the parents in this study worked long hours with limited time for additional activities, however, they were available for their children when needed, usually when they returned from work late at night. All of the parents acknowledged providing this support on a regular basis, with the times ranging from fifteen minutes to two hours a day. Findings by Baker et al. (2016) and Pena (2000) conclude that the move from parental presence

to involvement may require a reflective change that emphasises the capabilities and provisions that families can make towards their child's education. The above findings indicate that aside from resources, parents must have the determination and ability to assist their children with their education.

P3 - parent, female, 35 years old: "I support them also being at home."

P12 - parent, female, 40 years old: "Learning support is something... to do to make my child learn better, learn more."

The two Grade 1 teachers expressed analogous views, stating that learning support encompasses helping learners acquire new information and skills by making the various learning activities interesting. The support provided also brought about an improved understanding of the schoolwork so that learners were better equipped to cope with the amount of work.

P2 - teacher, female, 48 years old: "Mm ... my understanding of what learning support is that ... is the things that are helping learners to learn more and to find learning interesting for them so that they could easily understand what we are teaching"

P1 - teacher, female, 57 years old: Yeah. The ... the support help them a lot to ... to cope better."

Joy (2018), similarly, found that interesting activities definitely enhance the effectiveness of learning, with many learners wanting a chance to explore, imagine, and to go on field trips. These reports are comparable to the outcomes of Manurung's (2012) study, which describes how inspired teachers are able to plan joyful lessons. This encourages and promotes teachers' ability to explain complex concepts in simple ways, and provide acceptable examples so that uninterested learners become more involved in the lesson. In the Bioecological Theory, the proximal process is defined as the mutual collaboration between an individual and their environments, comprising persons, items, and symbols (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998). The manner in which a teacher organises her classroom, as well as the forms of actions and exchanges that are encouraged are all likely to impact the way in which learners engage in learning. It also affects how they interact with both their peers and teachers. In other words, this is likely to affect proximal processes (Bronfenbrenner, 1995; Griffiore & Phenice, 2016). The findings of this study further represent proximal processes given the manner in which both

of the Grade 1 teachers arranged fun, shared activities. These were observed to engage all learners, thereby promoting interactions between learners, peers, and teachers.

4.3 CREATIVE SUPPORT WITH HOME- AND SCHOOLWORK

The second theme highlights the forms of learning support provided by parents and teachers. Support is defined as all possible actions that lift the capability of a school as a system to react to the varied learning needs of children (Yoro et al., 2020). This theme focused on the creative methods that both the parents and teachers applied to encourage learning, and to provide the much-needed learning support. Many of the parents lacked resources and the necessary educational skills, and therefore used inventive and fun approaches to promote learning within the home environment. While all the parents confirmed that the main form of learning support they provided involved helping their children with their homework, some parents found this task difficult.

P4 - parent, female, 38 years old: “She helps her child with the writing. If the child doesn’t understand ... what he or she was doing, she explains, and make them understand, six to maybe eight with the homework. That’s the minimum ... only weekdays. Saturdays they all just sit together.”

P6 - parent, female, 29 years old: “I usually help them with homework, and ... the reading, spelling of words, not more than fifteen minutes, maybe three times a week. Like giving them ... blank paper to draw what she can draw and ask them to sing songs ... cause sometimes I only help when asked.”

Supporting this viewpoint, previous literature indicates that parents’ contribution to their children’s education is usually linked to assistance with homework as homework is seen as one of the main tools used for learning (Ndebele, 2018). Some of the parents established that their involvement was merely reminding their children to do their homework, and they only assisted when requested to do so. These views resonate with the findings of Selolo’s (2018) study, which reveals that while a few parents are able to help their children with homework, some can hardly do it, while others find it inconvenient to convert their homes into a learning setting, let alone monitor their child’s school work. The parents in this study who assisted went to great lengths to get their children involved in a variety of fun activities to encourage learning, such as singing songs and reciting poems, doing show and tell, and engaging in play.

Similarly, the Grade 1 teachers adapted their teaching methods to accommodate the learners' interests and cognitive abilities. They used various practical methods to make learning interesting, such as listening to stories on the radio, and utilising physical objects to explain concepts.

P1 - teacher, female, 57 years old: “We need to have real objects ... when they are counting, they ... they need something to count ... it can be adding or subtracting. They need to see you take it away, you see, so that they will understand ... the term subtraction.”

In the classroom, the teacher is the first and most significant link in the chain of support in ensuring quality learning for learners (Oswald, 2019). It has been revealed that teachers sometimes use a variety of manipulatives, including beads, number lines, and flash cards. This supports the development of knowledge on a particular number or concept, or techniques related to number processes such as addition (Adendorff et al., 2018). This is similar to the findings of this study, with the Grade 1 teachers utilising physical objects when explaining mathematical concepts.

P2 - teacher, female, 48 years old: “They learn uh ... they must understand. They must have this support to really ... in order for them to understand, so most of the time when we are teaching, we must use this support material.”

Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Model explains that when young children participate in interactive processes such as reading and learning new skills, they generate the ability, motivation, and knowledge to engage in such activities with others and on their own (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998). Through increasingly complex exchanges with their parents, children gradually become agents of their own development (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998). The outcomes of this study indicate that through the continuous provision of learning support from parents and teachers (the microsystems of the learners), Grade 1 learners gradually gain the ability to perform certain tasks on their own.

4.3.1 Singing and reciting poems

In the following sub-theme, the parents described the various ways in which songs and poems were used as a form of learning support.

P3 - parent, female, 35 years old: “Yes ... we sing together, whatever they sing in school. She teaches me and then we sing.”

In agreement with this excerpt, Kalinde (2016) indicates that a great connection lies between music and language as similar processes are involved in the learning of both. The songs and poems learnt are either studied at school or are religious verses learnt at the local church. The parents in this study described singing out aloud together as one of the methods that they used to make the learning process more fun. The children enjoyed it, and it also assisted them to remember information.

P7 - parent, female, 31 years old: “She helps uh ... they sing together, but church songs.”

These views are echoed in the findings of Dzanic and Pejic (2016), showing that those songs fit into the category of enjoyable actions, which serve as useful tools for learning, the most useful feature being repetition. Participants 3 and 5 described the techniques that they used in providing this form of support, stating that when their children struggled to understand a new poem, they encouraged them to sing out one line, thereafter the children taught the parents the poem. In many ways, this boosted the children’s confidence and improved their memory of the poem.

P5 - parent, female, 27 years old: “When the child doesn’t understand, she makes us sing the thing, so she can understand them ... like they sing the line to understand.”

Singing has been labelled as the most common and normal occurrence witnessed in children as they grow as songs are drawn from children’s environment and everyday experiences (Kalinde, 2016). An experimental study has found that where music activities, singing, and movement were used in an English language lesson, learners from the experimental group demonstrated considerably better academic scores in comparison to the control group (Kralova, 2014). The above findings are an indication that music, and even singing and movement, can be considered different forms of learning support that may aid the learner academically in the classroom.

All of the parents stated that their weekends were dedicated to church activities and going out socially. This gave the learners the opportunity to partake in singing, which, as stated above, may be considered a form of learning support. Many of the parents stated that the songs they knew were religious in nature, and it was one of the ways in which they could assist their

children to learn, finding that it helped learners with their memory and reading skills. A prior study has indicated that any activities involving music have a noteworthy influence on language and reading skills (Chen-Hafteck & Mang, 2012). Educators and researchers have recognised a connection between language and music as both are aurally sensed, temporally organised, and have some facets that are common and others that are culture-specific (McMullen & Saffran, 2004; Reese, 2017; Saffran et al., 1999; Trehub et al., 1993).

Although IsiZulu was the language of learning for the foundation phase at the participating school, English was also taught as a subject. Many of the learners struggled to understand English, therefore the teachers used songs and sometimes drama to improve their understanding thereof. This is similar to Dzanic and Pejic's (2016) findings, which indicate that teachers use songs to teach learners new concepts and language as they are comprised of language patterns. Moreover, singing develops listening skills, articulation, and rhythm, and, most importantly, is seen as a fun activity while establishing learning. The results of this study indicate that the learning support given by parents promotes family bonding, allowing the children to have fun and learn at the same time, improving language skills, listening skills, and pronunciation.

Vygotsky's Socio-Cultural Theory suggests that a child's growth and education should be located in a cultural setting (Bredekamp, 2014; Louw & Louw, 2014). In this socio-cultural setting, learning is as a result of reciprocal social exchanges, which highlights the support provided by those who are more knowledgeable to those who know less (Scrimsher & Tudge, 2003). The Vygotsky perspective assumes that children learn in the presence of knowledgeable others. In this study, this refers to the parents as their use of music and songs assisted in the learning process (Vygotsky, 1978). The outcomes of this study have shown that music and songs may be considered a form of learning support as both the parents and teachers from a low-income, rural community were able to constructively interact with learners so that learning took place.

4.3.2 Play

The following sub-theme explores play as many of the parents emphasised the importance thereof, stating that their children needed more play time at school. The parents expressed the need for more free time as their children became tired when academic lessons continued for lengthy periods of time. Some of the parents suggested taking the learners on excursions to different places where they could play games and be free. Other suggestions encompassed

having a sports ground and introducing more play activities like soccer. Most of the parents encouraged play during the weekends as this gave their children the opportunity to interact with their siblings, and also promoted learning.

P3 - parent, female, 35 years old: “Maybe you’ll can get something ... a car ... or somewhere where you’ll can take them uh ... where you’ll can take them and make them play or ... they need the time.”

P5 - parent, female, 27 years old: “They must give them time like ... playing time, more free time, sometimes they get tired of learning.”

P8 - caregiver, female, 27 years old: “Weekends, they want to stay at home ... so the child can have more time to play.”

Irvin (2017) finds that playing offers a secure and essential way for young children to practice and experience a variation of social skills, such as critical thinking, within a group of friends while attaining and refining language skills. Vygotsky developed the concept of Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), referring to the difference in what individuals can accomplish by themselves and what they can accomplish with the support of others (Vygotsky, 1978; Warithorn, 2013). The ZPD is seen as the area where the most tactful lessons or direction should be given, thereby permitting the child to develop skills they will use on their own. This then gradually leads to them developing higher mental functions (Vygotsky, 1978). Irvin (2017) further explains that play creates a ZPD in a child given that, while playing, children are inclined to behave above the average age and above their daily behaviours. Vygotsky also developed the concept of ‘scaffolding’, referring to the brief support that individuals receive from more educated others (such as caregivers, teachers, and peers) during their development (Lloyd & Fernyhough, 1999). According to Vygotsky’s research, adults and peers undoubtedly scaffold young children’s play while fostering conditions that permit resourcefulness and imagination throughout the pre-school years and into early childhood (Irvin, 2017; Lloyd & Fernyhough, 1999). The findings of the present study support those of Ogunyemi and Ragpot’s (2015) research, which highlights the importance of play. Specifically, it should be seen as more than just physical movements, but as educative and possessing the necessary elements for motivation, which fosters overall development in children.

4.4 AUDITORY AND VISUAL LEARNING SUPPORT TECHNIQUES

The participating Grade 1 teachers highlighted that although they worked at a low-income school, they had found resourceful ways of providing the much-needed learning support to their young learners. Using auditory support techniques, learners are encouraged to repeat verbally what they have learnt. Similarly, Kayalar and Kayalar (2017) emphasise that with auditory techniques, the learner has to listen to an explanation and hear it to comprehend it and learn. Most learners are good at telling stories and solving problems using talking as a method. The teachers in this study adapted lessons to meet the needs of their learners. Kayalar and Kayalar (2017) state that nearly all learners have diverse learning strengths that enable them to start to concentrate, remain focused, and understand and remember significant information and concepts. Syofyan and Siwi (2018) agree, indicating that auditory learners learn by listening and moving their lips while reading.

P2 - teacher, female, 48 years old: “Most of the time because as they are ... the Grade 1s. Most of the time they learn by saying things.”

Participant 1 indicated that when the learners struggled to write but still understood the work, she would call the learners to her table and give them the opportunity to give the answers verbally.

P1 - teacher, female, 57 years old: “They can’t write. But ... but I think if the child can’t write, I call them here in my table and stand there. I ask them to give the answers verbally. They get it verbally, they are not able to write it down, I ask them verbally.”

The teachers also described how the radio was used on a regular basis to promote the learners’ listening skills. Every day at a specific time, there was a story narrated on an IsiZulu radio station. The learners were encouraged to remain quiet and listen to the story, however, the radio was stolen in a burglary.

P1 - teacher, female, 57 years old: “The learners need to listen to the story because at nine o’ clock all the ... all ... every day at nine o’ clock, you have the story telling. So, if we had that radios, it would help.”

Current studies have found that the radio promotes the listener’s imaginative faculty through words and sounds (Budyana et al., 2018). Their study further details that listening through

electronic media requires a variety of capabilities, including the ability to concentrate, the ability to understand, and the ability to precipitate information (Budyana et al., 2018).

A visual learning support technique is also adopted by teachers as they use charts, pictures, physical objects, and books to explain new concepts. Raiyn (2016) clarifies that a large amount of all information processed by the brain is derived from visual formats. As these learners are very young in age, many are unable to read, therefore, pictures and colourful charts are used to assist them with phonics and counting. Raiyn (2016) further explicates that learners understand information better in a classroom when they see it as they are able to remember facts better by connecting ideas, words, and concepts with pictures. Participant 1 described a lesson involving a brown paper bag, stating that many of the learners had never seen a brown paper bag because plastic packets were mainly utilised in their community, therefore pictures and charts assisted in the learning process.

P1 - teacher, female, 57 years old: “Maybe we are talking uh ... long time ago we were using paper bag. One ... one time I was teaching them about ... paper bag, but I don’t have paper bag. So, they don’t understand this paper bag because they know plastic bag. If I am talking about the paper now, they don’t understand. So that’s why we need these ... these real objects. It helps us a lot because they see it. If they can’t see it, they don’t understand.”

P1 - teacher, female, 57 years old: “And ... try to get the pictures and put it, as you see, pictures next to it so that when the child forgot the phonic, they look at the picture and then after looking at the picture, they remember the phonic.”

The teacher further explained that real objects that the learners can see and touch are required for mathematics. To explain the concepts of addition or subtraction, the teacher had the learners move the physical object while counting loudly, which helped the learners to apply the concept.

P1 - teacher, female, 57 years old: “I must start from the books ... yes its helping because they can count, as you see this chart, they can count in this chart but to know the exact concept, they must apply it they must do it. That’s why I uh ... we use real objects.”

Participant 2 stated that many of the learners had not travelled outside of their community and did not know about ocean or sea life, so it was difficult to talk about sharks or dolphins when the learners did not even know what they looked like. For this reason, the teacher displayed pictures and charts.

P2 - teacher, female, 48 years old: “So most of them ... they didn’t even go to Ushaka Marine to see these things. So, this thing help me ... to explain more ... so they know more about that animal, that kind of animal.”

At the time of this study, the participating teachers were forced to work with a few children at a time and show them the relevant charts and pictures as resources were limited. However, they hoped in the future to obtain an overhead projector or television that would make the learning process easier.

4.5 SUPPORT FROM SIBLINGS, PEERS, AND TEACHING ASSISTANTS

In the classroom, learning experiences and assessment activities create opportunities for learner engagement, and the development of connectedness with peers and teaching staff (Smith, 2011). Similar to the concept of proximal processes, which refers to interaction between organisms and their environment, examples of these continuing patterns of proximal processes can be identified in parent-child and peer-peer activities (Swart & Pettipher, 2011). In this study, these patterns were indubitably evident when parents, siblings, and peers interacted with the children within the home and school environments, providing learning support in various ways. In the following paragraphs, the support received from siblings, peers, and teaching assistants will be discussed.

The participating parents described the manner in which they encouraged their older children to support their younger siblings with their schoolwork and play activities. These parents highlighted that they sometimes found the homework difficult to understand and therefore arranged the assistance of their older children. A study by Dunifon et al. (2017) emphasises that siblings influence each other given that they spend many hours together. The relationship between siblings embodies a unique bond, and is categorised by a high degree of closeness and familiarity, which fosters teaching and learning (Howe et al., 2019).

P4 - parent, female, 38 years old: “She’s got an older daughter ... so her older daughter also helps, they sing together.”

P5 - parent, female, 27 years old: “Not all but some ... she ... she does understand some ... the brother ... when they doing homework.”

Another contributing factor in parents embracing the support provided by siblings was their lack of time. The participating parents worked long hours and could not always be available to

support their children in their learning, so this responsibility was shared with their older children. When the teachers were asked about the provision of learning support in the classroom, Participant 2 described the initiative taken by some of the learners to assist fellow learners who were struggling to understand their schoolwork.

P2 - teacher, female, 48 years old: “The kids help each other ... they are always helping each other, and I find that when they are ... its them who is explaining to them. They understand more, when he explains to them, they understand more than I’ve explained.”

Those learners who are high achievers academically are more inclined to grasp the new information quicker, and subsequently assist the teacher in clarifying new concepts for their peers. Bojuwoye et al. (2014) confirm this, relating how the teachers in their study encouraged learners to work together in groups, introducing the ‘buddy system’, which inspired and improved the learners’ confidence. Participant 2 went on to highlight that these learners were always helping each other, and she had discovered that they tended to understand the work much better when their peers explained it. Research outlines that positive peer relationships among learners are advantageous to the pupils’ learning experiences as these ideas will ultimately provide a better avenue to efficiently achieve learning (Cox & Ullrich-French, 2010). Butler and Liu (2019) concur, indicating that peer relationships have significant and self-motivated associations with young learners’ language learning.

Cassim and Moen (2020) find that teaching assistants are necessary in Grade 1 classrooms as it permits the teacher to concentrate on quality teaching. Echoing this, the results of Chetty’s (2015) study concluded that foundation phase teachers require assistance and guidance with curriculum application as teachers are overloaded with necessary duties, such as marking and the preparation of instruction material. Participant 1 emphasised that the help received from the teaching assistant was much appreciated as it allowed her the opportunity to work one on one with learners who required further learning support. The teaching assistants gave the teachers the opportunity to focus on smaller groups of learners, thereby allowing for effective teaching.

P1 - teacher, female, 57 years old: “The teacher’s assistant came last week, it’s only five months, started November until March next year. There are these readers for groups, the small books for group. When I’m busy with the other group, she’ll take the other group. When we are doing writing, when I’m in the uh ... the other rows, she’s in the other one.”

These teaching assistants were only based at the school for a period of five months, and there were two assistants per grade with a total of six assistants for the foundation phase. While some classes benefitted from this assistance, Participant 2 stated that unfortunately her class did not have this additional support.

P2 - teacher, female, 48 years old: “But unfortunately, I don’t have in my class, it’s only when I’m absent or maybe I’m sick, they come.”

Participant 1 described the various ways in which the teaching assistant aided her, which included helping with marking, writing, and reading, however, not teaching. This is consistent with Navarro’s (2015) findings, which state that learning support staff contribute to the students’ learning and well-being by providing an improved classroom climate, personalised attention, and better overall teaching.

The additional support provided by teaching assistants could help both the teacher and learners as learners can progress even further when a knowledgeable assistant provides the necessary support while the teacher is occupied with other responsibilities (Cassim & Moen, 2018). The presence of a teaching assistant means having another person in the classroom, thus allowing teachers to oversee groups, and aid differentiation (Tucker, 2009).

4.6 POSITIVE ACADEMIC OUTCOMES ARISING FROM LEARNING SUPPORT

The following theme describes how the learning support provided in the home and schooling environment contributes to cognitive development. The findings of this study indicate that the parents viewed their assistance as beneficial, highlighting positive academic outcomes. The parents described improvements in writing, homework, and general attitude towards learning, with many learners wanting to attend weekend classes. When the participants were asked how the support they provided assisted their children, they expressed their views in the following extracts:

P4 - parent, female, 38 years old: “The child does enjoy school in such a way that they want to come to school in weekends.”

P7 - parent, female, 31 years old: “The child likes writing now, she likes the homework.”

P8 - parent, female, 27 years old: “The child likes going to school ... and the writing as well”

P9 - parent, female, 45 years old: “The child is passing now.”

P10 - parent, female, 31 years old: “And she copes with school now.”

The literature highlights that the home setting, and the link between parents and teachers are basically the building blocks of a child’s overall viewpoint concerning school and others. This study shows that the support provided by both parents and teachers was reflected in the ZPD as the learners were assisted when needed, but also given the opportunity to perform certain tasks on their own.

The teachers expressed similar views to the parents, reporting that the Grade 1 learners were more excited about learning. Participant 1 stated that she had seen many positive changes in her learners’ cognitive abilities, from writing and reading to understanding their work. They initially struggled with their schoolwork, with many of the learners unable to write in the third term, however, the teachers continued to find alternative ways to assist their learners. The support provided by the teachers was found to have assisted the learners to cope better. The teachers also acknowledged that the learners had improved academically from the third term to the fourth term (when the observations were done).

P1 - teacher, female, 57 years old: “I think it will help, that support ... because I ... saw them others change in their learning. I see the changes ... from the beginning of the year until now ... there are learners until the third term, can’t write, so I used dots, and they follow the dots. Now they are writing.”

P2 - teacher, female, 48 years old: “They more excited about things.”

Bojuwoye et al. (2014) establish in their study that the existence of various institutional activities, classroom instructions, and teacher and learner actions (which all represent support) assist learners to succeed academically in school. Similarly, in this study, the parents and teachers emphasised that the various forms of support provided within the home and school environment aided the learners to achieve positive academic outcomes.

4.7 POVERTY AND THE PROVISION OF LEARNING SUPPORT

This theme describes how poverty impacts the types of learning support provided by parents and teachers in a low-income school. Several of the parents explained that living in an impoverished community limited their abilities to provide additional learning support due to

limited financial resources, limited time, a lack of community infrastructure, and, to a certain extent, limited knowledge and understanding of what assistance to provide. Okeke (2014) reveals that there are a number of challenges that stop or hinder parents in effectively participating in their child's schooling, which include a lack of time, language barriers, and the distress of having nothing to contribute. In Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Theory, microsystems are the closest surroundings in which a person grows, therefore, what transpires within the family environment has an impact on how learners respond to school (Mahlo & Hugo, 2013). In the present study, the families were confronted with numerous challenges, including low income, a lack of proper housing, food and amenities, substance abuse, and limited resources that were difficult to access within their microsystem. Due to these numerous challenges, learners sometimes failed to attend school on a regular basis, or attended with limited resources, which hindered their ability to partake in lessons in class.

The parents highlighted that the community did not have tarred roads, water, electricity, proper toilets, parks, libraries, or sport facilities. Existing literature supports this viewpoint, maintaining that the socio-economic characteristics of rural areas, which include inadequate infrastructure for sanitation, water, roads and electrical energy, put learners in rural schools at a disadvantage (du Plessis, 2014). The home environment within these rural communities is often ill-equipped to meet the educational requirements of children, and for parents to provide the much needed learning support as many lack the basic necessities, including water and electricity (du Plessis, 2014).

One parent, Participant P4, stated that she would like better toilets for the children at school as, at the time of this study, they had portable toilets that did not flush. The parent described how these toilets were not very hygienic and she was concerned that her child would get an infection. Her child became uncomfortable any time he had to use these toilets as he was not familiar with them and avoided using them, resulting in her child's inability to focus in class. Louton et al. (2015) emphasise that the purpose of sanitation amenities at schools is to safeguard the health and dignity of learners. The study goes on to indicate that the need to perform the basic physical functions without risk to one's dignity, health, and safety is important, and must be met before the school can be considered to be a useful learning environment (Louton et al., 2015). Furthermore, results from another study highlight that learners experiencing difficulties with continence can suffer negative effects in their academic performance as many of the learners do not talk about their difficulties with their peers and teachers due to stigmatisation, bullying, and social alienation (Coswosk et al., 2019).

Therefore, a learner experiencing problems with continence due to a fear of using unfamiliar toilets may not be able to concentrate in class and enjoy the benefits of the support provided by the teacher.

P4 - parent, female, 38 years old: “It’s only the toilet that she’s not happy with, it is not flushing toilet ... they pick it up and they give other ones. It’s where you can get infection.”

Many of the parents stated that their homes were located next to a busy road, which did not have pavements for the learners to walk on. Many of the Grade 1 learners, aged between six and seven years, walked long distances by themselves to school and back on a daily basis. These learners arrived tired at school, and many missed the first lesson. The outcomes of a local study reveal that in rural South Africa, inadequate transport, poor roads, and threats to a rural learner’s security along the routes to school affect learners’ ability to go to school and partake completely and successfully (Portwig, 2017). A study by Rammuki (2018) details that learners from informal settlements normally travel the longest distances as they walk from their homes to the nearest schools. Peteros et al. (2022) highlight that poor scholarly accomplishment is explicitly associated with the distance the learner walks to school. This is the case as learners who walk lengthy distances spend less time studying and sleeping, resulting in them waking up late and missing early lessons at school (Peteros et al., 2022).

P8 - caregiver, female, 27 years old: “If they can help with maybe transport, the child walks to school ... it is raining, he walks by himself.”

Mahlaba (2014), similarly, reports that learners from poor, rural communities who walk long distances experience late coming and non-attendance, which lead to barriers that undermine admittance to quality education.

The teachers also detailed the daily challenges they faced due to a lack of books, charts, desks, and other learning materials. The learners were forced to share resources, which hindered the teacher’s ability to provide individual support. The teachers used whatever resources were available to them, and, in many instances, acquired resources at their own expense. Participant 2 described the community as poor, with nothing much in terms of learning resources. She claimed that as teachers, they could not show the learners anything except when discussing topics like the weather, time, and sports. Participant 1 highlighted the plight of a low-income school, stating that although the existing resources helped the learners to a certain extent, it was

not enough. Items like desks and reading books were limited as learners had to share a small desk and school workbooks, which hindered their ability to write and read.

P2 - teacher, female, 48 years old: “My husband is working in the library. So sometimes I ... I ... I ask him ... to find me somethings that they are throwing away. Yeah. So I used to take those things like the ... the books ... the old books.”

P1 - teacher, female, 57 years old: “We do have desks, because when they are ... when they are writing they need desks, but it’s not enough.”

These views resonate with those in the findings of Chakanika et al. (2012), which delineate the various concerns that teachers have working in a rural environment. These include the unsatisfactory quality of teaching amenities, the pitiable condition of classrooms, derelict library amenities or a total lack thereof, a lack of quality schooling for children, poor health amenities, and transport. Echoing similar views, another study maintains that with sufficient resources such as workbooks, learners have a better chance of performing well academically than poorly equipped institutions. Therefore, poor academic performance could be attributed to insufficient teaching and learning materials (Okongo et al., 2015).

When asked whether the community, local authority, and government could do more regarding learning support, many of the parents suggested building libraries that could be available all the time to the learners only. Some of the parents suggested building a sports ground at the school and introducing different sporting activities. The introduction of a school on Sundays with refreshments for the learners was also suggested by the participants.

P6 - parent, female, 29 years old: “If they can open this library ... maybe sometimes after hours from two to four so that they won’t have uh ... something on their minds like maybe come in, study, do their homework, you see.”

P7 - parent, female, 31 years old: “Extra classes... Saturday school and Sunday school with some refreshments for the kids.”

P8 - caregiver, female, 27 years old: “Libraries, play activities, extra classes with the Sunday school, and if they can help with maybe transport.”

The availability of additional resources would mean access to more books, as well as technological devices such as computers, tablets, and photocopying machines that learners could use when doing assignments. Bojuwoye et al. (2014) report that the many types of

support, including educational resources, have been found to aid learners in meeting academic, social, and emotional requirements. This further addresses the various hurdles to learning, and forms an encouraging educational setting. Various forms of support include addressing barriers to learning, and creating a positive learning environment.

The teachers also suggested having additional desks, books, and overhead projector to engage the entire class in the lesson, and a television.

P1 - teacher, female, 57 years old: “Overhead projector, because sometimes to call one child here ... and ... the others can’t see it. You call one by one, it takes time ... maybe I have pictures, I put it here and the overhead projector, it will be ... it will save time because all of them, they see that picture.”

P2 - teacher, female, 48 years old: “I love the smartboard but ...[laughs] ... but yeah, to have those things like TVs so that it will be easier for us if you want to show them something. It will be easier for us, maybe to hire something and show them.”

During the lockdown period in 2020 and 2021 due to the COVID-19 virus, the capacity of both the teacher and parent became interwoven in that much of the teaching was done by parents as learners were forced to remain at home. However, parents found the role of being a teacher difficult, with many parents struggling to provide the learning support at home due to their lack of understanding, and limited time and resources, resulting in their children forgetting their schoolwork.

P4 - parent, female, 38 years old: “Since it’s COVID-19 ... they only come a week and skip another week ... so they sometimes forget.”

Msila (2021), similarly, finds that parents from low socio-economic communities depend upon teachers for expertise as teachers are professionally trained. The study goes on further to state that these parents are faced with numerous challenges, which include poverty, a lack of adequate formal education, and being overwhelmed by ‘bread and butter’ matters, which overshadow the formation of effective schools (Msila, 2021).

4.8 OBSERVATIONS OF COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENT

This theme describes the observable influences of learning support on cognitive development. Below are the findings from the observations in the classroom and on the playground.

Table 4.2: Observation template for Grade 1 learners in the classroom

Description	L3	L4	L5	L6	L7	L8	L9	L10	L11	L12
Showing interest in the lesson.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Partaking in the lesson.	✓		✓		✓			✓		
Following instructions given by the teacher.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Ability to complete a task set by teacher.	✓	✓	✓		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
Understanding the language of instruction.	✓		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Ability to use a pencil and scissors correctly.	✓		✓		✓		✓		✓	✓
Ability to communicate with the teacher and fellow learners.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

The findings from the classroom observation indicated that while all of the learners showed interest in the lesson, only four of the learners actively engaged in the lesson. The learners that actively engaged with the teacher were confident, comfortable, and knowledgeable. The one noticeable factor was that all of the learners were submissive, quiet, and very disciplined. They followed the instructions of the teacher, and eight of the 10 learners were able to complete the work given by the teacher with assistance from the teacher and her aide. The above findings are consistent with existing literature that indicates that Grade 1 learners are able to comprehend the concepts used in the language of learning, especially if the school instruction is in their home language, which in this case was IsiZulu, as theoretical understanding is noticeably more encompassing than only than factual knowledge (van Rensburg, 2015). All of the learners were able to communicate with their peers in their language of learning, IsiZulu. However, two of the learners needed further guidance to understand the instructions given by the teacher. The learners were educated in their home language, IsiZulu, however, they were also taught English as a subject. In rural communities, learners are also not regularly exposed to English outside of the school environment as the language spoken at home is their language of choice (Brock-Utne, 2005). Omidire (2020) stresses that learning in a second language is both a teaching and learning issue. When teaching a second language, schools need to provide

an environment that supports learning, and teachers need to be committed to giving their learners the required time and attention (Hossain, 2016).

The lesson observed involved writing and mathematics. While the teacher worked with one learner to explain the concept of subtraction, the teaching aide worked with the rest of the class. The majority of the learners were able to partake in the lesson, and understood what was required of them, engaging intellectually with the teacher and their peers. These findings are similar to the results of prior research revealing that young children learn from toys, play, and from touching things and moving them around (Heckman et al., 2010). According to the National Curriculum Statement (NCS) of South Africa, the cognitive skills and strategies of a Grade R learner before entering Grade 1 include the following: paying attention; remembering; interpreting; classifying and categorising; comparison; analysing and problem solving; evaluating; and imaging possibilities (DoE, 2002). The findings indicate that the Grade 1 learners in this study displayed many of the cognitive skills listed above, thereby establishing that the learning support currently provided by their parents, teachers, peers, and the teaching assistant may have positively contributed to their cognitive development.

Table 4.3: Observation template for Grade 1 learners on the playground

Description	L3	L4	L5	L6	L7	L8	L9	L10	L11	L12
Ability to partake in games with fellow learners.	<u>✓</u>	<u>✓</u>	<u>✓</u>	<u>✓</u>	<u>✓</u>	<u>✓</u>	<u>✓</u>	<u>✓</u>	<u>✓</u>	<u>✓</u>
Ability to hop, jump, and skip.	<u>✓</u>		<u>✓</u>			<u>✓</u>			<u>✓</u>	<u>✓</u>
Ability to communicate with fellow learners.	<u>✓</u>	<u>✓</u>	<u>✓</u>	<u>✓</u>	<u>✓</u>	<u>✓</u>	<u>✓</u>	<u>✓</u>	<u>✓</u>	<u>✓</u>
Ability to follow the rules of a game/task.		<u>✓</u>				<u>✓</u>	<u>✓</u>			<u>✓</u>
Ability to use gross and fine motor skills in play activities.	<u>✓</u>		<u>✓</u>		<u>✓</u>		<u>✓</u>		<u>✓</u>	<u>✓</u>

The findings from the playground observations revealed that while all of the learners gathered outside the classroom, only a few learners had snacks to eat, and the rest walked around actively playing with their peers. The area around the classroom was tarred and on a slight incline, thus there were no grass areas for the learners to sit or play. A large water tank was situated close to the building for the learners to drink water and wash their hands. Five of the learners actively participated in a game that involved hopping and jumping. While all of the learners eagerly

spoke to their fellow peers, four of the learners merely watched, while six learners ran up and down the stairs. This study indicates that although the learners did not have access to a sportsground, jungle gym, or any play material, they all actively involved themselves in various games, from hide and seek to hopping. This is echoed by Dagli (2012), who explains that any activity on the playground during recess has continuously been considered a significant part of a learner's routine. This contributes to typical growth and development, with three key benefits: encouraging social collaboration; physical development; and improving academic achievements. The playground observations further revealed that all of the learners demonstrated the ability and skills to partake in various games, and to interact with peers in a meaningful way. This confirmed the idea that the support provided by peers positively contributes to cognitive development.

4.9 CONCLUSION

The outcomes of this study indicate that both parents and teachers found creative and stimulating methods to encourage learning, and to provide much-needed learning support. The study revealed that the participating parents utilised methods familiar to them, which included singing songs, reciting poems, and engaging in simple play activities. Alternatively, the participating teachers encouraged listening to stories on the radio, dramatisation, and the use of physical objects while learning mathematical concepts. While the parents and teachers provided most of the support, additional aid was provided by siblings, peers, and teaching assistants. Many of the participants described the challenges they faced with regard to limited resources, inferior infrastructure, limited time, and, to a certain extent, limited skill, which hampered their ability to provide supplementary learning support. Most significantly, the parents and teachers believed that the support provided positively contributed to their children's academic outcomes, with many of the learners expressing the desire to attend weekend classes. The findings from the classroom and playground observations highlight the extent of the learners' cognitive development, with many of the learners eager to partake in the learning process, and to interact constructively with fellow learners.

Chapter 5 provides a summary of this study, followed by the conclusions reached, as well as recommendations for further research.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter 4 focused on discussing the different themes that emerged from the data, reviewing the findings, highlighting the similarities between the findings and existing literature, as well as taking into account the differences between them. In Chapter 5, a summary of the study and significant findings will be outlined, followed by a description of the study's limitations. Inferences are drawn from the findings, the implications thereof are explored, and further recommendations are suggested.

5.2 SUMMARY OF THE STUDY AND SIGNIFICANT FINDINGS

The primary aim of this study was to investigate how parents and teachers of Grade 1 learners conceptualise and provide learning support. The outcomes of this study revealed that the participants conceptualised learning support as assisting learners. Moreover, despite limited resources and time, these parents and teachers at a low-income school adopted creative methods to provide learning support to Grade 1 learners.

The study also explored the different forms of learning support provided by the parents and teachers of Grade 1 learners. The participants described the various methods implemented to get the young learners involved in various interesting activities. These activities, which promoted learning, encompassed singing songs, reciting poems, listening to stories on the radio, and the use of manipulatives such as beads when applying certain mathematical concepts. The outcomes also revealed that further support was offered by siblings, peers, and teaching assistants, which aided the learners in the home and classroom environments.

The study furthermore examined how learning support at home and school might play a role in contributing to cognitive development. This was done by describing the observable qualitative influences of learning support on cognitive development in the participating learners. The observations conducted in the classroom revealed that many of the learners participated in the lesson, engaging with the teacher and their peers in a positive way. The majority of the learners followed the teachers' instructions, with many completing the task. On the playground, the learners participated in various games, from hopping to jumping, engaging effectively with peers.

5.3 CONCLUSIONS

5.3.1 Primary research question

How do the parents and teachers of Grade 1 learners conceptualise and provide learning support?

In response to the first research question, the findings of this study showed that the parents and teachers held similar views regarding learning support, that of aiding the learner. A few of the parents defined learning support as being physically present and available for their children when needed. The parents described their disadvantaged community, highlighting the challenges that they had to endure on a daily basis, which left them with little time to provide the learning support their children needed. However, all of the parents confirmed that they provided support on a daily basis, with times ranging from 15 minutes to two hours a day.

The teachers outlined their perceptions and experiences of learning support, which encompassed the provision of stimulating learning activities to encourage greater learning. The teachers established that the support provided aided the learners in acquiring a better understanding of the schoolwork; learners were also better equipped to cope with the volume of work.

These insights on the definition of learning support are consistent with those of Durisic and Bunijevac (2017), specifically that learning support involves assisting the learner by firstly being physically present when needed, and providing interesting learning experiences to motivate greater learning. The participants demonstrated a fair understanding of what learning support encompasses, and appreciated the importance of this aid both at home and at school. This would imply that they were in a good position to support any interventions directed at improving the availability of learning support both at home and at school. Such interventions must, however, take cognisance of the current limitations that these parents and teachers face in terms of the limited resources available.

5.3.2 Secondary research questions

How do parents in low-income contexts provide learning support for their children in Grade 1?

In addressing the second research question, and supporting prior research, the study revealed that the main form of learning support provided by parents involved assistance with homework. The results are similar to those of a prior study, which indicate that parents in rural communities can assist with homework by monitoring, supervising, and overseeing the homework process (Walker et al., 2001). While many parents were assiduous in their efforts, assisting their children for up to two hours per day, some of the parents' contributions included merely reminding their children to do their homework, and then provided more concrete assistance when requested to do so. A few of the parents found the task of assisting with homework difficult, stating that they had limited educational experience, and lacked the knowledge required to assist. Parents who lacked time, knowledge, and experience requested that their older children assist their younger siblings. This form of support from siblings allowed learners to engage positively with their older brothers and sisters.

The participating parents revealed that, in many ways, limited resources hindered their ability to offer an extensive range of support for their children as the community did not even have a library. These parents, however, incorporated activities familiar to them such as singing songs, reciting poems, and engaging in stimulating play activities. These songs and poems were studied in school or learnt at the local church. This bonding activity involved parents, their children, as well as the children's siblings. Parental participation in these simple actions were viewed as a form learning support since it improved the children's learning.

The use of fun, stimulating play activities was another form of learning support provided by parents. The learners engaged in soccer and other ball-based activities after school with their siblings. Research has shown that play supports the progress of early learning and numerical competence, while also nurturing the child's social, emotional, and creative abilities (Marbina et al., 2011). Many of the parents confirmed that weekends were dedicated to enjoyable play activities as the young learners needed time to relax.

A surprising finding was the creative forms of learning support provided in the form of singing songs, reciting poems, and engaging in play activities. While these parents contributed to their children's learning, and were fairly knowledgeable on the significance of learning support,

there is still a need for greater community involvement with regard to promoting and maintaining the learning support currently provided.

5.3.3 How do teachers of Grade 1 learners in low-income contexts provide learning support for the children?

In relation to the third research question, the findings of this study revealed that the Grade 1 teachers found innovative ways of making learning interesting and providing the support needed. The teachers also restated that they lacked desks, school workbooks, charts, and even the basic resources including stationery, which meant that learners had to share desks and workbooks. However, the teachers embraced creative approaches to learning, firstly allowing learners to verbalise what they had learnt, given that many of the learners struggled to write. One of the teachers stated that the learners were very young and therefore learnt best by saying things out aloud. The teachers also made use of a radio on a regular basis to listen to stories. They used whatever resources and aids were available, whether it involved making charts, using physical objects, or getting additional support from teaching assistants and learners in the classroom.

In agreement with the findings of Okeke et al. (2021), the results from this study have revealed that the participating teachers adopted creative aural and visual support techniques to engage learners in the classroom. Existing research highlights the crucial role that a radio plays in the field of education in that many people have easy access to this medium at a lower cost (Okeke et al., 2021). The teachers in this study utilised a radio to enhance listening skills, vocabulary, and grammar skills. A teaching assistant aided the teacher, and provided further support concerning the provision of individualised attention to learners. A noteworthy observation in this study was that the Grade 1 teachers had been proactive in their form of instruction, adapting their teaching styles, and bringing in new, stimulating resources to encourage learning and provide the necessary learning support. Similarly, previous research has shown that teachers tend to use a variety of support approaches, such as collaborative learning, peer assistance, skill grouping, graphic representation, and syllabus differentiation in an attempt to aid learners (Yoro et al., 2020). A significant conclusion from the present study is the need to build further on these creative techniques that teachers are capitalising on to support learners. Further training on newer, cost effective methods of support could also be implemented.

5.3.4 How does learning support at home and school contribute to cognitive development?

In addressing the fourth research question, the participants reported that the support they provided benefitted the Grade 1 learner in many ways, which left them better equipped to complete their schoolwork. The parents highlighted positive academic outcomes, with many of their children achieving better results in school tests. The parents further described improvements in their children's writing, homework, and general attitude towards learning, with many learners wanting to attend additional classes over the weekend.

The teachers reiterated similar views, with the findings revealing that the learners displayed greater motivation in the classroom, and displayed positive changes in their cognitive abilities. The teachers described improvements in writing, reading, and comprehension, highlighting that by adapting lessons to meet the needs of learners, these teachers were able to assist learners who previously struggled to read and write.

The findings of the present study show that the participants viewed the support they provided at home and at school to have encouraged and stimulated the learners in the classroom, as the participants noted positive changes in the learners' cognitive abilities. While these parents and teachers claimed that the support provided to the Grade 1 learners improved the children's cognitive development, the current study focused on how parents and teachers *conceptualise* learning support, and their evaluation of how this support impacts the development of cognitive abilities. Further quantitative research is required to determine the precise association between learning support and cognitive development.

5.3.5 What are the observable qualitative influences of learning support on cognitive development among Grade 1 learners in a low-income school?

In addressing the fifth research question, the observational findings of this study revealed the enthusiastic, attentive behaviour of the Grade 1 learners during the lesson; learners' ability to follow the teacher's instructions, and to engage constructively with peers and the teacher. The learners displayed good manners, sitting quietly while waiting for further instruction. These findings are similar to those in other research, indicating that the cognitive developmental outcomes of a seven-year-old learner should include good communication and listening skills (Esterhuizen & Grosser, 2014). Although a few learners required further assistance in

understanding the instructions, the majority of the learners were able to complete the task set out by the teacher.

On the playground, the observational findings of this study revealed that the learners actively participated in games, and engaged productively with fellow learners. Although learners lacked access to a playground, jungle gym, or other play material, they all found different ways of participating in fun activities, like hopping, jumping, and skipping along the tarred area outside their classroom.

The outcomes of this study indicate that the learning support offered by parents and teachers may have led to improvement in the learners. This included the learners having meaningful interactions with teachers and peers, following instructions given by teachers, participating in classroom discussions, and engaging actively with fellow learners on the playground. While the conclusions of causality cannot be drawn from the observations conducted, the data collected from the study provide some support for the importance of encouraging learning support. Parents and teachers continually need to invest more time and resources into assisting learners in order to ensure optimal cognitive development.

5.4 IMPLICATIONS FOR THEORY, POLICY, AND PRACTICE

The outcomes of this research confirmed that the implementation of learning support by parents and teachers is constructive as many of the Grade 1 learners in this study expressed an eagerness to partake in the learning process. This was supported by positive, observable influences in the classroom and on the playground. One implication of this study is that the stimulating, creative approaches to learning support adopted by parents and teachers could be encouraged and promoted by the school principal. This should especially be the case during inter-school meetings and workshops so that other schools and parents in rural communities can benefit, as these methods are not dependent on an abundance of resources. Furthermore, the benefits of peer, sibling, and teaching assistant support can be further developed in the schooling environment. Further methods could be employed, such as fundraising events to acquire more educational material.

Another implication is a suggested amendment to existing learning support policies, which would involve amendments to the South Africa's White Paper 6 policy. This study has confirmed the importance of assistance within the classroom environment, as well as the implications this could have for the development of particular cognitive skills. Therefore,

policymakers should consider prioritising such assistance, particularly for low-income schools. This is necessary as the current policy clearly states that both youth and adults have the capability to learn if given the required support. Large classes inhibit the teachers' ability to provide individual support, however, the presence of a teaching assistant allows the teacher to provide the support required. A further recommendation would be that the South African government invest more in rural, low-income schools through the provision of better infrastructure and additional resources, such as libraries and playgrounds. According to The National Norms and Standards for Schooling Funding (NNSF), low-income, impoverished schools are ranked as Quintile 1, with the wealthier schools ranking at Quintile 5. The reasoning behind this ranking system is that poor communities should, in theory, receive more government funding.

A positive, real approach to learning support would be for the South African Department of Basic Education to set up workshops in schools to encourage those individuals closest to the learner, namely, parents, teachers, siblings, and peers. This training would enable them to assist young learners in whatever way is suitable and familiar to them, whether it be telling stories, playing, or merely engaging in conversation. Young learners benefit from reciprocal interactions with siblings and peers, engaging in conversation, and play; and in the process, learning occurs naturally. Furthermore, it is suggested that the South African Department of Basic Education provide educational workshops that equip teachers with the understanding and capabilities to identify learners that need additional aid, and to ensure that the necessary support is in place. The professional development of teachers, and training workshops must be encouraged to meet the educational demands of the schooling environment. The school needs to establish healthy, positive relationships with the community so that they can help parents to support their children. Workshops set up by the school can be presented to parents so that they improve their knowledge of how to assist their children in their learning.

5.5 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The first limitation was that this study was conducted at only one low-income school in Pietermaritzburg, KwaZulu-Natal, and therefore cannot be generalised to all low-income schools in South Africa. The aim of the study was not to generalise, rather, a small sample study was seen as more useful in providing rich, in-depth perspectives, thus allowing for a more personal understanding of the phenomenon. Secondly, the observational results of this study presumed that the learning support provided by the parents and teachers contributed to positive

cognitive outcomes, causal conclusions cannot be made. Due to the limited time frame to qualitatively observe the Grade 1 learners, it was challenging to assume that certain cognitive developments could be attributed to learning support. To manage this limitation, the researcher applied existing models of cognitive development that highlight what learners can achieve with support from significant others. These models also show how the interaction between individuals in the different microsystems influence learners' ability to reach their optimal learning potential through support from key role players, caregivers, and teachers. In the present study, the models of Vygotsky and Bronfenbrenner were used to gain a better understanding of the contribution of learning support to cognitive development. To further address this limitation, additional longitudinal research is needed here to monitor the effectiveness of learning support as the learner develops. Thirdly, due to the nature of qualitative research, a small sample was used, however, the aim of qualitative studies is to gain a rich, in-depth understanding and this was achieved, albeit with a small sample. Fourthly, the study lacked a male perspective on learning support in terms of parental and teachers' viewpoints; thus, future studies should aim to include the male voice. Lastly, a further limitation was that the sample had only two Grade 1 teachers. However, the teachers selected had many years of teaching experience coupled with higher academic qualifications, and were able to provide important data regarding learning support.

5.6 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The following recommendations are based on the understanding that both youth and adults have the capability to learn if given the required support. The first recommendation would be a comparative study of the various forms of learning support provided at different schools (e.g. government, Model-C, and private schools). A comparative research method could be used to investigate the similarities and differences across societies regarding the types of learning support provided. Academic outcomes could also be measured against the learning support provided.

The second recommendation would be a longitudinal study that monitors the effectiveness of learning support through the various grades at school. This would allow one to record the support provided alongside the age of the learner. A longitudinal study would take into account changes over a period of time, thereby providing insight into the cause-and-effect relationship between learning support and cognitive development. Teachers could use this to determine

what support is beneficial, and modify or change the support provided according to the age of the learner.

The third recommendation would be an experimental study that allows for observations within a controlled environment. The effects of learning support could be studied and manipulated to determine the cause-and-effect relationship between learning support and cognitive development. Furthermore, it could also possibly provide insight into the relative impacts of home and in-classroom support on learners' academic achievement.

5.7 CONCLUSION

Chapter 5 began with a summary of the study and the significant findings thereof. Noteworthy conclusions were drawn in answering the various research questions set out in this study. Firstly, due to a fair understanding of learning support, the participants are in a good position to support any intervention directed at improving the availability of learning support. Furthermore, an important conclusion from this study is the need to build further on the creative techniques that teachers are capitalising on to support learners. Moreover, an effort should be made to promote further training on newer, cost-effective methods of support. In addition, the participants were of the opinion that the support they provided at home and at school encouraged and stimulated the learners in the classroom.

While conclusions of causality cannot be drawn from the observations conducted, the data collected from the study provide some support for the importance of encouraging learning support. Therefore, parents and teachers need to continually invest more time and resources in assisting learners so as to ensure optimal cognitive development. The implications for theory, policy, and practice were also outlined, which included the provision of educational workshops to better equip teachers with an understanding, and the capabilities to identify learners that need additional aid. One of the biggest limitations of the study was a limited sample size, which was justified through the benefit of gaining rich and in-depth data. Lastly, recommendations for future research were explored, with the main idea being that future comparative, longitudinal, and experimental research is required to establish the cause-effect relationship between learning support and cognitive development.

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LIST OF APPENDICES

APPENDIX A



Exploring learning support and cognitive development in the home and school among Grade 1 learners in a low-resource school in South Africa

Dear Participant (Parent)

I am a postgraduate student at the University of Pretoria.

The title of my study towards my Master's degree is **“Exploring learning support and cognitive development in the home and school among Grade 1 learners in a low-resource school in South Africa”** The broad aim of the study is to explore the various types of learning support provided at home and school among Grade 1 learners in a low-resource school. The researcher also seeks to discover some of the observable influences on learners' cognitive development due to the support provided.

As a caregiver of a Grade 1 child, I kindly invite you to participate in this study. In the proposed study, the aim is to conduct face-to-face, semi-structured interviews. A translator will be used if required, and the interview session will be recorded. The same questions will be put to all of the participants, and you will be allowed to expand on your answers and add further information if required.

The interview will be scheduled as per your availability and will take place at a venue convenient to you. The interview should take approximately 30 minutes each.

Please note face-to-face interviews will be conducted only if it's safe to do, in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. Strict safety protocols will be observed during the interview process. Also, be aware that if the lockdown restrictions change, making it impossible to conduct face-to-face interviews, data will be gathered either telephonically or virtually via zoom or google meet. Adequate internet data will be provided if need be.

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 transcription of data valid and authentic. The recording will be safely kept at the University of Pretoria. Only the researcher 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 supervisor. As a participant, you will have the opportunity to access and verify the recorded views and the transcriptions of interviews made in case there is a need to do so.

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

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

Kind regards

Ashika Singh

E-mail address: micor@sai.co.za

Contact number: +27 (0)836569356

Supervisor: +27 (0)604084832

E-mail address: angelina.wilsonfadiji@up.ac.za

APPENDIX B



01 July 2021

4 Ryall Lane
Hayfields
Pietermaritzburg
3201
Dear Sir/Madam

RE: REQUEST TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN PIETERMARITZBURG (MSUNDUZI MUNICIPALITY)

My name is Ashika Singh; I am currently completing a Master's degree in the Department of Education Psychology (Learning Support, Guidance and Counselling) at the University of Pretoria. I am required to conduct a research study to obtain the degree.

The aim of the proposed study is to explore the various types of learning support provided at home and school among Grade 1 learners in a low-resource school. The researcher also seeks to discover the influence of this support on the learner's cognitive development.

I hereby request the permission to conduct research in the Pietermaritzburg area (Msunduzi Municipality)

Kind regards

Ashika Singh
083 656 9356

Dr Angelina Wilson Fadiji (Supervisor)
0604084832

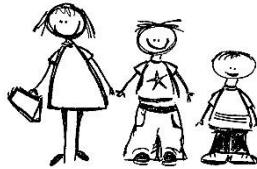
APPENDIX C



Faculty of Education

Fakulteit Opvoedkunde
Lefapha la Thuto

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION LEAFLET AND ASSENT FORM



TITLE OF THE RESEARCH PROJECT: Exploring learning support and cognitive development in the home and school among Grade 1 learners in a low-resource school in South Africa

RESEARCHERS NAME(S): Ashika Singh

ADDRESS: 4 Ryall lane, Hayfields, Pietermaritzburg

CONTACT NUMBER: +27 (0)836569356

WHAT IS RESEARCH?

Research is something we do find **NEW KNOWLEDGE** about the way things (and people) work. We use research projects or studies to help us find out more about children and teenagers and the things that affect their lives, their schools, their families and their health. We do this to try and make the world a better place!

WHAT IS THIS RESEARCH PROJECT ALL ABOUT?

The reason for the study is to understand and describe the different ways your teachers give you additional help with your schoolwork and how this has helped you with your learning and thinking.

WHY HAVE I BEEN INVITED TO TAKE PART IN THIS RESEARCH PROJECT?

You have been invited to be part of this research because you as a Grade 1 learner (aged between 6 and 7) enrolled in a primary school within the rural community in Pietermaritzburg.

WHO IS DOING THE RESEARCH?

I am a student at the University of Pretoria (South Africa) and I am doing this project as part of my Masters studies.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN TO ME IN THIS STUDY?

You will be watched in the classroom for about 30 to 45min to see how you listen to the teacher and follow instructions. You will also be watched in the playground to see how you play with your friends, what games you play and how you follow the rules for 30 to 45min.

CAN ANYTHING BAD HAPPEN TO ME?

Nothing bad will happen to you. Please inform your parents or teachers if you are not well or feel any discomfort as a result of being observed.

CAN ANYTHING GOOD HAPPEN TO ME?

You will not receive any direct benefits but what I observe will assist in the understanding and describing the additional help you get from the teacher and how this affects your learning and ability to think.

WILL ANYONE KNOW I AM IN THE STUDY?

No one will know you participated in this study except for my supervisor at University of Pretoria that I am currently working with.

WHO CAN I TALK TO ABOUT THE STUDY?

You can talk to either your parent or teacher, and the following people if you have any problems during the study or any questions about the study once it is completed.

Ashika Singh + 27 (0) 836569356

WHAT IF I DO NOT WANT TO DO THIS?

You do not have to participate in this study if you do not want to, and even if your parents have agreed. You are also allowed to stop being in the study and you will not be punished for it.

Do you understand this research study and are you willing to take part in it?

YES

NO

Has the researcher answered all your questions?

YES

NO

Do you understand that you can STOP being in the study at any time?

YES

NO

Signature of Child/ Thumb print

Date

APPENDIX D

Semi-structured interview schedule for parents

1. Background Information

ID number.....

Age.....

Gender.....

Race.....

Relationship to Grade 1 child.....

Level of education.....

Number of children caring for.....

Describe your socio-economic status and living
circumstances.....

2. Experiences of learning support

2.1 What is your understanding of learning support?

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2.2 In what ways do you support the child in learning?

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2.3 What happens during the time you spend supporting the child and how much time do you spend with him/her to learn?

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2.3.1 How often do you provide this support?

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2.3.2 Do you understand the academic work given to the child?

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2.4 Describe the various ways you provide creative, interesting experiences to motivate the child to learn?

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2.5 How do you feel about your assistance in helping the child and describe the ways this support has helped the child in their thinking and ability to cope with the work at school?

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2.6 How does the child benefit from the support you provide?

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2.7 How does your support affect the child's view of learning, and to what extent?

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3. Suggestions to improve learning support

3.1 How can learning support be improved?

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3.2 Do you believe that teachers should do more regarding learning support and can you suggest different ways that they can improve the learning support provided at the school?

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3.3 Do you believe that the community/ local authority/ government can do more regarding learning support and can you suggest ways that these groups can improve learning support?

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APPENDIX E

Semi-structured interview schedule for Grade 1 teachers

1. Background Information

ID number.....

Age.....

Gender.....

Race.....

Level of education.....

Number of children in class.....

Years of teaching.....

2. Experiences of learning support

2.1 What is your understanding of learning support?

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2.2 Describe the ways in which you provide learning support to your learner?

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2.3 Describe the extent of the support provided in terms of time, frequency and the nature of interactions/activities?

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2.4 What additional resources do you use?

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2.4.1 Where do you obtain these resources?

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2.5 Describe which individuals, (assistant teacher, fellow learners) in the classroom are involved in providing learning support?

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2.6 Describe the different ways you provide creative, stimulating experiences to inspire the learner?

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2.7 How do you feel about your assistance in helping the child and describe the ways this support has helped the child in their thinking and ability to cope with the work at school?

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2.8 How does the child benefit from the support you provide?

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2.9 How does your support affect the child's view of learning, and to what extent?

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3. Suggestions to improve learning support

3.1 How can learning support be improved?

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3.2 Do you believe that caregivers should do more regarding learning support and can you suggest different ways that they can improve the learning support provided at home?

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3.3 Do you believe that the community/ local authority/ government can do more regarding learning support and can you suggest ways that these groups can improve learning support?

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APPENDIX F

Observation template for Grade 1 learners

In the classroom

Description	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	P8	P9	P10
Showing interest in the lesson										
Partaking in the lesson										
Following instructions given by the teacher										
Ability to complete task set by teacher										
Understanding the language of instruction										
Ability to use the pencil and scissors correctly										
Ability to communicate with the teacher and fellow learners										

In the playground

Description	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	P8	P9	P10
Ability to partake in games with fellow learners										
Ability to hop, jump and skip										
Ability to communicate with fellow learners										
Ability to follow rules of a game/task										
Ability to use gross and fine motor skills in play activities										

APPENDIX G



01 July 2021

4 Ryall Lane
Hayfields
Pietermaritzburg
3201

Dear Sir/Madam

RE: REQUEST TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN PIETERMARITZBURG PRIMARY SCHOOL (MSUNDUZI MUNICIPALITY)

My name is Ashika Singh; I am currently completing a Master's degree in the Department of Education Psychology (Learning Support, Guidance and Counselling) at the University of Pretoria. I am required to conduct a research study to obtain the degree.

The aim of the proposed study is to explore the various types of learning support provided at home and school among Grade 1 learners in a low-resource school. The researcher also seeks to discover the influence of this support on the learner's cognitive development.

I hereby request permission to conduct research by interviewing 2 Grade 1 teachers and observing 10 Grade 1 learners from 2 classes at the primary school in the Pietermaritzburg area (Msunduzi Municipality).

Kind regards
Ashika Singh
083 656 9356

Dr Angelina Wilson Fadiji (Supervisor)
0604084832

APPENDIX H



01 July 2021

4 Ryall Lane
Hayfields
Pietermaritzburg
3201

Dear Sir/Madam

RE: REQUEST TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN THE NATIONAL DEPARTMENT OF BASIC EDUCATION

My name is Ashika Singh; I am currently completing a Master's degree in the Department of Education Psychology (Learning Support, Guidance and Counselling) at the University of Pretoria. I am required to conduct a research study to obtain the degree.

The aim of the proposed study is to explore the various types of learning support provided at home and school among Grade 1 learners in a low-resource school. The researcher also seeks to discover the influence of this support on the learner's cognitive development.

I hereby request permission to conduct research by interviewing 2 Grade 1 teachers and observing 10 Grade 1 learners from 2 classes at the primary school in the Pietermaritzburg area (Msunduzi Municipality).

Kind regards
Ashika Singh
083 656 9356

Dr Angelina Wilson Fadji (Supervisor)
0604084832

APPENDIX I



Informed consent - translator

Exploring learning support and cognitive development in the home and school among Grade 1 learners in a low-resource school in South Africa

I.....declare that:

I have provided the document covering the information about the proposed research study and have explained the same. I have encouraged the participant to ask questions and I have answered all queries of the participant patiently. After the discussion, I am satisfied that the participant has adequately understood the information provided. I have informed the translator about the confidentiality of the study and the recording of the semi-structured interviews. The purpose thereof is to make transcription of data valid and authentic. The recording will be safely kept at the University of Pretoria. Only the researcher will have access to the audio recordings. All data collected will only be used for academic purposes

Print Name of Principal Investigator:.....

Signature of Principal Investigator:.....

Date:.....(Day/Month/Year)

.....

Statement/Declaration by the translator

I..... declare that:

I am proficient in the participant's native language and have agreed to be the translator. I have assisted the principal investigator in explaining the document covering the information about the proposed research study in the participant's native language. The participant was encouraged to ask questions and answers to all the queries were addressed patiently. I have assisted in the factual translation of the information provided to me. After the discussion I am satisfied that the participant has adequately understood the information provided. I understand that all information in

the research study is confidential, pseudonyms will be used for the participants and no participant names or personal information will be disclosed by myself. I understand that in participating in this research study, I will be asked for permission by the principal researcher to have the semi-structured interviews recorded.

Print Name of Translator:.....

Signature of Translator:.....

Date:.....(Day/Month/Year)

APPENDIX J

student thesis

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