BEST PRACTICES IN WHOLE CHILD DEVELOPMENT AT PRE-PRIMARY SCHOOL LEVEL - A MULTIPLE CASE STUDY OF SELECTED PRE-PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN WINDHOEK

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN FULL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS

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ABSTRACT

The aim of the study was to explore the experiences of pre-primary teachers in Namibia about best practices in whole child development (WCD) at four pre-primary schools in Windhoek, Namibia. The study was underpinned by Maslow's hierarchy of needs under the concepts of the Association for Curriculum Development and Supervision's (ASCD) whole child approach to education. This study employed a qualitative research approach, specifically adopting a collective case study design to explore the WCD practices in pre-primary classrooms in Windhoek. The sample for this study comprised 12 voluntary pre-primary teachers at four pre-primary schools in Windhoek. The chosen data collection instruments to determine popular teaching methods among volunteer teachers included individual interviews and observations. These research instruments were checked beforehand for trustworthiness and authenticity. Results showed that best practices in WCD were compromised by lack of skills and inadequate teacher training, incomplete teaching guides, insufficient teaching aids, time constraints and insufficient playground equipment. Despite these adverse circumstances, all teachers were aware of the concept of WCD as well as what it entails. However, they found that the factors listed above proved an obstacle to implementing the WCD approach. As a result, in applying best practices in holistic education for pre-primary classrooms, certain domains of child development were emphasised at the cost of others.

Implications for enhancing a holistic approach in the four schools include compulsory workshops on holistic child developmental practices for all teachers and providing Namibian pre-primary schools with a practical WCD manual.

The study thus recommends that future research should target studies into holistic child development in rural Namibia. A quantitative study is also recommended to investigate the availability of proper teaching equipment or resources at pre-primary schools throughout Namibia.

Keywords: holistic, development, hierarchy, implementation, pre-primary

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ABREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

ASCD	Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development
ECD	Early Childhood Development
IECD	Integrated Early Childhood Development Policy
JSC	Junior Secondary Certificate
MoE	Ministry of Education
MoEAC	Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture
NIECD	National Integrated Early Childhood Development Policy
SPIE	Sector Policy on Inclusive Education
UNAM	University of Namibia
UNESCO	United Nation Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
WCD	Whole Child Development
ZPD	Zone of Proximal Development

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To God be the glory.

I would like to express my profound gratitude to the following:

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this study to my dearest mother, Coreen Human.

Dear Mom, you taught me that I am stronger than I think I am, and that we can overcome all obstacles by faith and love. I miss you dearly.

DECLARATION

I, Elana van Wyk, hereby declare that this study is my own work and is a true reflection of my research, and that this work, or any part thereof has not been submitted for a degree at any other institution.

Elana van Wyk		April 2025
Name of Student	**Signature**	**Date**

CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

This chapter introduces the background of the study in investigating the experiences of teachers regarding best practices in whole child development at pre-primary level in selected pre-primary schools in Windhoek, Namibia. This chapter includes the statement of the problem, the research questions, significance of the study, limitations and delimitations as well as the definitions of the core concepts used in this study. The chapter ends with an outline of the thesis.

1.1 Orientation of the study

This study focused on exploring current practices employed by pre-primary teachers to realise the whole child development (WCD) approach in Namibia. Ultimately, the study investigated whether pre-primary teachers are implementing the WCD approach, or if teachers are more biased towards one or other domains of child development at the expense of the holistic development of the child.

The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) defines whole child development as the comprehensive and interconnected process of supporting children's growth across multiple domains. This includes not only their physical health but also their social, emotional, cognitive, and linguistic development (NAEYC, 2019). The challenge of distinctly separating these concepts highlights a key attribute of all of the above-mentioned domains, which is that they are interconnected and do not exist independently. Each facilitates and reciprocally supports learning and development in the others (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2015).

New knowledge about human development from neuroscience demonstrates that effective learning depends on secure attachments, supportive relationships, and a definite integration of social, emotional, and academic skills (Darling-Hammond & Cook-Harvey, 2018). Darling-Hammond and Cook-Harvey (2018) further emphasise that a positive school environment supports children's growth across all the developmental pathways – physical, psychological, cognitive, social, and emotional**.** This researcher experienced a lack of integration of social, emotional, physical, and academic skills in the pre-primary classroom, with the emphasis being put on the cognitive developmental pathway of the pre-primary child.

Holistic development or whole child development in the child's early years of life serves as a strong foundation for lifelong learning, performance and good health (Hanover Research, 2015). Children spend their early years in the pre-primary classrooms, where Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) practitioners take a holistic approach to child development: they pay attention to children's physical, personal, social, emotional and spiritual wellbeing, as well as the cognitive aspects of learning (EYFS Statuary Framework, 2021). The term 'early childhood development'(ECD) refers to the process of change through which a young child (birth to 8 years old) masters more complex levels of moving, thinking, feeling and interacting with people and objects in the environment (UNESCO, 2019). In the early years, young children formulate their own insights while mastering fundamental skills and understandings (Wilson, 2008). Thompson (2016) posits that early learning thrives on curiosity, active participation in learning tasks, perseverance in problem-solving, the willingness to explore different approaches, application of reasoning and problem-solving strategies, confidence in oneself, and the ability to regulate attention, cognition, and emotions during learning activities.

The National Integrated Early Childhood Development (IECD) policy (2007) also reiterates the importance of the early years, signifying that the childhood period from conception to six years is crucial for brain development. Countless critical periods of development occur before the child enters formal education, usually at the age of six. It is challenging to reach the brain's full potential once these critical periods have passed (World Health Organization, 1999).

Early childhood development can be positively or negatively influenced by environmental or biological factors (NIECD, 2007). Mcilroy (2021) reiterates that, for children to reach their developmental goals, their basic physical need for protection, food and health must be met along with their psychosocial need for affection, interaction and sensory stimulation, and learning through exploration and play.

The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF, 2018), originally known as the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund, describes education as an important vehicle through which all children can be empowered to enhance their life opportunities and to obtain the means to participate more fully in their communities. The Namibian Government has committed itself to early childhood development (ECD) as a key route to the development of the potential of its children, youth and workforce. However, many vulnerable Namibian children experience barriers to accessing not only quality education, but also many other basic services such as health and safety (NIECD, 2007). ECD therefore refers to more than mere schooling and the cognitive development of children. It concentrates on the potential of ECD centres to intensify many interdependent components of a child's life, including nutrition, health and safety, emotional well-being and social competence (Donald et al., 2014).

A growing body of research has taken a holistic view by addressing the importance of WCD in play-based learning, for which the pre-primary classroom is ideal. The key emphasis is to nurture children in attaining holistic development with an understanding of each young child within family and classroom contexts (Keung & Cheung, 2019). When pre-primary school teachers implement best practices regarding holistic child development in their classrooms, they provide an appropriate number of opportunities for children to explore, imagine, create and express themselves, which will lead to positive learning outcomes as well as well-balanced learners (Keung & Cheung, 2019).

In 2017, Namibia formulated a framework for action towards IECD which is guided by the NIECD Policy (2007). This IECD policy views the child holistically, and states that all dimensions of survival, growth and development should be mutually inter-dependent. A child's development takes place holistically and gradually and not in an unsystematic, partial manner. A collaborative relationship exists between children's survival, development, and physical growth (NIECD, 2007).

According to the NIECD Policy of Namibia (2007), early learning opportunities for young children outside of the home are extremely limited, especially in rural areas. Even though facility-based early childhood programmes have increased, with an estimated attendance figure of 50000 children, the quality of the early learning services provided remains questionable (NIECD, 2007).

In Namibia, relatively more children drop out of school during or at the end of grade one than in all the other lower primary grades, indicating low levels of early learning capacities among young children entering the formal school system. Ineffective, poor-quality education has resulted in low-learning outcomes. As a rule, this trend is manifested in high rates of failure, dropouts, and repetition due to poverty, hunger,

teenage pregnancy, and the impact of HIV/AIDS (NIECD, 2007). Current amended educational efforts have specifically identified early childhood education as foundational to the overall development of children and their success in school. Anecdotal evidence suggests a lack of emphasis on the WCD approach and consequently the absence of holistic development of the young child.

Therefore, the spread of ECDs should be encouraged within the guidelines of the Ministry of Gender, Equality and Child Welfare (MGECW), to ensure a quality and holistic ECD environment and successively contribute to the overall education system in the country (Ministry of Gender Equality and Child Welfare, 2007).

In 2007, the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD) outlined a whole child development approach to education as its core mission. The researcher, being a pre-primary school teacher in Namibia for the past 12 years, has observed that a holistic approach to education is not a priority in the pre-primary school classroom. Teachers seemingly emphasise specific domains of child development at the expense of whole child development. To this end, the researcher has observed a tendency for pre-primary teachers to focus on cognitive development, especially formal tasks at this level.

Children learn best through play, and according to Vygotsky (1978), play is the leading behaviour in children's development, "the preeminent educational activity of early childhood" (Berk & Winsler, 1995, p. 57). Vygotsky posits that play provides an opportunity for socially assisted learning, a key role in abstract thinking, and a tool that promotes development and learning. Instead, according to the researcher's observations, an increase in structured and formal tasks at a desk is becoming the norm in the Namibian pre-primary school classroom, replacing the fundamental importance

of accidental learning through play. Yet, numerous education systems have diminished the opportunities for playful learning whilst increasing the emphasis on structured methods to prepare learners for school and enhanced academic achievement (Jay & Knaus, 2018).

Cognitively, play contributes to the development of children in the areas of creativity, logic, and problem-solving. It helps them explore, experiment, and discover the world around them (Wilson, 2008). Wilson further elaborates by saying that the imaginary world of children helps them learn many critical concepts about the world that we call "real." Anecdotal evidence based on this researcher's observation and experience suggests that play does not form part of learning for Namibian pre-primary school children, thereby denying children opportunities for holistic development.

This study was underpinned by Maslow's hierarchy of needs under the concepts of the ASCD. Maslow's theory, as outlined in his 1958 work, posits that individuals typically address their needs sequentially, beginning with physiological needs, then progressing through safety, love and belonging, esteem, and finally self-actualisation needs. This hierarchy has had a significant impact on the WCD approach, particularly through the principles of the ASCD (2007).

The ASCD developed five tenets grounded in child development theory, which follows the principles of holistic education. It declares that each child in each school and each community deserves to be healthy, safe, engaged, supported and challenged. These aspects constitute a whole child approach to learning, teaching and community engagement. More than a way to boost achievement or academics, the whole child approach views the collaboration between learning and health as fundamental (ASCD, 2007).

Figure 1.1 gives a detailed explanation of the Whole School, Whole Community, Whole Child (WSCC) model with the five tenets at the centre of the child's development.

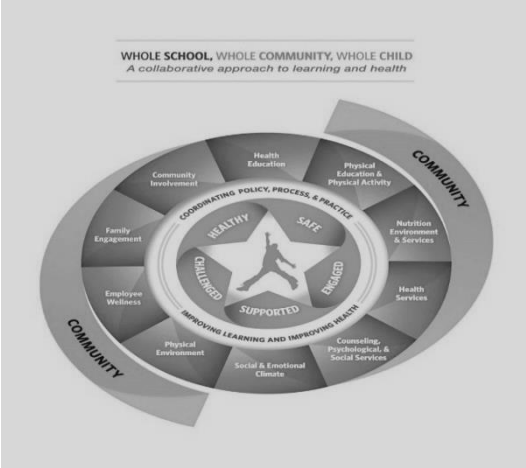

Figure 1.1: The Whole School, Whole Community, Whole Child (WSCC) model

Note: This model was produced to support the idea that, when children are healthy, safe, engaged, supported, and challenged, they will perform optimally. The WSCC model recognises the interconnectedness of these components and emphasises the importance of collaboration and coordination among stakeholders, including educators, families, community members, and health professionals, to create a supportive environment for student success. From : "Making the case for educating the whole child," by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 2007, (*www.wholechildeducation.org*).

1.2 Statement of the problem

New understandings of ECD show that the first five years of a child's life are a time of enormous growth in linguistic, abstract, social, emotional, and motor competence (Bowman et al., 2001).

These researchers further state that, from birth, healthy children continuously explore their environment, learn to communicate, and attempt to figure out how things work around them.

Berman et al. (2018) agree that effective academic development requires an environment where learners feel socially and emotionally safe in taking risks necessary to learn and grow, hence the necessity for a holistic developmental approach. Teaching approaches and strategies that integrate physical, emotional, social and cognitive development during pre-primary level learning promote the holistic development of the child. Such an approach will directly support the statutes of the WCD approach – that all children should be able to develop to their full potential by feeling safe, healthy, supported, engaged and challenged.

Anecdotal evidence, based on the researcher's observation, suggests that current practices at preschool level put more emphasis on the development of one or the other domain of child development, for example, cognitive development at the expense of whole child development. Instead of promoting the holistic development of the child through the application of the WCD approach, play is being replaced by lessons which concentrate on cognitive development, especially reading and literacy *(*Zigler & Bishop-Josef, 2006).

Empirical evidence suggests that children are comprised of wholes, and one cannot attempt to promote the development of the cognitive domain without addressing and nurturing the development of the child as a whole being (Miller, 2010). That is, pre-primary school teachers cannot promote children's cognitive development at the expense of physical, emotional, social and language development.

Considering the background provided for this study, it could be argued that by not promoting the child as a holistic human being during the critical developmental phase of a child, one defies the principles of the IEC approach to education currently adopted in Namibia. This study therefore explored whether teachers indeed put more emphasis on the development of the one or the other domain of child development, at the expense of whole child development, or whether they actively implement the WCD approach in order to promote holistic child development. Thus, this study focused on exploring current practices of pre-primary teachers to realise the whole child development approach in Namibia.

1.3 Research questions

The main research question for this study was: *What are best practices in whole child development at pre-primary school level in Namibia?*

The sub-research questions supporting the main question were:

1. *What knowledge do Namibian pre-primary school teachers possess about best practices in whole child development?*
2. *How do pre-primary teachers implement best practices in WCD in their teachings to realise the WCD approach?*
3. *Do teachers put more emphasis on a selected or specific domain of child development instead of following the WCD approach?*

1.4 Significance of the study

The significance of the study is to unravel the best practices pre-primary school teachers employ to realise the WCD approach in Namibia. Ultimately, the study explored if pre-primary school teachers are indeed implementing the WCD approach or if their emphasis is biased towards one or the other domain of child development at the expense of the holistic development of the child.

The study thus, hopes to create awareness about the WCD approach which could contribute to a paradigm shift resulting in teachers fully implementing the WCD approach and enabling them to make the holistic development of the child at the pre-primary school level possible. By creating awareness of WCD, teachers will benefit by adapting and improving their teaching methods and as a result experience the tremendous impact it has on the child as a whole. According to Tough (2012), teachers need to ensure learners master the rigorous academic standards, but they also need to help them develop other 'non-cognitive' skills.

Jones and Bouffard (2012) agree that social and emotional learning done in isolation has had generally modest effects. They have postulated that social and emotional development should be interconnected in the academic curricula to have a significant impact on learners' success (Jones & Bouffard, 2012). Berman et al. (2018) further argue that the integration of all these developmental components improves school climate and teacher effectiveness.

1.5 Limitations of the study

The scope of the proposed study is limited to pre-primary school teachers in the Khomas region. The sample was limited to only four pre-primary schools in the city of Windhoek in the Khomas region, thus the findings of this study cannot be generalised to the entire region, much less to pre-primary schools in all the regions of Namibia. The researcher has taken cognisance of social desirability of responses as another limitation of this study.

While the researcher emphasised that there were no right or wrong responses and encouraged participants to give sincere responses, the possibility that some responses were made to socially please the researcher cannot be ignored.

1.6 Delimitations of the study

The study used only four selected pre-primary schools in the Khomas region. The scope of this study is delimited in that only pre-primary school teachers from the four selected pre-primary schools who gave consent participated in the study. Given this, the research findings derived from these teacher responses cannot be generalised to other regions.

This study is also delimited to the following scopes:

a. Discussing the experiences of teachers about the nature of WCD at pre-primary level;
b. Exposing the implementation of WCD practices at pre-primary level;
c. Defining key areas and presenting relevant theories from literature that review experiences of teachers and learners about best practices in whole child development at pre-primary school level in Namibia;

d. Analysing and discussing findings gathered from the empirical data;
e. Suggesting possible solutions and recommendations towards improving current practices in whole child development to ensure effective and holistic development of the preschool child in Namibia.

1.7 Definitions of operational terms

It always remains crucial to explain the concepts that could lead to ambiguity and misinterpretation in order to establish a frame of reference within which the researcher approaches the problem of interest (Best & Kahn, 2014). Accordingly, the following terms should be understood as explained herein:

Definitions

Early childhood development (ECD): The period of a child's life noticed by rapid and critical development from conception to the age of eight years (UNESCO, 2019).

Integrated early childhood development (IECD) The need to view all aspects of children's development holistically. It acknowledges that giving the child the best start in life requires an approach whereby child-centred interventions in areas such as health, nutrition, water, sanitation, psychosocial care and protection all converge to work together (UNICEF, 2018).

Whole Child Development (WCD): Whole child development is the process of focusing attention on the social, emotional, mental, physical as well as cognitive development of learners (Slade & Griffith, 2013).

Early years foundation stage (EYFS): This stage covers the education of children aged 0-5. It sets the standards for the care, development and learning of children from birth to 5 years of age (Center for Research in Early Childhood, 2019).

1.8 Layout of the thesis

This thesis has five chapters. Chapter One provides a brief introduction, background information, the problem statement, the research questions, significance of the study, limitations, and delimitations to the study. Finally, the chapter gives an outline of the conceptual terms used in the study.

Chapter Two discusses the theoretical framework that underpins the study and literature reviewed relating to experiences of teachers and learners about best practices in whole child development in pre-primary schools.

Chapter Three provides a discussion of the research methodology and design used in the study.

Chapter Four presents and discusses the results obtained from the study. This chapter analyses and interprets the data gathered during this study.

Chapter Five provides the conclusion of the study and includes recommendations for further studies about the WCD approach in pre-primary school settings.

1.9 Chapter summary

This chapter presents an overview of the background of the study, the statement of the problem, as well as the research questions. In addition, the chapter includes the significance of the study and the limitations of the study. It also sheds light on the reasons for undertaking the study. The chapter further clarifies important concepts that were used throughout the study. This chapter concludes by drawing attention to how the thesis is arranged and what information each chapter contains. The next chapter describes the theoretical framework that underpins the current study, followed by an overview of literature on whole child development at pre-primary level in Namibia.

CHAPTER TWO
LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

Chapter One concluded with an overview of the background of the study, the significance of the study as well as the reasons for undertaking the study. This chapter describes the theoretical framework that underpins the study, followed by an overview of literature on whole child development at pre-primary level in Namibia.

Humans develop in stages and a variety of domains - cognitive, physical, social-emotional, and linguistically. Each area develops in the context of all others and cannot be separated. Each affects the others in important ways. Just as children's language or mental skills develop because of maturation and experience, so too do children's development in other areas, such as social, emotional, and ethical (Levine & Munsch, 2014).

2.2 The concept of holistic education

The concept of whole child development does not have a single originator, as it has evolved over time through the contributions of various scholars, educators, researchers and practitioners in the fields of psychology, education, child development, and public health. In the early 20th century, educational philosophers such as John Dewey (1916), emphasised the importance of holistic education that addresses the intellectual, emotional and social needs of children.

Holistic development or whole child development (WCD) therefore focuses on the social, emotional, physical, mental and intellectual growth of a person (NAEYC, 2019). The LEGO Foundation takes a holistic view that learning comprises the full

breadth of skills including cognitive, social, emotional, creative, and physical (Zosh et al., 2017).

A WCD approach to education recognises the interrelationships among all these areas of development and designs school policies and practices to support them. These include access to nutritious food, health care, curricular designs that integrate social-emotional learning, restorative and renewing disciplinary practices; and learning opportunities that are designed to challenge and engage learners while supporting their motivation and self-confidence to persevere and succeed (Hanover Research, 2015). All aspects of children's well-being are supported through a holistic approach to education to ensure that learning happens in deep, meaningful, and lasting ways (Darling-Hammond & Cook-Harvey, 2018).

If we revisit the definition of a whole child development approach to education by Slade and Griffith (2013), we should focus on each of the following areas of development: cognitive, social, emotional as well as physical development. Cognitive development happens rapidly during the preschool years. Neuroscientists have found in their experiments that learning in terms of behaviour and cognitive development occurs through physical activity. Piaget's theory of cognitive development (1952) suggests that intelligence changes as children grow. A child needs to construct a mental model of the world around him, and therefore a child's cognitive development is not just about acquiring knowledge.

Piaget (1952) proposed the following four stages of development in his theory of cognitive development:

Sensorimotor stage: birth to 2 years

Preoperational stage: 2 to 7 years

Concrete operational stage: 7 to 11 years

Formal operational stage: ages 12 and up

The order of the stages is universal across cultures and follows the same unchanging order. All children go through the same stages in the same order, but not all at the same rate (McLeod, 2018). Darling-Hammond and Cook-Harvey (2018) explain that a child's emotions and social relationships affect learning. Positive emotions, such as eagerness and enthusiasm, as well as positive relationships including trust in the teacher open up the mind to learning.

Negative emotions such as anxiety, fear of failure and self-doubt reduce the brain's capacity to absorb and process information. Learners' interpersonal skills, including their ability to positively intermingle with peers and adults, resolve conflict and successfully participate in group work, all contribute to effective learning and enduring behaviours.

These social skills, which build on the development of empathy, consciousness of one's own and others' emotions, and necessary skills for communication and problem solving, can be taught. (Darling-Hammond & Cook-Harvey, 2018).

It is questionable as to whether all children in Namibian pre-primary schools are exposed to this holistic development if the WCD is not implemented. According to Archer and Syraj (2015), physical development involves the child's gradual mastery of movement, coordination, balance, and both fine and gross motor skills.

As infants repeatedly practise specific movement patterns, such as crawling on all fours, they develop necessary muscle strength which lays the foundation for the fine motor skills essential for tasks like writing, drawing, and manipulating objects like scissors, blocks, and balls (Archer & Syraj, 2015). Furthermore, movement-play involves children engaging in targeted movements that follow a developmental sequence of fundamental motor patterns, establishing connections between the body and the brain (Archer & Syraj, 2015). Before an infant's body and brain can operate to their full potential, the child goes through a series of developmental movement stages (Lamont, 2007). Lamont further states that, when children miss out on significant movements, essential functions are compromised, affecting later development and thus a child's ability to reach their full potential during formal education.

Goddard Blyth (2005) suggests that physical skills, including coordination, balance and posture need to be secured in the early years for children to enter the school system better prepared to cope with the demands of the classroom. According to Taras' (2005) study, engaging in physical activity could potentially enhance concentration and subsequently improve academic performance. Further investigation into the relationship between physical development and academic performance indicated that proficient gross motor skills, such as balancing, were correlated with improved concentration during academic activities (Budde, 2008).

Anecdotal evidence based on the researcher's observation and experience doubts the implementation of the physical development of the child in a regular and pre-planned manner. If this is true, certain areas of physical development of the child are being compromised at pre-primary level.

According to Hinkley et al. (2018), excessive focus on sedentary activities or academic instruction at the expense of active play and physical exploration can have negative effects on children's physical development. Lack of opportunities for gross and fine motor activities during the preschool years may contribute to delays in motor skill acquisition and physical fitness.

2.3 Competing versions of early-childhood education policy

Two competing versions of early-childhood education policy and practice have taken root in communities (Smith, 2021). On the one hand, an increased emphasis on literacy and numeracy in a child's early years comes at the expense of developing the whole child, including social-emotional skills and the ability to make decisions that have a profound impact on later learning. Traditionally, early childhood education focused on developing knowledge in literacy and mathematics to prepare children for essential skills needed to become informed and productive members of society. Thus, we can agree that we live in a success-oriented society that leads to the misguided overview of formal academic instruction at an early age and which also places a great deal of stress on children and compromises their emotional well-being.

According to McMurrer (2008), artistic, creative expression, and play are diminished because of over testing that prioritises only a few content areas and results in the loss of other non-academic time.

Elias (2001) agreed that "unfortunately, for many schools, current policy is forcing them to turn what could be an inspiring and enjoyable educational experience for many children into a narrow accountability-driven school culture that is alienating children by preparing them for a life of tests, and not the tests of life" (p.40).

Regrettably, according to the researcher's observations and experience, pre-primary children in Namibian schools experience the same phenomenon by being exposed to more and more 'paper-orientated' and structured tasks, being completed at a desk in a formal class environment.

On the other hand, holistic education is concerned with the development of every child's intellectual, emotional, social and creative potential (Kochlar-Bryant & Heishman, 2010). Arguably, adopting whole-child development curricula that widen the gap of key learning outcomes to unite social interaction, self-regulation and other psychosocial development milestones in the preschool, puts academic progress at risk (Perdue & Costanza, 2019). Perdue and Constanza (2019) further assert that a whole child approach guarantees to be less structured and less routine orientated than an academic approach. Supporters of the academic approach might argue that valuable learning time will be lost in the process. However, scientific evidence demonstrates that social, emotional and academic development should be interconnected in the learning process in that it claims that: depriving young children of the kinds of experiences that are essential to later development – that is, the building blocks that create the scaffolding upon which development depends – leads to severe consequences in both brain structure and function (Tierney & Nelson, 2009).

Evidence from the field of neuroscience suggests that the childhood period from conception to six years, especially the first three years, is crucial for brain development (IECD, 2007). These years include vital periods for the development of important functions. Many of these critical periods of development take place before the child enters formal education, usually at the age of six.

Once these critical periods have passed, it is difficult to achieve the brain's full potential. During these critical periods a child should be exposed to developmentally appropriate interactions and experiences for optimal development of these functions. (WHO, 1999). The National Research Council (2001) concurs that cognitive, social-emotional, and motor development are interrelated and mutually reinforcing aspects of growth, each requiring significant focus during the preschool years.

Darling-Hammond and Cook-Harvey (2018) agree that development is malleable. The brain never stops changing and growing in response to experiences and relationships. The growth of the brain and the development of skills depend on the nature of these experiences and relationships. Figure 2.1 shows the importance of the early years for human brain development.

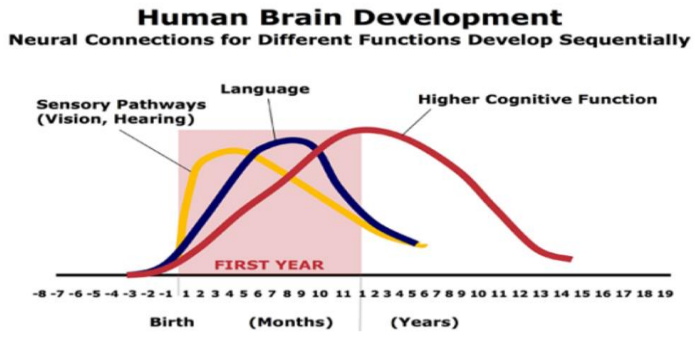

Figure 2.1:Timeline for human brain development of various functions

Note: Figure 2.1 provides a summary of why it is important to start early in providing integrated whole child development in the early years. This is the time when the brain undergoes its most rapid development. This period is pivotal for establishing neural connections which serve as the cornerstone for a child's physical, mental and lifelong well-being. From "Development potential in the first 5 years for children in developing countries," by S. Grantham-McGregor et al. 2007. *The Lancet* (369), p. 60-70 (https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(07)60032-4). Copyright 2007 Elsevier Ltd. Published by Elsevier Ltd.

Emotional well-being and social competence provide a strong foundation for establishing cognitive abilities, and together they form the building blocks that comprise the foundation of human development (Jones & Kahn, 2019). These basic scientific concepts, established over decades of neuroscience and behavioural research, help illustrate why child development is a foundation for lifelong learning. Hanover research (2015) also found that holistic development in the child's early years of life serve as a solid foundation for lifelong learning, performance, and good health.

Piaget (1952) understood cognitive growth as increasingly organised, complex and differentiated. He viewed the infant as an active and interactive being who assembles knowledge about the world by engaging it. The infant's knowledge of the world, therefore, is constructed from interactions and experiences with people, playthings, events, and social relationships.

Jones and Bouffard (2012) postulate that social and emotional learning done in isolation only has had moderate effects on child development. Integrating social and emotional learning into the academic curricula may be necessary for social-emotional learning to have a significant impact on child development. There is an increasing appreciation for the need to teach and support the development of the whole person as opposed to merely focusing on academic achievement and test scores.

According to Sahlberg (2010), director general of Centre for International Mobility and Cooperation (CIMO) and one of the world's leading experts on school reform and the educational and economic success of Finland, predominant reliance on standardised assessments to assess educational performance is not crucial for fostering significant educational progress. Increasing evidence indicates that the intensified emphasis on high-stakes testing is hampering students' conceptual understanding,

stifling their creativity, and limiting their capacity for innovation—fundamental elements of modern education in a society driven by knowledge. Educational institutions should prioritise nurturing mindsets, cultivating cultures, and developing skills conducive to fostering creative and collaborative learning environments *(*Hargreaves & Sahlberg, 2013).

2.4 Best practices in whole child education

Best practices in high quality whole child education should involve instructional application of supporting learners' social-emotional health and learning (Hanover Research, 2015). In other words, early childhood teachers should use the holistic approach to connect children's development with their natural environment and build strong relationships through active learning and social activities (Foundation Education, 2018). Although few will argue against the inclusion of literacy and mathematics skills in school curricula, social and emotional capabilities are increasingly being recognised and valued as essential for children's school and life successes (Duncan et al., 2007).

Research from developmental science also points out that human relationships are the essential ingredient that actuates healthy development and learning. Supportive, approachable relationships with caring adults are foundational for healthy child development and learning (Berman et al., 2018). Positive, stable relationships can safeguard the potentially negative effects of even serious hardship.

Conditions of high support and low threat have a positive influence on a child's performance versus deficient performance whenever a child must perform without support or under threatening circumstances. When adults have the social competence to appreciate and understand children's needs, communication, and experiences, they

can counterweight stereotypes, promote the development of constructive attitudes and behaviours and build confidence to support learning in all learners (Darling-Hammond & Cook-Harvey, 2018). They state that optimal brain design and optimal learning are developed by the presence of sincere, consistent relationships.

Darling-Hammond and Cook-Harvey (2018) further claim that the brain's capacity develops best when children feel emotionally and physically safe; when they feel connected, supported, engaged, and challenged; and when they have robust opportunities to gain experience - with rich materials and experiences that allow them to inquire into the world around them.

2.5 Whole-child development in Namibia

According to the situational analysis of the IECD approach (2017), the extent of the Integrated Early Childhood approach in Namibia is not well comprehended, with many parents and caretakers focusing on kindergartens or centre-based facilities. Several child-focused pointers reveal a range of IECD components to clearly reflect on Namibia's performance in the domain of ECD. These components are maternal and child health, nutrition, child protection, a nurturing family environment parenting support, and stimulation for early learning (IECD, 2017). According to the 2011 National Education Conference, there is still little access or equity in the provision of early childhood development and education.

Based on the 2011 Census, less than 20% of children 0-4 years of age attend an ECD centre. According to the 2011 Census, 37,789 children between the ages of 0 and 4 years were enrolled in ECD programmes. The Ministry of Gender Equality and Child Welfare (MGECW) baseline survey in 2012 found 61,218 children in ECD centres. Such facilities and programmes are community or privately run and dependent on the contributions from parents, guardians, and benefactors.

Access to quality services is not equitable. Parents who can afford it send their children to programmes with well-trained educators and adequate facilities, while poorer families use a volunteer or lowly paid educators working in inadequate facilities with little training or equipment (IECD, 2017). The Ministry of Education provided pre-primary education to 17,572 children in 2012 (EMIS 2012) and to an estimated 25,000 in 2015. The number of children in pre-primary education classes increased to 41,607 in 2017, representing 6% of learners in Namibian schools (15th Day School Report, 2017).

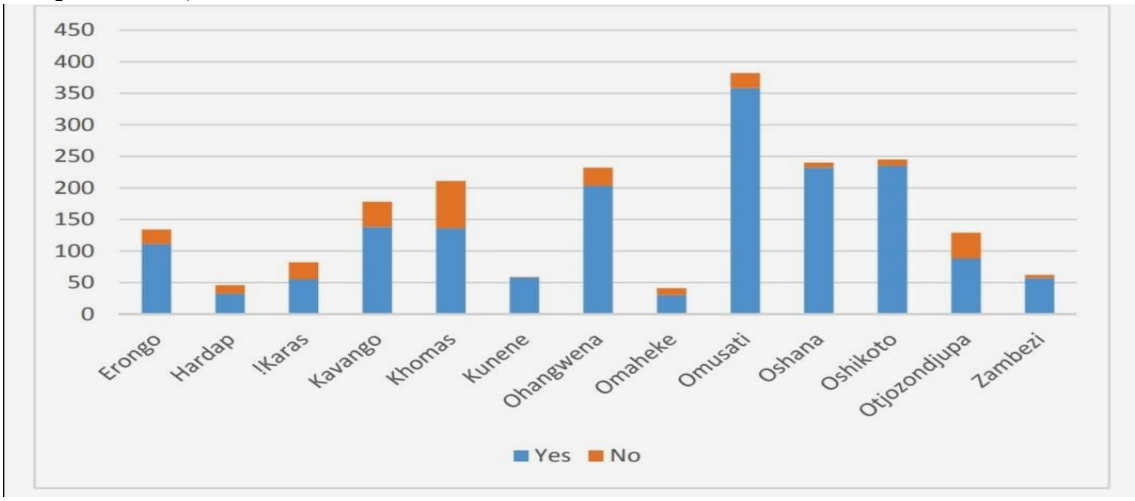

Figure 2.2: Numbers of ECDs per region that were registered or not with the MGECW

Note: Figure 2.2 presents the results of the 2012 nation-wide survey of ECD centres in Namibia. Regions with the greatest number of ECD centres were Omusati (392), Oshikoto (259), Oshana (246) and Onhangwena (235). Regions with the highest proportions of registered centres were Kunene, Oshana, Omusati and Oshikoto. The lowest proportions were in the Khomas, Hardap and Karas regions. From "Early Childhood Development and Education in Namibia," by the Ministry of Gender Equality & Child Welfare, 2014, *Research & Information Services of Namibia (Raison),* p. 2 (www.raison.com.na). Copyright 2014 by the Government of the Republic of Namibia.

Many ECD centres operate apart from the regulations and ordinances necessary to provide quality holistic child development services with well-trained educators and adequate facilities. UNICEF (2018), partnering with the government of Namibia, agrees that one of the many challenges of the Namibian education system is the inadequate quality of education due to unqualified and underqualified teachers. To combat this, UNICEF and the government of Namibia are engaged in efforts to improve access to early childhood education, including developing the NIECD policy (2007) guidelines.

Children's play has come under renewed attack and this plays a fundamental role in the pre-primary classroom attempts at following a whole child approach. In Namibia, especially in the pre-primary classroom, play is of great importance if holistic education is to be regarded as a priority. The researcher found that structured lessons and formal learning take the place of normal, creative and interactive play.

Consistent with what is observed in some Namibian pre-primary classrooms, Golinkoff et al. (2006) have figured that in the current policy environment, play has become a "four-letter word", with many preschools having lessened or even eliminated play from their schedules. According to UNICEF (2018), an obstacle to integrating play into pre-primary systems is the lack of understanding of the value of play as a foundation for academic concepts. Rote memorisation and recall of information remain the norm in many settings. In many formal educational environments, you'll find elements like structured readings, traditional lectures, digital learning tools, and standardised evaluations, often lacking the interactive, play-based teaching approach (Almon, 2003).

Zosh et al. (2017) agree that, although play is highlighted in numerous early childhood policies, its implementation in practice frequently falls short. Moreover, the significance of learning through play is often undervalued both in homes and schools as children progress in age.

Further, in a misguided effort to increase school readiness, some education systems are introducing basic reading and mathematics skills earlier in preschool at the expense of whole-child development through playful pedagogies (Allee-Herndon & Roberts, 2020).

The teachings addressing cognitive development often involve children sitting at tables engaged in formal class activities (Golinkoff et al., 2006), instead of activities such as creating play dough gifts or making block constructions with the teacher engaging the children in guided conversations about their processes. Alphabet drills and quiet desk work are also increasingly used (Steinhauer, 2005).

Shifting away from rote alphabet drills and structured reading sessions, children thrive in environments rich with language, where they can actively engage through games, interactive exercises, and frequent storytelling sessions. This immersive approach fosters vocabulary enrichment and facilitates robust language development in early childhood (Mcilroy, 2023).

According to Brandon (2002), teachers have argued that the instruction techniques that early childhood education experts say are ideal for learning, are frequently disregarded as ‘just play’ by administrators and policymakers pushing what they consider to be more academically oriented curricula. Parents of young children are also increasingly demanding preschool content that they view as academic instead of play (Healy, 2003).

Observations by this researcher indicate that Namibian teachers do realise the value of play-based learning. In contrast, the researcher experienced that Namibian parents regard written/formal tasks as sensible learning as they are mostly uneducated about the benefits of play for their children's overall development. A recent journal article in the NAEYC (2019) guides teachers who need to defend play-based preschool environments from attacks by individuals, including parents, who question their values.

As parents are the customers of early childhood programmes, these programmes are likely to eventually give in to parental pressure and change curricula to mirror parental preferences, even if devaluing play is not sensible (Zigler & Bishop-Josef, 2006).

The current attack on play contradicts sound development theory as well as a holistic developmental approach in the pre-primary classroom. Piaget developed his theory of cognitive development after conducting extensive observations of his own children, including their play. He argued that children actively acquire knowledge through interacting with the physical environment. In particular, cognitive development occurs through the complementary process of assimilation and accommodation. In assimilation, the child interprets the environment in terms of his or her present way of thinking. For example, a child using a box as if it were a car, is assimilating the box into his or her mental concept of a car. Accommodating, in contrast, consists of the child changing and expanding on what he or she already knows. When the child encounters something in the environment that he or she does not understand, the child must expand, through accommodation, his or her view of the world and thereby restore equilibrium.

Play, according to Piaget (1952), provides the child with a multitude of opportunities to interact with materials in the environment and construct his or her own knowledge about the world. This play is one of the primary contexts in which cognitive development occurs (Zigler & Bishop-Josef, 2006).

2.6 The relationship between the views of IECD and ASCD regarding holistic child development

Figure 2.3 shows the five crucial aspects of learning that should be presented daily in the classroom, including cognitive-intellectual activity, creative-intuitive activity, structured physical movement and unstructured play, art- and craftwork and engagement with nature and the community (Hanover Research, 2015). The researcher as a teacher has not witnessed this type of approach to learning in the Namibian pre-primary classroom. The whole child approach, which includes these various types of learning, relies on the fact that learners have multiple intelligences and thus intend to engage all the different aspects of child development. When children are healthy, safe, engaged, supported, and challenged, they will be able to perform to the best of their ability (ASCD, 2007).

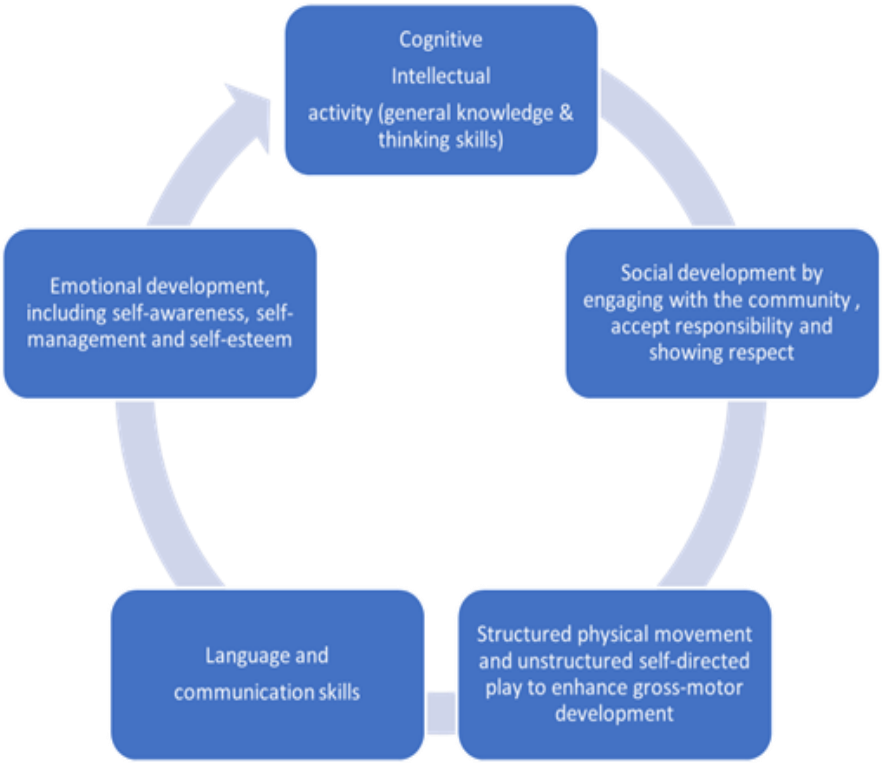

Figure 2.3. The five developmental domains of early childhood

Note: A summary of the domains of child development and early learning: Cognitive development, social- emotional learning, physical development as well as language and communication skills. Adapted from "Transforming the Workforce for Children Birth Through Age 8: A Unifying Foundation", by National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine, 2015, *The National Academies Press.* (https://doi.org/10.17226/19401)

Rooted in the child developmental theory, the Whole Child Initiative (WCI) acts by the principles of holistic education to promote the development of children who are healthy, safe, engaged, supported and challenged. The ASCD maintains that all five tenets serve to help learners in their long-term success by addressing a diversity of developmental needs. Each learner enters school healthy and engages in a healthy lifestyle by learning basic health principles in the classroom.

One area in which ASCD's whole child approach delivers a new focus for an old insight is the integration of health as part of a positive school climate in which learning can thrive. Health and education are integrally linked (Basch, 2011). It has been confirmed that these two sectors are both foundational and interdependent. A learner, who is unhealthy, is likely not to attend school, or attend but is not able to concentrate.

- Each learner learns in a milieu that is physically and emotionally **safe** for everyone;
- Each learner is actively **engaged** in the learning process which is connected to the school and larger community;
- Each learner is **supported** by competent, caring adults and has access to personalised learning;
- Each learner is **challenged** academically and prepared to excel not only in the school environment, but also for successful participation in a global environment. (ASCD, 2007).

A situation analysis by the NIECD Policy (2007) presents a snapshot of the current status of young children and women in Namibia. It also highlights in which areas the rights of young children and women in Namibia remain unfulfilled. Data was presented within a framework of six key areas considered relevant to an IECD approach: health, nutrition, early learning, psychosocial development, water and sanitation and protection. The framework demonstrates the inter-dependency of the sectors and highlights a range of issues that have emerged to have a dramatic impact on the lives of women and children in Namibia. These issues include poverty, HIV/AIDS, gender relations, orphans and other vulnerable children and previously socially disadvantaged ethnic groups.

The term ‘integrated’ is defined as the need to view all aspects of children’s development holistically. It acknowledges that giving the child the best start in life requires a synergistic approach whereby child-centred interventions in areas such as health, nutrition, water, sanitation, psychosocial care, and protection all converge to work together.

These areas of the IECD’s approach correspond with the five tenets of the ASCD’s holistic approach to education to address diverse development needs necessary for best practices in a whole child development approach.

2.7 Roles and responsibilities of the entire community

According to Slade and Griffith (2013), current learners need to think both critically and creatively, communicate well, assess massive amounts of information, and solve complex problems. A solid foundation in reading, writing, math, and other fundamental subjects is as important as ever, yet insufficient for lifelong success. These 21st-century challenges require a new and improved way of approaching education policy and practice – a whole child methodology to learning, teaching, and community engagement. A holistic approach to education, therefore, goes beyond the establishment of early learning and stimulation, and is concerned with the development of every person’s cognitive, emotional, social, physical, creative and spiritual potential (Kochlar-Bryant & Heishman, 2010). Moreover, these skills are essential for learners’ eventual success in life. Slade and Griffith (2013) agree that a renewed commitment to the needs of the whole child will result in the determined goal of ensuring that all children become college, career, and citizenship ready by the time they graduate from high school for them to lead productive and satisfying lives.

The United Nations Children's Fund's holistic approach to education aligns with the ASCD's approach and begins with early learning. Early learning is the critical foundation period before primary school begins, followed by quality primary education where children begin accumulating significant skills and then continue through adolescence for success, where the goal is to satisfactorily equip adolescents for adulthood (UNICEF, 2018).

Our emotions, skills, experiences and knowledge all work together in one package. Unfortunately, in many circumstances, these non-cognitive skills are not cultivated together, but are seen as separate, detached skills. This is problematic because learners do not leave their emotions outside the classroom. Instead, they enter the classroom as complete bodies possessing hearts and minds. Supporting and nourishing the whole child must therefore be a priority to ensure that effective and mindful learning takes place in the classroom. Darling-Hammond and Cook-Harvey (2018) strongly agree that a positive school climate is essential for a thriving educational experience, considering that learning is greatly influenced by emotions and relationships.

School climate, moulded by its interpersonal relationships, teaching practices and organisational structures, creates the physiological and psychological conditions for productive learning. When these features of school life are not supportive, student engagement and learning are undermined (Darling-Hammond & Cook-Harvey, 2018).

The cultivation of learners' social and emotional competencies aims to equip them with essential skills for navigating emotions effectively, establishing and attaining meaningful goals, empathising with diverse viewpoints, fostering healthy relationships, exercising sound judgment, and addressing interpersonal challenges with constructive approaches (Elias, 2014).

The ASCD's whole child approach outlines that social-emotional learning aims to educate the 'whole student', support learners' capacity to know themselves, build and sustain supportive relationships and participate in their school communities as socially responsible citizens and foster academic achievement.

Refashioning the definition of a successful child, ASCD moves away from a narrow focus solely on narrowly defined academic achievement towards one that champions the long-term development and success of children (ASCD, 2007). This new definition laid the groundwork for the whole child initiative, which advocates for local, national, and international policies and practices that ensure each child, in each school, and each community, is healthy, safe, engaged, supported, and challenged. In addition, there is also a growing body of research demonstrating that expanding schools' focus to include social and emotional learning benefits learner development. (Thapa et al., 2013). Indeed, there is evidence that learners increase academic achievement because of the implementation of social-emotional programmes (Durlak et al., 2011).

The provision of an all-embracing set of services does not rest with only one sector or government since children's early childhood development and basic needs are inseparable.

Protecting the worldwide early childhood development rights of children necessitates an integrated plan that involves all private- and religious organisations, government departments, parents and children (IECD Policy, 2015). Liew and McTigue (2010) confirm the importance of a school curriculum to integrate activities that promote the development of social-emotional and self-regulatory skills with academic instruction.

But how are schools to do this? How will schools put the whole child policy into practice? A focus on the fundamentals is vital, though not necessarily the fundamentals of the information age (reading, writing, and mathematics). Firstly, the new fundamentals refer to the atmosphere and society that is established to ensure success - including providing resources and attention to a child's health (physical, social, emotional, and mental) and safety. This provides attention and awareness to elements which promote learning and create a supportive environment that allows for development and growth (Flook, 2019).

Secondly, schools should move beyond mere academic measures and expand their understanding of what creates effective learning. If the purpose of a school is to prepare learners for an ever-changing society, then effective schools must look toward what skills, abilities and behaviours will be required. Pink and Zhao (2011) describe it as being focused on developing concepts and using the essential skills of empathy, creativity, and experimentation through play. Content knowledge should be combined and utilised with other skills toward a larger goal and not be confined to specific subjects. Schools will need to be restructured and adapted to accommodate individual learners' interests, preferences, and learning needs.

The essential skills of the future will allow an individual to navigate abstract learning**,** develop emotional skills of empathy, communication, and understanding, cultivate social skills of teamwork and leadership as well as expand creative skills of problem solving and production. Schools need to apply changes that enable all children and teachers in the school environment to promote, practise, and enhance their social and emotional development – not just as an add-on to their curriculum, but as a fundamental part of all that takes place in the school (Slade & Griffith, 2013).

The Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL, 2012) is an integrated framework for how educators, families and communities can partner to support social and emotional learning (SEL).

Figure 2.4: Five competencies of CASEL framework

Note: Transformative Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) Competencies (Figure 2.4) describe the knowledge, skills, outlooks, and capacities that children can develop when the conditions are supportive of their healthy, whole development. From "*Effective social and emotional learning programs"* by CASEL, 2012, *CASEL guide.* https://casel.org/casel-framework/. Copyright by CASEL, 2020

2.8 Theoretical framework

2.8.1 Maslow's hierarchy of needs

Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs has been used as the platform in the development of a variety of school improvement processes that ensure that the approach is integrated and systemised into the policies and practices of the school, district, and community (Maslow, 1958). Maslow's (1958) theory states that people tend to fulfil needs hierarchically in the order of physiological needs, safety needs, love and belonging needs, esteem needs and self-actualisation needs.

Maslow's hierarchy of needs has influenced the WCD approach through the tenets of the ASCD in that the whole child tenets are arranged in this hierarchy: healthy, safe, engaged, supported and challenged. Reflecting on Maslow's hierarchy, the five tenets that all schools should strive for are also formulated in the IECD approach in Namibia. These indicators can also be divided into the categories of Maslow's needs: physiological (nutrition and health), safety (child protection), love, belonging and esteem (family and parent support) and self-actualisation (early learning). They illustrate the conditional requirements of one need to successfully strive for the next.

The WCD approach is inspired by Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs. It asserts that, before learners can respond to being appropriately supported and challenged in their intellectual growth, they must first be healthy, safe, and engaged (Slade & Griffith, 2013). The idea is that better health makes for better education, and better education will improve health (UNESCO, 2019).

When children's basic physiological and psychological needs (safety, belonging, self-sufficiency, and competence) are met, they are more likely to become engaged in school, act in agreement with school goals and values, develop social skills, make a positive contribution to the school and community, and achieve academic success. Furthermore, when schools fail to meet those needs, children are more likely to become less motivated, more alienated, and poorer academic performers (Slade & Griffith, 2013).

At the bottom of Maslow's hierarchy of human needs, we find the physiological level which contains our basic and survival-ensuring needs such as sleep, food, water and shelter. The research that supports the benefits of valuable nutrition and physical activity on children's learning is convincing. Benton (2008) provides a breakdown of

the research available on diet and cognitive development in children. The author reports on research which suggests macro (protein) and micronutrient deficiency (like zinc and iron) are associated with behaviour problems and hyperactivity. Consuming nutrient-dense food has been linked with positive academic results, while increased consumption of high-calory, low nutrient food has been linked with negative academic and behavioural results (Burrows et al., 2017).

At the second level of Maslow's hierarchy, the needs for safety and security become primary. Maslow (1943) defined safety needs as "security; stability; dependency; protection; freedom from fear, anxiety, and chaos [and] need for structure, order, law, and limits". Children who do not feel physically and emotionally safe, are not able to concentrate in the classroom, do not connect with their classmates, or do not go to school at all. Another sign of the child's need for safety is his or her preference for some kind of undisrupted routine. Children seem to want a predictable, orderly world. For instance, injustice, discrimination or inconsistency in the parents or teacher seems to make a child feel anxious and unsafe.

Young children seem to thrive better in a system where there is a schedule or a routine of some kind; a system that can be counted upon, not only for the present but also far into the future. It would be reliable to say that a child needs an organised world rather than an unorganised or unstructured one for optimal functioning as a human being (Maslow, 1943).

If both the physiological and the safety needs are gratified, the love, affection and belongingness needs will emerge. A child will hunger for affectionate relations with people in general and some children will go to extreme measures to satisfy this desire.

Ample research shows that children who feel both valued by adults and who experience belonging in their schools, perform better academically and have shown more social-emotional competence (Palmer & Gasman, 2008; Elias & Haynes, 2008).

Once all previous needs are met, a child may then move onto the next level: the need for self-esteem. All people in our society have a need or desire for a stable, firmly based, (usually) high evaluation of themselves, for self-respect, or self-esteem, and the esteem of others. With "firmly based self-esteem", we mean that which is soundly based upon real capacity, achievement, and respect from others. Increasingly today, there appears to be widespread appreciation of the crucial importance of these aspects of a child's development.

According to Maslow (1943), satisfaction with self-esteem needs leads to feelings of self-worth, self-confidence, strength, capability, and the capability of being useful and necessary in the world. Only then, do children feel confident in their learning ability and become assured enough to take responsibility for their own learning. By preventing these needs, feelings of inferiority, weakness and helplessness will be produced. These feelings in turn escalate to either basic discouragement or else compensatory or neurotic trends.

Once all previous needs are met, a child may then move to the next level: The need for self-actualisation. Even if all these needs are satisfied, we may still expect that new unhappiness and restlessness will eventually develop, unless the individual is doing what they are built for. Maslow writes: "*A musician must make music, an artist must paint, a poet must write, if he is to be ultimately happy. What a man can be, he must be. This need we may call self-actualization*" (1954, p.46).

At the fifth level, self-actualisation turns out to be the motivating factor where children will strive for higher learning goals and seek to achieve them. Figure 2.5 below summarises Maslow's hierarchy of needs.

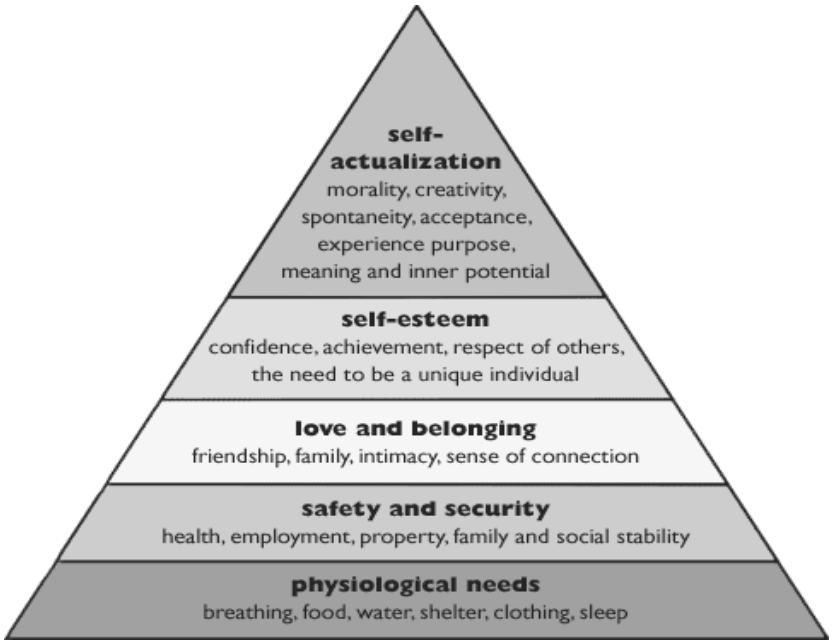

Figure 2.5: Maslow's hierarchy of needs explained

Note: Maslow's hierarchy of needs is a theory proposed by psychologist Abraham Maslow in 1958, which suggests that human needs can be arranged in a hierarchical order, with lower-level needs needing to be fulfilled before higher-level needs become motivating factors. The hierarchy is typically represented as a pyramid with five levels, arranged from the most basic physiological needs at the bottom to higher-level needs at the top. Adapted from "*Emotional blocks to creativity*." by A.H. Maslow, 1958. *Journal of Individual Psychology 14*, p. 51–56 (https://psycnet.apa.org/record/1959-07879-001). Copyright 2016 by PsycINFO Database Record

Using growth and health as his baseline, Maslow provides a model for how children are motivated to learn. At the same time, he acknowledges the role of backsliding forces and the potential for stagnation, often as a result of inadequate environmental conditions (Bland & Derobertis, 2017).

Maslow (1943) referred to his own hierarchy of needs as a holistic-dynamic theory because it assumes that the whole person is constantly being motivated by one need or another and that people have the potential to grow toward the highest need, which is self-actualization. His theory therefore is best suited to drive this study about holistic child development, as the WCD approach also strives to include all aspects of development whereby one facet cannot exist without the other – with the same desire for each child to become everything he or she is could become.

The objective of the study, that explored current practices Namibian pre-primary teachers employ to implement the holistic development of children, therefore benefitted from Maslow's theoretical framework as it also realised the importance of the different developmental aspects of child development to one another.

2.8.2 Contributing theorists of holistic ideas

Originating theorists of holistic ideas include Friedrich Fröbel (1782 – 1852) and Amos Bronson Alcott (1799 – 1888). As an educator, Alcott initiated new ways of interacting with young children, focusing on a conversational style. He pursued developing tuition based on self-exploration, with an emphasis on dialogue and questioning rather than drill and lecturing. Many of Alcott's educational principles are still used in classrooms today, including teaching by encouragement, art, music and drama education, learning through experience, risk taking in the classroom, physical activities and recess in early childhood education.

Alcott believed that early education must bring forth spontaneous thoughts and emotions of a child. He also emphasised that infancy should primarily focus on enjoyment (Bedell, 1980).

This contributing theory of holistic education adds value to the current study as a holistic approach to education should include subjects like art, music, drama, play and physical activities that aid children to develop additional skills, not only cognitive skills.

Fröbel was a German pedagogue who did the groundwork for modern education based on the insight that children have unique needs and capabilities. He believed that play is the basis of learning in early childhood, and he created the concept of the kindergarten (Bruce, 2012). He puts play at the heart of his educational programme, calling it the "highest expression of human development in childhood for it alone is the free expression of what is in a child's soul" (Fröbel et al., 1912).

Fröbel's theory adds to the current study because play forms an integral part of holistic child development. Through play, children learn social and interpersonal skills, for example by sharing toys. Such socio-emotional development is an essential part of WCD. Maslow (1954) agrees and states that he is interested in a type of creativity that arises from the unconscious mind, generating fresh ideas that depart from the current status quo. From the depths of our inner selves emerge the capacity to play, enjoy, fantasize, laugh, relax and be spontaneous. This creativity is like intellectual play, granting us the freedom to express our true selves.

2.9 Zone of proximal development (ZPD)

Lev Vygotsky (1896-1934) was a Russian psychologist and theorist of cognitive development. Vygotsky emphasised sociocultural influences on development, particularly how interactions with people – parents, teachers and peers – foster cognitive development. He argued that development occurs within the ZPD (Vygotsky, 1978), meaning tasks that are difficult for children to learn alone can be mastered if someone skilled at the task, guides the child. The lower limit of the ZPD represents what the child can accomplish independently, while the upper limit denotes the child's potential with assistance or guidance.

Vygotsky (1978) claims that play serves as the primary context for cognitive development: “Play is the source of development and creates the zone of proximal development” (1978, p.138). In play, the child interacts with others and can learn from them. Further, Vygotsky argues that when children use objects to represent other objects in play (e.g. using a block as a telephone), they inadvertently set the stage for abstract thought. Play allows children to understand that an object can be a symbol of another object, separating the actual physical object from its meaning.

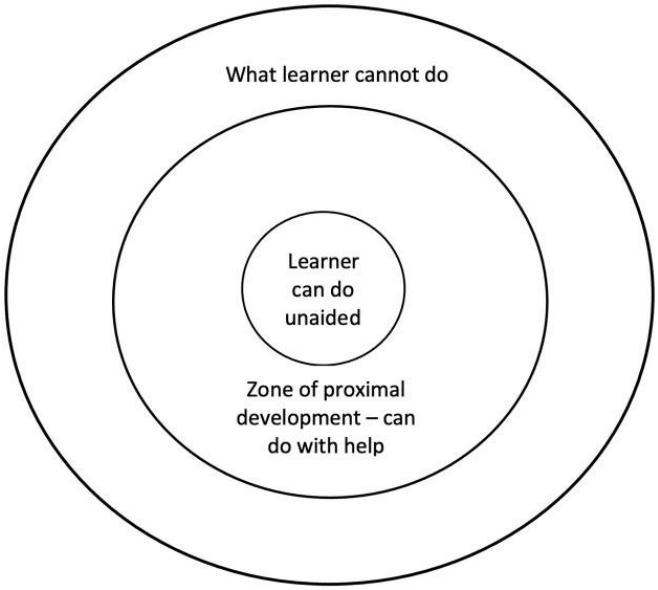

Figure 2.6: Social development theory: Vygotsky

Note: Figure 2.6 presents Vygotsky's theory for social development in the young child. It refers to the difference between what a learner can do without assistance and what they can achieve with guidance or collaboration from a more knowledgeable other, such as a teacher, parent, or peer. From "Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes," by L.S. Vygotsky, 1978*https://www.simplypsychology.org/Vygotsky*

2.10 Summary

Meeting learners' needs according to Maslow's hierarchy forms the basis for the Integrated Early Childhood approach in Namibia which is guided by the National Integrated Early Childhood Development of 2007. The IECD approach defines ECD as a set of integrated interventions directed at holistic care, development and protection of the child, and the approach forms the basis of the theoretical framework.

CHAPTER THREE
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

Chapter Two described the theoretical framework that underpinned the study, followed by an overview of literature on whole child development at pre-primary level in Namibia.

This chapter covers the research paradigm, research design, population, sampling procedures, research instruments used, data collection procedure and analysis. The validity and reliability of the research instruments, as well as the ethical issues that guided the research process are also presented in this chapter.

3.2 Research paradigm

This study will make use of a constructivism research paradigm to explore the WCD practices in the pre-primary school classrooms in Windhoek, Namibia. Piaget (1952) is one of the most prominent figures in the development of the constructivist theory, particularly in the context of cognitive development. He emphasised that knowledge is actively constructed by individuals through their interactions with their environment. Vygotsky's theory of social constructivism (1978) focuses on the 'zone of proximal development' and this concept underscores how learners construct understanding with the help of more knowledgeable others (See section 2.9).

Recent scholars, who have summarised this perspective, are Lincoln and colleagues (2011). Social constructivists assert that individuals strive to understand the world around them. They create subjective interpretations of their experiences, which are directed toward specific objects or concepts. These interpretations are diverse and multifaceted, prompting researchers to explore the complexity of viewpoints, instead

of simplifying them into a few categories. According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), the aim of research is to prioritise participants' perspectives on the situation being examined. Consequently, questions are formulated to be broad and general, allowing participants to shape the meaning of their experiences, often developed through discussions or interactions with others. The more open-ended the questions, the more effective, as researchers attentively listen to what individuals express in their everyday contexts (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

3.3 Research approach and strategy

This study used a qualitative research approach to explore the WCD practices in the pre-primary school classrooms in Windhoek, Namibia. Creswell (2014) asserts that qualitative research enables the researcher to investigate the actual experiences of the participants and thereby obtain in-depth information about people and places. According to Creswell (2014), data analysis in a qualitative study is moving from an inductive to a deductive format. Terre-Blanche et al. (2006) as cited in Hannah (2015, p.321), maintains that an inductive process of data analysis is "a back and forth movement between what one knows and what one wishes to know, description and interpretation, foreground and background, part and whole, to achieve a compelling account of the phenomenon being studied". A deductive research approach was followed to validate existing knowledge and theory regarding best practices in holistic education at the pre-primary school level.

3.4 Research design

As stated, this study used a qualitative approach. Specifically, it used the collective case study design to explore the WCD practices in the pre-primary school classrooms in Windhoek, Namibia. A qualitative case study methodology involves more than one case where the researcher forms patterns of findings across cases (Hartsfield, 2021). According to Yin (2014), a case study is defined as an "empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-world context" (p.16). Yin (2014) further describes a case study in research as a detailed and systematic investigation of a particular individual, group, event, or phenomenon within its real-life context, aiming to provide rich and comprehensive insights into the complexities and dynamics of the subject under study. Individuals, events or groups are often examined in case studies. According to Algozzine et al. (2021), researchers aim to achieve a profound understanding of situations and the significance they hold for those involved through the examination of case studies. Case study research typically includes multiple data collection techniques and data is collected from multiple sources.

Qualitative data analysis was used to analyse the data received through the interviews, transcripts and questionnaires and analysis techniques such as thematic analysis and content analysis were used to identify themes or patterns within the data. Once the data had been analysed, the researcher interpreted the findings with due consideration of the research questions. This involved drawing conclusions based on the results of the analysis and considering their implications for theory, practice, or policy.

Combining different methods (interviews, observation) allowed data triangulation and increased the authenticity and trustworthiness of the study (Barbour, 2001). Data triangulation makes use of several data sources in a study and methodical triangulation is used to strengthen results because previous studies on the subject have provided questionable evidence. Researchers therefore make use of different research approaches where questionnaires were used along with interviews involving open-ended questions in order to improve the trustworthiness and authenticity of the findings (Bans-Akutey & Tiimub, 2021). It is Yin's (2014) view that, when the process has been given careful attention, the potential result is the production of a high-quality case study.

To understand the epistemological element of this study, we should ask the question of how we know what we know? Epistemology therefore helps us to know the truth and what counts as knowledge (Davidson, 2000). The epistemological basis of this research was empirical epistemology since knowledge was best derived from sense experiences and demonstrable, objective facts to gain knowledge.

Ontology is the study of the nature of our beliefs about reality. It describes how the researcher perceives reality and the nature of human engagement in the world (Alele & Malau-Aduli, 2023). Empiricism once more refutes the concept of absolute truth and pre-existing facts, instead asserting that truths emerge through meticulous observation and assessment of our surroundings. The research questions of this study were set up for a subjective approach. Subjectivism means that the social phenomena are created from the perceptions and actions of the observer (Dale, 2014). Individuals may perceive the world differently based on their unique experiences, beliefs, and perspectives.

The social phenomena of the current study were created from the perceptions and consequent actions of the participants.

3.5 Population

Creswell (2014) defined a research population as a group of individuals who fit the conceptual definition of people with the same characteristics the researcher wants to base his or her study results on. Teachers at the pre-primary level at four conveniently selected pre-primary schools in Windhoek, Namibia, were the population of interest for this study. The selection of the schools for the population followed the convenient sampling method. With the convenient selection method, units are selected for inclusion in the population because they are the easiest for the researcher to access (Creswell, 2014). In the case of this study, the researcher included pre-primary school teachers in the population due to their geographical proximity (Windhoek), availability, and willingness to participate in this study.

The population consisted of 30 full-time pre-primary school teachers at four different pre-primary schools in Windhoek. One is a private school (with 20 teachers) and the other three are public schools (with a total of 10 teachers for the three schools together). Fewer pre-primary teachers are employed at public schools, thus the discrepancy between the number of public- and private school teachers selected as the population.

By choosing private and some public schools, the researcher hoped to collect a wide range of participants with different viewpoints, as the curriculum and the learning outcomes in the two types of schools (public and private) will differ.

3.6 Sample

Based on previous studies, 30 participants seem to be an ideal sample size for qualitative studies for the most comprehensive view, but qualitative studies can have as few as 10 participants and still yield fruitful and applicable results (InterQResearch, 2022).

As there are no exact rules regarding the ideal number of cases to be selected in a case study, recommendations made in the relevant literature range from four to 15 (Mills et al., 2012). A sample of 12 participants from the 30 teachers of the four pre-primary schools were conveniently selected for the current study. That is, three teachers were selected from each of the four schools. Guest, Bunce and Johannson (2006) analysed 60 interviews and found that the saturation of themes was reached by the 12th interview, therefore the decision that 12 participants should suffice for the current case study.

Purposive sampling relies on the personal judgement of the researcher and is based on the study's purpose. This sampling type was used to select a sample of three teachers from the private pre-primary school. Considering the different types of purposive sampling techniques, the maximum variation sampling technique was applied as it allows for the selection of a wide range of participants with different viewpoints.

The three public pre-primary schools in the population only employ three teachers each, thus it was decided to include all nine of these teachers in the sample. Total population sampling was thus applied with the teachers of the three public schools, all full-time teachers in pre-primary schools.

This is a type of purposive sampling technique where you choose to examine the entire population that shares a particular set of characteristics (Creswell, 2014).

Thus, in summary, the sample of this study consisted of 12 participants. Three of the participants were purposively selected with the maximum variation sampling technique from amongst 20 teachers employed at a private pre-primary school in Windhoek. All nine teachers from three public pre-primary schools were selected to participate in this study, using the total population sampling technique.

3.7 Research instruments

Observation (watching what people do) is deemed an obvious method of carrying out research in psychology, or in any case study. Neuman (2014) defines observation as the systematic process of watching and recording behaviours, events, or phenomena as they naturally occur in their real-world context. However, there are diverse types of observational methods, and a distinction needs to be made between naturalistic observations, controlled observations and participant observations.

This study made use of naturalistic observation which involves observing the spontaneous behaviour of participants in natural surroundings (McLeod, 2015). Rather than writing a detailed explanation of all behaviour observed, it is often easier to code behaviour according to a previously agreed scale using a behaviour schedule (McLeod, 2015). An observation table (see Appendix F) was created by the researcher with relevant items that could be marked off during the observation of participants. As proposed by Lindlof and Taylor (2011), written descriptions in the form of field notes were made during and immediately after observations.

A semi-structured interview guide will be used during the individual interviews. Digital voice recordings will be made of the interviews if the participants allow such. For participants who do not want to allow recordings of their voices, notes will be taken during the interview.

3.8 Data collection procedure

The researcher obtained ethical clearance from the University of Namibia's Research Ethics Committee before the commencement of this study (see Annexure A). The Executive Director of the Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture, as well as the Director of the Khomas Education Region (see Annexures B and C) granted the researcher permission to conduct this study in the selected schools in the Khomas region.

Thereafter, principals of the four selected schools were approached for permission to conduct this study with the pre-primary teachers concerned. Once the principals had granted their permission for the study to continue, all the teachers were called together during break time to explain the rationale of the study. The first teachers at each school who responded positively to the invitation to participate, were included in the study. Participants indicated when the researcher could observe their teaching activities. Likewise, the researcher asked participants when and where they would find it most convenient for the researcher to conduct the interview. Interviews were about 20 minutes long and were conducted outside of teaching hours.

Data collection techniques include interviews, observations (direct and participant), questionnaires, and relevant documents (Yin, 2014). Observations of teaching techniques/styles regarding whole child development were carried out at the four selected pre-primary schools in Windhoek. Naturalistic or nonparticipant observation happens when a researcher does not intervene and only studies behaviour that occurs naturally (McLeod, 2015). According to Yin (2014), the interview protocol script could help control the flow and sequence of questions that are part of the script.

Semi-structured interviews were also used to gain an understanding of the extent to which the WCD approach was used or not used by teachers in pre-primary classrooms in Namibia.

A semi-structured interview guide was used during the individual interviews. Items focused on specific practices in whole child development approaches at pre-primary school level. Digital voice recordings were made of the interviews with permission from the participants and recordings were transcribed verbatim (word-for-word). The researcher captured every word, including pauses, filler words, and non-verbal cues.

Where participants did not want their interviews to be recorded, the researcher took notes of their responses. The researcher conducted all the interviews herself. The relationship between the interviews and observations was reciprocal, as information obtained through observations was extended through interviewing and vice versa.

3.9 Data analyses

Interviews were recorded and transcribed, coded and grouped according to developing themes. The software programme Atlas. ti (version 22) was used to facilitate the analysis of the qualitative data. Data that was gathered during observation was used to supplement data gathered through interviews.

3.10 Trustworthiness and authenticity

Stahl and King (2020) posit that the trustworthiness of a study is important in evaluating its worth.

Trustworthiness involves establishing the following: (1) Credibility- confidence in the 'truth' of the findings; (2) Transferability- showing that the findings have applicability in other contexts; (3) Dependability- showing that the findings are consistent and could be repeated; and (4) Confirmability- a degree of neutrality or the extent to which the

findings of a study are shaped by the respondents and not the researcher's bias, motivation, or interest.

In the same vein, Ary, Jacobs and Sorensen (2010) explain that, although the qualitative researcher typically does not have generalisability as a goal, it is his or her responsibility to provide sufficiently rich, detailed, thick descriptions of the context so that potential users can make the necessary comparisons and judgments about similarity and hence transferability. Ary et al. (2010) further explain that transferability of a set of findings to another context depends on the similarity or goodness of fit between the context of the study and other contexts. However, the transfer of findings is made by the potential user of the findings, who must compare and decide on the similarity of the two contexts.

To ensure trustworthiness and authenticity of the findings derived from the research instruments used, the researcher based the questionnaire on established theory and the questions were carefully and precisely worded.

3.11 Ethical considerations

This study adhered to the ethical guidelines of the University of Namibia. All necessary steps were taken to ensure that the participants understood the research requirements, that the participants and their privacy were not harmed in any way, and that the key principles of informed participant consent, privacy, confidentiality and anonymity were upheld. Any information that could identify the participants was kept confidential and will be deleted after five years. Participants were thoroughly informed about their rights and were told that they could leave the study without consequences.

As Creswell (2009) advises, the following ethical safeguards were employed in this study: written permission (informed consent) was granted by the participating teachers

before data collection commenced; the purpose of the study (research objectives) was explained verbally to the research participants, and the participating teachers were presented with the purpose of the study in writing through the written consent form.

The following three aspects were also considered:

Confidentiality and anonymity: The researcher conducted the interviews alone and had sole access to the collected data. No assistant was involved to maintain the greatest confidentiality and anonymity possible.

Dissemination of results: Participants were informed that the final report of the study would be published in the form of a bound research report (thesis).

Participants also understand that such a report is intended to grant the researcher a master's degree and provide knowledge about best practices regarding whole child development in Namibian pre-primary schools. The final report would be disseminated as follows: one copy of the thesis would remain with the researcher whilst another copy is forwarded to the Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture.

A copy of the thesis shall also be delivered to the Khomas Education Directorate and another copy shall be kept in the University of Namibia's library. The principals of each of the participating schools will also receive a copy of this thesis.

Disclosure: Being a teacher at Windhoek Gymnasium, the researcher remained objective by having discussed the interview questions and data with her supervisor. The researcher also remained objective by comparing the findings with those of the other three schools, which had corresponding findings and results.

3.12 Summary

This chapter provided a synopsis of the research methodology used to collect data for the study. The chapter outlined the research design, population, research instruments, sample and sampling procedures and procedures for data collection that were used. In this chapter the validity and reliability of the research instrument were addressed. Furthermore, the procedure of data analysis, how the data was collected and the ethical issues regarding this study were addressed.

The next chapter, Chapter Four, presents the findings of the study.

CHAPTER FOUR
PRESENTATION OF THE FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

The aim of this study was to explore best practices regarding holistic child development practices at four pre-primary schools in Windhoek, Namibia.

Chapter Three provided an overview of the research methodology employed, including the research design, target population, research tools utilised, sample selection process, and data collection procedures. Additionally, it delved into the assessment of the validity and reliability of the research instrument. Furthermore, the chapter clarified the data analysis methodology employed, detailing the process of data collection and addressing the ethical considerations pertinent to the study.

Chapter Four presents the findings of this study according to the themes emerging from the interviews and observations. The themes reflect the views and experiences of 12 teachers about the nature of whole child development at four pre-primary schools in Windhoek, Namibia. Due to this study being a qualitative, collective case study, data in this study is presented by describing participants' responses verbatim.

This study sought to answer the following research questions:

1. What knowledge do Namibian pre-primary teachers possess about the best practices in WCD?
2. How do pre-primary teachers implement best practices in WCD in their teachings to realise the WCD approach?
3. Do pre-primary teachers put more emphasis on a particular domain of child development at the expense of WCD?

The findings of this study are expected to provide policymakers, regional education planners, school management and teachers with more information regarding prevailing barriers to learning and how they are being experienced at participating pre-primary schools in the Khomas region. In this way, the findings of this study aid in identifying barriers to whole child development in the four pre-primary schools identified. Such findings could lead to an improvement in teaching that will eventually benefit the holistic development of the pre-primary child.

4.2 Contextualisation

In this section, the researcher provides participants and participating schools' pseudonym profile data used during interviews and observations as follows: school one (S1); school two (S2); three teachers from school one (T1s1, T2s1, and T3s1), and the three teachers from school two (T4s2, T5s2, T6s2).

Similarly, the three teachers from school three are referred to as (T7s3, T8s3, and T9s3), whilst the three teachers from school four are referred to as (T10s4, T11s4, T12s4).

4.3 Demographic information of participants and themes

The following table provides demographic information of teacher participants in this study.

Table 4.1: Teachers' demographic information

Demographic information			
Characteristic	Category	Frequency (F)	Percentage (%)
Age	20 – 30	2	16.7
	31 – 40	6	50
	41 – 50	1	8.3
	Over 50	3	25
Gender	Male	0	0
	Female	12	100
Grade taught	Grade RRR	1	8.3
	Grade RR	1	8.3
	Grade R	10	83.3
Years in current school	1 – 2 years	2	16.7
	3 – 4 years	3	25
	More than 5 years	7	58.3
Teaching experience	Less than 1 year	0	0
	1– 2 years	1	8.3
	3 – 4 years	2	16.7
	5 years and more	9	75
Professional qualification	Diploma in Education	7	58.3
	Degree in Education (BED)	2	16.7
	Honours in Education BED(HONS)	0	0
	Other: Non-Education Qualification	3	25

Note: Demographic information of teacher participants

Table 4.1 presents a summary of the demographic information of the teachers by gender, age, the grade they teach, years of teaching experience, years they have been in the current school, and their professional qualifications. All 12 pre-primary teacher participants are female. The ages of the teacher participants ranged from 20 to over 50 years of age. Six (50%) of the teacher participants fell within the age bracket of 31 – 40 years, two within the age bracket of 20 – 30, and another one within the age bracket of 41–50 years. Only three participants were above 50 years of age. Most of the

participants were Grade R teachers, and only two teachers indicated that they taught Grade RR and RRR classes, respectively. Out of the 12 teachers who participated in the study, nine had five or more years of teaching experience and only one had teaching experience of less than two years. Furthermore, seven of the teacher participants indicated that they had been teaching at their current school for more than five years, two have taught at their current school for one or two years, and three teachers indicated that they had been teaching at their current school for three to four years. Table 4.1 above also shows that most of the teachers (58.3%) have a teaching diploma qualification, whilst two have a degree in education (BED) and three indicated "Other" (**a non-education)** qualification.

4.4 Themes derived from teachers' views and experiences of whole child development in the classroom.

In this section, the researcher presents the findings according to the themes, which emerged from the research data collected. Table 4.2 below presents an overview of the themes derived from the interview questions, 59 organised under topics and sub-topics. Table 4.2: Themes derived from teachers' views and experiences

Topic 1: Teachers' views and knowledge about the whole child development approach *(Addressing Research Question 1)***.**
Sub-topic 1.1: Meaning of whole child development *(Teachers' definitions and understanding of WCD).* **Themes:** physical development social development emotional development cognitive development spiritual development
Sub-topic 1.2: Opinions of teachers on the importance of WCD in the pre-primary classroom *(Teachers elaborated on the important role of WCD on children's overall performance in and beyond the classroom).* **Themes:** the positive effect of WCD on learner's behaviour in general; the positive effect of WCD on learners' academic performance; the positive effect of WCD on learners' future or lifelong opportunities; the positive effect of WCD on school readiness.

Topic 2: Teachers' experience with the implementation of holistic child development in their respective classrooms. (*Addressing Research Questions 2&3)*
Sub-topic 2.1: Classroom strategies to address WCD and the methods teachers apply in their classrooms to address WCD (*Addressing Research Question 2)* **Themes:** daily programme emotional awareness creating awareness of the social needs of learners positive teacher/learner interaction implementing clear learning goals regarding WCD redesigning curriculum/lesson plans investing resources and educational toys safe, positive, and relaxed learning environment diverse curriculum including opportunities for social-, emotional-, physical- and cognitive development creative, interesting, and experimental learning opportunities/activities* concrete learning learning through play learning through movement and music stimulating critical thinking by asking questions or having group discussions.
Sub-topic 2.2: Types of learning difficulties or behavioural problems teachers experienced in class because of NOT developing the child as a whole. *(Addressing research question 3)* **Themes:** problems with social behaviour/interaction (not sharing, not submitting to authority) emotional outbursts of aggressiveness, emotional outbursts of anger, low self-esteem, crying, withdrawing, anxiety Attention Deficit Disorder, Attention Deficit Disorder Hyperactivity Disorder, lack of concentration disciplinary problems poor fine motor skills physical developmental delays poor listening skills.
Sub-topic 2.3: Challenges experienced when adapting a WCD approach **Themes:** inadequate teacher training/knowledge concerning holistic child development lack of resources /teaching aids lack of proper equipment for physical development overcrowded classrooms physically small classes heavy workload and time constraints parents not actively involved language barrier.

Subtopic 2.4 The implementation of WCD in Namibia **Themes:** Renewed mindset Proper education structure/syllabus Educated/equipped/properly trained teachers Educational equipment/enough teaching aids Teacher support groups/workshops for teachers Age of learners entering Gr R More pre-primary schools.

4.5 Teachers' views and knowledge of holistic child development (*Knowledge of the WCD approach – Research Question 1)*

This study's main aim was to explore the experiences of teachers regarding best practices of WCD at their schools and specifically in the Namibian pre-primary classroom. The main aim of the study was divided into two objectives: i) teachers' views and knowledge about whole child development, and ii) teachers' experiences on the implementation of best practices in WCD in the pre-primary classroom. Teachers' views about holistic child development were subdivided into:

- meaning of whole child development and the
- importance of whole child development.

Teachers' experiences with whole child development were subdivided into:

- classroom strategies to address WCD
- learning difficulties or behavioural problems encountered,
- challenges experienced with the WCD approach
- the implementation of WCD in Namibia.

4.5.1 Meaning of whole child development

Table 4.3: Teachers' views and knowledge about the whole child development approach (Addressing Research Question 1)

Meaning of whole child development
physical development social development emotional development cognitive development spiritual development

In this section of the study, the researcher presents the views of teachers regarding holistic child development. The findings presented in this section aim to answer the first question: What does the term holistic child development mean to you? This question provides a direct answer to Research Question 1: *What knowledge do Namibian pre-primary teachers possess about the best practices in WCD?* By using simpler vocabulary during interviews, the researcher found that the participants were more at ease, which was not the case initially when more complex vocabulary was used. The teachers first gave their definition of WCD in question 1 of the interview guide. In question 2 of the interview guide (see below), they explained why WCD is important in the classroom, which explained best practices regarding WCD. In their responses to the question about the meaning of whole child development, teachers expressed their views as follows:

T1s1: *"…it means we focus on all the different areas of a child, not just the educational part. We make sure their social-, emotional- and cognitive development is on par."* T1s1 added that teachers cannot only focus on one part of the child, knowing that all these areas affect the child's development.

In T5s2's view: "*To look in all the aspects of the child as a whole person, and not just cognitive, but the whole development of the little one."*

According to T7s3: *"Holistic child development is a way we work with the child as a whole. We try to develop the whole body of the child: physically, emotionally, socially and cognitively."*

T8s3 described holistic child development as follows: *"Holistic child development means the total development of this child: the socio-emotional development, the physical development, the intellectual development of a child is very important so the child needs to be developed in all those areas whereby I will not neglect the others."*

T8s3 further added that these aspects are interrelated, and that development should be holistic. T12s4 reinforces that the whole child needs to be developed; not only academically, but also physically, socially, and emotionally as well. T6s2 added the term 'spiritual development' when she described the term holistic child development as follows: *"To develop a child; mind body and spirit."*

Table 4.3 shows that most teachers' views on the meaning of whole child development are fairly similar. Their comprehensive definitions of the concept included most of the aspects of holistic child development, including the physical-, social-, emotional-, spiritual- and cognitive aspects of development. This description concurs with the description of *integrated development* as stated in the NIECD Policy of Namibia (2007). (see 2.6 of chapter 2). For children to develop, their basic physical needs for protection, food, and health must be met, along with their psychosocial needs for affection, interaction, and stimulation, and learning through exploration and discovery.

The key findings of this study indicated that most teacher participants had basic knowledge about the meaning of whole child development relative to the context from which they stemmed. Teachers in this study, however, viewed the meaning from different angles of teaching. Some participants offered a more global (and thus vague)

definition of holistic child development, for example T5s2 who defined WCD as follows: “To look in the aspect of the child as a whole person and not just cognitive but the whole development of the little one”. Some participants offered more specific examples and detail of their view of WCD. T1s1 remarked: “It means we focus on all the different areas of a child, not just the educational part. We make sure their social development is on par, the emotional part, and the intellectual or cognitive. Yes. So not only focusing on one part but know that all of these areas affect the child’s development.”

The findings in the preceding paragraph were consistent with the literature review of Namibia’s IECD policy (see Section 2.6) that defines whole child development as a nature whereby the physical, social, emotional, spiritual, and mental dimensions of development are considered inter-dependent.

In practice, integration will require a merging of service provision for young children and their families at the household and community level by a series of multi-sectoral IECD service providers (IECD, 2007). This entails the child being exposed to higher levels of strategic cognitive and creative activity, developing motor skills and social skills.

4.5.2 The importance of WCD in the pre-primary classroom

Table 4.4: Teachers’ views and knowledge about the whole child development approach (Addressing Research Question 1)

The importance of WCD in the pre-primary classroom and the teachers’ views on the important role/effect WCD has on children in the classroom
the positive effect of WCD on learners’ academic performance the positive effect of WCD on learners’ behaviour the positive effect of WCD on learners’ future/lifelong opportunities the positive effect of WCD on school readiness

In this section of this study, the researcher presents the views of teachers regarding the importance of holistic child development.

The findings presented in this section aim to answer the question: "In your view, is the development of the whole child important in the pre-primary classroom and why"? This question still attempts to answer research question 1: *What knowledge do Namibian pre-primary schoolteachers possess about the best practices in WCD*? By explaining why WCD is important or not and by elaborating on the importance of WCD in the pre-primary classroom, the teachers' knowledge about best practices in WCD was made clear.

T1s1 said: *"Definitely, very important, because, if the child is emotionally not okay, cognitively they won't be able to function as they should. And if physical development is not on par, it'll affect their schoolwork, so we have to make sure that, especially in preschool, that all the areas are being catered for."*

In addition, T2s1 stated that: *"Very important, because if a child is not okay sensory wise, you will see it in his behaviour, and he will not be able to sit still."* She added: *"...so they affect each other and if we start looking at the whole child development approach, then we will start seeing better results, better productivity and just a happier and safer space for the child."*

This is the response of T4s2 : *"Very important since it is the foundation class. It is very important to make sure that everything of the child is properly developed to make them ready for school."* T4s2 elaborated that WCD is also important as it lays the foundation for academic performances of career for the little one to be.

In response to the same question, T8s3 responded as follows: *"Yes, it is very much important because I'm sitting with a child as an individual in front of me. And if I do*

not develop this child as a whole, that child will be having a back log for his or her lifelong learning."

She further explained that all parts of development are intertwined, and that there is no way she can skip certain areas of development. T10s4 agreed that if a child misses any milestones early-on, *" ... it plays a role later on in life."* T9s3 feels very strongly about the importance of the emotional development of the child, commenting that: *"...because if a child is emotionally unstable, then how will the child go and learn in the next grade? They won't have confidence in themselves and they will always be crying and be like: 'I can't do this, I can't do that'...."*

As will be shown in Table 4.4, teachers presented strong views about the importance of whole child development in the pre-primary classroom. None of the 12 interviewees considered holistic child development as unnecessary or unimportant in the pre-primary classroom.

Most of the teachers recognised the importance of WCD for school readiness. Others also recognised the importance of WCD for lifelong learning and future success. Research question 1 was thus fully answered. Teachers not only understood the meaning and the importance of WCD in the pre-primary classroom but also explained why they deemed it important. By collaborating on the importance of WCD, they highlighted best practices regarding WCD, for example the significance of the integration of all the facets of holistic child development and how they impact one another.

During the interviews, all the teacher participants agreed that a holistic child development approach in the pre-primary classroom is of vital importance. According to most teachers, all aspects of development affect one another, whether on the

behaviour of the child, on learners' academic performance and/or on their social-emotional development. This is consistent with the findings of the National Research Council (2001)(cf. 2.3) that cognitive, social-emotional, and motor development are complementary, jointly supportive areas of growth, all demanding active attention in the preschool years. Social skills and physical skills influence cognitive development, just as cognition plays a role in children's social understanding and motor competence.

All aspects of development are therefore related to early learning and later academic performance and are necessary areas of early childhood pedagogy. These teachers do make a persuasive argument for the importance of WCD. Mcilroy (2023) agrees that holistic child development is the key to learning in the early years of childhood and that it is the role of the parent or teacher to start children on an early learning path to success by giving attention to all aspects of their development. The opinions of these teacher participants draw a parallel to a study that was done in Australia, claiming that modern literature defines school readiness as a holistic concept that incorporates cognitive, socio-emotional, and physical components (Australian Council for Educational Research, 2016).

Some teachers also commonly agreed that holistic child development has a direct effect on learners' future opportunities. The findings of this study concur with literature of the IECD policy of Namibia (2007).

The latter acknowledges that the key role played by IECD educators in the holistic development of the child establishes a relevant career path for them. Hanover research (2015) also found that holistic development in the child's early years of life serve as a solid foundation for lifelong learning, performance, and good health (cf. 2.3).

4.6 Teachers' experience on the implementation of holistic child development in the pre-primary classroom (*Knowledge of implementing the WCD approach – Research Question 2 & 3)*

4.6.1 Classroom strategies for implementing WCD at pre-primary level

Table 4.5: Teachers' experience on the implementation of WCD in the pre-primary classroom

Classroom strategies and methods teachers apply in their classrooms to address WCD *(Addressing research Question 2 & 3)*
daily programme/integrated lesson plans safe and relaxed environment diverse curriculum including opportunities for social- emotional learning creative, interesting, and experimental learning opportunities activities for higher levels of thinking/reasoning learning through play learning through movement, physical activities, and music

In this section of the study, the researcher presents the experiences of teachers regarding the implementation of WCD at pre-primary level. The findings presented here aim to answer the question: "What are the methods you apply in the classroom to address WCD?" This question was intended to answer research question 2: *How do pre-primary teachers implement best practices in WCD in their teachings to realise the WCD approach?* It indirectly also provided the answer to research question 3: *Do pre-primary teachers put more emphasis on one domain of child development at the expense of WCD?* While the teachers explained how they try to implement WCD in the classroom, they automatically emphasised the domains of child development that are a priority in their classrooms and omitted the areas that do not get attention during their daily teachings.

In their response to the question about the implementation of whole child development in their respective classrooms, teachers expressed their experiences regarding the **curriculum** provided by the Namibian Government as follows:

T4s2 described the methods she applies in the classroom to address WCD as follows: "*We actually do activities and then, out of these activities that's when you will see that OK, this child did not develop here, or this child cannot jump yet, or this child cannot hold a pencil yet. Then, from there on, you work out your lesson plans according to how you are going to assist the children in developing what they need to develop."* T12s4 also mentioned the **daily programme** in her class: "*We follow a daily programme, so we need to focus on one aspect of learning and in that lesson, we follow all of the criteria needed to develop this learner for that specific subject."*
T9s3 stated that the criteria for implementing whole child development in her school, is part of the curriculum provided by the government. She continued that she implements these criteria by doing a lot of physical activities. *"I do the fine muscle development, play with clay, thread beads. All of that."*

T12s4 stated that she also uses the curriculum provided by the government: "*I use the syllabus guide that is given to us by the government, and I let them have group discussions to help them to get to become more confident in their speaking. In this way they interact more with each other as well."* T11s4 supports the same criteria used in her school to implement WCD in the classroom: *"In the curriculum we also see what other topics we need to cover about the child."*

Teachers in the current study mentioned the importance of a **safe, positive, and relaxed learning environment.** This view is supported by other evidence-based studies that focus on the importance of whole child education, demonstrating that safe and healthy learners have higher levels of academic achievement (Bernal-Morales, 2018; Fobbs, 2015; Shaw, Gomes, Polotskaia & Jankowska, 2015). Children who feel unsafe in the classroom are unable to connect with their peers, to concentrate on the task at hand, or do not go to school at all (Hanover research, 2015). The experiences

of the teachers regarding best practices in WCD in the classroom, including that of a safe learning environment, are consistent with the literature review of the current study.

The whole child approach, inspired by Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs, asserts that, before learners can respond to being appropriately supported and challenged in their intellectual growth, they must first be healthy, safe, and engaged (ASCD, 2007)(cf. 2.8) . In response to the above-mentioned question, these teachers emphasised the importance of a safe, positive and relaxed learning environment as follows: T2s1: "*I try to produce an environment that makes everyone feel safe. That's a very big deal for me, and it makes no one feel left out."*

Teachers in the current study also mentioned that high-quality whole child education involves useful practices that support learners' **social-emotional health and learning**. They agreed that the social- and emotional development of the pre-primary child is essential for effective learning to take place. According to the Stanford Centre for Opportunity Policy in Education, social and emotional support for learners in school have commonly been called the missing piece in the accountability driven practices that are the cornerstone of the 'No Child Left Behind' movement (Hamedani & Darling-Hammond, 2015). There is a large quantity of research stressing the positive effect of social-emotional learning on learners' tertiary and career readiness, and on learners' commitment to engage in meaningful, challenging learning (Yoder, 2014). T1s1: "*We make sure that all the activities for the day is included in the daily program to make sure that every area is touched and they (the children) get enough physical activity, they have work that stimulates them cognitively, to socialise with their friends and have good relationships and know how to deal with social interactions in a better way."*

T8s3 supports the idea of social- emotional learning by saying that: "*The methods I'm applying is the various learning areas for the child. I'm taking the real situation, the practical situations, say for instance, if a child is bullying the other one, I have to use that as an example… I have to address it to show how a child must deal with his or her emotions."* In the same vein, another teacher from school one (T3s1) highlighted that: "*They (*the children) *have free playtime where they can socially interact with their friends. Emotionally we try to make it a safe and a friendly environment where they can be themselves."*

Teacher participants noted that **creating interesting and experimental learning opportunities**, which include concrete material and teaching aids, is an important strategy used in the classroom to address holistic child development. T11s4 emphasised the importance of concrete learning and sensory development: *"…because kids learn by curiosity. They have to touch things, they have to smell things, they have to taste things. I want to make learning fun, because when learning is boring and not interesting enough, then the leaners lose interest."* She further stated that learning has to be *"encouraging, inviting and fun for the learners."* T7s3 stated that she interacts a lot with the children, singing songs and rhymes, clapping and physically doing things as they learn in a concrete manner. She continued: "… *and then a lot of exercise, jumping, and a lot of concrete work with the kids. We tell a lot of stories to them in order to interact and we do group work as well.*"

Hanover research (2015) supports the fact that children should be engaged during learning opportunities, reporting that teachers "Offer learners an array of extracurricular activities and extended-day learning opportunities and provide learners with academic credit for experiential learning" (cf. figure 2).

Summarised by Best practices in whole child education (2015), the most successful assessment of holistic child education includes various methods of learning.

The teacher participants agreed that **learning through play** is still a crucial component in whole child development at pre-primary school level. Their insights therefore match the findings of Aronstam and Braund (2016), who stated that pre-primary teachers are stage managers arranging teaching and learning media, helping learners steer their academic and world and displaying the rich possibilities in play. "*So we basically concentrate more on physical development and learn through play and concrete work. That's how we do it here."*

During observations at the four pre-primary schools, the researcher found that, despite the need for play-based teaching, Namibian pre-primary learners are integrated into formal static classroom settings at the expense of the social-emotional and physical development of learners. According to Almon (2003), these formal settings often have features such as formal reading, written teaching, computerised learning, and standard assessment without any or limited play base teaching (cf. 2.5). In more highly structured classroom environments, children with poor academic skills tend to have difficulties meeting school demands and are prone to experience peer rejection and conflicted relationships with teachers (Denham et al., 2003). For example, early self-regulatory problems manifest in violent behaviour, impulsivity, inattention, defiance, or social uncommunicativeness and may interfere with the development of important social skills such as peer play that contribute to learning in the pre-primary classroom.

The observations done by the researcher uncovered similar effects of the formal settings on the holistic development of the children. Children, especially those in Gr. R (Reception year, the year before Grade 1), are exposed to very formal class situations which include sitting at formal desks for the majority of the day, already wearing formal school uniforms like the Grade 1 children.

Time for play is limited, physical activities don't take place daily, social-emotional learning is not frequently incorporated in the lesson plans and experimental- and concrete learning is compromised in this formal environment.

Physical development at pre-primary level includes the child's ability to progressively control movement, coordination, balance, fine and gross motor skills. Movement-play is about children moving in specific ways as they go through a developmental order of significant movement patterns that link the body and brain (Archer & Siraj, 2015 cf. 2.2).

Teacher participants in the current study reported that learning should take place through movement (physical activities) and music. T8s3 elaborated on the importance of physical development by saying that: "…*learners are really learning through play. We need a lot of movement, to be specific."* In the same vein, T3s1: "*In my classroom specifically, we do planned movement lessons weekly. We also have a playground that help them with physical development outside."* T10s4 described the importance of learners' physical development as follows: "*We go out physically to play, to see which child struggles with balancing and all the aspects in physical education. Physical education plays a role in writing and all the things."*

However, according to the researcher's observations, such movement did not take place regularly or consistently. The participants' views, nevertheless, were consistent with the findings of Archer and Siraj (2015), namely that movement, the senses and early reflexes are the young child's route to learning. These authors further elaborate that core concepts of maths are rooted in the body through a sense of position in space, sequencing, patterns, and rhythm. Movement is inseparably linked to other areas of learning and is at the heart of young children's physical development (Archer & Siraj, 2015).

Another important classroom strategy that teacher participants mentioned to address holistic child development in their classrooms is to **stimulate critical thinking** by asking questions or executing group discussions. T3s1 emphasised the stimulation of critical thinking in the classroom: "*We also do cognitive development ... educational toys, puzzles, blocks… so that they can develop their own feeling about creativity.*"

"This links directly to the findings of Shanmugavelu et al. (2020) asserting that, by asking better questions, teachers help promote critical thinking skills, improve learners' problem-solving skills, enhance their creativity and boost self-confidence. At the same time, it enables a person to discover answers for themselves. Critical thinking skills and problem-solving skills are essential to reach the final level of Maslow's hierarchy of needs, which comprise the theoretical framework of this study. At the highest level of Maslow's hierarchy of needs, self-actualisation turns out to be the motivating factor where children will strive for higher learning goals and seek to achieve them (Maslow, 1970).

4.6.2 Learning difficulties or behavioural problems encountered

Table 4.6: Teachers' experience in the implementation of WCD

Types of learning difficulties or behavioural problems teachers experience in class as a result of NOT developing the child as a whole. *(Addressing Research Question 3)*
problems with social behaviour/interaction (not sharing, not submitting to authority)
emotional developmental delays: aggressiveness, emotional outbursts of anger, low self-esteem, crying, withdrawing, anxiety
disciplinary problems
physical developmental delays
poor listening skills.

In response to interview questions related to the learning difficulties (LD) and/or behavioural problems encountered because of not developing the whole child, several teachers reported that most learners experience behavioural problems due to learning difficulties. These learning difficulties or behavioural problems are not necessarily clinically defined, and the definitions might not be academically correct. These problems and learner difficulties are based on the daily experiences of teachers in the pre-primary classroom. This interview question intended to contribute to the answers already received in the preceding paragraphs with regard to research question 3.

T2s1 mentioned that children in her class with severe learning difficulties will try to hide it as much as possible. They will come across as either naughty or say things like "I am bored". In her own words: *"… they will just try to quickly make a mess and act like they do not listen to authority or follow instructions, but that's not the case. There's actually a learning problem behind it."*

T3s1 agreed: *"The children sometimes is aggressive, because they now need to learn to share. They also act out if they are seeking for attention, and also, at that age, they are busy and still need to learn to sit still and concentrate."*

T6s2's answer to the question was as follows: *"I experience learning difficulties in children who can't cope, who cry a lot. You also identify it through children with a low self -esteem and a low sense of value."*

T8s3 strongly agreed with the concept of learning difficulties resulting in behavioural problems. *"Yes, there are learning difficulties, for instance, where a child is withdrawing due to a lack of confidence. Those are learning difficulties that really results in behavioural problems"*. She continues: *"It also develops if he or she fails … it tends to create a learning problem as a person is not believing in him or herself."*

T9s3 also mentioned that she experiences a lot of emotionally unstable children in her class. She said: *"They don't have confidence in themselves and even when it comes to working, they don't want to do it. Or when you ask them a question, being too shy to respond."* T10s4 commented that *"…because I have personal experience: I've seen that if a child is not developed in all aspects, it plays a role in subjects like mathematics or languages or even in other aspects."* She continued by commenting as follows on the emotional problems experienced in her classroom: *"… sometimes children who are not developed tend to be withdrawn, lacks self-confidence or have anxiety or stress. So, it is very important to have a child develop in all aspects from grade zero so that the child can feel confident to master any skill that they have to face later in life."*

The following teachers emphasised learning difficulties or developmental delays they experienced in their classrooms because of not developing the learners holistically. It provided direct insight to research question 3, notably that certain aspects of child development are being emphasised at the expense of others in holistic child development. T4s2 highlighted that children's physical development are overlooked. She stated that *"we find learning difficulties and the learning difficulties are mostly in their physical development. I think children nowadays are not exposed to outside playing, and for that reason they end up not being able to do this or that"* (eye-hand coordination difficulties, poor cutting skills, and poor pencil grip).

She advised as follows: *"Start with the physical development where we see children are experiencing difficulties in the classroom."*

T8s3 also agreed with the lack of emphasis on the physical development in the pre-primary classroom: *"Yes, the learning difficulties are there. When it comes to learners who cannot do the writing on lines or they don't know the left from the right movements, they are also having a problem. But then I think the problem is also because children's physical development skills were not addressed as it was supposed to be addressed. That's why we get those learning difficulties."* T12s4 added that the reason why children struggle with the correct pencil grip is because of poor fine motor skills.

The last and final learning difficulty or developmental delay many teachers experience in class is that of poor auditory/listening skills and the inability to follow instructions. Due to a number of reasons, a child may not understand what is being expected of him or her, or is unable to follow instructions correctly.

The following are two of the main reasons: Firstly, the teachers and the researcher are aware that children receive instruction in English, which is not their mother tongue. Secondly, language development forms part of the WCD approach, and efforts should be made to teach aspects such as vocabulary, sentence construction and the correct pronunciation.

According to the observations and experiences of the researcher and the participating teachers, whenever a child does not understand what is being done in the classroom, he or she might present with behavioural problems which will directly influence the learner's academic performance as well. T7s3 explained: *"…so we have to cope with these kids to get them to be disciplined, to get them in the routine."*

T12s4 further stated that listening skills are a huge problem in the classroom: *"…they lack listening skills because at home they are not given chores, orders or instructions, so then it might be difficult for them to adhere to my rules in the class as well."* She further added that the reason might be the excessive use of social media or screen time children are exposed to these days: *"…because parents just give them the phone and then they're off."*

Regarding the emphasis put on one domain of child development at the expense of other domains in the pre-primary classroom, teachers admitted that they tend to focus on the cognitive aspect of child development, 'forgetting' the rest. T2s1 mentioned *"…teachers just wanting to perform with the work (on paper), and then forgetting that there are other areas that are important and remembering to include everything, not just be focused on one area."* She further elaborated on the difficulty of evaluating social-emotional development, and therefore she focusses more on structured tasks on paper which are easy to evaluate.

In her words: *"…having a whole child development approach might be a bit of a challenge because you want to see results. You want to see something that is recorded and that might not even be a true reflection of who the child is, because of all these other things (emotional- and social development) are not being evaluated."*

The observer added this particular interview question to obtain the beliefs of the teachers as to whether a lack of implementing a WCD approach might, or might not, result in learning difficulties or behavioural problems in the pre-primary classroom.

The researcher, being a pre-primary teacher for the past 12 years, is experiencing this phenomenon daily. However, by being unbiased during the interviews, the researcher left the question entirely open to each participant's own opinion.

Participant responses regarding learning difficulties centred on physical developmental delays including poor gross- and fine motor skills, lack of concentration and substantial delays in language skills. Teachers in this study specifically noted that learners struggle with limited English abilities, such as comprehension, speech- and listening skills. In most cases, English is not the mother tongue of the learners.

The researcher is aware of the fact that English is not the main language spoken by Namibians and that the variety of languages spoken by Namibians might play a role in the difficulties experienced by learners who are taught in English.

The possibility cannot be excluded, however, that language forms an integral part of the holistic child development approach. Thus, a lack of teaching specific language skills can contribute to children's misinterpretation and misunderstanding of concepts taught in the class. In the same vein, language development is not a domain that is focused on in the pre-primary classroom. It is wrongfully assumed that most learners entering the preschool classroom possess sufficient vocabulary to understand and

follow instructions properly. This, sadly, is not the case, and teachers do not have the time and resources to teach the aspects of a language while being under pressure to finish a syllabus filled with formal and written tasks. The researcher also has not observed any stories being read to children which would contribute to the language development aspect of the WCD approach. The researcher's finding agrees with the findings of Mcilroy (2023) that, to build vocabulary in early childhood, children need to be exposed to a language-rich environment through playing games, engaging in interactive language activities and story reading (cf. 2.5). If language development is neglected in the pre-primary classroom, children will inevitably experience learning difficulties regarding understanding as well as following instructions correctly. Children will also experience difficulties with auditory perception skills essential for formal education.

Teacher participants also highlighted problems with social behaviour and emotional developmental delays that children encounter in the classroom because of not coping with the demanding workload, as well as not being exposed to social-emotional acceptable behaviour in real life situations. These challenges include learners struggling with interaction, for example not sharing or not submitting to authority. Emotional developmental delays include aggressiveness, emotional outbursts of anger, low self-esteem, crying, insecurity, withdrawal, and anxiety. A study conducted in North Carolina by Carruth (2016) highlights the recognition of emotional development as essential to a child's psychological and physical well-being. Edwards and Panlilio (2003) noted that emotionally neglected children will likely fail to interact with their caregivers in a way that facilitates learning. This can lead to other failures in development.

The experiences of the teacher participants in the current study correspond with findings by Achenbach, McConaughy and Howell (1987). They propose that a common description of problems because of negative socio-emotional adjustment might include aggressiveness, hyperactivity, concentration problems, anxiety, depression, fearful behaviour and sometimes even psychosomatic complaints including feeding or eating problems.

The physical development of children in this modern era, might probably be the biggest area of neglect when it comes to holistic development. T4s2 agreed that children's physical development is overlooked.

She stated that *"we find learning difficulties and the learning difficulties are mostly in their physical development. I think children nowadays are not exposed to outside playing, and for that reason they end up not being able to do this or that"* (eye-hand coordination difficulties, poor cutting skills, and poor pencil grip). She advises as follows *"Start with the physical development where we see children are experiencing difficulties in the classroom."*

T8s3 also agreed with the lack of emphasis on the physical development in the pre-primary classroom: *"Yes, the learning difficulties are there. When it comes to learners who cannot do the writing on lines or they don't know the left from the right movements, they are also having a problem. But then the problem is because children's physical development skills were not addressed as it was supposed to be addressed. That's why we get those learning difficulties."*

According to the researcher's observation and knowledge, children lead significantly more sedentary lives due to the widespread adoption of technology in today's digital age, resulting in very poor gross- and fine motor skills when they enter the pre-primary

classroom. Neglecting the physical aspect of development in pre-primary classrooms can lead to learning challenges for children, including difficulties in concentration due to weakened core muscle strength and inadequate shoulder stability. Insufficiently developed gross motor skills can directly affect fine motor skills, subsequently impacting a learner's writing abilities, writing speed and overall performance. These findings correlate with the findings of research done by Taras (2005) stating that physical activity may improve concentration and therefore enhance school performance. Additional research regarding physical development and school performance revealed that coordinated gross motor skills such as balancing, were associated with better concentration on academic tasks (Budde, 2008 - see Section 2.2).

4.6.3 Challenges experienced when implementing a WCD approach

Table 4.7: Teachers' experience in the implementation of WCD

Challenges experienced when implementing a WCD approach
lack of resources /teaching aids
lack of proper equipment for physical development
overcrowded classrooms
physical small classes
heavy workload and time constraints
language barrier

Teachers in this study were asked about the challenges they faced when adopting a whole child development approach. They stated the following challenges:

T1s1 said: *"A challenge could be making sure on paper you have all your themes. And then kind of forgetting there are other areas that are important and being so focused on work and then forgetting there's not only one area to focus on. I need to think of everything."* T3s1 stated that time can be a problem. She said: *"Sometimes the time*

is not enough to get to each child, even if the classes are not too big. You don't always get the time to have one on one conversations or time with each child."

T6s2 added that classes are too big and not having enough teaching aids is a challenge she faces. T7s3 also said she feels that the number of learners and small classrooms is a problem at her school. She said: *"So the big number of learners in the class. …the Government should really address that problem and maybe build more schools and classrooms in order to make sure that one teacher only has a certain number of kids, so that we can give all the kids the same attention."*

Another teacher participant, T8s3, expressed discontent with the small classrooms as follows: *"…my class is extremely small…young learners are really learning through play, and we need a lot of movement. One I would say to be specific is the need for movement, it's very stressful."*

Some of the other obstacles teacher participants in this study highlighted in implementing a holistic child development approach were the following: Teacher T4s2 and T12s4 recounted that a lack of resources and equipment is a huge challenge. According to T4s1: *"I need proper equipment to help this child do these exercises and develop properly."*

T12s4 added that they lack playground equipment to develop gross motor skills. She said: *"Yes, because learners learn through movement also, and once their body is active and the muscles are loosened up, they are more excited to learn as well. So, it is important for the learners to play, to have a sand pit …."*

Furthermore, T5s2, T11s4 and T12s4 agreed that the language barrier is a challenge that they are all facing when trying to implement a holistic child development approach in the classroom.

According to T5s2, a child does not necessarily struggle at school because he or she is weak, but the language barrier might hamper progress in the child. T11s4 explained the language barrier as a challenge, saying that *"...children come from different societies and backgrounds. Then you find the ones coming straight from the rural area and now they come here and you have to teach this child in English. So, if a child stays with the grandmother that does not have an English background, it is difficult to teach them English. You can only say basic words instead of talking in sentences."* T12s4 agreed. *"It might be that the home languages of the learners are different, so when they come to school, we speak English."*

So, it might be difficult to address an issue or to explain an activity that they need to do. So that is, I think, the biggest challenge - the communication barrier."

Teachers who participated in the current study remarked that there were challenges in implementing the WCD approach in their schools. These challenges were related to inadequate teacher training and skills in holistic child development practices, lack of proper outdoor equipment for physical development, overcrowded classrooms, heavy workloads and time constraints.

In addition, teacher participants mentioned that poor understanding of the English language is a further challenge in providing holistic teaching because children lack adequate knowledge and language skills to understand and follow basic instructions. These challenges arose while trying to implement a WCD approach in the classroom. In other words, these challenges prevent teachers from implementing a holistic approach to education in the classroom. Consequently, this leads teachers to prioritise specific domains of development, thereby neglecting the broader spectrum of holistic child development.

Teachers in the current study also indicated that they lack skills regarding best practices in holistic child development. The training they received was inadequate in preparing them to deal with all the aspects that need to be dealt with in WCD.

They explained that, although they might have some knowledge of what WCD is all about, they lack the methods to apply this knowledge in a practical way in the classroom. Sharifah Nor and Aliza (2012) found that, even though teachers had a good perception of the preschool curriculum, they were unclear on the method of its implementation, including the holistic child development approach.

This lack of knowledge of a holistic developmental approach in the classroom resulted in teachers emphasising certain domains of child development at the cost of other areas of WCD. The observations made by the researcher in all 12 classes correspond with the findings of the teachers who only cover certain aspects of development because teachers lack the knowledge to practically implement all the different aspects of WCD. The challenges that teachers experienced regarding a lack of knowledge about the WCD approach in the classroom, as well as the researcher's findings, correspond with a similar study done by Schreiner (2009) on holistic education and teacher training.

If the paradigm of holistic education does not encourage different fields of pedagogy and educational practice including teacher training, it is nothing more than a theoretical exercise (Schreiner, 2009).

Most teacher participants in this study also expressed their concern about the lack of teaching and learning resources. Teachers in the study reported that the teaching and learning resources were insufficient to enhance the development of all necessary requirements regarding WCD.

The Ministry of Gender Equality and Child Welfare in Namibia complement this fact by arguing that the provision of inadequate learning opportunities and facilities may hinder a child's ability to learn, may even create self-doubt and delay learning (IECD 2007). Appropriate learning materials were found to be lacking, affecting the children's gross motor, socio-emotional, cognitive and language development. These developmental needs are necessary to create a favourable environment (Coury, Opper & Nahayo, 2018).

Teachers specifically mentioned the lack of resources, for example not sufficient concrete material for play, as well as outside equipment and facilities necessary for developing gross motor skills. According to Oliver et al. (2007), 49 studies measured physical activity in preschoolers, concluding that preschoolers are characterised by low levels of physical activity and high levels of inactive behaviour. The preschool environment is comprised of an outer and inner environment. The provision of playgrounds and child-friendly equipment was investigated in all four pre-primary schools involved in this study. In two of the four schools, physical competence was limited to running and jumping due to the lack of sufficient playground and other necessary equipment. The equipment deemed to be lacking, included swings and slides necessary for stimulating the vestibular systems of children as well as children's awareness of their position in space; jungle gyms for climbing (to improve gross motor development); monkey bars (shoulder stability and core muscle strength); bridges and creeping and crawling surfaces (balancing skills); and sandpits (sensory play).

The Early Headstart National Resource Centre (2013) reports that swings provide children with first-hand knowledge and experience of cause and effect and the understanding of spatial learning such as up and down, and back and forth. Only one of the preschools in this study had a playground with swings, tyres, a sandpit area, and

a slide. The remaining two playgrounds had the bare minimum of equipment, no swings, no slides, and no sandpits. They only had one steel structure which was not safe, which the researcher deemed not to be suitable for pre-primary learners.

The researcher's view aligns with that of Wiljenje and Waithaka (2018), noting that certain aspects of playground facilities, including age-appropriate playground facilities, profoundly promote children's participation in outdoor play activities.

Furthermore, teacher participants at the three government schools in this study reported that large class sizes were yet another obstacle to the provision of holistic teaching strategies. Large classes are difficult to manage, making it almost impossible to provide individual attention to learners who experience learning difficulties.

Whilst attending to learners with difficulties, the teacher needs to keep the mainstream group of learners effectively occupied during the lesson. Studies conducted by Ndinisa (2016) in South Africa also identified over-crowdedness in classrooms as a problem for learning support provision.

The challenge of overcrowded classrooms to teaching the pre-primary learner matches the findings of Diamond (2010) that low adult-child ratios help ensure that learners get enough one-on-one attention, and are aiding with more in-depth teacher-child interaction, more individualisation, and less restraining and controlling teacher behaviour. Smaller group sizes have been linked to more child-initiated activities, and more opportunities for teachers to work on expanding language, facilitating children's social interactions, and encouraging exploration and problem solving (Diamond, 2010).

Several teacher participants in this study raised the concern that, due to high workload and time constraints, teachers find it challenging to address all aspects of development. Teachers in the study mentioned that the extent of the syllabus hinders them from giving attention to some areas of a child's development, which may then be neglected. These findings are consistent with those of Hannah (2015) and Mkhuma et al. (2014), who found that heavy workloads and increased responsibilities hindered the provision of effective teaching strategies.

In this study, the impact of time constraints is summarised as follows by T1s1: *"…and then kind of forgetting these other areas to focus on, being so focused on work, how the file looks, or the craft looks, and then forgetting like, oh my goodness there's not only one area to focus on, I need to think of everything."* Similarly, Mkhuma et al. (2014) assert that learners' needs are compromised because of teachers' lack of time to sit down as a team and design strategies that can best serve the needs of the learners.

Teacher participants in this study also reported that parents were not actively involved in their children's education. Teachers indicated that parents' involvement was mostly only when they were summoned to school because of misbehaviour, developmental delays, or to learn that additional intervention would be needed for their child to be ready for formal education. Heijnen-Maathuis (2016) regards parental involvement in children's school affairs as vital. For this reason, a few teacher participants in this study mentioned that they initiate communication with the parents of learners with learning difficulties to stimulate collaboration on how to support their children at home. The challenge of uninvolved parents is highlighted by Kochlar-Bryant and Heishman (2010) who found that professionals must collaborate and bridge the different and separate worlds of family and school, academic disciplines, professional roles, and school and the community, to produce a well-coordinated service system to

meet the holistic needs of the learners. Parent involvement falls under the 'support' tenet of the whole child development approach of the ASCD. Central to a supportive school are teachers, administrators and other caring adults including caregivers, parents and guardians who take a personal interest in each learner and therefore also in the success of each learner (ASCD, 2007).

Family support and involvement form a crucial factor that contributes to a well-coordinated service system to meet the holistic needs of learners (Kochlar-Bryant & Heishman, 2010).

In this study, another shared challenge in all four pre-primary schools is the language barrier. Children often encounter challenges in fluently expressing themselves in English. Their limited understanding and comprehension of English can also hinder their ability to follow instructions effectively.

This is understandable, as most of the children entering their first year of school have never been exposed to a language other than their mother tongue. This is a direct consequence of the Language Policy for schools in Namibia (2003) that promotes mother tongue instruction, especially in the lower primary cycle of basic education. The justification for this is the fact that the mother tongue is crucial for concept formation and literacy attainment.

In relation to this finding, Kioko (2015)) caution that, when presenting a lesson, teachers should consider learners' English proficiency and present the subject matter using understandable and simple language accessible to the young child.

Although English is not the mother tongue of many Namibian children, language development still forms a part of the Whole Child Approach (c.f. Chapter Two, 2.7) to education and can therefore not be discarded. Walker-Gleaves and Waugh (2017)

emphasise the importance of literacy development since literacy creates the foundation for knowledge in all other areas of learning. The language barrier brought on by English as a medium of instruction, instead of the mother tongue of learners, presents more challenges for pursuing a holistic approach.

The overall findings suggest that the challenges impact greatly the efforts of schools and teachers to implement effective holistic child development strategies.

4.6.4 Implementation of best practices in WCD in the pre-primary classroom in Namibia

Table 4.8: Teachers' experience in the implementation of WCD

The implementation of best practices regarding WCD in Namibia
Renewed mindset Proper education structure/syllabus Educated/equipped/properly trained teachers Educational equipment/enough teaching aids Teacher support groups/workshops for teachers More pre-primary schools

The experiences of teachers on the implementation of best practices regarding WCD in Namibia was extracted by the question: 'What will be necessary to make WCD a reality throughout pre-primary schools in Namibia?'

Several teachers stated that equipped teachers, who are properly trained in WCD, will be a solution to the implementation of best practices in WCD. T1s1, T3s1 and T5s2 responded as follows. T1s1 said: *"The teachers responsible need to be equipped, that they have proper training. And there needs to be good resources to be able to make this possible - and good support. Teachers need support to support the kids."* T3s1 agreed that teachers should be educated well to know how to help with the whole child development. She asked the rhetorical question: *"Is the teacher educated enough to*

know how to implement all the necessary steps and to put it practically in the classes to help the children to develop completely?''

T5s2 further elaborated: *"Take the teacher by the hand and tell them or guide them through what they must come back and teach the children. Do not just put a teacher in a classroom and say it's inclusive education and you have to teach all the children.* She continued by saying that teachers need to be given *"... a clearer understanding of how to do real teaching."*

On the necessity of the proper equipment needed to stimulate development, T9s3 responded: *"...I think it should also have to do with equipment, ... the necessary teaching aids. Yes, the things that they need to use in the classroom should be enough to accommodate everybody, not just a handful."* To put this into the context of the interview, the teacher meant materials and teaching aids necessary to perform activities in the classroom, such as playdough, beads and educational equipment such as puzzles, should be available. She also added that, because of a lack of the above-mentioned teaching aids, *"...they [the children] use to share all the time, the some are sitting idle, and the rest are working."*

T4s2 argued that the syllabus needs to be reviewed. She explained: *"Our syllabus does not really have so many activities that will allow teachers to make lesson plans to help children develop properly."* Several teachers agreed on the value of support groups and workshops as a solution to making WCD a reality in Namibia. T4s2: *"The Ministry needs to get experts in to assist us with the lesson plans. You need to think on your own and out of the box, but then you know, teaching is a learning process for us as well. But if you can get expert advice on how you can do this, it will work as well."* T7s3 said *"I think workshops ... it is important to interact with other teachers at the*

schools, and to do research about these things." T8s3 agreed: *"I think the government can do in-service training. But to make it a reality, I think that schools have what we call the cluster system, whereby we are reaching to other schools and the other schools are also reaching to us, and we are like exchanging ideas with one another."*

T12s4 argued that things change as a result of changing technology, and older teachers are stuck with older mindsets. In her words: *"…why can teachers not be sent every 3,4 or 5 years for a refresher, you know? …it will really help to upgrade the standard of learning of the learners."*

Furthermore, T10s4 said: *"…more pre-primary schools. I like the idea that every school has a pre-primary class…so more pre-primary schools linked to a primary school would be a very excellent idea."* T10s4 further elaborated on the positive impact that more pre-primary schools can have on achieving a WCD approach: *"…it will help a lot, because then you can talk to the grade one teacher and see, ok, this child has a problem with this and we still have to work on that. And then you can pass it (information) on to the grade one teacher. So, more pre-primary schools linked to a primary school, would be a very excellent idea."*

In summary, based on the themes summarised in Table 4.8, teachers offered information derived from their different contexts and experiences. For example, teachers mentioned proper education structure/syllabus, properly trained teachers, enough teaching aids, teacher support groups and workshops as well as more pre-primary schools.

4.7 Conclusion

In this chapter, the researcher presented the findings of the data collected from the teacher interviews at four pre-primary schools in Windhoek, Namibia. The sources that informed this study, as stated earlier, were 12 pre-primary teachers, three teachers from each school.

The next chapter presents the discussions of the findings, recommendations, limitations, and conclusion.

CHAPTER FIVE
DISCUSSIONS, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

"If education is a "key" to unlocking a student's potential, then it is teachers who should help them to design their key and determine which lock they wish to open."

Gray (2013: 41)

5.1 Introduction

In Chapter Four, the researcher presented the observations and findings of the data collected from the teacher interviews at four pre-primary schools in Windhoek, Namibia. This chapter discusses the conclusions and recommendations based on the findings of the collected data.

This study aimed at exploring best practices in WCD at four pre-primary schools in Windhoek, Namibia. The study generated data through observations and qualitative interviews. The data was obtained from 12 pre-primary teachers from four schools in the Khomas educational region of Namibia.

In this study, the researcher explored the experiences of qualified pre-primary teachers in the four selected pre-primary schools in the Khomas region. The main aim of the study was to explore current practices pre-primary teachers employ to realise the whole child development (WCD) approach in Namibia. Ultimately, the study explored whether pre-primary school teachers are indeed implementing the WCD approach or whether the emphasis of the teachers was more biased towards some domains of child development at the expense of the holistic development of the child.

In view of this study, three sub-research questions were asked:

1. What knowledge do Namibian pre-primary teachers possess about the best practices in WCD?
2. How do pre-primary teachers implement best practices in WCD in their teachings to realise the WCD approach?
3. Do teachers emphasise one domain of child development more than the WCD approach?

The interview questions were developed to extrapolate data that would address the research questions and to address the research aim of this study.

This study also made use of naturalistic observations and was coded according to an observation table. This instrument was developed before data collection commenced. Written descriptions in the form of field notes were made during observations. The relationship between the interviews and observations was reciprocal, as information obtained through observations was extended through interviewing and vice versa. Specifically, the observation checklist focused on a positive and relaxed learning atmosphere, including teacher-learner interaction during class time, physical status of playgrounds necessary for gross-motor development, curriculum, and learning strategies to guide the teaching activities in all aspects of development, including social-emotional development, and sufficient movement activities during class time. The observation checklist was compiled with the five tenets of the WCD approach in mind, being the health, safety (emotional and physical), engagement in classroom activities, support of teachers in a positive and caring environment, and activities that challenge the cognitive developmental needs of each child.

The observation checklist also included statements on the teacher–child ratio as this was indicated by the teacher participants during the interviews as one of the biggest challenges they experience in implementing a WCD approach. The observation checklist further assessed whether teachers put more emphasis on one domain of child development at the expense of other domains by observing how each teacher implemented best practices to develop children's social, emotional and physical development. The observation checklist also assessed if play is taking its rightful place in the pre-primary classroom, since it aids the development of children's social-emotional needs.

An interview guide for the pre-primary teacher participants dealt with the understanding and importance of the holistic child development concept, classroom strategies to implement WCD, learning difficulties and behavioural problems as a result of not developing the child as a whole, and challenges faced. Interviews also focused on teachers' views on the implementation of best practices in WCD in Namibia. As a result, these topics and sub-topics were developed.

Topic 1: Teachers' views and knowledge about whole child development.

The following sub-topics guided the discussion section of this study:

a. Meaning of whole child development

b. The importance of WCD in the pre-primary classroom

Topic 2: Teachers' experiences on the implementation of holistic child development in the pre-primary classroom.

The following sub-topics guided the discussion section of this study:

a. Classroom strategies to address WCD;
b. Types of learning difficulties or behavioural problems teachers experience in class as a result of NOT developing the child as a whole;
c. Challenges experienced when adapting a WCD approach;
d. The implementation of WCD in Namibia.

5.2 Discussion of findings

In this section, the researcher discusses the findings of the current study under sub-topics derived from topics 1 and 2, which were further derived from the main research questions.

5.2.1. Meaning of WCD

Even though teacher participants all had a basic idea regarding the definition of WCD, they viewed their meanings from different angles of teaching, where some participants offered a global and thus vague definition, and others offered a more detailed view and definition.

The literature reviewed for this study suggested that a holistic or whole child development approach to education should focus the attention on the cognitive, social, emotional as well as physical development of children; these aspects of development should be seen as inseparable from one another (cf. Section 2.3). Therefore, the aim should always be the integration of all developmental aspects during best practices in holistic development at pre-primary school level (Darling-Hammond & Cook-Harvey, 2018; Whitebread, 2012; Slade & Griffith, 2013 - cf. 2.2).

The researcher agrees with the views of the teacher participants in this study regarding the meaning and definition of the term ‘whole child development’ (WCD) as it corresponds with the literature review in the preceding paragraph.

5.2.2 The importance of WCD in the pre-primary classroom

In summary, the findings of teachers in the current study on the importance of WCD are in line with the MGECW’s (2007) vision that the provision of ECD to children in a holistic manner is crucial in continuous education and training. As shown in Table 4.6, teachers presented very strong views on the importance of whole child

development in the pre-primary classroom. None of the 12 teachers interviewed thought that holistic child development was unnecessary or unimportant in the pre-primary classroom. Instead, the majority recognised the importance of WCD for school readiness, while some teachers also recognised the importance of WCD for lifelong learning and future success.

Research question 1 was thus wholly answered – teachers not only understood the meaning and the importance of WCD in the pre-primary classroom, but also explained why they deemed it important. By collaborating on the importance of WCD, they highlighted best practices regarding WCD, for example the significance of integrating all the facets of holistic child development and how they impact one another.

5.2.3 Teachers' experience of WCD in the pre-primary classroom

5.2.3.1 Classroom strategies to address WCD.

It is evident that different pre-primary teachers implement best practices regarding WCD differently. Very few teachers mentioned all aspects of holistic child development in implementing best practices in WCD in their teachings. Most of them highlighted a few domains of child development present in their classroom strategies and other domains simply get less or no attention at all.

These classroom strategies varied from creating a safe and positive learning environment, creating diverse opportunities for social-emotional learning, creative and interesting learning opportunities through concreate learning material and teaching aids, including movement and music lessons as well as focusing on the importance of play in their respective classrooms.

The review of related literature in Chapter Two revealed that Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs has been used as the platform in the development of a variety of

school improvement processes that ensures that the approach is integrated and systemised into the policies and practices of the school, district, and community. As teachers in the current study reported that they use varying and integrated teaching strategies to meet the diversity of learners' needs, it is implied that these teachers considered the learners' zone of proximal development in their teaching strategies (see Figure 2.6).

It is worth noting that the practice of using different teaching strategies to address holistic child development is partially integrated into Namibian school policies. However, Namibian pre-primary learners are exposed to very formal static classroom settings at the expense of social-emotional development, play based learning and physical activities.

5.2.3.2 Types of learning difficulties or behavioural problems teachers experience in class as a result of NOT developing the child as a whole.

This study reinforces the notion that neglecting certain facets of child development could lead to learning hurdles and/or behavioural challenges. It also adds value to the study in proving that, if certain aspects of the child's development are being neglected, and the emphasis is being placed on specific facets of children's development at the expense of others, shortcomings will be experienced in the pre-primary classroom. The participants' feedback highlighted learning difficulties related to physical developmental delays, encompassing challenges with gross and fine motor skills, concentration, and significant delays in language proficiency.

Teachers specifically observed struggles among learners with limited English proficiency, particularly in comprehension, speech, and listening skills, noting that English was often not their first language.

Because of several challenges discussed in Chapter Four (cf. Section 4.6.2), teachers find it difficult to address all aspects of WCD and therefore put emphasis on one domain of child development at the expense of holistic child development. The researcher observed that the focus was on formal and structured tasks, at the expense of informal play, physical development – especially gross- and fine motor skills, as well as emotional- social development.

Mavuso (2014) explains that learning difficulties can be categorised as specific difficulties learners encounter regarding basic literacy skills, learners who had significant language difficulties and learners whose general academic achievement is below their potential, just like the participating teachers in the current study indicated. However, Gulliford (1971) regards the following also as part of learning difficulties: spatial orientation problems (difficulty to distinguish between left and right, up and down, etc.); perceptual and language weaknesses; uncoordinated and slower hand and eye tasks; visual-spatial difficulties in recognising and distinguishing between written symbols, in reproducing letters or groups of letters correctly, confusing or reversing letters; speech-sound difficulties in synthesizing words from their component sounds, in relating words to meanings; association difficulties, for example when the learner has problems with associating speech sounds with their symbols in reading and writing.

According to the researcher's observations, as well as the answers of the participants regarding learning difficulties experienced in the classroom as a result of not integrating all facets of child development, the result of research question 3 was that teachers do put more emphasis on certain aspects of development, (especially cognitive development by means of structured and formal tasks) at the expense of informal play, physical development as well as socio-emotional development. As a

result, learners experience difficulties with social skills, such as aggressiveness, as well as difficulties with emotional skills such as a lack of self-confidence, or the presence of fear or anxiety.

In summary, the researcher agrees with the words of Johnson (2006) as cited in Barnes (2011, p. 94) who said, "A child is a person first and their difficulties are an add-on which, although posing difficulties, can be overcome by a good teacher, appropriate support and a positive attitude".

5.2.3.3 Challenges experienced when implementing a WCD approach.

To summarise, teachers noted that a lack of English proficiency among students makes it tough to teach comprehensively because kids struggle to grasp basic instructions. This difficulty emerged when they tried to introduce a whole-child development (WCD) approach in class. Further challenges experienced in the classroom when attempting to implement a WCD approach include a lack of resources, overcrowded classrooms, a lack of proper equipment for physical education, as well as time constraints.

Essentially, these obstacles hinder teachers from fully adopting a well-rounded educational approach, causing them to focus more on certain aspects of development and overlook the broader picture of holistic child development. Research questions 2 and 3 were thus fully answered by the discussion of the teachers' experiences of whole child development in the pre-primary classroom (cf. 4.6).

5.3 Recommendations on the implementation of WCD in Namibia

The recommendations made by this study could constitute an important step forward in the realisation of the WCD approach in Namibia's pre-primary schools. In addition, results of this study could serve as a point of entry for other studies to be carried out in the field of whole child development.

Teacher participants in the current study considered several aspects that can play a vital role in successfully establishing WCD in Namibian schools. Based on the findings yielded by this study, the following recommendations are suggested to advance best practices related to WCD in Namibia.

These aspects include: **(i)** a reviewed curriculum design including all aspects of WCD attended to, **(ii)** teacher training focused on best practices in WCD, **(iii)** properly equipped pre-primary schools in Namibia **(iv)** smaller class groups.

5.3.1 Renewed curriculum design

Curriculum development has become increasingly sensitive and responsive to the fact that children enter formal school from diverse backgrounds and with varying levels of skills (Winsler, Tran, Hartman, Madigan, Manfra & Bleiker (2008).

School readiness is a broad concept which makes it difficult to reach an agreement on its definition.

However, there appears to be little dispute about the fact that school readiness is essential before entering school to ensure that learners are equipped with the necessary readiness for learning and school (Kagan, 1992). According to the teacher participants in the current study, the syllabus provided by the Government of Namibia does not include all activities that allow teachers to prepare lesson plans supportive of holistic child development in the classroom.

A guest contributor to the ASCD, Ms. Tamera Musiowsky-Borneman (2021) contributes to curriculum development by noting that, to design an effective curriculum for engaging and educating the whole child, it is useful to plan backwards – beginning with the desired goals and outcomes. Teachers should specifically consider questions such as: "What do I want my learners to know and be able to do by the end of the unit?". and "How will I design my curriculum to support them in understanding what I want them to know?" (Musiowsky-Borneman, 2021). Curricular design and instructional practices integrate social-emotional learning with academics through both content (what children learn) and process (how they learn it) (Hanover Research, 2015).

Thus, it is essential that the Namibian government focuses on a school curriculum that integrates activities which encourage the development of social-emotional and self-regulatory skills with academic instruction, particularly when educational practices emphasise risky, standardised testing to assess learner achievement. In that case, learners' abilities to pay attention, control their impulses, and regulate emotions or cope with stress become core skills for academic success.

5.3.2 Compulsory in-service training of all teachers

Teacher participants stated that they do not feel equipped or properly trained to develop the children in all aspects of development. Most of them welcomed the idea of refresher courses or teacher workshops on the topic of holistic child development at pre-primary level.

The Namibian government should conduct teacher workshops where current pre-primary teachers can receive regular and frequent updates on the latest ideas and findings regarding best practices in WCD in the classroom.

The skilful development of teachers is linked to the quality of early childhood programmes and programme quality predicts developmental outcomes for children. Teachers are trained and encouraged to reflect on their classroom strategies, on the receptiveness of their children to classroom activities and to plan and revise their teaching accordingly (National Research Council (US) Division of Behavioral and Social Sciences and Education, 2001).

5.3.3 The provision of sufficient outdoor equipment and concrete teaching aids in the classroom

Participating teachers agreed that the provision of enough educational equipment and sufficient teaching aids will assist in the implementation of holistic child development in Namibia. The Namibian government should ensure that all pre-primary schools have proper outside play areas which include equipment such as slides, swings and jungle gyms. This equipment is necessary for gross motor developmental skills such as balance, core muscle strength, eye-hand coordination, eye-foot coordination, and shoulder stability. Two of the participating teachers mentioned that they lack enough equipment and the necessary teaching aids: "…the things that they need to use in the classroom should be enough to accommodate everybody, not just a handful. Because they use to share aids all the time, some learners are sitting idle, and the rest are working" (T9s3). This reality underlines the necessity of ample teaching aids in every pre-primary classroom for each child to benefit from. The Namibian government should ensure that each teacher has sufficient teaching aids available to achieve efficient WCD. This finding is supported by the Cambrian School District Strategic Plan (2015-2016) that the provision of challenging and experiential learning opportunities for learners is one way of attending to the whole child.

5.3.4 Smaller class groups

The last necessity according to participating teachers for WCD, which should become a reality in pre-primary schools in Namibia, is fewer children per teacher and the building of more pre-primary schools. According to Hoveka (2023), there are currently only 123 qualified pre-primary teachers employed in the Khomas Region of Namibia.

This study recommends that when building more schools as well as employing qualified teachers, the Namibian Government will definitely contribute to the implementation of holistic child development in Namibia. MGECW (2007) notes that ECD is "…foundational to the overall development of children and their success in education". This view is in line with the worldwide perspective on the importance of ECD as a building block for further education and for nations to achieve rightful sustainable development (UNICEF, 2012).

Hanover research (2015) agrees with the importance of small school sizes and opportunities for personalisation, as this results in an intimate environment where social awareness and relationship skills are necessary.

5.4 Suggestions for future research

This study contributes to the field of ECD, in particular, to the provision of best practices regarding WCD at pre-primary school level.

The following suggestions for future studies are informed by teacher experiences and observations by the researcher:

Additional studies are recommended to investigate best practices in WCD, specifically at pre-primary level in Namibia. A single study exploring best practices is simply not enough to report comprehensively on the Namibian context.

The researcher believes that this study achieved its intended objective, but further studies with a different approach or different focus will contribute to the initial findings of this project regarding best practices in WCD.

A study to investigate best practices regarding whole child development in the rural areas of Namibia is recommended. The availability of resources and/or support to these teachers and schools might be very different from the realities of schools in urban Namibia, which might result in divergent outcomes. A quantitative study is recommended to investigate the availability of proper teaching equipment or resources at pre-primary schools throughout Namibia.

5.5 Conclusions

This chapter discussed the key issues that emerged from the experiences of teachers regarding best practices in holistic child development at the four pre-primary schools in Windhoek, Namibia. It was evident that most teachers do not possess the required training and expertise that would enable them to apply and implement WCD strategies in their classrooms, although most teachers applied certain strategies to implement some aspects of WCD. The results also indicated that the teachers in the four schools attempted to cater to the whole child development approach, although some aspects of development are emphasised at the expense of others. A lack of teaching support, resources, time constraints, teacher workload, overcrowded classrooms, and lack of parental involvement were but some of the challenges that limited their efforts.

Observations made at all the research locations found that all preschools made use of planned lesson materials and/or the curriculum provided by the Namibian government. These lesson plans are grouped according to different themes and the daily programme in the pre-primary classroom and revolve around these different themes.

However, observations revealed that certain aspects of holistic child development were being overlooked in implementation, possibly due to factors such as time constraints, limited teacher expertise, lack of awareness and resource limitations.

Certain aspects of child development are emphasised, and most teachers are unable to combine the essential child skills through the activities conducted. Observation of teachers' methods to implement WCD identified teacher failure to combine knowledge and skills using various teaching aids and materials. In general, the incorporation of different approaches and strategies (by creating stimulating activities through teaching aids and concrete material), and the incorporation of learning through play have not been successfully implemented in the pre-primary classroom. New knowledge regarding the formal nature of classroom conditions in the pre-primary classroom was insightful and valuable to this study as it contributed to the field of early childhood development in Namibia. With this study as a predecessor for future studies, abounding possibilities exist for making great strides in the field of WCD in Namibia.

In summary, the researcher believes that the needs of the whole child (including academic, physical and social-emotional learning) must be considered and aligned throughout the process of curriculum development. Traditional school curricula primarily emphasise academic proficiency, which was a significant aspect during observation at all four participating schools.

The researcher believes that incorporating Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) competencies into the formal curriculum will help nurture learners to become educated and psychologically- and emotionally healthy members of society (Liew & McTigue, 2010).

The main research question for this study was: "*What are best practices in whole child development at pre-primary school level in Namibia"?* Whole child development at the pre-primary level involves nurturing children's physical, cognitive, social, emotional, and creative abilities (cf. 2.2). For optimal success in implementing a holistic development approach in Namibia, it is crucial to base best practices on Maslow's hierarchy of needs, which has shaped the WCD approach by aligning with the principles of the ASCD. This means organising the Whole Child tenets in a hierarchy that prioritises health, safety, engagement, support, and challenge. By incorporating these best practices into pre-primary education, educators can create a supportive and enriching environment that fosters the holistic development of young children. The main research question for this study was conclusively addressed through the comprehensive examination and thorough discussion of all the principles outlined by the ASCD, in accordance with Maslow's hierarchy of needs.

To conclude, the researcher wholeheartedly agrees with a 2009 study conducted by the Malaysian government. The study posits that the goal of preschool education is to develop the potential of children, aged four to six years, in a holistic and integrated manner in the physical, emotional spiritual, intellectual, and social domains in a safe and nurturing environment, with fun, creative and meaningful activities (Malaysian Pre-school Standard document, 2009).

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UNAM
UNIVERSITY OF NAMIBIA

ETHICAL CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE

Ethical Clearance Reference Number: WKC0018

Date: 28 September 2022

This Ethical Clearance Certificate is issued by the University of Namibia Decentralized Ethics Committee (DEC) 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 **School of Education (Windhoek & Khomasdal Campuses) Decentralized Ethics Committee**.

Title of Project: Exploring best practices in whole child development at pre-primary level - a multiple case study in Windhoek.
Researcher: Van Wyk Elana
Student number: 221115943

Take note of the following:

1. Any significant changes in the conditions or undertakings outlined in the approved Proposal must be communicated to the ethics committee. An application to make amendments may be necessary.
2. Any breaches of ethical undertakings or practices that have an impact on ethical conduct of the research must be reported to the ethics committee
3. The Principal Researcher must report issues of ethical compliance to the ethics committee (through the Chairperson) at the end of the Project or as may be requested by the ethics committee
4. The ethics committee 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.

The ethics committee wishes you the best in your research.

Dr. Job U. Hengari (Chairperson, Windhoek & Khomasdal Campuses Decentralized Ethics Committee)

Prof. Davis Mumbengegwi
(Head, Multidisciplinary Research)

REPUBLIC OF NAMIBIA

MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, ARTS AND CULTURE

Enquiries: Mr. G. Munene
Tel: +264 61 -293 3202
Fax: 264 61- 293 3932
Email: Gibson.Munene@moe.gov.na
File no: 13/2/9/1

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

Ms Elana Van Wyk
P. O. Box 80136
Windhoek

Dear Ms Van Wyk,

SUBJECT: PERMISSION TO CONDUCT ACADEMIC RESEARCH IN KHOMAS REGIONS

The Ministry wishes to acknowledge receipt of your letter dated 20 October 2022. The Research Proposal which we requested for was received on 21 October 2022 seeking for permission to conduct academic research in Khomas region for your Master's Degree studies which is focusing on: *"Exploring Best Practices in Whole Child Development at Pre-Primary Level: A Multiple Case Study in Windhoek."*

Permission has been granted to you under the following conditions:

- that you seek further clearance from the Regional Director of Education, Arts and Culture of the Khomas region.
- parental consent should be obtained from the parents or guardians of participants who are under the age of 16 years,
- core work is not disrupted during your interviews; and
- 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 on the above provided contacts 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 studies.

Yours sincerely,

03/11/2022

Sanet L. Steenkamp
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture
Office of the Executive Director
2022 -11- 03
Tel: 061-2933202
Fax: 061-2933932
Private Bag 13186, Windhoek

All official correspondence addressed to the Executive Director

REPUBLIC OF NAMIBIA

KHOMAS REGIONAL COUNCIL
DIRECTORATE OF EDUCATION, ARTS, AND CULTURE
Tel: [09 264 61] 293 4356
Fax: [09 264 61] 231 367/248 251
Private Bag 13236
WINDHOEK

18 November 2022

For Attention: Ms. Elana Van Wyk

REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH INTERVIEWS WITH SELECTED PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN WINDHOEK, KHOMAS REGION

Your letter on the above topic is hereby acknowledged.

Permission is hereby granted to you to research '*Evaluating current practices pre-primary teachers employ to realize the Whole Child Development (WCD) approach*: Suiderhof Primary School, Pionierspark Primary School, Delta Primary School, Windhoek Gimnasium Private School, Van Rhyn Primary School in Windhoek, Khomas Region under the following conditions:

- The Principal of the selected school to be visited must be contacted in advance and an agreement should be reached between you and the Principal.
- The school programme should not be interrupted.
- The teachers and students who will take part in this exercise will do so voluntarily.
- The Directorate of Education, Arts and Culture should be provided with a copy of your thesis/ findings.

We wish you success in your research.

Yours sincerely

MINISTRY OF EDUCATION
ARTS AND CULTURE
PRIVATE BAG 13236 WINDHOEK
13 -12- 2022
DIRECTOR
KHOMAS REGION

Paulus D. Nghikembua
Director of Education, Arts and Culture

APPENDIX D: CONSENT FOR TEACHERS

Name: ……

I hereby give consent to participate in the research study conducted by Ms Elana van Wyk, a Master of Education student at the University of Namibia (UNAM) on experiences of teachers regarding holistic child development at four selected pre-primary schools in Windhoek, Namibia.

I volunteer to participant in the study. I also allow my voice to be digitally recorded during the interviews, with the understanding that such recording will be kept safe and gets discarded of after a certain period.

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 penalized or prejudiced in any way.

e. I may be asked to leave the study before it has finished, if the study 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*) …… 2023

Declaration by investigator

I, *Elana van Wyk*, declare that:

a. I explained the information in this document to

……

b. I encouraged him/her to ask questions and took adequate time to answer them.

c. I am satisfied that he or she adequately understands all aspects of the research, as discussed above.

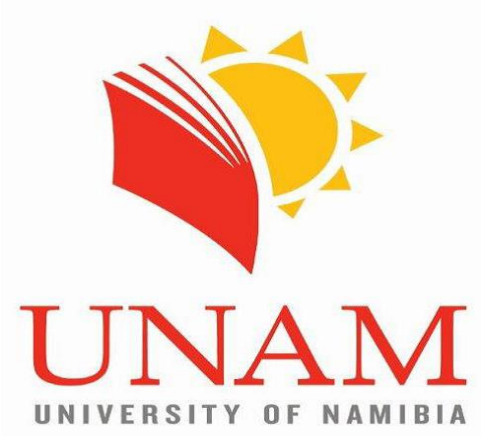
d. I did not use an interpreter.

Signed at (place) …… on (date) …….…… 2023

Signature of investigator: ……..……

Signature of witness: …….……

APPENDIX E: INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR TEACHERS



Researcher: Elana van Wyk

Topic: Holistic child development in four selected pre-primary schools in Windhoek, Namibia.

Main Supervisor: Dr K. Veii

SECTION A: BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Please answer the following questions in the spaces provided. Simply tick (√) the appropriate box for each question below.

Gender:

Male □ Female □

a. The grade(s) you teach:

Grade RRR □

Grade RR □

Grade R □

b. Number of years teaching at this school:

1-2 years □ 3-4 years □ More □

c. Years teaching experience:

Less than 1year □ 1 - 2 years □ 3 - 4 years □ More □

d. Your age group:

e. 20– 30 □ 31 – 40 □ 41 – 50 □ Over 50 □

f. Highest teaching qualification:

Diploma in Education □

BED □

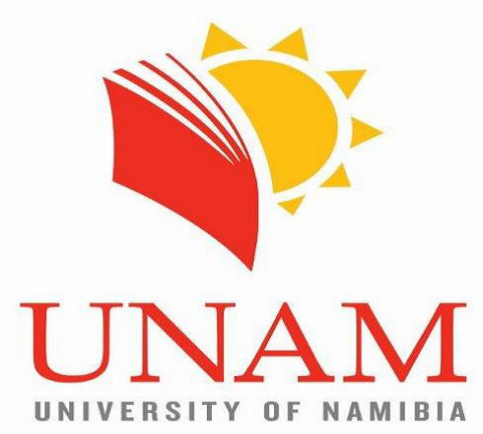
BED Honours □

Other □

SECTION B: INTERVIEW GUIDE

1. What does the term holistic child development mean to you?
2. In your view, is the development of the whole child important in the pre-primary classroom?
3. If yes, please elaborate?
4. What are the methods you apply in the classroom to address WCD?
5. How are best practices regarding WCD organised in this school?
6. What kind of learning difficulties or behavioural problems might learners experience in a classroom due to not developing the child as a whole?
7. How do you address these behavioural problems or delays that learners encounter in your class?
8. What kind of challenges might a teacher face when adapting a whole child development approach in the classroom?
9. Your final words to conclude: how can best practices in WCD be implemented in the pre-primary classroom and what will be necessary to make this a reality throughout pre-primary schools in Namibia?

APPENDIX F: OBSERVATION TABLE



Researcher: Elana van Wyk

Topic: Whole child development in four selected pre-primary schools in Windhoek, Namibia.

Main Supervisor: Dr K. Veii

Observer: E. van Wyk **Location:** _____

Date: _____

Teacher assessment criteria	Strong	Some	None
Established clear learning goals regarding WCD prior to learning experiences *(lesson planning, materials etc.)*			
Implemented and used results during lessons.			
Engaged individually with all children as they entered and exited the classroom.			
Employed positive student interaction during class time.			
Helped develop awareness of each other's emotional development as situations arise *(is sensitive to the needs and feelings of the children).*			
Helped develop awareness of each other's social needs and responsibilities as situations arise *(recognises and responds positively to the social needs of children).*			

Gave sufficient and repeated opportunity for children to engage in physical and movement activities throughout the day.			
Established a positive and relaxed learning atmosphere conducive to routine and self-discipline.			
Utilises play as a daily and integral part of the classroom.			

APPENDIX G: LANGUAGE EDITING CERTIFICATE

Editing, Materials Development & Course Moderation

Ms B. A Beukes Cell: 081 236 7227 beukesbronwen9@gmail.com P O Box 98023, Windhoek

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- PROOFREADING AND COPY-EDITING CERTIFICATE -

TITLE OF THESIS: EXPLORING BEST PRACTICES IN WHOLE CHILD DEVELOPMENT AT PRE-PRIMARY SCHOOL LEVEL - A MULTIPLE CASE STUDY OF SELECTED PRE-PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN WINDHOEK. *Student: Elana Van Wyk - 221115943*

I have vast experience editing academic and other professional documents and have rendered my services to a range of public and private institutions, performing editing services for a variety of purposes, including policy documents, course materials and research projects. I declare that I have done the copy-editing and proofreading of said thesis. Herewith a comprehensive summary of the scope of work performed:

- Correcting grammatical mistakes (i.e. spelling, punctuation, word choices parallelism.)
- Improving sentence constructions (clumsy/vague sentences, reducing wordiness/redundancies)
- Highlighting issues with APA citation and referencing
- Giving guidelines for formatting of figures in APA, including formatting of block quotes, graphics, and numbering conventions.
- Assessing the relevance of source information to thesis.
- Suggesting general document formatting (Table of Contents, Page breaks, spacing and indentation).

Do not hesitate to contact me should you have any questions regarding this exercise.

Yours,

Date: 23 July 2023

Editor: *Bronwen A Beukes*
Lecturer: University of Namibia

Proofreading and Copy-editing Certificate