

TEACHERS' PERSPECTIVES REGARDING PLAY-BASED APPROACHES TO
TEACHING IN PRE-PRIMARY CLASSROOMS: A CASE STUDY IN THE
KHOMAS REGION

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ABSTRACT

The play-based approach is widely recognised as a developmentally appropriate practice for instructing young children during their formative years. The absence of a universally agreed-upon operational definition for play-based learning has significantly impacted its implementation within the realm of education. Teachers' viewpoints regarding play have a substantial impact on their daily instructional strategies. The primary objective of this research endeavor was to examine and gain insights into the viewpoints held by educators in Namibia in regard to the utilisation of play-based instructional approaches within the pre-primary educational setting. The research design utilized in this study was qualitative phenomenology. The population comprised 104 teachers, and a sample of six teachers was selected for the study. The data was obtained through the utilization of interview schedules, video recording, and examination of the teachers' lesson plans. The data was categorized into two primary groups, in accordance with the research inquiries: the viewpoints of educators concerning the benefits and implementation of a play-based approach in pre-primary classrooms. How do educators delineate play-based pedagogy, and to what degree does their definition impact its implementation? There is evidence to suggest that teachers may lack a comprehensive understanding of the terminology associated with play-based learning, which could contribute to confusion when attempting to implement this policy. The significance of academic performance in higher grade levels surpasses the necessity for pre-primary teachers to incorporate play-based learning or teaching methods. The integration of play-based learning poses a significant challenge for educators in the process of lesson planning.

KEYWORDS: Early Childhood, Socio-cultural, Guided play

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DEDICATION

This study is dedicated to my beloved belated mother, who has always been a source of motivation to preserve and succeed in education and life.

To my father who continually motivates me and believes that the sky is the limit for me.

To my husband who provides moral, spiritual, emotional, and financial support.

To my daughter, Devine Imanuella Mutau, may this book be a source of motivation in education and life. We may face battles every day, pick yourself up and try again.

Lastly, I dedicate this book to the Almighty Father, thank you for the guidance, strength power of the mind, protection, skills, and a healthy life. All of these, I offer unto thee.

DECLARATIONS

I, Hedwig Nando Kaveto, hereby declare that the thesis titled “TEACHERS’ PERSPECTIVES REGARDING PLAY-BASED APPROACH TO TEACHING IN PRE-PRIMARY CLASSROOMS: A CASE STUDY IN THE KHOMAS REGION submitted to the University of Namibia is a record of original work done by me under the supervision of Professor Cilas Wilders, Associate Dean: School of Health and Applied Health Sciences, UNAM in partial fulfilment of the requirement of Master in Education by Thesis. This thesis has been exclusively compiled by me and has not been submitted to any other institutions or published anywhere before.

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Hedwig Nando Kaveto

October 25

Date

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

ECD	Early Childhood Development
ECE	Early Childhood Education
ECEC	Early Childhood Education and Care
ECED	Early Childhood Education Development
IPA	Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis
NIED	National Institute for Educational Development
PBL	Play- Based learning
UN	United Nations
UNAM	University of Namibia
UNCRC	United Nation Convention on the Right of a Child
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and cultural Organization
ZPD	Zone of Proximal Development

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CHAPTER 1: BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

1.1 INTRODUCTION

The play-based learning is a pedagogical approach that is considered developmentally appropriate for children between the ages of birth and 8 years. It has garnered considerable interest as an effective strategy for promoting early childhood development (Yin, Keung, & Tam, 2022). According to Zhao et al. (2019), play is widely recognised as a fundamental element of human nature, as it involves children in various activities that foster creativity, imagination, and holistic learning experiences. The curriculum and policies in Namibia have undergone modifications to incorporate academic learning through Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP) over time. However, there remains a deficiency in the inclusion of play within educators' instructional methods and classroom environments (Pyle & Danniels, 2017). Nevertheless, despite the increasing amount of scholarly literature about play-based education, there exists a significant knowledge deficit regarding the viewpoints of educators who are responsible for executing this methodology within pre-primary educational settings (Hedges & Cooper, 2018; Khalil et al., 2022; Parker et al., 2022).

Teachers in a play-based pedagogy may encounter challenges in effectively implementing such curricula due to limitations in their teacher training (Pyle & Danniels, 2017; Parker et al., 2022). The training of teachers has a significant impact on their perspectives on play-based pedagogy, and subsequently, these perspectives have a direct influence on their instructional methods (Bawani & Mphahlele, 2021). Hence, it is imperative that educators who are responsible for implementing a Play-Based Learning (PBL)

curriculum possess a robust academic foundation in the domain of play (Bianca, 2020). Furthermore, the successful implementation of such a curriculum necessitates ongoing monitoring and evaluation. According to Pyle and DeLuca (2017), educators must assess students' academic progress and growth. In contemporary educational settings, it has become customary to consider academic achievements in response to external pressures from governmental entities, school administrators, and parents. Consequently, this prevailing trend often results in the prioritization of traditional pen-and-paper methods, thereby exerting undue pressure on play-based approaches to teaching and learning (Hedges & Cooper, 2018; Henricks, 2022).

The exclusive emphasis on teachers' educational qualifications may lead to a neglect of the fact that their perceptions also play a significant role in shaping the implementation of a curriculum based on play. According to Nilsen (2021), the educator is responsible for designing and guiding Play-Based Learning (PBL) experiences. However, it is important to note that the nature of these activities may be influenced by the teacher's subjective understanding of PBL's role within an academic setting. It can be postulated that these perceptions will consequently impact how teachers design their instructional plans and implement their pedagogical strategies within the classroom (Keung & Cheung, 2019).

In addition to the ongoing curriculum reform, educators encounter various obstacles when it comes to effectively implementing developmentally suitable pedagogical approaches like PBL. The challenges encompass various aspects, such as the need for professional development in effectively implementing play-based learning (PBL), concerns regarding

academic performance, limited availability of outdoor equipment, insufficient teaching and learning aids, overcrowded classrooms, and a high ratio of teachers to learners (Yin et al., 2022).

The absence of a universally agreed-upon definition of play-based learning/teaching has a discernible impact on the instructional practices employed by educators (Eberle, 2014). The successful implementation of a Play-Based Learning (PBL) approach necessitates the establishment of a shared understanding and agreement on its definition (Bubikova-Moan, Hjetland, & Wollscheid, 2019). The absence of a shared understanding regarding the definition of appropriate pedagogy for different stages of development results in ambiguity and challenges in effectively implementing such instructional practices.

This research paper seeks to explore the viewpoints of teachers in the Khomas Region of Namibia regarding the implementation of the play-based approach in pre-primary classrooms. Additionally, it aims to examine the extent to which these perceptions impact their instructional practices. Lastly, this study aims to emphasise the importance of teachers' perspectives regarding a particular pedagogical approach in the Khomas Region of Namibia. The Khomas Region encompasses the Capital City of Namibia, Windhoek, as well as a diverse population attending various pre-primary schools. This geographical area provides an opportunity to explore teachers' perspectives on the challenges within the educational context.

1.2 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) 1989, Article 31, stipulates that every child possesses the entitlement to engage in play (U.N General

Assembly, 1989). According to Khalil et al. (2022), it is mandatory for United Nations (UN) members to incorporate and implement this legislation within their educational curricula. Hence, governments must allocate the requisite legislative, administrative, financial, and other resources to effectively uphold the provisions outlined in Article 31 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Khangala, 2024). From the period of Independence in 1990 to 2008, the Ministry of Gender and Child Welfare assumed responsibility for the supervision of Early Childhood Education and Care, specifically focusing on the provision of services for children aged 0 to 6 years. These services primarily include day-care facilities, kindergartens, and pre-primary centers. Following the 2008 curriculum reform, a decision was made to transfer pre-primary education (ages 5-6) to the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education, Arts, and Culture, while the responsibility for the age group of 0-4 continues to reside with the Ministry of Gender Equality, Poverty Eradication, and Social Welfare. According to the Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture (2014), a play-based pedagogy was subsequently adopted for instructional purposes in this grade level.

When the implementation of the policy to incorporate pre-primary education into formal schools took place, there was a lack of teacher training in higher education institutions regarding the application of developmentally appropriate practices, such as a pedagogy centered around play (Brown et al., 2024). As a result, educators who were initially prepared for the lower primary phase, now known as Junior Primary, were assigned to teach in pre-primary classrooms without the necessary relevant and formal instruction (Nakale, 2018). The number of teachers who possessed the necessary qualifications to teach in Junior Primary was insufficient. Consequently, the Ministry of Education, Art,

and Culture had to recruit teachers who were either unqualified or lacked sufficient qualifications to instruct pre-primary classrooms. According to the Ministry of Education, Art and Culture (2013), although these teachers underwent induction and on-the-job training in play-based teaching, they rarely implemented it in their classrooms. However, it is worth noting that they did not receive any specific training in the practical application of a play-based pedagogy (Yee et al., 2022). Nevertheless, it is worth noting that a significant number of these educators have obtained a higher education degree in the field of pre-primary and Junior primary education. However, it is important to acknowledge that the training they have received lacks comprehensive instruction on the implementation of a play-based pedagogical approach.

The effectiveness of play-based teaching in a classroom environment is contingent upon the implementation carried out by a competent and well-informed educator. Khalil et al. (2022) assert that the implementation of play-based pedagogy facilitates a transition in the instructional and learning process, shifting the focus from a teacher-centric paradigm to a child-centric paradigm. The significance of this application resides in the teacher's ability to plan, organise, and evaluate play-based activities to maximise the learner's potential benefits (Aronstam & Braund, 2016). In the context of pre-primary education, teachers should refrain from employing scripted teaching methods, formal reading instruction, computerised learning tools, and standardised assessments that lack or only minimally incorporate play-based teaching approaches, as commonly observed in the subsequent junior primary grades.

The assumption that altering policies and incorporating specific terminology, such as the play-based approach, into teaching materials and guidelines will lead to subsequent changes in classroom practices has frequently been overlooked (Yee et al., 2022). Therefore, it can be argued that policy decisions have an inevitable impact on the pedagogical practices employed by teachers (Jay & Knaus, 2018; Yee et al., 2022). Hence, the primary objective of this research endeavor is to examine and comprehend the viewpoints held by educators in Namibia on the utilisation of play-based instructional methods.

1.3 PROBLEM STATEMENT

According to Ogunyemi (2016), the mushrooming of early childhood education in the African context has introduced novel concepts, including the play-based approach, which has been embraced by the Ministry of Education, Art, and Culture as a pedagogical strategy in pre-primary classrooms. The concept of freely chosen and child-initiated and directed play has historical roots in Europe, tracing back to the philosophies of Plato, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Comenius, and Froebe (2016).

According to Yee et al. (2022), there exists a concern regarding the alignment between the theoretical underpinnings and the practical implementation of play, despite its endorsement as a crucial approach in children's development and as a pedagogical tool in Early Childhood Education. Scholars and governmental entities have acknowledged the significance of play-based learning within the realm of Early Childhood Education and Care (Yee et al., 2022). Nonetheless, it is frequently observed that the implementation of such practices does not align with the principles of play-based learning. It is important

to acknowledge that the incorporation of play-based learning into daily activities is infrequent due to limitations in space, equipment, and materials (Jay & Knaus Marianne, 2018).

The ongoing utilisation of formal instruction in pre-primary education, which prioritises academic achievement, is resulting in the marginalisation of play-based learning approaches employed by pre-primary teachers (Jay & Knaus, 2018). The combination of parental expectations, academically focused curricula, and the cultural beliefs held by parents and educators can lead to a situation in which teachers feel compelled to prioritise academic outcomes, resulting in a limited incorporation of play-based activities within pre-primary classrooms (Yee et al., 2022).

According to Lam (2018), in the classroom setting, teachers typically engage in activities that hold a more prominent role, while learners assume a passive role, engaging in silent work at their desks. An additional noticeable concern in Namibia pertains to the lack of outdoor play facilities in certain schools. With those institutions possessing such environments often underutilizing them. According to Ogunyemi (2015), the resolution of issues and challenges related to play-based learning in early childhood in Africa necessitates a comprehensive overhaul of approaches to Early Childhood Development. Hence, it is imperative to examine the viewpoints of pre-primary educators with regard to the play-based approach.

1.4 RESEARCH PURPOSE

The primary objective of this study is to ascertain the viewpoints of educators regarding the utilisation of a play-based instructional approach in pre-primary educational settings

within the Khomas region of Namibia. Secondly, it is crucial to ascertain whether individuals' perspectives have an impact on the implementation of a play-based pedagogy in their teaching and learning encounters.

1.5 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What is the level of understanding and knowledge among teachers in the Khomas region of Namibia regarding the benefits associated with the implementation of play-based pedagogy in pre-primary classrooms?
2. To what degree did the perspectives of teachers impact their implementation of play-based pedagogy in pre-primary classrooms within the Khomas region of Namibia?

1.6 THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

A multitude of scholars have elucidated the advantages associated with employing a play-based approach to pedagogy and knowledge acquisition. However, no research has been conducted in Namibia to investigate the perspectives of educators regarding the role of play within an academic setting. According to Yee et al. (2022), there seems to be a shortage of information and research on the pedagogy of play in Africa, despite the existence of extensive research in Europe and other developed nations. Therefore, this research is of utmost importance as it will contribute to the existing knowledge in Namibia concerning teachers' perspectives on the play-based approach and how these perspectives shape their implementation of such practices. Furthermore, this study aims to provide valuable insights to policymakers regarding the level of comprehension among

teachers regarding play pedagogy, as well as the potential necessity for ongoing professional development in this area. In conclusion, this study will also provide valuable insights for researchers regarding potential areas for future research.

1.7 LIMITATION

The scarcity of previous research investigations on the subject matter is particularly evident in the context of Namibia. The knowledge gap will have an impact on the literature review, as a significant portion of the existing literature is predominantly focused on the Western world. Another constraint arises from the potential bias inherent in self-reported data, as it is contingent upon individuals' verbal accounts. The research may also encounter obstacles due to limited access to educational institutions and potential participants. In 2018, the proposal was approved; nevertheless, the researcher was compelled to endure a year-long delay in 2019 due to the requirement of obtaining ethical clearance. The academic progress was further impeded by the closure of schools due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Upon the reopening of schools, the Ministry of Education was compelled to modify its curriculum by eliminating non-promotional subjects, including Religious and Moral Education, Arts Education, and physical education, among others. The full implementation of "learning through play" was hindered due to concerns regarding the potential transmission of Covid-19 among both students and educators.

1.8 DELIMITATIONS

In the scope of this study, the inclusion of pre-primary teachers was essential due to the contrasting nature of teaching and learning between grade 1 and pre-primary. While grade

1 instruction is characterised by a more formal approach, pre-primary education is intended to employ a "play-based approach." The inclusion of kindergarten and daycare centre teachers in the study was precluded due to their current affiliation with the Ministry of Gender and Child Welfare, rather than the Ministry of Education. The scope of this study is limited to educational institutions that are exclusively owned by the government and offer pre-primary education. To address the significant age disparity among teachers, it is necessary to restrict participation to individuals within the age range of 20-40 years.

1.9 DEFINITIONS OF TERMS

Play

According to the Mariam dictionary (2016), the term "play" is defined as the condition of being engaged in active, operative, or relevant activities, particularly in the context of recreational or spontaneous activities performed by children.

Play-based.

Activities that possess clearly defined objectives and regulations and are guided by the curriculum while also being initiated by the child (Aronstam & Braund, 2015).

Pedagogy

Methods of instruction, learning activities, and methods of grading these activities (Alexander, 2008)

Early Childhood

The period of human development spanning from birth to eight years of age where rapid growth is experienced in domains such as cognitive, physical, social and emotional (NAEYC, 2021).

Early Childhood Development.

The early developmental stage, spanning from conception to eight years, is characterized by a period of accelerated physical growth, alongside potential psychological and social advancements (WHO, 2020)

Early Childhood Education (ECE)

Refers to the educational approach and practices that focus on the development and learning of young children, typically ranging from birth to around eight years of age (NEAYC, 2020).

Pre-Primary

According to UNESCO (2015), it is generally expected that a child should be 5 years old, turning 6, in the year preceding their enrollment in grade 1.

Kindergarten

In the Namibia context, "kindergarten" pertains to the provision of early childhood education and care for children under the age of 5.

Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture

The governmental entity/department in Namibia entrusted with the implementation of the National Education Policy within the nation (Government of Namibia, 2023).

Ministry of Gender Equality, Poverty Eradication, and Social Welfare

The entity refers to a governmental department in Namibia, which assumes the responsibility for the promotion of socio-economic development, children's well-being, gender equality, poverty eradication, and the overall welfare of society (Government of Namibia, 2023).

Developmentally Appropriate Practices (DAP)

An approach is characterized by a focus on strengths and utilizes a play-based methodology to foster joyful and engaged learning (NAEYC, 2020).

1.10 STRUCTURE OF THE STUDY

In the first chapter, the orientation of the study was discussed. This chapter included the statement of the problem, objectives, research questions, significance, limitation of the study, and definitions of terminologies. The second chapter focused on the theoretical framework and literature review. The third chapter discussed the research methodology. Chapter 4 presents the findings, and lastly chapter 5 focused on discussions and recommendations.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Early childhood education and the promotion of play-based learning have been significantly influenced by several historical figures who contributed to the field's evolution. Friedrich Froebel (1782-1852) emphasised the significance of incorporating play as a means of learning, while Maria Montessori (1870-1952) advocated for an educational approach that prioritised the individual needs and interests of the child. The cognitive development hypothesis, formulated by the renowned psychologist Jean Piaget (1896-1980), underscores the importance of developmental congruence in educational practices. Lev Vygotsky (1896-1934) introduced socio-cultural perspectives on learning, John Dewey (1859-1952) advocated for inquiry-based learning centred on the learner, while Rudolf Steiner (1861-1925) contributed to the promotion of holistic child development. Erik Erikson (1902-1994) expounded on the importance of psychological stages, and Loris Malaguzzi (1920-1994) catalysed child-led inquiry, while David Weikart (1931-2003) prioritised the progression of intellectual development. Martin Luther (1483-1546) played a pivotal role in advocating for the concept of universal education. John Amos Comenius (1592-1670), advocated for sensory learning within the realm of early childhood education. John Locke's (1632-1704) argument underscores the substantial impact exerted by the environment in moulding the cognitive development of individuals in their early stages of life (Bynum, 2015). These scholars made noteworthy contributions to the advancement of early childhood education and play-based learning.

According to Leggett and Newman (2017), Vygotsky conceptualised play as a social endeavour that facilitates comprehensive development. According to the social-cultural theorist Lev Vygotsky, the process of knowledge construction in children does not occur in isolation, but rather through collaborative interactions with adults within a social context. Vygotsky posited that the involvement of adults in children's play and learning has a beneficial impact (Altun, 2018). According to Ndlovu et al. (2023), within the framework of social constructivism theory, educators and school administrators must shift their focus from traditional teaching methods to fostering the development of learners who possess critical thinking skills and actively engage in their learning process. The socio-cultural perspective of Lev Vygotsky places considerable importance on the role of social interaction, which can present challenges in facilitating such interactions in crowded classrooms or situations with limited access to peers (Verenikina, 2010). The allocation of sufficient scaffolding for every child can require significant resources and may not always be practical.

Altun (2018) asserts that the aforementioned theorist has been instrumental in the establishment of pedagogical methodologies that prioritise experiential and child-centric learning encounters. These concepts have significant implications in terms of enhancing autonomy, fostering social engagement, and promoting cognitive development in young students (Khalil et al., 2022). Nevertheless, it is crucial to recognise that these theories are not without limitations and encounter specific challenges. The implementation of play-based education in early childhood settings is faced with several challenges, including the complexities associated with evaluation and the constraints imposed by limited resources (Yee et al., 2022). To ensure the continued advancement of play-based

education, it is imperative for educators and policymakers to effectively tackle these issues (Aronstam & Braund, 2016). According to the study conducted by Khalil et al. (2022), despite the abundance of available information, there remains a dearth of knowledge regarding teachers' perspectives on the utilisation of a play-based approach to instruction in Early Childhood educational settings.

2.2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The field of Early Childhood Education and Development (ECED) has recognised that play serves as a highly effective approach to teaching and learning in early childhood education, as it facilitates the holistic development of children. The absence of a universally agreed-upon definition of play-based learning poses a significant challenge in identifying an appropriate theoretical framework (Bubikova-Moan, Hjetland, & Wollscheid, 2019). The research conducted by theorists such as Freud, Bruner, Dewey, Piaget, and Vygotsky primarily centres around the topic of play and its various forms of development, specifically emotional, cognitive, and social development.

Lev Vygotsky, a prominent Russian psychologist, is credited with formulating the theory of social cultural constructivism. According to Veresov and Barrs (2016), this theory suggests that learning primarily occurs through social interactions involving both peers and adults. This aligns with play-based learning (PBL) pedagogy, wherein the focus is placed on the educator and their strategic planning of play activities. For the successful implementation of PBL, children must engage in guided play rather than unrestricted free play. In the context of guided play, children acquire knowledge and skills through the guidance provided by their teachers, as well as through the influence of their surrounding

environments (Yee et al., 2022). According to Veresov & Barrs (2016) and Yee et al. (2022), it is widely acknowledged that children acquire knowledge and skills through their interactions with their respective societies, resulting in variations in learning experiences across different cultures. Nevertheless, it has been argued that children possess the capacity to acquire knowledge and skills independently, as suggested by Hebe (2017).

According to Vygotsky (1967), it was posited that children's play contributes to both their development and learning outcomes. A child exhibits behaviour that surpasses their typical age and daily conduct. In the context of play, it can be likened to the child being intellectually advanced, as if they were a head taller than their usual self. Veresov and Barrs (2016), argues that play serves as a concentrated representation of various developmental tendencies, similar to the focal point of a magnifying glass. In the context of play, it can be observed that children strive to surpass their typical behavioral patterns. Vygotsky (1967), was of the opinion that play does not merely serve as a predominant characteristic but rather assumes a central role in the developmental trajectory during the preschool period (In: Yee et al., 2022). Liu (2017) alluded that, the utilisation of play can serve as an effective means to impart academic concepts and skills to pre-school children. Therefore, according to Vygotsky's perspective, it can be inferred that learning is perceived as an active and constructed process.

According to Vygotsky's theoretical framework, children engage in play to effectively operate within the boundaries of their zone of proximal development (ZPD), thereby facilitating the process of learning (Veresov & Barrs, 2016). The concept of the Zone of

Proximal Development (ZPD) refers to the discrepancy between a child's current level of development, as assessed by their ability to solve problems independently, and their potential level of development, as determined by their ability to solve problems with the guidance of an adult or in collaboration with more capable peers (Verenikina, 2010). According to Vygotsky's theory, it is proposed that a child can acquire knowledge and skills independently, albeit with certain conditions. Specifically, the child must be exposed to tasks that surpass their current level of ability, and the evaluation of their progress should be based on this challenging work (Verenikina, 2010).

The play holds significant value in a child's developmental and educational journey. This is primarily attributed to the fact that play facilitates the cultivation of social interactions, language acquisition, and problem-solving abilities (Hebe, 2017). Vygotsky (1976) indicated that play activities serve as a primary catalyst for development during the pre-primary years or in Early Childhood Centers (ECE). Moreover, Vygotsky suggested that a correlation exists between comprehensive development and the utilisation of play-based activities within the context of Early Childhood Education (In: Hebe, 2017). Fessha and Pyle (2016) suggest that the self-motivating nature of play enables the facilitator to leverage the learner's intrinsic interest and motivation within the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). This allows for the development of activities that foster a collaborative learning process, where both the teacher and learner actively contribute. Siraj-Blachford (2009) asserts that the social-cultural theorists argue that play provides a significant context for both learning and development.

2.3 DEFINITION OF PLAY-BASED PEDAGOGY

According to the definition provided by Merriam-Webster (2016), play can be understood as a condition characterised by being active, operative, or relevant, or as a recreational and spontaneous activity typically engaged in by children. While Oxford Dictionary of English (2010) defines play as an engagement for enjoyment and recreation rather than a serious or practical purpose. The term "play" can be defined as a set of activities that afford children the opportunity to independently investigate and uncover their immediate environment (Aronstam & Braund, 2016). It has been commonly referred to as the trial-and-error process. Play is commonly linked to the engagement of children in various activities, including but not limited to imitating others, manipulating objects such as toys, participating in board games or computer games, or engaging in other informal recreational pursuits (Kessel, 2018). Thus, the concept of play can be defined as engaging in physical activities, while inactivity refers to the absence of play-related activities. The act of play within these scenarios is widely regarded as being entirely driven by the child, with a vast array of potential outcomes (Daniels & Pyle, 2018). These activities are commonly regarded as pleasurable, impromptu, gratifying, and intrinsically driven. Play is a dynamic and ongoing process, distinct from an outcome or result (Nikolopoulou & Gialamas, 2015). Consequently, the utilisation of play within educational contexts is deemed impractical. It is important to acknowledge that play serves a dual purpose, encompassing both enjoyment and its contribution to the acquisition and cultivation of essential life skills necessary for the contemporary era (Yee et al., 2022).

To establish a comprehensive understanding of play-based education, educators must recognise that for activities to be considered playful, children must actively participate in meaningful endeavours that are designed to facilitate the acquisition of specific learning objectives and outcomes (Aronstam & Braund, 2015). Aronstam and Braund (2015) indicated that educators should also ascertain their role in facilitating play and determine effective strategies for delivering the curriculum in a manner that is both playful and impactful for learners' educational development. The objective of incorporating play into educational settings is to augment a child's academic abilities and preparedness for school, with a particular emphasis on cultivating skills that are essential in the 21st century, including critical thinking and lifelong learning (Fesseha & Pyle, 2016).

The play-based approach possesses its unique characteristics; nevertheless, the precise definition of this concept remains uncertain (Danniels & Pyle, 2015). According to Aronstam and Braund (2015), the term "play-based" encompasses both formal and informal aspects. Formal activities are characterised by a set of predetermined rules and anticipated outcomes, while informal activities are characterised by a naturalistic, spontaneous, and enjoyable nature. According to Lindhahl and Folkesson (2012), play can be categorised as informal when children engage in self-directed activities, and as formal when it is structured and planned by teachers (Nikolopoulou & Gialamas, 2015). According to Devries (2004), engaging in educational play can enhance cognitive abilities that contribute to the overall development of individuals. Play-based learning can be characterised as educational activities initiated by teachers but directed by children, a concept also known as guided play (Weisberg, Kittredge, Hirsh-Pasek, Golinkoff & Klahr, 2015).

According to Eberle (2014), play can be conceptualised within the realm of psychology as a purposeful activity that arises from individual experiences and is pursued for the sake of pleasure. From a neuroscientific perspective, engaging in play enhance brain capacity and cognitive functions, including the development of mathematical skills and language abilities (Oguyemi, 2015). From a sociocultural standpoint, play can be understood as a child's active involvement with the classroom environment through engaging in playful activities (Cutter- Mackenzi et al., 2014). From an educational perspective, play is recognised as a means of fostering the acquisition and development of various skills across different domains of learning (Oguyemi, 2015). Overall, these definitions fail to provide educators with a definitive framework for defining the concept of play. Hence, the conceptualisation or agreement on play-based learning in the context of Early Childhood Education (ECE) is significance in ensuring its appropriate implementation. In essence, play encompasses both structured environments and activities that foster the development of educational concepts, while also granting learners the autonomy to make decisions regarding their actions and timing (Zimmerman, 2002). Consequently, play-based education ought to achieve a harmonious equilibrium between autonomy and organisation. Stegelin, Fite and Wisneski (2015), indicated that play can be understood as a process, while education can be seen as the resulting outcome. For this research, the term "play-based" is used to describe activities that possess clearly defined goals and rules, are driven by the curriculum, and are initiated by the child (Aronstam & Braund, 2015).

2.4 THE INTEGRATION OF PLAY-BASED LEARNING WITHIN THE CURRICULUM

The play-based approach has garnered significant recognition as a suitable method for delivering pre-primary education due to its capacity to foster development and facilitate learning (Coelho et al., 2020). Research conducted by Lynch (2015) provides evidence that the utilisation of play-based approaches can lead to enhancements in the academic performance of learners and this is confirmed with a systematic review by Yee et al. (2022). Therefore, the question of how to effectively implement a play-based approach is of utmost importance in countries like Namibia, where the establishment of a solid educational foundation is still a concern.

Leggett & Newman (2017) and Yee et al. (2022) propose that a play-based curriculum encompasses interactive engagements, experiential encounters, and activities, whether they are premeditated or spontaneous, transpiring within a deliberately crafted setting aimed at nurturing children's educational development. Based on the provided definition, it can be inferred that the content included or excluded from the curriculum has an impact on the development of the child. Hence, educators must exhibit intentionality and deliberation in their decision-making and subsequent actions (Fessha & Pyle, 2016). Educators employ play-based teaching and learning activities to facilitate the achievement of curricular objectives (Lynch, 2015).

The incorporation of play within educational settings serves as a catalyst for the development and enhancement of learners' abilities in the context of 21st century skills (Oguyemi, 2015). Hence, education must encompass more than the mere acquisition of

factual knowledge or skills. The implementation of guided play has been found to facilitate the acquisition of fundamental competencies and learning objectives, thereby enhancing a child's academic skills, school readiness, as well as cognitive and socio-emotional development (Fessha & Pyle, 2016). Proponents of incorporating play into education assert that by infusing tasks and activities with an element of enjoyment, learner engagement is more likely to be enhanced. In the context of Early Childhood Development (ECD), play serves as a means of facilitating learning. This aligns with the perspective of Jean Piaget (1962), who posited that each instance of a child engaging in play contributes to the augmentation of their pre-existing cognitive frameworks, known as schemata (Legget & Newman, 2017). Play-based learning is a form of active learning that diverges from the conventional approach in which learners are required to memorise the knowledge imparted by teachers (Ndlovu et al., 2023). This transformation entails a shift in the teacher's role, transitioning from a traditional lecturer or authoritative figure to that of a facilitator and scaffold, while the learners are regarded as repositories of knowledge (Khalil et al., 2022).

In conclusion, the foundation of a curriculum centred around play should be derived from the interests and ideas of children, which are then translated into carefully designed and structured learning experiences. By leveraging children's interests and ideas, it is imperative to expand educational opportunities by effectively utilising both indoor and outdoor environments to develop learning activities through play (Yee et al. 2022). A curriculum centred around play incorporates various learning areas that encompass different types of play, including but not limited to the construction corner, mathematics corner, arts corner, reading corner, and fantasy corner (Ndlovu et al., 2023). A curriculum

that incorporates play as its foundation encompasses the utilisation of children's self-selected materials and encourages independent play, thereby providing opportunities for open-ended experiences and access to a variety of materials. A play-based curriculum is an educational approach that prioritises the needs and interests of children, providing them with opportunities to engage in independent or collaborative activities while accommodating diverse abilities and learning styles. In conclusion, a curriculum centred around play should possess the flexibility to adapt to the individual needs of children, while minimising disruptions to their play experiences (Yee et al., 2022).

2.5 LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS CENTRED ON PLAY

Stegelin et al. (2015) state that to facilitate the implementation of a successful play-based approach, it is essential to utilise both indoor and outdoor environments to enhance children's learning and holistic development. Planning educational activities indoors is often perceived as easier, while outdoor environments are seen as non-conducive to learning. In the context of outdoor environments, educators tend to prioritise the supervision of children during play rather than leveraging it as an educational opportunity (Jay & Knaus, 2018). These educators derive their perspectives from the theories of Piaget, who posits that children acquire knowledge through active involvement with their surroundings, independent of adult intervention (Piaget, 1970). According to Woods & Bond (2018), the statement reflects a child-centred developmental approach influenced by Piagetian theory, emphasising the importance of free play and free choice. Consequently, educators maintain that it is imperative to afford children autonomy during outdoor activities, limiting their intervention to observation and supervision. Learning

environments should facilitate an atmosphere that encourages risk-taking, enabling children to showcase their critical thinking abilities and become active participants in their educational development. The works of Lave (1988, 1993) and Rugoff (1990) in the fields of cultural anthropology and cultural psychology respectively, demonstrate that the process of learning occurs within diverse cultural and social contexts (Moore, Edwards, Cutter-Mackenzie-Knowles & Boyd, 2014). According to Moore et al. (2014), play-based learning, when viewed through a sociocultural lens, necessitates the involvement of adults to facilitate the learner's acquisition of knowledge in connection with their cultural and societal backgrounds.

Gandini et al. (2005) assert that an indoor environment designed for play-based activities should incorporate distinct learning areas, each with its specific educational objective. To foster a fondness for reading among children, educators should establish designated reading areas that encourage children to engage with diverse reading materials and genres. One frequently overlooked aspect of classroom design is the inclusion of a fantasy corner, which has the potential to facilitate the development of a child's imagination, language proficiency, and social aptitude. The inclusion of a science corner is significant, as it provides children with the opportunity to engage in investigative and exploratory activities related to various scientific themes (NAEYC, 2010). To foster the acquisition of numeracy skills, it is imperative to establish an educational setting that facilitates the exploration of numerical concepts, including numbers, shapes, and other mathematical principles that are targeted for development (NAEYC, 2010). Another significant domain is the arts section, where children can showcase their artistic abilities. Lastly, the inclusion of a carpet within a play-based area holds significance as it serves as a pivotal space where

children can engage in meaningful interactions with their teacher or find solace and unwind while attentively listening to the teacher's instructions. In the context of pre-primary education, it is important to prioritise the integration of children's work as a central component. This entails ensuring that all materials and equipment are thoughtfully arranged and accessible at a level appropriate for the children (Curtis & Carter, 2014). While the indoor environment can be readily discerned, the outdoor environment may pose certain difficulties.

One primary obstacle lies in the perception of the outdoor environment as a recreational space. The playground serves as a valuable outdoor setting for fostering the holistic development of a child, encompassing their physical, social-emotional, and cognitive abilities (Frost et al., 2012). Therefore, it is imperative that these outdoor environments are equipped with suitable age-appropriate equipment, while also considering the prevailing weather conditions, with utmost priority given to ensuring safety. The provision of certain fundamental amenities is essential for schools to effectively implement a play-based approach. These include, but are not limited to, a jungle gym, parallel bars, a slide, swings, a seesaw, motorcar tyres, and a sandpit (Frost et al., 2012). The outdoor environment refers to the physical surroundings that can be utilised for exploration and investigation across various learning areas.

2.6 THE INFLUENCE OF PLAY-BASED LEARNING ON HOLISTIC DEVELOPMENT

In contemporary society, it is evident that there has been a decrease in the amount of time children dedicate to play. Children often exhibit low levels of physical activity when

engaged in activities such as watching television and playing board games. Engaging in such activities has the potential to result in a child developing obesity, overweight conditions abnormal development and deviant behaviour (Goldstein, 2012). Childhood obesity has been found to be associated with the development of various comorbidities, including but not limited to hypertension, type 2 diabetes mellitus, and cardiovascular diseases (Goldstein, 2012). Children who have limited engagement in social play activities may be at risk of experiencing social rejection, which in turn could potentially contribute to the development of depression and even suicidal tendencies (Goldstein, 2012). The likelihood of a child who does not engage in play activities experiencing academic underachievement and ultimately dropping out of school is significantly elevated (Kessel, 2018). Hence, proponents of play have recognised the advantages and significance of employing a play-based methodology, leading to its integration within the realm of education. Physical play offers a range of advantages, encompassing the development of fine and gross motor skills, as well as hand-eye coordination. These skills are crucial for tasks such as grasping pencils, engaging in locomotion (e.g., walking and crawling), engaging in physical activities (e.g., running), and manipulating objects with dexterity (Stegelin et al., 2015). When a child is in a state of physical well-being, there is an increased likelihood of their academic performance being positively impacted, as this condition facilitates sufficient cerebral blood flow, thereby ensuring an adequate supply of oxygen to the brain (Bubikova-Moan et al., 2019). The presence of positive play experiences contributes to the development of a child's emotional well-being and fosters the cultivation of a positive self-concept. Playful environments that are conducive have been found to have a positive impact on a child's cognitive development, as they stimulate

their thinking capacity and promote social interactions. The provision of play environments is said to enhance a child's self-esteem and self-worth, factors that are strongly associated with a child's academic and social achievements (Ntshangase et al., 2022). The engagement of children in social play activities has been found to enhance their problem-solving and critical thinking abilities. Extensive research has demonstrated that engagement in play activities positively correlates with enhanced academic performance in various subjects, including mathematics, early literacy, and reading proficiency.

In essence, the objective of play is to foster a child's academic preparedness and readiness for school. Scholars in the field of human and child development advocate for the implementation of play policies and endorse their outcomes. According to Kessel (2018), play-based learning is crucial for young children as it enhances brain development. According to Goldstein (2012), engaging in play activities has been associated with enhanced language abilities, improved social skills, heightened creativity, and imagination, as well as an increased likelihood of developing critical thinking skills in children. In conclusion, it can be asserted that children who engage in play activities are more likely to achieve academic success and develop the necessary skills required in the contemporary era.

2.7 PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR EDUCATORS

In the context of this research, the Namibian educational system is defined as the period preceding grade 1, commonly referred to as pre-primary education. All children who are five years old and will turn six within the current year are mandated to be enrolled in pre-

primary education. However, there continue to be obstacles in ensuring the registration of children for pre-primary education. The pre-primary stage is widely recognised as a critical period for the development of skills and the preparation of children for their eventual transition into formal schooling (Bawani & Mphahlele, 2021). As per the guidelines outlined in the national curriculum for pre-primary education, it is recommended that the pedagogical practises employed in this context are founded upon the play-based approach. According to the Ministry of Education (2014), early childhood education provides children with a significant advantage in their overall development, improves their academic performance in formal educational settings, and fosters their holistic growth. Ministry of Education (2014) states that young children acquire knowledge by engaging in experiential learning, actively exploring their surroundings, and through social interactions with both adults and peers. Moreover, play serves as a crucial avenue for learning in early childhood.

The primary means of education for pre-primary teachers in Namibia primarily involves enrolment in universities and colleges. To teach in pre-primary education, individuals are required to possess either a diploma or a degree. It is worth noting that despite a rise in the number of students enrolling in education programmes, a significant portion of these students tend to avoid specialising in pre-primary and junior primary education (Nakale, 2018). According to the Ministry of Education, NIED (2014), it is expected that pre-primary teachers possess qualities such as problem-solving skills, responsibility, initiative, and critical thinking abilities to effectively implement pre-primary education using a play-based approach. However, it is evident that teacher education in Namibia primarily emphasises theoretical knowledge rather than practical application (Bawani&

Mphahlele, 2021). The utilisation of pre-existing resources, such as teacher's manuals, textbooks, and activities, can facilitate the process of teaching and learning. However, it may also have a detrimental impact on teachers' critical thinking abilities and their ability to effectively implement a play-based approach. This is because these materials may not always provide the necessary equipment or instructions required to successfully execute a play-based approach, thus rendering it ineffective.

The importance of teacher training cannot be overstated in facilitating effective teaching and learning across various curricula (Bawani & Mphahlele, 2021). Darling-Hammond, Hyler, and Gardner (2017), as referenced by Bawani and Mphahlele (2021). Vygotsky emphasised the significant roles that proficient educators play in facilitating children's learning. Skilled educators contribute to the advancement of learning and development through their aptitude for establishing conducive learning environments and effectively monitoring and guiding children's educational experiences.

2.8 THE ROLES OF TEACHERS IN A PLAY-BASED EDUCATION

Vygotsky (1976) acknowledged the significance of educators in facilitating social learning during play. Hence, it is imperative for educators to promote the concept of prolonged cognitive engagement as a pedagogical exchange between children and adults within the context of play. Educators must find a harmonious equilibrium between child-centred activities and thorough inquiry to establish a more solid foundation for incorporating content within a curriculum that emphasises play (Moore et al., 2014). The absence of a universally agreed-upon definition of play has resulted in educators experiencing challenges in comprehending their role in facilitating play, as evidenced by

research findings. The teacher bears the responsibility of meticulously organising the learning environment and providing appropriate support to facilitate children's learning within a play-based classroom setting (Khali et al., 2022). Environmental preparation refers to the deliberate selection of educational toys by the teacher for use during a designated instructional period, as well as the planning and organisation of various activities that will take place within the context of play-based instruction (Weisberg et al., 2015).

The educator arranges the learning environment and offers support to facilitate the learner's actions. Formal play, whether initiated by a teacher or structured by a set of rules, entails predetermined expectations for outcomes. The educator is responsible for determining the selection of toys and equipment that learners will utilise within various learning spaces, encompassing both indoor and outdoor environments (Weisberg et al., 2015). To foster learning and development, it is imperative to grant children the opportunity to engage in activities within diverse environments. On the contrary, child-led or freedom play activities in an informal setting are characterised by a naturalistic and unplanned approach, aimed at fostering enjoyment while accommodating the diverse needs, cultural backgrounds, and home experiences of learners (Bruce, 2001). Hence, it is evident that within classrooms that employ play-based learning, adults exert a certain level of control and engagement to facilitate learning opportunities by harnessing a child's innate inclination towards play.

In conclusion, teachers assume three distinct roles within the context of the play-based approach. The initial role assumed by the teacher is passive, entailing the act of observing

children during their play activities. Additionally, another important function they serve is the establishment of interactive educational settings that promote playfulness and learning. Finally, their primary responsibility entails engaging in interactive activities with children during play. Therefore, it is imperative for educators to actively endorse and facilitate the incorporation of play within the realm of education, as advocated by Weisberg et al. (2015).

2.9 THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PLAY-BASED APPROACH IN EDUCATION

To effectively advocate for the integration of play in educational settings, it is imperative to acquire a comprehensive understanding of the inherent characteristics and dynamics of play. The play-based approach has garnered significant recognition as an appropriate method for delivering pre-primary education due to its facilitation of development and learning (Jay & Knaus, 2018). There exists empirical evidence indicating that the utilisation of play-based methodologies yields enhancements in learners' academic performance (Martlew et al., 2011). Therefore, the question of how to effectively implement a play-based approach is of utmost importance in countries like Namibia, where there is a pressing need to address the foundational aspects of learning.

2.10 TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF PLAY-BASED PEDAGOGY IN EDUCATION

The concept of play is widely recognised, yet practitioners across the globe hold varying perspectives regarding play and its role within the realm of education. For instance, educators in Hong Kong and Japan hold the belief that play within the context of

education lacks academic merit. According to Aronstam & Braund (2015) and Wong et al. (2011), there is a belief that play can impede academic achievement and is primarily advantageous for the development of one's social-emotional skills. These countries concur with the cognitive development theorist Piaget, who similarly posited that play does not yield any novel learning outcomes. On the contrary, Swedish educators maintain the belief that through the utilisation of play, all obstacles can be overcome. The viewpoint expressed aligns with the perspective of Vygotsky, a social constructivist theorist, who posits that children acquire new knowledge through play (Aronstam & Braund, 2015). In contrast to the European perspective that attributes significant educational value to play, developing countries prioritise formal learning over play due to the belief that it contributes to economic development (Ogunyemi & Ragpot, 2015). The increasing prominence of technology in society has led parents to believe that introducing children to technology at a young age would enhance their future skill set, rather than allowing them to spend their educational time solely on recreational activities. According to Ng'asike (2014), there is a prevalent perception among Africans that the play-based approach in early education is primarily rooted in Western cultures, thereby neglecting the significance of African cultures in educational practises.

The level of awareness regarding the cultural perception of play and its significance in formal early education, particularly among individuals who are expected to incorporate play into their daily instructional methods, remains insufficiently understood. The concept of play in early education refers to the activities and experiences that children engage in for the purpose of learning, development, and enjoyment during their early years of schooling. Do educators perceive educational merit in the act of play? A

paradigm shift has occurred in policymaking, yet there is a dearth of research examining the practical implementation of this paradigm shift, potentially elucidating the subpar educational outcomes. This research endeavour aims to address certain disparities by examining the viewpoints of educators regarding the utilisation of play in pre-primary education.

2.11 OBSTACLES ENCOUNTERED BY EDUCATORS IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF A PLAY-BASED PEDAGOGY

Despite the lack of clarity surrounding the play-based approach, teachers frequently face pressure from upper grade teachers, administrators, and parents to adopt a more rigid and traditional instructional approach that relies on rote memorisation and positions the teacher as the primary source of academic knowledge transfer (Fesseha & Pyle, 2016). Educators at the upper grade level prioritise the acquisition of fundamental skills such as alphabet recognition, proficient penmanship, legibility, and mathematical proficiency among their students. The pre-primary teachers experience increased pressure, leading them to potentially prioritise academic subjects over the utilisation of play-based approaches, which may be perceived as less valuable and time-consuming (Marlew et al., 2011). One additional obstacle encountered by educators is the lack of comprehension among parents regarding the play-based approach and the educational significance of play (Keung & Cheung, 2019). Parents tend to prioritise the instruction of fundamental skills, including literacy, numeracy, handwriting, and information and communication technology (ICT) proficiency, for their children. Doubert et al. (2018) concur with the notion that playtime is diminishing while academic demands and the emphasis on information and communication technology (ICT) skills are escalating.

While the government policies pertaining to the utilisation of a play-based approach in pre-primary classrooms may appear favourable on paper, it is important to acknowledge that the ministry requires teachers to provide evidence of teaching and learning occurring within these classrooms. Consequently, teachers often find themselves compelled to employ traditional pen and paper methods instead of a play-based approach, as documenting such activities proves to be challenging (Bawani & Mphahele, 2021). Despite teachers' ability to implement these policies within their classrooms, they continue to encounter a dearth of an environment that fosters play-based learning (Keung & Cheung, 2019). The teachers' ability to effectively implement the play-based approach is hindered by inadequate infrastructure and equipment (Marlew et al., 2011). The absence of outdoor equipment or limited utilisation of such facilities can be attributed to the belief that children should prioritise discipline over recreational play.

2.12 CONCLUSION

In contemporary times, children exhibit a preference for engaging with screens as opposed to participating in traditional forms of play. Considering this context, countries have made the decision to incorporate play within the realm of education. There exist a variety of policies that govern the implementation of play within the classroom setting. Nevertheless, it is crucial to solicit the viewpoints of individuals responsible for executing these policies on a day-to-day basis. Research has demonstrated the significance of play in fostering development and facilitating learning. However, it is worth noting that teachers' perceptions and attitudes towards incorporating play into educational settings may vary from this perspective. The presence of inadequate play opportunities in

classrooms and the subpar quality of play experiences are subjects of concern, potentially stemming from teachers' underestimation of the value of play-based pedagogy in both practical and theoretical contexts. Therefore, this distinction between play and learning is a contributing factor to their perceived separation rather than integration. Incorporating play into the educational process presents a formidable task, as mere recognition of the significance of play in facilitating learning and growth does not guarantee effective implementation of the play-based approach. This has resulted in the prevalence of teacher-led activities in pre-primary education. Therefore, it is imperative to ascertain the pedagogical perspectives of educators and their implementation of the play-based approach within their instructional settings. The significance of teachers' pedagogical decisions lies in their impact on the selection of teaching methodologies employed in the classroom and the establishment of the learning environment. It is crucial to ascertain the perspectives of educators regarding the incorporation of play in education and their involvement in the play-based approach when considering these pedagogical decisions.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The primary objective of this research was to gain insight into the perspectives of pre-primary educators who employ play-based pedagogy in their instructional practices. Therefore, this chapter will examine the research methodology employed in this study. The research employed a qualitative phenomenological design. The study focused on educators who were instructing in pre-primary classrooms located within the Khomas Region. The data was gathered through the utilisation of interview schedules, video recordings, and evaluations of lesson plans. The data was analysed through the application of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). Further elaboration on these topics is provided in the subsequent chapter.

3.2 RESEARCH DESIGN

The research utilised a qualitative methodology as the researcher conducted field visits to the participants' indoor and outdoor environments, refraining from manipulating the focal case. The objective was to gain insight into the participants' viewpoints on the implementation of a play-based pedagogy in their instructional practices. Qualitative research was applied to explore and comprehend the significance that individuals or groups attribute to their experiences, by employing diverse sources of data (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Tuffour, 2017). The researcher utilized the descriptive nature and inductive approach, with a primary emphasis on elucidating the underlying significance as perceived by the participants (Mariam & Tisdell, 2016).

In this study, a research design known as phenomenology was employed to gather data regarding the perceptions of pre-primary teachers regarding the utilisation of a play-based approach within their educational settings. The selection of a phenomenological design was deemed most suitable for this study due to its capacity to facilitate the researcher's understanding of the participants' lived experiences and the practical implementation of a play-based pedagogy in their teaching practices. The primary focus of the research utilising phenomenology was to examine of individuals' lived experiences (Groenewald, 2004). This phenomenological study aims to explore individuals' cognitive processes in comprehending, perceiving, and applying their lived experiences (Yildiz & Gizir, 2018). The interpretative phenomenological approach is to investigate the subjective experiences of the individuals involved in the research (Alase, 2017).

3.3 PRELIMINARY INVESTIGATION

A pilot study was conducted involving a single teacher to assess the procedures, evaluate the reliability, and establish the validity of the research instruments. The preliminary investigation indicated that certain inquiries on the interview questionnaire exhibited redundancy, while the terminology employed proved challenging for the educators. The provided responses facilitated the assessment of the interview schedule and the alignment of questions with the research questions.

3.4 POPULATION AND SAMPLE

The researcher employed a homogenous sampling technique to select the participants for this study. The primary objective of employing a specific purposive sampling technique

is to gain a comprehensive understanding of the central phenomenon within the target population (Cresswell, 2013).

The population for this study comprised 104 pre-primary teachers who were employed in 39 government-owned schools located in the Khomas Region of Namibia. The establishment of these classrooms took place within the time frame of 2008 to 2019.

The study's sample comprised six educators from three educational institutions situated in the urban, semi-urban, and rural regions of the Khomas Region in Namibia. The schools included in this study primarily consisted of educational institutions that had pre-primary classrooms between the years 2008 and 2014. Participants that were selected met the following criteria. Participants must have a minimum of 5 years of teaching experience in a pre-primary classroom. Participants must have been teaching at the same educational institution for the past 5 years. Participants must hold a qualification in Pre-Lower Primary Education, with the earliest cohort being from 2015 (University of Namibia or equivalent institutions). Those that were excluded were, teachers with less than 5 years of teaching experience in pre-primary education. Teachers who have not taught in the same institution continuously for at least 5 years. Teachers without a qualification in Pre-Lower Primary Education or a relevant equivalent degree obtained after 2015.

3.5 RESEARCH INSTRUMENTS

In the context of qualitative research, it is generally recommended that participants furnish comprehensive accounts of their experiences pertaining to the phenomena under investigation. To obtain a comprehensive comprehension of the viewpoints held by

teachers and their implementation of a play-based pedagogy, the following instruments were employed for this study.

3.5.1 AUDIOVISUAL RECORDINGS

The primary objective of this research endeavor was to acquire a comprehensive comprehension of the impact of the participant's perspective on play-based pedagogy within pre-primary educational settings. Consequently, comprehensive video recordings were conducted, capturing the participants' activities throughout an entire school day, spanning a duration of four hours. The researcher chose to employ video recordings as a means of observation rather than relying on a predetermined observation checklist. This decision was motivated by the researcher's recognition that video recordings afford the opportunity to review the footage and capture pertinent data pertaining to the subject matter, which may otherwise be overlooked when using a checklist. Fieldnotes were collected in conjunction with video recordings, and additional information was incorporated during the analysis of the videos (Appendix 3).

3.5.2 SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS

To facilitate participants' freedom and capacity for introspection, the study employed one-on-one and in-depth semi-structured interviews. The utilisation of semi-structured interviews was chosen due to its ease of management and ability to provide participants with the necessary time and opportunity to express their thoughts and opinions (Creswell, 2013). Furthermore, this approach ensures that crucial data pertaining to the topic under investigation is not overlooked during the dialogue (De Clerk et al., 2011). The interview topics are predetermined, as most of the questions were formulated by the researcher and

verified by experts in the field of research education (Appendix 4). Nevertheless, to facilitate further discussion and maintain the flow of conversation, the researcher found it necessary to pose additional inquiries to the participants as they articulated their perspectives on the matter at hand. The interview schedule consisted of two components: the background information of the participants and the specific topic under discussion. The duration of the interviews was one hour, during which a single participant or multiple participants were engaged, depending on the specific circumstances encountered within the schools. Alase (2017) emphasised the importance of employing semi-structured and unstructured interviews as the data collection method for an IPA (Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis) study. Furthermore, it was recommended that interviews should have a minimum duration of one hour. The utilisation of an audio recorder was employed to record all interviews, as recommended by Alase (2017), who emphasised the importance of incorporating multiple sources, including technological means, in the process of data collection.

3.5.3 ANALYSIS OF DOCUMENTS (LESSON PLANS)

Finally, the participants were requested to submit their lesson plans for the entire week, with the purpose of examining the integration of a play-based pedagogy within their instructional strategies. The utilisation of document analysis as a qualitative research method is highly advantageous due to its capacity to yield reliable data that remains unaffected by the researcher's influence (Morgan, 2022). The lesson plans (Appendix 5) were utilised as a supplementary source of information to corroborate the participant's

responses during the interview and the analysis of video recordings, thereby mitigating potential biases introduced by the researcher.

3.6 PROCEDURE

The initial step after obtaining ethical clearance involved obtaining permission from the Ministry of Education Arts and Culture of the Democratic Republic of Namibia as well as from school principals to conduct the research. Additionally, it was necessary to obtain consent from both participants and their parents, as well as assent from the participants.

The study involved a total of six participants, with the researcher dedicating an entire day to everyone. The data collection process commenced during the visit by documenting participants' instructional activities both indoors and outdoors, with the aim of observing their implementation of play-based pedagogy within their classroom settings. During the recording process, the researcher concurrently documented observations as the lesson unfolded. After the conclusion of the school term, the individuals involved were subsequently interviewed to gain insight into their perspectives on the play-based approach. Finally, an assortment of the participants' lesson plans was gathered and examined to gain insight into the integration of play into their daily instructional routines.

The study's data was securely stored on the researcher's Google Drive account and protected through encryption using a password. The stored data could only be accessed by the researcher.

3.7 ANALYSIS OF DATA

A framework for data analysis was employed to derive significance from the collected data. In the study conducted by Hackett and Strickland (2019), it is stated that the framework is a qualitative data analysis approach that provides researchers with a structured system to effectively manage, analyse, and identify themes. This approach facilitates the establishment and maintenance of a clear and traceable record of the research process.

Initially, the researcher engaged in repeated listening of the audio recordings until the researcher achieved the ability to recollect the contents of the interview. Furthermore, the researcher recorded the data in its raw form. Following the process of notetaking, it became apparent that there were recurring themes. Consequently, the notes were organised into cohesive groups based on their relevance to the research questions. The themes that were formulated were found to be consistent with the responses provided by the participants.

The researchers engaged in the process of replaying video recordings and concurrently made notes with the specific aim of addressing the primary research inquiries. The notes were composed in a reported format.

Finally, the lesson plans of the participants for the week were assessed. The qualitative research documents offer the necessary data to comprehend the participants' perspectives on the utilisation of a play-based approach in their teaching practices, as well as how teachers incorporated this approach into their lesson planning.

The findings derived from the data collection were analysed and documented in the form of a report to ascertain the viewpoints regarding the implementation of a play-based approach among pre-primary teachers.

The present study aims to elucidate the primary semantic interpretations of the codes employed in this research.

The participants in this study were identified as T1, T2, T3, T4, T5 and T6 while the three schools were identified as S1, S2, and S3, are being referred to.

3.8 RESEARCH ETHICS

The study obtained research permission letter from the Centre for Post Graduate Studies at the University of Namibia (UNAM) (Appendix 2) and obtained ethical clearance certificate (Appendix 1) from the University of Namibia Research Ethics Committee (UREC). The researcher subsequently sought permission from the Executive Director of the Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture to collect data from various schools (Appendix 6). Subsequently, the researcher-initiated contact with the principals and head of the Department at the school, introducing herself and seeking permission, which was duly granted by the school administration.

Each participant received a concise overview of the study, including its objectives, potential advantages, as well as the criteria employed for participant selection and the subsequent procedures to be implemented. The participants were duly notified that their involvement in the study was entirely voluntary, and they had the freedom to withdraw their participation at any point if they chose not to proceed. Finally, following a

comprehensive explanation, the participants provided their informed consent by signing the requisite consent forms (Appendix 7).

The teachers were provided with parental consent forms (Appendix 8) to distribute to the parents, requesting their consent for their children's participation in the study. The teachers were provided with an explanation of the consent forms, which they were then tasked with conveying to the parents as they collected said forms. Although direct interaction was not conducted with the learner, the researcher was able to acquire information regarding the learner's consent through contact with them.

In the present study, the participants were duly notified that their identities would remain anonymous, and that the data collected would solely be utilised for the purpose of this investigation, to safeguard the rights, dignity, and privacy of the individuals involved in the research. However, it is important to note that the report may also be disseminated to the Ministry of Education, Arts, and Culture as they explicitly requested it in their official permission letter.

CHAPTER 4: PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Early childhood education is crucial for establishing the fundamental aspects of a child's development in areas such as motor skills, language acquisition, emotional and social development, and cognitive growth (Stegelin et al., 2015, Bubikova-Moan et al., 2019). The developmental aspects of children are influenced by their social and cultural interactions, as emphasised by Vygotsky's sociocultural theory. According to Vygotsky, children acquire knowledge and progress in their development by engaging in social interactions within their cultural environment. Vygotsky also highlights the importance of play as a tool for learning and development (Leggett & Newman, 2017).

This case study attempts to reveal the perspectives of pre-primary teachers regarding play-based pedagogy in selected schools in the Khomas region. Play-based pedagogy is a developmental practice that is recommended by the Namibian government to be used in teaching pre-primary learners. This chapter presents a detailed analysis of data and discussion guided by the themes and subthemes, integrating the theoretical framework and literature review. Table 1 is providing an overview of experience, qualification and training of the respondents.

4.2 DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION OF PARTICIPANTS

Table 1: Demographic Information

Participant	Experience in teaching pre-primary	Highest qualification	Training from employer
1	5 years	Grade 12	Yes
2	5 years	Diploma	Yes
3	20 years	Diploma	Yes
4	7years	Diploma	Yes
5	5years	Diploma	Yes
6	10years	Diploma	Yes

The respondents were all teachers at various schools in Windhoek district. The table shows that the respondents consisted of 6 teachers. The participants have been teaching in pre-primary grades for a of minimum 5 years and maximum 20 years. Most except one of the participants were qualified for pre-primary and all have obtained training from their employers.

This section presents the findings of this study under various themes that emerged from the data analysis. Data presentation includes the description of the collected data into some form of explanation. The data was presented under themes and sub-themes. The study comprise of 8 themes and 18 sub-themes as indicated in Table 2.

4.3 THEME AND SUB-THEMES

Table 2: Themes and Sub-Themes

Theme	Sub-theme
1. Holistic development	1.1 Motor Skill Development 1.2 Language Acquisition and Communication Skills 1.3 Emotional and Social Development 1.4 Cognitive Development
2. Reduces absenteeism	2.1 Play-based learning enhances attendance 2.2 Motivation through play
3. Play is fun	3.1 Universal Enjoyment and Self-Expression 3.2 Intrinsic Pleasure 3.3 Freedom in Play
4. Play is amusing	4.1 Joy and Emotional Well-being through Play
5. Play is self-directed	5.1 Autonomy and Flexible Rule-Making 5.2 Persistence and Resilience

6. Play creates noisy classroom	6.1 Management's Disapproval of Noise 6.2 Teacher Hesitation to Use Play
7. Teacher dominance	7.1 Teacher-Centered Approaches 7.2 Need for Professional Development
8. Little use of outdoor environment.	8.1 Impact of COVID-19 on Play: 8.2 School Policies and Space Constraints

4.3 THEME 1: HOLISTIC DEVELOPMENT

The data strongly supports the findings that holistic development can be achieved through play-based learning. This aligns with Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, which emphasises the importance of social interactions and cultural context in cognitive development. The Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), as conceptualised by Vygotsky, emphasises the significance of play in enabling children to engage in tasks that surpass their current abilities and developmental potential. This can be achieved through guidance from adults or through collaborative efforts with peers (Verenikina, 2010). Lesson plans, interview data, and video observation highlight the significance of holistic development, as emphasised by Vygotsky's sociocultural theory.

4.3.1 SUB THEME 1: MOTOR SKILL DEVELOPMENT

Participant 1 and Participant 5 noted that play activities such as climbing, running, and jumping are crucial for developing both fine and gross motor skills.

T1S1 said: *“learners should be allowed to manipulate things, they should climb and interact with others because this helps develop their fine and gross motor skills”*.

T5S3 *“When children are jumping and running they are developing their motor skills which will help them to be good in sports.”*

Motor skill development is essential in early childhood as it establishes the groundwork for physical activities and overall well-being. Stegeline et al. (2015) affirmed that physical play provides various benefits, including the enhancement of fine and gross motor skills, as well as hand-eye coordination. Proficiency in these abilities is essential for activities such as grasping writing instruments, participating in movement (e.g., walking and crawling), engaging in physical exercises (e.g., running), and skillfully handling objects (Stegeline et al., 2015). The Physical Education lesson plans included activities such as tracing circles in the air, clapping in rhythm, and running, as these activities are essential for the enhancement of motor skills. However, video observations have shown that these activities are not fully integrated into teaching and learning because of limited or insufficient utilisation of outdoor environments. This is further validated by the interview data, which underscores the significance of motor skills. Pyle and Daniels (2017) agree that children gain knowledge and skills through the guidance of their teachers and the

influence of their surrounding environments. Consequently, the failure to utilise outdoor environments creates a disconnect between the planning and implementation processes.

4.3.2 SUB-THEME 2: LANGUAGE ACQUISITION AND COMMUNICATION SKILLS

Vygotsky believed that language is important for cognitive development, and this is supported by participants 2, 3, and 6 who alluded that play enhances language development.

T2S1 said, *“they learn how to use language and even pick up a new language while they play.”*

T2S2 said, *“Play is beneficial to a child developing language, how to speak properly, and how to communicate with others.”*

T6S3 *“When they play for example house -house, the children are using words. This is how a child develops good language skills.”*

Kessel (2018) agrees with the aforementioned findings, asserting that play-based learning is essential for young children as it promotes brain development and facilitates the acquisition of language and skills necessary for proficiency in social contexts, such as new vocabulary, communication skills, and grammar. Goldstein (2012) concurs that participating in play activities is linked to improved language abilities, enhanced social skills, heightened creativity and imagination, and an increased probability of developing critical thinking skills in children. The development of language and communication skills is closely connected to both cognitive and social aspects. Vygotsky's theory

emphasises the significance of language as a means of both thinking and communicating. This is achieved through the involvement of adults and peers in play-based activities (Hebe, 2017).

The Lesson plans for Language Development emphasised activities such as storytelling, retelling, and vocabulary expansion, which are in accordance with Vygotsky's perspective on the social dimension of language acquisition. Video observations of Participant 2 and 5's classrooms revealed the integration of play-based language activities into their lessons. Nevertheless, it was observed that some participants exhibited a greater reluctance to engage in play-based activities and instead opted for teacher-led activities, as evidenced by the lesson plans. This preference may potentially restrict the potential for more extensive language interactions.

4.3.3 SUB-THEME 3: EMOTIONAL AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Participants 4 and 6 observed that children can acquire the necessary abilities to manage their emotions and develop appropriate social skills through engaging in play.

T4S2 “Children also learn how to regulate their emotions because they do not want to be referred to as crybaby.”

T6S3 “I allow learners in my class to play because this is how a child develops an understanding of their emotions and others.”

A child's overall well-being is dependent on the integration of emotional and social development. Vygotsky posited that children acquire the ability to navigate social

relationships, cultivate empathy, and regulate emotions through engaging in play. Engaging in play-based learning promotes the development of emotional intelligence and social competence, which are crucial for achieving success in the future. The lesson plans for Religious and Moral Education centre on engaging in conversations regarding relationships, respect, and acceptance within the family, which contributes to the emotional and social growth of learners. This is consistent with Vygotsky's emphasis on the significance of social interactions. Participant 4's video observations demonstrate the significance of play in promoting emotional regulation, which is also reflected in the lesson plans. However, not all participants, as observed in the video, offer sufficient opportunities for these interactions.

4.3.4 SUB-THEME 4: COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENT

According to the constructivist Vygotsky, children construct knowledge by engaging in hands-on experiences and social interactions. Participant 2 agree with the constructivist by emphasising that play-based learning helps children learn mathematical concepts and problem-solving skills.

T2S2 “Play is good for a child’s brain because the child will learn mathematics while they are playing with others.”

Vygotsky posits that cognitive development is a progression that is aided by social interaction and cultural tools, such as language. Play facilitates children's involvement in problem-solving, critical thinking, and the enhancement of reasoning abilities, all of which are essential for cognitive development. The Preparatory Mathematics lesson plan

incorporates cognitive development by engaging students in activities such as rhythmical counting, problem-solving, and sorting. These activities enhance logical reasoning and the ability to differentiate by touch, which aligns with Vygotsky's concept of cognitive development through guided interactions. While Participant 5's classroom effectively utilises interactive methods, other classrooms predominantly rely on traditional activities that are less engaging, thus restricting the potential for cognitive development through play.

4.4 THEME 2: REDUCES ABSENTEEISM

Play-based learning creates immersive and pleasurable environments, thereby fostering children's motivation to consistently attend school. The data findings provide evidence that play-based learning decreases absenteeism. This is corroborated by research that suggests that when children perceive school as enjoyable and meaningful, they are more inclined to attend consistently and actively participate in educational endeavors (Cipriano & Strambler 2023).

4.4.1 SUB-THEME 1: PLAY-BASED LEARNING ENHANCES ATTENDANCE

Participant 1 and Participant 2 pointed out that by incorporating play-based learning into the curriculum, children attend school regularly rather than staying at home.

T1S1 *“Learners in my class are hardly absent unless it is due to health reasons.”*

T2S1 *“If you can truly use play in our teaching learners will not be absent from.”*

The lesson plans for Religious and Moral Education and Arts Education have shown that incorporating music, dramatisation, and collaboration can enhance the enjoyment of learning and potentially reduce absenteeism. Video observations of Participant 2 revealed that when a play-based approach is given priority, children exhibit higher daily attendance rates at school. Research indicates that when activities are successfully integrated, prioritising play increases the likelihood of regular student attendance. Nevertheless, in educational settings where play is reduced, the issue of absenteeism may persist as a cause for concern.

4.4.2 SUB-THEME 2: MOTIVATION THROUGH PLAY

Participants 3, 4, 5, and 2 outlined that when play-based learning is integrated into educational settings, children are motivated to attend school.

T3S2 *“It also encourages learners to come to school every day”.*

T4S2 *“Children would not want to miss out and will therefore be in school every day.”*

T5S3 *“Just like adults’ children also face many challenges, especially at home but because it is fun to be in school to play with other children are always present.”*

T6S3 *“Because we play in class, they would rather prefer to be here than at home.”*

Play-based learning not only facilitates the achievement of developmental milestones but also improves school attendance. The inherent satisfaction and delight obtained from engaging in play enhances the enjoyment of learning, thereby promoting regular attendance. The presence of universal enjoyment, self-expression, and freedom in play fosters a constructive and captivating learning atmosphere that consistently entices children to attend school. The lesson plans demonstrate the compelling influence of play, as they incorporate a range of captivating activities across different subjects. Evidence indicates that when play is employed skillfully, such as in the classroom of Participant 2, students exhibit higher levels of motivation and engagement. On the other hand, classrooms where teachers are in control of the activities, as seen in the settings of Participants 3 and 4, may face difficulties in motivating students through play, which could have an impact on student attendance.

4.5 THEME 3: PLAY IS FUN

The data strongly substantiates the notion that play is intrinsically pleasurable and gratifying for children, which is pivotal for their involvement and overall welfare.

4.5.1 SUB-THEME 1: UNIVERSAL ENJOYMENT AND SELF EXPRESSION

Participants 3 and 4 noted that play allows children to express themselves freely and realise their full potential.

T3S2 *“Children like to play because it is fun, they feel free to be who they are.”*

T4S2 *“Play is fun and enjoyable, play is when one can do whatever you want.”*

Activities like singing, dancing, and dramatising stories, as seen in the Arts and RME lesson plans, cater to children's need for self-expression and enjoyment. Observations of Participant 5's classroom, where such activities were prominent, confirm that these elements can make learning more enjoyable. However, the absence of such activities in other classrooms, as observed, suggests that not all students experience the fun of play-based learning.

4.5.2 SUB-THEME 2: INTRINSIC PLEASURE

Play provides intrinsic pleasure and a sense of freedom, as noted by Participant 2.

T2S1 *“When children are playing, they enjoy themselves.”*

4.5.3 SUB-THEME 3: FREEDOM IN PLAY

Play provides a sense of freedom, as noted by Participant 4.

T4S2 *“Play is fun and enjoyable, play is when one can do whatever you want.”*

The freedom and pleasure of play are emphasised in activities that allow children to move, create, and express themselves, as seen in the Physical Education and Arts lesson plans. While observations of classrooms like that of Participant 2 reflect this freedom, others, particularly those following more rigid, teacher-led structures, may limit opportunities for children to experience the intrinsic pleasure of play.

4.6 THEME 4: PLAY IS AMUSING

The theme of amusement and joy associated with play is evident in the classroom dynamics described by the teachers.

4.6.1 SUB-THEME 1: JOY AND EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING

Participants like Participant 1 and Participant 2 consistently observed that play is accompanied by laughter and happiness, which are indicators of emotional well-being.

T1S1 *“When children are playing, they like to laugh and have a lot of fun.”*

T2S1 *“When children are playing there is always a lot of laughter because there are happy.”*

The inherent allure of play lies in its ability to elicit happiness, amusement, and psychological welfare. An educational environment that encourages play cultivates satisfaction and a favourable emotional ambiance, which is crucial for a child's overall well-being and educational journey. This aligns with the definition of play provided by the Oxford Dictionary of English (2010), which states that play involves participating in an activity for enjoyment and recreation, rather than for a serious or practical objective. It also involves engaging in games or activities for amusement, as well as entertaining oneself through imagination. The lesson plans consistently emphasise the pleasure derived from engaging in play, particularly through activities such as singing, dramatisation, and free movement. The observations made in Participant 1's classroom, where children derived pleasure from the activities, provide evidence that play promotes emotional well-being. Nevertheless, in classrooms where play is not given as much importance, the emotional advantage may be reduced.

4.7 THEME 5: PLAY IS SELF-DIRECTED

The importance of self-directed play is reflected in the teachers' observations, where children are given the autonomy to explore and learn at their own pace.

4.7.1 SUB-THEME 1: AUTONOMY AND FLEXIBLE RULE-MAKING

Participants 2 and 4 highlighted that play allows children to make their own decisions and create flexible rules, allowing children to explore and learn independently within a prepared environment.

T2S1 *“Children are free to do what they like when they are playing. They have rules while they play but their rules always change to fit them.”*

T4S2 *“When children play they are free to do whatever they like.”*

The activities included in the lesson plans, such as role-playing family members or engaging in art, are specifically designed to promote autonomy. This concept is reinforced by Aronstam and Braund (2016), who define play as a collection of activities that enable children to independently explore and discover their immediate surroundings. Video observations of Participant 2's classroom, in which children were given the autonomy to investigate, corroborate this assertion. Play in these scenarios is predominantly child-led, with a wide range of possible results (Daniels & Pyle, 2018). These activities are widely considered enjoyable, spontaneous, satisfying, and motivated by internal factors. However, in other classrooms, specifically those facilitated by Participants 3 and 4, the dominance of the teacher and the presence of structured activities restrict the chances for self-directed play.

4.7.2 SUB-THEME 2: PERSISTENCE AND RESILIENCE

Participant 3 noted that children frequently continue engaging in activities they find enjoyable, even in the presence of obstacles. The ability to persist is vital for cultivating resilience and honing problem-solving abilities, both of which are indispensable for continuous learning throughout one's life.

T3S2 *“Sometimes they would continue trying at something they fail until they get it right.”*

Play autonomy enables children to independently explore their personal preferences, establish adaptable rules, and engage in self-directed exploration. This liberty not only fosters tenacity and fortitude but also strengthens individual pleasure and self-assertion, which are crucial for a child's feeling of control and selfhood. Lindhahl and Folkesson (2012) classify play as informal when children participate in activities, they choose themselves, and as formal when it is organised and guided by teachers (Nikolopoulou & Gialamas, 2015). The lesson plans prioritise activities that necessitate problem-solving and creativity, such as sculpting family members or arranging family pictures in a specific order. These activities have the potential to cultivate persistence and resilience. Nevertheless, the prevalent use of worksheets and less interactive activities in certain classrooms could potentially hinder the cultivation of these attributes.

4.8 THEME 6: PLAY CREATES NOISY CLASSROOMS

While play has many benefits, the data also highlights the challenges it poses, particularly to noise and classroom management.

4.8.1 SUB-THEME 1: MANAGEMENT’S DISAPPROVAL

Teachers such as Participant 1 and Participant 2 have voiced concerns about the disapproval they receive from school management and colleagues regarding the noise created during play activities. This highlights the conflict between conventional, calm classroom settings and the lively, frequently noisy nature of learning through play.

T1S1 “Our school management does not understand us, when they come into our classrooms, they do not want to hear noise and even sometimes our colleagues would complain that we are making noise”

T2S1 “It is not really easy implementing this plaything, because our H.O.D and principals would reprimand us that we are making noise and learners should sit quietly”.

The interview data demonstrates the difficulty of striking a balance between engaging in playful activities and maintaining a quiet classroom, despite the numerous advantages of play. Pre-primary teachers face mounting pressure, which may cause them to prioritise academic subjects over play-based approaches, which are sometimes seen as less valuable and time-consuming (Marlew et al., 2011). They often receive directives from school administrators to uphold a serene and uninterrupted learning atmosphere, which dissuades the utilisation of play-oriented methods. Moreover, it is typical for these educators to face pressure from grade one teachers to teach these students in a structured manner, to adequately equip them for the requirements of grade 1. This problem arises because of the lack of recognition and misunderstandings about the importance of play in facilitating the learning process. Doubert et al. (2018) agree with the idea that the amount of time

dedicated to play is decreasing, while the importance placed on academic requirements and the development of information and communication technology (ICT) skills is increasing. There is an urgent requirement to educate upper-grade educators about the importance of play and the reasoning behind Vygotsky's claim that it is a fundamental tool for learning and development in the early years. The video recordings of Participants 1, 3, and 4's classrooms, where noise was a matter of concern, clearly demonstrate this state of tension. The lesson plans, which consist of dynamic and potentially disruptive activities, may worsen this difficulty, especially in settings where administration emphasises silence and organisation.

4.8.2 SUB-THEME 2: TEACHER HESITATION TO USE PLAY

Participant 3's observation of the potential for chaos and disruption during play can cause teachers to be reluctant in fully adopting play-based learning. This challenge highlights the necessity of professional development to assist teachers in effectively managing play in a manner that achieves a balance between student engagement and classroom discipline. Bawani & Mphahlele (2021) concur that teacher training is paramount in promoting effective instruction and knowledge acquisition across diverse curricula.

T3S2 "Sometimes play can cause chaos in the classroom because learners get too excited and then they start shouting and screaming and laughing but when the school management hears this you are reprimanded".

The observations revealed that teachers were cautious about fully incorporating play-based learning into their teaching practices, as Participant 3 had previously noted the potential for playful activities to become disruptive during play. This could be attributed

to participants' apprehension regarding noise levels and classroom management, which may arise from the dynamic and interactive activities specified in the lesson plans.

4.9 THEME 7: TEACHER DOMINANCE

The theme of teacher dominance, characterised by teachers taking the lead in activities with minimal involvement from the children, contradicts the principles of play-based learning, which prioritise child-centered approaches.

4.9.1 SUB-THEME 1 TEACHER-CENTERED APPROACH

The data indicated that in areas such as language development and environmental learning, teachers frequently took charge of the activities with limited participation from the children. This aligns with the findings of Nicolopoulou et al. (2009), who argued that teachers have a significant influence on the activities, leading to restricted chances for spontaneous involvement and inadequate inclusion of the child. This approach is in opposition to the constructivist theory, which supports active, student-centered learning where children acquire knowledge through exploration and interaction, as stated by Baker (2014). Therefore, in the zone of proximal development, a child's language development is enhanced by working together with peers or adults. To achieve the zone of proximal development, educators must have a thorough comprehension of their role within a play-based educational framework. The teacher-child relationship in a play-based learning environment is characterised by interdependence and mutual reinforcement (Hyvonen, 2011). When educators take over play or the play process, it is noticed that children show decreased levels of involvement and disengagement from the educational experience. The lesson plans demonstrate a combination of activities that are led by the teacher and

activities that are centered on the child. Nevertheless, video observations indicate that in reality, teacher authority frequently eclipses chances for student-centered learning. This is especially apparent in classrooms such as those of Participants 3 and 4, where the organised nature of the lessons restricts the chances for children to assume control.

4.9.2 SUB-THEME 2: NEED FOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

These findings indicate that teachers would benefit from professional development to shift from a teacher-centered approach to a more child-centered approach, where play is utilised as a means of facilitating learning and exploration. Vygotsky's main emphasis was on the process of constructing knowledge within a socio-cultural framework, where learners' acquisition of knowledge is influenced by the presence of knowledgeable peers or adults (Ogunnaike, 2015). The necessity for professional development to transition from teacher-centered to child-centered approaches is apparent. Teachers must have a strong academic background to successfully implement a play-based curriculum and understand their duties in this context (Bianca, 2020). Teachers must strategically plan and supervise play and activities that are based on play (Ntshangase et al., 2022). The lesson plans, comprising both prescriptive and participatory activities, emphasise the potential for more equitable methodologies. Observations of Participant 2's classroom, where play was successfully incorporated, indicate that teachers could enhance their implementation of play-based learning through appropriate training. Nevertheless, it is crucial to acknowledge that the beliefs held by teachers significantly influence how they carry out a play-based curriculum and the behaviours they exhibit in these environments (Sandberg & Heden, 2011).

4.10 THEME 8: LITTLE USE OF OUTDOOR ENVIRONMENTS

The limited use of outdoor environments, as highlighted by the teachers, presents a significant challenge to implementing a holistic play-based pedagogy.

4.10.1 SUB-THEME 1: IMPACT OF COVID-19

Teachers, such as Participants 1 and 6, observed that the COVID-19 pandemic greatly limited the chances for outdoor play. This constraint is worrisome, as outdoor play is essential for physical growth, imagination, and social engagement, as substantiated by research in the field of early childhood education.

T1S1 *“I love the idea of children playing, but currently because of COVID we have to just let learners sit and maintain social distancing.”*

T6S3 *“. Currently because of COVID we are also not using the playground.”*

As a result of COVID-19 social distancing measures, educators have banned students from physically manipulating objects as can be seen in the video recordings. The effects of COVID-19 restrictions can be seen in nearly all lessons. Amidst a pandemic, it is imperative to retain play as an integral part of education, as it plays a crucial role in facilitating development, learning, and aiding children in managing the stress associated with pandemics (O’Keeffe & McNally, 2021; Kourti et al., 2021). The lesson plans indicate the inclusion of playful activities to some extent. However, these activities are insufficient, and outdoor environments are rarely used as observed in the video recording. Play is frequently restricted to classroom settings where teachers exercise authority over the activities and learners seldom interact with each other, leading to restricted chances

for spontaneous involvement and inadequate inclusion of the child (Nicolopoulou et al., 2009).

4.10.2 SUB-THEME 2: SCHOOL POLICIES AND SPACE CONSTRAINTS

The absence of playground amenities and restrictive school regulations further impede the utilisation of outdoor spaces. This challenge is worsened by the limitations of classroom space, which restrict the possibilities for physical activity and recreation, both of which are crucial elements of a play-based curriculum.

T3S2 “We are not allowed to be outside the school management does not allow it. It will also be good if our school could get a playground that we could utilise”

T6S3 “Our management does not allow us to take the learners outside unless it is break time. Currently, because of COVID we are also not using the playground.”

The limited utilisation of outdoor spaces, as indicated in the interview data and verified through observations, highlights the necessity for more adaptable policies and improved utilisation of the existing areas. Nzala (2020) affirms even though outdoor environments are accessible, participants do not fully take advantage of these spaces to improve the effectiveness of play-based education. The lesson plans, although they contain a lot of information, could be improved by including more outdoor activities, particularly for subjects like Physical Education, where movement and space are crucial. A study conducted by Nilsen (2021) revealed that restricted availability of play materials in educational environments has a significant effect on children's ability to engage in play.

This limitation often leads to a reliance on pen and paper-based activities. Play materials have a strong connection to children's acquisition of knowledge, growth, curiosity-driven behaviour, ability to act independently, and self-regulation in children (Ekeh & Venketsamy, 2020). The pedagogical intentions of teachers are of paramount importance in the planning of instructional practice. Therefore, when educators recognise the educational capacity of physical play structures and equipment in terms of children's learning and development, they are motivated to create and support environments that promote the playful exploration of objects by children.

4.11 CONCLUSION

Ultimately, Vygotsky's sociocultural theory offers a valuable framework for comprehending the significance of social interaction and cultural context in the process of child development. Despite the difficulties it presents, play-based learning continues to be a vital component in promoting the comprehensive growth of children and improving their educational encounters.

The discipline of Early Childhood Education and Development (ECED) acknowledges play as a profoundly efficient pedagogical methodology. The lack of a universally accepted definition of play-based learning presents difficulties in implementing a coherent theoretical framework. Nevertheless, Vygotsky's theory of social-cultural constructivism provides a strong basis for comprehending the developmental advantages of play. The ZPD, a key concept in Vygotsky's theory, emphasises the importance of play-based learning. According to this concept, children can reach their maximum potential when they are involved in the guided play. By engaging in carefully planned activities

created by educators, children can explore tasks that challenge their existing abilities, fostering comprehensive development.

Although the study's findings strongly support the advantages of play, its limitations arise from its dependence on teacher perceptions, which could potentially introduce bias. Furthermore, Vygotsky's framework, although extensive, relies on the educator's role in directing play within the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). If play is not appropriately organised or directed, its developmental advantages may not be completely achieved. The study's narrow focus on a particular cultural context also restricts the applicability of the findings, as Vygotsky's theories highlight the significance of cultural and social contexts in the process of learning.

The results indicate that incorporating play into early childhood education is crucial for promoting comprehensive development. Teachers should create play-based educational activities that are inclusive and culturally sensitive, guaranteeing that all children can take advantage of the developmental benefits that play provides. It is recommended to prioritise guided play, as suggested by Vygotsky, to optimise learning outcomes within children's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). This methodology enables educators to provide structured support to children's learning, ensuring they receive the appropriate assistance to reach higher levels of comprehension and proficiency.

A consolidation of lesson plans, interview data, and classroom observations provides a comprehensive depiction of the present condition of play-based learning in early childhood education. The lesson plans are effectively designed to foster comprehensive development, but their execution is frequently hindered by teacher-centric methods,

constrictive settings, and external constraints. To more effectively adhere to the principles of Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, it is crucial to tackle these challenges through professional development, policy modifications, and an increased focus on adaptable, student-centered learning environments. Implementing this approach will not only optimise the efficacy of play-based learning but also guarantee the holistic and harmonious development of all facets of a child's growth.

The data emphasises the diverse advantages of play in the development of young children, confirming the belief that play is essential for fostering individuals with a wide range of skills and abilities. Vygotsky's theoretical framework, specifically the notion of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), offers a valuable perspective for comprehending these advantages. By acknowledging and considering the constraints of the study and integrating the perspectives of Vygotsky, educators can enhance their approach to play-based learning, guaranteeing that it adequately promotes the comprehensive development of all children.

CHAPTER 5: SUMMARY, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

5.1 SUMMARY

This study aimed to answer the following questions:

1. What is the level of understanding and knowledge among teachers in the Khomas region of Namibia regarding the benefits associated with the implementation of play-based pedagogy in pre-primary classrooms?
2. To what degree did the perspectives of teachers impact their implementation of play-based pedagogy in pre-primary classrooms within the Khomas region?

The present study revealed that educators held the perception that play is crucial for the developmental progress of children, a viewpoint that aligns with the findings of various prior research endeavors. These studies have demonstrated that environments that promote play, helps in fostering holistic development in educational settings, emphasizing its significance in motor skill enhancement, language acquisition, emotional and social growth, and cognitive development. Through an examination of the interplay between play-based learning and student engagement, the research highlights how play can reduce absenteeism by making learning enjoyable and intrinsically motivating. By integrating play-based learning into curricula, educators can create engaging, motivating experiences that not only enhance attendance but also foster a love of learning.

Notably, the study supports that play is not just a pedagogical strategy it is a developmental necessity and a fundamental right, as outlined in Article 31 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Denying children opportunities for play

due to firm instructional models, policy constraints, or pandemic-related restrictions limits their right to learn and grow in a developmentally appropriate way (NAEYC, 2020). Play must be repositioned as central to the early education experience.

The findings of this research supported by theories of holistic development. Vygotsky's sociocultural theory and the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) were especially relevant. Observations revealed that teachers frequently acted as facilitators scaffolding children's learning by posing open-ended questions. However, data also revealed that there was no peer collaboration lacking the element of social learning. The sociocultural theory states that learning does not happen in isolation it is embedded in social interactions and context (Vygotsky, 1978).

The research also echoes with other developmental frameworks. According to Bronfenbrenner (1979) ecological systems theory stresses how school policies, leadership attitudes, and access to play spaces shape the quality of learning environments. Piaget's (1952) constructivist theory affirms the importance of hands-on, exploratory play in cognitive development, while Gardner's (1983) theory of multiple intelligences supports the idea that play allows for the expression of various learning styles . Collectively, these frameworks reinforce the study's conclusion that play is not only developmentally appropriate but developmentally essential.

Therefore, the teachers must ascertain their role within a play-based learning environment to effectively implement a successful play-based curriculum. According to Bianca (2020), teachers must possess a robust academic foundation to effectively implement a play-based curriculum and comprehend their responsibilities within this context. Educators are

required to strategically design and oversee play-based activities (Ntshangase et al., 2022). However, it is important to recognise that teachers' beliefs have an impact on their implementation of a play-based curriculum and their actions within these settings (Sandberg & Heden, 2011). Vygotsky's primary focus was on the process of knowledge construction within a socio-cultural framework, wherein learners' acquisition of knowledge is influenced by the presence of knowledgeable peers or adults (Ogunnaike, 2015).

According to Pyles and Daniels (2017), teachers' personal beliefs about what constitutes "real learning" extremely influence how confidently and competently they implement play-based pedagogies. If a teacher believes that formal instruction such as rote learning, worksheets and quiet classrooms are superior to play-based activities, they are less likely to plan or implement such activities effectively regardless of curriculum mandates. Wenner & Campbell (2017) states that this directly impacts teacher's belief in their own ability to foster learning and achieve desired student outcomes. When teachers doubt the legitimacy of play-based learning, they are unlikely to feel capable or motivated to use it meaningfully (Pyle & Daniels, 2017). Therefore, beliefs act as both enablers and barriers to teacher efficacy in play-based classroom.

The study points out that teachers have limited exposure to play-based training, especially at the pre-service level. Without strong theoretical grounding and practical modeling, teachers may not develop the beliefs and confidence needed to view play as an appropriate instructional strategy Pendergast & Exley (2018). Professional development should be continuous, contextualized which includes collaborative reflection and encourages

experiential learning, it can positively reshape teachers' beliefs. This will lead to greater self-efficacy in implementing play-based strategies, adapting lessons to meet developmental needs and increased flexibility in managing classroom challenges using play-based tools (Pyles & Daniels, 2017).

The thesis addresses challenges such as the noisy classroom environment that often accompanies playful activities, leading to management's disapproval and teachers' hesitance to embrace play-based methods. It critiques traditional teacher-centered approaches and advocates for professional development that empowers educators to facilitate rather than dominate the learning process.

The school environment also plays an important role in reinforcing or challenging teacher beliefs. In rigid, academic-focused, or management-driven settings, teachers who might otherwise embrace play-based approaches may suppress their beliefs due to institutional pressure (Hitlock, Eivers & Walker, 2023). On the other hand, supportive environments where school leaders value developmental pedagogy, encourage collaboration, and provide resources can strengthen teacher efficacy by validating their professional judgment and promoting experimentation with play-based methods (Hitlock, Eivers & Walker, 2023). Teacher efficacy in play-based learning stems not just from individual belief, but from the intersection of belief, training, and setting.

The research acknowledges the limitations imposed by school policies, outdoor environments and COVID-19. Educators have prohibited students from engaging in the manipulation of physical objects to adhere to social distancing regulations (Kourti et al., 2021). Play materials are closely associated with children's learning, development,

exploratory behavior, independent actions, and self-governance in children (Ekeh & Venketsamy, 2020). Despite the availability of outdoor environments, participants do not fully utilise these spaces to enhance the effectiveness of play-based education (Nzala, 2020). The correlation between play-based learning of high quality and the physical environment, as well as the accessibility of play materials, has been established (Nilsen, 2021) Play cannot be removed from education during a pandemic further reducing outdoor learning opportunities as this serves as a means of development, and learning, and helps children to cope with the stress of pandemics (O’Keeffe & McNally, 2021).

5.2 RECOMMENDATIONS

This research highlights significant challenges, including the stigma associated with noise in classrooms, the dominance of traditional teacher-centered approaches, and the constraints imposed by physical space and school policies. Addressing these issues is essential for cultivating an educational atmosphere that fully embraces the benefits of play. Professional development for teachers is crucial, equipping them with the skills and confidence to facilitate play in ways that support learning while maintaining classroom management.

Furthermore, the need to revitalize outdoor play in light of the restrictions posed by the COVID-19 pandemic is paramount. Advocating for policies that prioritize outdoor spaces will not only enhance the play experience but also promote physical and emotional well-being.

Ultimately, this thesis advocates for a transformative approach to education that recognizes play as a powerful tool for holistic development. By fostering a playful,

inclusive, and engaging learning environment, we can empower children to thrive both academically and personally, laying the groundwork for lifelong learning and well-being.

The study therefore suggests the following recommendations.

5.2.1 RECOMMENDATION FOR DEFINING PLAY-BASED PEDAGOGY IN THE NAMIBIAN CONTEXT

There seems to be a confusion between the phrases “play and play-based. Many refer to it as one and the same thing however it should be noted that there is a thin line between the two. Hence the researcher would recommend that as a nation we go back to the drawing board and clearly define the two terminologies in a Namibian context rather than applying the European and American definitions. We should clearly not discard the fact that play and play -based is influenced by the cultural context of the country.

Namibia's rich cultural diversity offers a wealth of untapped potential for developing play-based learning and resources that resonate with children's everyday lives. For instance, materials such as traditional games, folklore, music, and locally sourced objects can serve as powerful learning tools that promote cultural identity, storytelling, and creativity, while still supporting cognitive and emotional development. Cultural norms and values profoundly shape how play is understood, encouraged, and interpreted.

If educational strategies fail to acknowledge these cultural dimensions, they risk being seen as irrelevant in a play-based setting. Therefore, there is a need to move away from adoption of Western definitions and applications of play-based learning. To support this, conduct community consultations, design and produce local learning materials, include culturally grounded play practices in teacher training programs, encourage multilingual

play activities and promote inclusive play strategies that reflect the values of respect, cooperation, and shared responsibility, which are deeply embedded in many Namibian cultures.

5.2.2 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE GOVERNMENT

The study can also be extended to those who make policies in order to address the gaps and challenges faced by the teachers in implementing developmentally appropriate pedagogies. This will aid them to see that those entrusted to implement the play-based pedagogy do not fully comprehend it and that they face multiple challenges, therefore they need continuous support.

Therefore, the government should take active steps to bridge the gap between policy and practice by offering structured, ongoing support to educators tasked with implementing play-based learning strategies. Higher education institutions together with the government should ensure that teacher education programs integrate comprehensive modules on play-based learning. Continuous professional development workshops should be offered to equip in-service teachers with practical tools, updated knowledge, and confidence to facilitate play-based instruction effectively. The government can support the development and distribution of culturally relevant play materials and curriculum guides that align with Namibian values, languages, and lived realities. Existing learner assessment and evaluation practices should continuously be reviewed to ensure they do not undermine play-based strategies. Replace or supplement formalized testing models with developmentally appropriate, formative assessments that value observation, portfolios, and demonstration of skills through play. Invest in the

development of inclusive, safe, and stimulating play spaces both indoors and outdoors. Encourage principals and school management teams to act as instructional leaders who value and support play-based learning. This could include leadership training that helps school management understand the purpose and practicalities of play-based pedagogy and how to monitor its implementation without defaulting to rigid control. Launch public awareness campaigns and parent education initiatives to shift perceptions around play as non-academic. Establish mechanisms for ongoing consultation with teachers, allowing them to share challenges, suggest improvements, and contribute to policy refinement.

By taking these steps, the government can help close the gap between curriculum intentions and classroom realities, enabling teachers to fully embrace play-based learning as a tool for holistic child development.

5.2.3 RECOMMENDATION REGARDING THE CHALLENGES OF IMPLEMENTING A PLAY-BASED PEDAGOGY IN NAMIBIA

COVID 19 pandemic revealed that implementing play-based learning in a Namibian school setting proved to be challenging. Play-based learning was not implemented as classroom became more formal in order to avoid infections. Therefore there is a need to carry out research on how play-based learning can still be implemented in the midst of pandemics.

Another important area of research that can be carried out is what role the outdoor environment has in play-based learning environment seeing that these environments is not existing as some schools and the schools that do have these facilities available do not

make use of it in a productive manner, instead it is used simply for play (for the purpose of amusement and fun).

The researcher strongly recommends that the government, curriculum developers, and teacher training institutions provide clearer curriculum guidance on how play can be effectively integrated with formal learning outcomes. These bodies need to emphasize that play is not an interruption to learning but a valid and effective method for achieving educational and developmental goals. Hence the need to include structured training on outdoor pedagogy and investment in basic outdoor infrastructure. By addressing these gaps in curriculum design, infrastructure, and emergency preparedness, Namibia can strengthen its education system's capacity to deliver play-based learning under all circumstances.

5.2.4 RECOMMENDATION ON THE IMPLICATIONS OF TEACHER TRAINING FOR THE EFFECTIVE DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION OF PLAY-BASED LESSON PLANS

Play-based is a relatively new terminology that was introduced in the country a decade ago it is important to carry out research at institutions where education is offered to understand the extend of play-based instructions and theoretical understanding of lecturers and how this have an impact on the teacher and her role of planning an effective play-based lesson plan and implementing such lessons.

Therefore, it is recommended that research be undertaken at higher institutions offering teacher education to examine the extent to which play-based pedagogy is being incorporated into coursework, teaching methodology, and practicum experiences. Theoretical understanding of lecturers and how their interpretations of play-based

education influence the pedagogical perspectives and planning abilities of student teachers should be assessed.

To bridge the disconnect between teacher education and real-world classroom demands, Institutions should ensure that child development and play-based pedagogy are core components of early childhood and pre-primary. Coursework must include practical training in play-based lesson planning, linking theory to real-world application through hands-on activities, microteaching, and reflective assessments.

The Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture, in collaboration with teacher training institutions, should provide ongoing, structured CPD workshops focused on planning, facilitating, and assessing play-based learning.

Newly qualified and in-service teachers should be supported through mentorship programs, where experienced educators or play-based specialists guide and model best practices. Schools can also establish professional learning communities (PLCs) that encourage peer collaboration, team planning, and co-teaching of play-based lessons.

Teachers must be equipped with tools and frameworks for ongoing self-reflection into their play-based practices. Reflective journals, lesson debriefs, and classroom observation feedback can help teachers identify what works, what needs improvement, and how to continuously evolve their instructional methods.

School management must be trained to understand what quality play-based teaching looks like, so they can offer constructive feedback instead of enforcing rigid compliance with formal teaching norms.

By prioritizing the empowerment of teachers through continuous learning, mentorship, and reflection, we can ensure that play-based education is not only understood theoretically but also endorsed effectively in everyday classroom practice. Such investment in teacher capacity is foundational to fostering a generation of educators who can plan and implement lessons that are pedagogically sound and developmentally and culturally responsive

5.3 SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This qualitative case study, focused on understanding teachers' perceptions and application of play-based pedagogy within a limited school setting. While it provided rich, in-depth insights, it also presented certain methodological limitations that must be acknowledged and addressed in future research.

The current study involved a small sample based in Windhoek, it is recommended that future research be amplified to include a larger and more diverse cohort of teachers, encompassing schools across all fourteen regions of Namibia. A broader geographic spread would help identify regional discrepancies in the implementation of play-based learning and reveal how contextual factors such as infrastructure, resource availability, and cultural interpretations influence pedagogical practices.

While the study focused primarily on teachers, future research should incorporate the voices of other key stakeholders, particularly parents or guardians, who play a critical role in shaping children's learning experiences. Understanding their perceptions of play and their support for play-based practices could offer valuable insights into how to strengthen parental involvement.

Additionally, future studies should engage school management teams, including principals and heads of departments (HODs), to explore their understanding of play-based pedagogy and their role in policy interpretation, school-wide implementation, and teacher support. These perspectives are vital in shaping a whole-school approach to developmentally appropriate education.

The small sample size limits generalizability. Participants were drawn from a specific context, which may not represent the diversity of experiences across the country. Data from classroom observation, provide potential for the Hawthorne effect, where teachers modify their behavior due to the presence of the researcher. Interview responses may be influenced by social desirability bias, with participants presenting their practices in a more favorable light than reality.

To address these limitations, future studies should consider using triangulated data sources (e.g. document analysis, learner assessments, parental feedback) and blinded observation methods where feasible, to enhance validity and reliability.

To better understand the sustained impact of play-based learning, future studies should adopt longitudinal research designs. These would track the long-term developmental and academic outcomes of learners exposed to play-based environments, as well as changes in teacher attitudes and practices over time.

Moreover, intervention-based research is recommended to assess the impact of targeted teacher training programs or professional development initiatives focused on play-based pedagogy. Such studies could examine how structured support influences lesson

planning, classroom implementation, and learner engagement, providing actionable evidence to inform teacher education policy and practice.

5.4 CONCLUSION

To conclude, play is not merely a leisure activity; rather, it is a vital mechanism through which children develop holistically. The discovery of play-based learning reducing absenteeism further require investigation and emphasizes the need for engaging educational practices that resonate with students' intrinsic motivations.

Moreover, the challenges such as teacher hesitance towards noise, traditional teaching methodologies, and limited access to outdoor play serve as critical barriers that must be addressed. By advocating for professional development and systemic changes in educational policies, this research lays the groundwork for a transformative approach that prioritizes play as a fundamental aspect of learning.

As we move forward, it is essential to continue exploring the dynamics of play-based pedagogy in education, particularly in light of the evolving educational landscape post-pandemic. The insights gathered from this study not only contribute to our understanding of child development but also call for a collective commitment to creating playful, inclusive, and enriching learning environments that support every child's growth and well-being. Future research will be pivotal in further elucidating the multifaceted benefits of play, paving the way for innovative practices that empower educators and enhance the learning experience for all students.

Finally, this research advocates for a transformative educational approach that upholds play as both a right and a foundational method for learning. Addressing institutional and policy barriers, enhancing teacher training, revitalizing outdoor spaces, and reframing perceptions of play are all essential steps toward embedding play not only into the curriculum, but into the core philosophy of early childhood education.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: ETHICAL CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE FROM UNAM



ETHICAL CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE

Ethical Clearance Reference Number: FOE /541/2019 Date: 22 November, 2019

This Ethical Clearance Certificate is issued by the University of Namibia Research Ethics Committee (UREC) in accordance with the University of Namibia's Research Ethics Policy and Guidelines. Ethical approval is given in respect of undertakings contained in the Research Project outlined below. This Certificate is issued on the recommendations of the ethical evaluation done by the Faculty/ Centre/ Campus Research & Publications Committee sitting with the Postgraduate Studies Committee.

Title of Project: Teachers' Perspectives Regarding Play Based Approach To Teaching In Pre-Primary Schools In The Khomas Region

Researcher: HEDWIG KAVETO

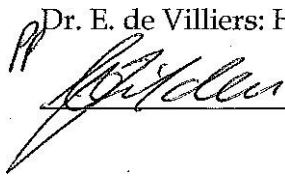
Student Number: 200947435

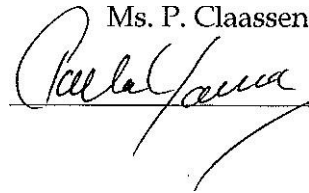
Supervisor(s): Prof C. Wilders (Main) Ms Marika Matengu (Co)

Take note of the following:

- (a) Any significant changes in the conditions or undertakings outlined in the approved Proposal must be communicated to the UREC. An application to make amendments may be necessary.
- (b) Any breaches of ethical undertakings or practices that have an impact on ethical conduct of the research must be reported to the UREC.
- (c) The Principal Researcher must report issues of ethical compliance to the UREC (through the Chairperson of the Faculty/ Centre/ Campus Research & Publications Committee) at the end of the Project or as may be requested by UREC.
- (d) The UREC retains the right to:
 - (i) Withdraw or amend this Ethical Clearance if any unethical practices (as outlined in the Research Ethics Policy) have been detected or suspected,

- (ii) Request for an ethical compliance report at any point during the course of the research.

Dr. E. de Villiers: HREC Chairperson

Chairperson

Ms. P. Claassen: HREC Secretary

Secretary

UREC wishes you the best in your research.

APPENDIX 2: PERMISSION LETTER FROM UNAM



CENTRE FOR POSTGRADUATE STUDIES

University of Namibia, Private Bag 13301 , Windhoek, Namibia
340 Mandume Ndemufayo Avenue, Pioneers Park UNAM a +264 206 3275/4662; Fax
+264 61 206 3290; URL: <http://www.unam.edu.na>

UNIVERSITY OF NAM Iam

RESEARCH PERMISSION LETTER .

Student Name Hedwig Nando Kaveto

Student number 200947435

Programme Master of Education by Thesis (Early Childhood Education)

Approved research title Teacher's perspectives regarding play-based approach to teaching and learning in pre-primary classrooms: a case study in the Khomas Region

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

I hereby confirm that the above mentioned student is registered at the University of Namibia for the programme indicated. The proposed study met all the requirements as stipulated in the University guidelines and has been approved by the relevant committees.

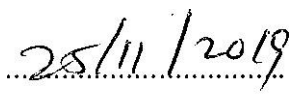
The proposal adheres to ethical principles as per attached Ethical Clearance Certificate. Permission is hereby granted to carry out the research as described in the approved proposal.

Best Regards


Prof. M. Healdimbi

Director: Centre for Postgraduate Studies

Tel: +264 61 2063275


Date

E-mail:directorpgs@unam.na

APPENDIX 3: ANECDOTAL NOTES

38 learners

Teacher B:

Teacher B, is very optimistic and sings and dances along with her learners. It was noteworthy to observe that although the teacher still observed the COVID 19 regulation of no physical contact and social distancing, she managed to incorporate play base activities such as learner counting through playing (jumping, clapping and turning around). The teacher was active that she would participate in every activity the learners were doing. ~~The teacher~~ When the teacher reads a story, she sits down on a chair the same size as the learners. The teacher communicated or interacted with the learners while reading the story. It is clear that learners are included in the lessons. Throughout every lesson the teacher incorporated play. It was clear to note that the teacher understood learning through play. For the morning session, the learners did not do any pen and paper activity. However every activity was done through play. Again it was noted that the outdoor environment was not utilise whether it be the playground or just the environment itself. Although learners were given an activity it was an interactive activity. Due to COVID 19, the ~~teacher~~ ^{participant} has the role of a teacher and seldom a facilitator. The teacher uses the teacher centred approach instead of the learner centred approach.

Although the teacher allows the learners to talk from time to time, most of the time they are just sitting quietly. There is no activities done through play to teach phonics. It is mainly a drilling process. Language development is taught together with environmental studies and this is mainly taught by the teacher talking most of the time and learners take on the passive role of listening.

2 worksheets given to ^{Math} Enrico

Teacher C+D

The teacher share a classroom, they do a lesson together in English and then in the mother tongues which is ^{eshiyonga & Rukwaga}. Teacher led activities are dominant, The teacher stands in front of the class and transfer knowledge to the learners. The learners sit at the desks and like in previous classrooms paper and pen activities were more dominant. The teacher read the story from the teacher manual, she explained that the reason for doing so was that she did not receive the lesson plan for R.M.E. One could note that learners were bored and distracted as the ~~teacher~~ ^{teacher} read the story. Learners were playing with their colour pencils while others were writing or simply talking to one another. One could notice few activities of play, such as writing numbers in the air, table etc. or clapping and snapping fingers while counting. When learners do this it is evident that they all participate. The classroom was quite overcrowded and learning corners were not evident. One could notice that when learners were given activities (worksheet) the teacher set next to those struggling and would provide support to the learners. It was the first day number 3 was introduced, however learners were already forced to practice the number on paper. After break learners sat idle for 30 minutes while teachers were busy with administrative work. learners were singing ~~for~~ From time to time while teachers were occupied.

After break there was no teaching taking place. The teachers were busy with assessment activities (pen and paper) in workbook because the teacher have to submit marks to the H.O.D. Teacher D continue to shout at learners and learners were crying.

APPENDIX 4: INTERVIEW GUIDE

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE GUIDE

1. How many years have you been teaching pre-primary?
2. Do you have a pre-primary qualification?
3. Have you received any kind of training from your employer to teach pre-primary?
4. How does the training you received help you in your daily teaching practices?
5. Base on the pre-primary government policy, it states that delivery of pre-primary should be done through play, what are your views based on the above-mentioned statement?
6. How would you define play- based pedagogy?
7. What role does a teacher have in a play-based classroom?
8. What are some of the advantages and disadvantages of teaching through play on academic performances and development of a child?
9. What is kind of activities do you consider as playful activities that you incorporate in your teaching?

Participant 5 & 6

Subject RME Theme My family Topic Social and Emotional Development Week 1

LEARNING OBJECTIVE Children will learn to accept others and be accepted in group situation and sensitive to the feeling of others

MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
INTRODUCTION	INTRODUCTION	INTRODUCTION	INTRODUCTION	INTRODUCTION
Sing song Mine, mine, mine	Sing song, alive, alive	Sing song Mine, mine, mine	Sing song, alive, alive	Sing song, alive, alive
TEACHERS' ACTIVITY	TEACHERS' ACTIVITY	TEACHERS' ACTIVITY	TEACHERS' ACTIVITY	TEACHERS' ACTIVITY
Tell the story of Wedding in Canna	Retell the story	Discuss relationships, respect and acceptance in the family	Sing song and ask learners to dramatize stories	Give learners a worksheet and ask them to trace and mosaic the picture
LEARNERS' ACTIVITY	LEARNERS' ACTIVITY	LEARNERS' ACTIVITY	LEARNERS' ACTIVITY	LEARNERS' ACTIVITY
Listen	Listen	Participate in the discussion	Sing song and dramatize stories	Trace on dotted line and complete a picture of the stone pots; make mosaic
ASSESSMENT	ASSESSMENT	ASSESSMENT	ASSESSMENT	ASSESSMENT
Ability to listen	Ability to listen	Ability to discuss	Ability to dramatize	Ability to trace on dotted line and mosaic a picture

APPENDIX 5: LESSON PLANS

**APEPENDIX 6: PERMISSION LETTER FROM MINISTRY OF EDUCATION,
ART AND CULTURE**



REPUBLIC OF NAMIBIA

MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, ARTS AND CULTURE

Tel: +264 61 -2933202
Fax: +264 61- 2933922
Enquiries: G. Munene
Email: gm12munene@yahoo.co.uk
File no: 13/2/9/1

Luther Street, Govt. Office Park
Private Bag 13186
Windhoek
Namibia

Ms Hedwig Nando Kaveto

P O Box 4201

Windhoek

Email: hedwigkaveto@gmail.com

Cell. No. 081 3683 535

Dear Ms Kaveto,

**SUBJECT: PERMISSION LETTER TO CONDUCT RESEARCH TO SCHOOLS IN
KHOMAS REGION**

The Ministry wishes to acknowledge receipt of your email seeking permission to conduct a developmental research at schools which is focussing on: "Teachers ' perspectives regarding play based approach to teaching in " Pre-Primary schools in Khomas region, Namibia.

Permission is hereby granted to you provided you seek for further clearance from the Regional Director of Education, Arts and Culture Khomas region where you wish to conduct your research to ensure that:

- Permission is sought from the school principals and parents;
- teaching and learning should not be interrupted;
- participation is voluntary.

Furthermore, you are kindly requested to share your research findings with the Ministry after completion of the research project. You may contact Mr G. Munene at the Directorate: Programmes and Quality Assurance (PQA) for submission of your research findings at the above indicated details.

We wish you the best in conducting your research and the Ministry looks forward to hearing from you upon completion of your study.

Yours Sincerely,

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

upon completion of your study.

Yours Sincerely,


Sanet L. Steenkamp
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



16. 3. 2021.
Date

All official correspondences must be addressed to the Executive Director.

APPENDIX 7 :PARTICIPANT INFORMATION LEAFLET AND CONSENT FORM

TITLE OF THE RESEARCH PROJECT: PRE-PRIMARY TEACHERS' PERSPECTIVES REGARDING PLAY-BASED APPROACH TO TEACHING IN PRE-PRIMARY CLASSROOMS: A NAMIBAIN CASE STUDY

REFERENCE NUMBER:

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Hedwig Nando Kaveto

ADDRESS: P.O.Box 4207, Windhoek

CONTACT NUMBER: 061-1027348/ 0813683535

You are being invited to take part in a research project. Please take some time to read the information presented here, which will explain the details of this project. Please ask the study staff or doctor any questions about any part of this project that you do not fully understand. It is very important that you are fully satisfied that you clearly understand what this research entails and how you could be involved. Also, your participation is entirely voluntary and you are free to decline to participate. If you say no, this will not affect you negatively in any way whatsoever. You are also free to withdraw from the study at any point, even if you do agree to take part.

This study has been approved by the Research Ethics Committee at The University of Namibia and will be conducted according to the ethical guidelines and principles of the international Declaration of Helsinki, South African Guidelines for Good Clinical Practice and Namibian National Research Ethics Guidelines.

1. What is this research study all about?

a) Where will the study be conducted; are there other sites; total number of participants to be recruit

This study will be conducted at 3 schools in the Khomas region (1 school in rural Windhoek, 1 school in Urban Windhoek and 1 school in Sub-urban Windhoek). The total number of participants will be six pre-primary teachers (two pre-primary teachers at every school).

b) Explain in participant friendly language what your project aims to do and why you are doing it?

Play is believed to be the best way in which young people learn, it is against these background that the Ministry of Education has drafted a policy that states that teaching and learning in pre-primary should be done by using the play-based approach. However those that are trusted to implement this policy most often do not use it. That is why the study aims to investigate the perspectives of pre-primary teachers in the Khomas region regarding the play- based approach

c) Explain all procedures.

Participant permission will be requested to make the video recordings of the lessons and class interaction however participants are free to abstain from the video recordings if they are not comfortable. Participants will be recorded while they are presenting their lessons. A day after the lesson have been recorded the researcher will set a time that fits the participant to have an interview, All interviews will last for an hour or the participant may stop the interview and proceed on a another day. After interviews have been carried out a copy of the teachers daily preparation will be required. The researcher will only spend 1-3 days with each participant

d) Explain any randomization process that may occur.

Not applicable

e) Explain the use of any medication, if applicable.

Not applicable

2. Why have you been invited to participate?

The following criteria was used to select the participants. Participants must be from a government school with pre-primary classrooms that's has been operating since 2011 when Ministry of education took over pre-primary from Ministry of Gender and Child Welfare. Secondly the schools should be in the urban, semi urban and rural areas in the Khomas region.

3. What will your responsibilities be?

All participants are expected to carry out their normal teaching and learning. Participants will be requested to make their lesson sheets available to the researcher but if participants do not wish to do so they may state so. Lesson plans are needed to see whether teacher plan their lesson incorporating the play based pedagogy. Participants will only have to sit and do a one on one interview with the researcher after school hours at a place that is convenient to the participants.

4. Will you benefit from taking part in this research?

There will be no personal benefits for participants who agree to be part of this study however the country will benefit when the views of the teachers are heard, and will be consulted in the future when implementing policies that directly affects them.

5. Are there in risks involved in your taking part in this research?

a) There are no risks involve in taking part in this research.

6. If you do not agree to take part, what alternatives do you have?

a) *Clearly indicate in broad terms what alternative treatment is available and where it can be accessed, if applicable. Not applicable*

7. Who will have access to your medical records?

There will not be any medical records involved in this study. All information collected will be treated as confidential and protected. If it is used in a publication or thesis, the identity of the participant will remain anonymous. This information will only be accessed by the researcher and supervisor.

8. What will happen in the unlikely event of some form injury occurring as a direct result of your taking part in this research study?

Participants will not be carrying out any unusual tasks from their daily tasks. However should injury occur participants will have to receive medical attention and depending on the seriousness of the injury another participant might be chosen so that the research is not delayed.

9. Will you be paid to take part in this study and are there any costs involved?

There will be no monetary rewards. Participants do not have to spend any money or resources because the researcher will go to the participants to get information.

10. Is there anything else that you should know or do?

a) *You should inform your family practitioner or usual doctor that you are taking part in a research study. (Include if applicable)*

b) *You should also inform your medical insurance company that you are participating in a research study. (Include if applicable)*

c) *You can contact Dr at tel if you have any further queries or encounter any problems.*

d) *You can contact the Centre for Research and Publications at +264 061 2063061; pclaassen@unam.na if you have any concerns or complaints that have not been adequately addressed by the investigator.*

e) *You will receive a copy of this information and consent form for your own records.*

11. Declaration by participant

By signing below, I agree to take part in a research study entitled pre-primary teachers' perspectives regarding play-based approach to teaching in pre-primary classrooms: a Namibian case study.

I declare that:

- a) I have read or had read to me this information and consent form and it is written in a language with which I am fluent and comfortable.
- b) I have had a chance to ask questions and all my questions have been adequately answered.
- c) I understand that taking part in this study is voluntary and I have not been pressurised to take part.
- d) I may choose to leave the study at any time and will not be penalised or prejudiced in any way.
- e) I may be asked to leave the study before it has finished, if the study doctor or researcher feels it is in my best interests, or if I do not follow the study plan, as agreed to.

Signed at (*place*) on (*date*)
2005.

.....
Signature of participant

.....
Signature of witness

12. Declaration by investigator

I (*name*)
declare that:

- I explained the information in this document to
- I encouraged him/her to ask questions and took adequate time to answer them.
- I am satisfied that he/she adequately understands all aspects of the research, as discussed above

- I did/did not use a interpreter. *(If a interpreter is used then the interpreter must sign the declaration below.*

Signed at *(place)* on *(date)*
2018.

.....
Signature of investigator

.....
Signature of witness

13. Declaration by interpreter

I
(name)de
clare that:

- a) I assisted the investigator *(name)*
to explain the information in this document to *(name of participant)*
..... using the language
medium of (Oshiwambo, Oshierero, Afrikaans, etc.)

APPENDIX 8: PARENTS ASSENT FORM

TITLE OF THE RESEARCH PROJECT: PRE-PRIMARY TEACHERS' PERSPECTIVES REGARDING PLAY-BASED APPROACH TO TEACHING IN PRE-PRIMARY CLASSROOMS: A NAMIBIAN CASE STUDY

REFERENCE NUMBER:

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Hedwig Nando Kaveto

ADDRESS: P.O.Box 4207, Windhoek

CONTACT NUMBER: 061-1027245/ 0813683535

Your child is being invited to take part in a research project. Please take some time to read the information presented here, which will explain the details of this project. Please ask the study staff or doctor any questions about any part of this project that you do not fully understand. It is very important that you are fully satisfied that you clearly understand what this research entails and how you could be involved. Also, your child's participation is entirely voluntary and you are free to decline their participation. If you say no, this will not affect your child negatively in any way whatsoever. You are also free to withdraw your child from the study at any point, even if you do agree for them to take part.

This study has been approved by the Research Ethics Committee at The University of Namibia and will be conducted according to the ethical guidelines and principles of the international Declaration of Helsinki, South African Guidelines for Good Clinical Practice and Namibian National Research Ethics Guidelines.

10. What is this research study all about?

f) Where will the study be conducted; are there other sites; total number of participants to be recruit

This study will be conducted at 3 schools in the Khomas region (1 school in rural Windhoek, 1 school in Urban Windhoek and 1 school in Sub-urban Windhoek). The total number of participants will be six pre-primary teachers (two pre-primary teachers at every school).

g) Explain in participant friendly language what your project aims to do and why you are doing it?

Play is believed to be the best way in which young people learn, it is against these background that the Ministry of Education has drafted a policy that states that teaching and learning in pre-primary should be done by using the play-based approach. However those that are trusted to implement this policy most often do not use it. That is why the study aims to investigate the perspectives of pre-primary teachers in the Khomas region regarding the play- based approach

h) Explain all procedures.

Approval of parents for their children to participate in this study is needed. Parents can agree to let their children participate in the video recordings and parents are also free to withdraw their child's participation if they are not comfortable and there will be no consequences. Children will not be expected to do anything then carry on with their daily learning. Learners will not be interviewed or given any activity because the research is focusing on the teachers.

i) *Explain any randomization process that may occur.*

Not applicable

j) *Explain the use of any medication, if applicable.*

Not applicable

11. Why have you been invited to participate?

The following criteria was used to select the participants. Participants must be from a government school with pre-primary classrooms that's has been operating since 2011 when Ministry of education took over pre-primary from Ministry of Gender and Child Welfare. Secondly the schools should be in the urban, semi urban and rural areas in the Khomas region.

What will your responsibilities be?

Learners will only be in the video recordings when the teacher is presenting her lessons. Learners will not be interviewed or given any activity.

12. Will you benefit from taking part in this research?

There will be no personal benefits for participants who agree to be part of this study however the country will benefit when the views of the teachers are heard, and will be consulted in the future when implementing policies that directly affects them.

13. Are there in risks involved in your taking part in this research?

b) There are no risks involve in taking part in this research.

14. If you do not agree to take part, what alternatives do you have?

b) *Clearly indicate in broad terms what alternative treatment is available and where it can be accessed, if applicable.* Not applicable

15. Who will have access to your medical records?

There will not be any medical records involved in this study. All information collected will be treated as confidential and protected. If it is used in a publication or thesis,

the identity of the participant will remain anonymous. This information will only be accessed by the researcher and supervisor.

16. What will happen in the unlikely event of some form injury occurring as a direct result of your taking part in this research study?

Participants will not be carrying out any unusual tasks from their daily tasks. However should injury occur participants will have to receive medical attention and depending on the seriousness of the injury another participant might be chosen so that the research is not delayed.

17. Will you be paid to take part in this study and are there any costs involved?

There will be no monetary rewards. Participants do not have to spend any money or resources because the researcher will go to the participants to get information.

10. Is there anything else that you should know or do?

- f) *You should inform your family practitioner or usual doctor that you are taking part in a research study. (Include if applicable)*
- g) *You should also inform your medical insurance company that you are participating in a research study. (Include if applicable)*
- h) *You can contact Dr at tel if you have any further queries or encounter any problems.*
- i) *You can contact the Centre for Research and Publications at +264 061 2063061; pclaassen@unam.na if you have any concerns or complaints that have not been adequately addressed by the investigator.*
- j) *You will receive a copy of this information and consent form for your own records.*

14. Declaration by participant

By signing below, I agree to allow my child to take part in a research study entitled pre-primary teachers' perspectives regarding play-based approach to teaching in pre-primary classrooms: a Namibian case study.

I declare that:

- f) I have read or had read to me this information and assent form and it is written in a language with which I am fluent and comfortable.
- g) I have had a chance to ask questions and all my questions have been adequately answered.
- h) I understand that taking part in this study is voluntary and my child have not been pressurised to take part.

- i) I may choose to withdraw my child from the study at any time and will not be penalised or prejudiced in any way.
- j) My child may be asked to leave the study before it has finished, if the study doctor or researcher feels it is in my child's best interests, or if my child do not follow the study plan, as agreed to.

Signed at *(place)* on *(date)*
2005.

Name of Child

.....
.....

.....
Signature of parent/ legal guardian

.....
Signature of witness

15. Declaration by investigator

I *(name)*
declare that:

- I explained the information in this document to
- I encouraged him/her to ask questions and took adequate time to answer them.
- I am satisfied that he/she adequately understands all aspects of the research, as discussed above
- I did/did not use a interpreter. *(If a interpreter is used then the interpreter must sign the declaration below.*

Signed at *(place)* on *(date)*
2018.

.....
Signature of investigator

.....
Signature of witness

16. Declaration by interpreter

I
(*name*).....de
clare that:

b) I assisted the investigator (*name*)
to explain the information in this document to (*name of participant*)
..... using the language
medium of (Oshiwambo, Oshtjiherero, Afrikaans, etc.)

