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**THE IMPLEMENTATION OF GRADE R ADMISSION POLICY: A CASE STUDY OF
FOUR PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN MOPANI DISTRICT LIMPOPO PROVINCE**

by

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the implementation of Grade R admission policy in Mopani District in Limpopo Province and focussed on four primary schools in Makhutswe circuit which has got Grade R classes. The interpretive paradigm was applied as the chosen methodology for the study. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and focus group interviews. A review of secondary sources to corroborate the gathered information was also used. Data analysis was done using thematic analysis through emerging themes from the transcribed data from the interviews. The participants were purposively selected for the sample of this study. These included 1 principal per school, 1 Grade R educator per school, 5 SGB members per school, and 2 admission committee members per school. Through the participant's responses from the schools under study, a transcript was formulated, coded, and categorized in view of the implementation of the Grade R Admission Policy in primary schools. The study found out that the admission policy for Grade R learners was not properly implemented in most of the primary schools due to lack of understanding how the policy must be implemented. It was also revealed that, most of the principals together with their admission committee members tend to use their own discretion concerning the admission of Grade R learners in schools. It further emerged that some of the learners denied admission despite the existing legislation that proscribes that every child has the right to education. Furthermore, the study found out that the district office did not involve the primary teachers before formulating the policy. Hence, the participants showed that they did not have good and proper understanding of the implementation process neither were they well versed about what entailed monitoring the admission policy. As a result, Department of Education resorted to coming up with ways of continuously training and conducting workshops for the educators before they can admit learners to Grade R.

Key words: Implementation, Grade R, Learners, Admission policy, Educators

DECLARATION

I, Matsatsi Paulina Lebea, declare that:

(a) This dissertation, *The Implementation of Grade R Admission Policy: A Case Study of Four Primary Schools in Mopani District Limpopo Province*, is my original work;

(b) It has not been submitted for degree purposes at any other University; and,

(c) The information derived from published and unpublished work of others has been acknowledged in the text and a list of references is provided.

Researcher's signature:  Date: 16 – 01 – 2020

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DEDICATION

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	i
DECLARATION.....	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iii
DEDICATION	iv
TABLE OF CONTENTS	v
ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS	iix
LIST OF APPENDIXES.....	x
LIST OF TABLES.....	xi
CHAPTER ONE	1
BACKGROUND	1
1.1 Introduction.....	1
1.2 Global context on admission for Grade R (preschool learners).....	2
1.2.1 Implementation policy for the foundation phase in African countries.....	3
1.2.2 South African Context	5
1.2.3 The admission policy procedures	7
1.3 Statement of the problem	8
1.4 Purpose of the study	9
1.5 Research Questions.....	9
1.5.1 Main research question	9
1.5.2 Sub-research questions	9
1.6 Objectives of the study	9
1.7 Significance of the study	10
1.8 Delimitations of the Study (The scope of the study)	10
1.9 Definition of terms	10
1.10 Chapter Outline	11
CHAPTER TWO	13
LITERATURE REVIEW	13
2.1 Introduction	13
2.2 Theoretical Frameworks.....	14

2.2.1 Top-Down Policy Implementation Model	15
2.2.2 The Bottom-Up Policy Implementation Model	18
2.2.3 Rationale for adopting the top and bottom up theories	22
2.3 Empirical Studies on the implementation of Grade R Admission Policy	23
2.3.1 Issues regarding admission policies	23
2.3.2 Admission of learners in South African Schools	24
2.3.2.1 Admission of learners who are foreign nationals or non-citizens	27
2.3.2.2 Admission of learners with special education needs	27
2.3.2.3 Admission of learners in feeder zones	28
2.3.3 The strategies used by school to implement Grade R admission policy	29
2.3.3.1 The language issue	34
2.3.4 Monitoring and support mechanisms for implementation of Grade R admission policy	35
2.3.5 Challenges encountered by schools in the implementation of Grade R admission policy	38
2.4 Summary	42
CHAPTER THREE	43
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY	43
3.1 Introduction	43
3.2 Research Paradigm	43
3.3 The interpretive paradigm	44
3.4 Research Approach	46
3.5 Research Design	47
3.5.1 Case Study Design	47
3.6 Population, sample and Sampling Techniques	49
3.6.1 Population	49
3.6.2 Sample and Sampling	49
3.7 Data Collection Procedures	50
3.7.1 Open-ended interviews	50
3.7.2 Focus group interviews	51
3.7.3 Document analysis	52
3.8 Data processing and analysis	53
3.9 Trustworthiness and credibility of research instruments	54

3.9.1 Trustworthiness	54
3.9.2 Credibility	55
3.9.3 Dependability and conformability	55
3.10 Ethical considerations	55
3.10.1 Voluntary participation	56
3.10.2 Avoidance of harm	56
3.10.3 Anonymity and confidentiality	56
3.10.4 Informed Consent	56
3.10.5 Gaining entry	57
3.11 Summary	57
CHAPTER FOUR	59
DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS	59
4.1 Introduction	59
4.2 Biographical data of the participants	60
4.2.1 Gender representation	60
4.3 The implementation of the Grade R admission policy in schools	65
4.3.1 Strategies used to implement the grade R admission policy in the schools	66
4.3.2 Ensuring smooth running of the implementation of the Grade R admission policy	74
4.3.4 Support and monitoring of the Grade R admissions policy	78
4.3.5 The challenges encountered in the implementation of the Grade R admission policy.	85
4.3.5.1 Lack of parental involvement	85
4.3.5.2 Forceful demand for admissions	87
4.3.5.3 Lack of accurate records	89
4.3.5.4 Chronic illnesses	92
4.3.5.5 School transport	93
4.3.5.6 Migrant parents	96
4.3.5.7 Inadequate training on the admission policy	98
4.3.5.8 Language issue	101
4.4 Document analysis	103
4.5 Chapter summary	103
CHAPTER FIVE	105

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS	105
5.1 Introduction	105
5.2 Availability of Grade R Admissions Policy in Schools.....	105
5.3 Implementation of Grade R Admissions Policy	106
5.4 The roles and responsibilities of the admission committee members in implementing the Grade R policy.....	108
5.5 Support and monitoring of the Grade R admissions policy.....	111
5.6 Challenges in implementing the Grade R admissions policy	118
5.6.1 Lack of parental involvement.....	118
5.6.2 Forceful demand for admissions and lack of accurate documents	120
5.6.3 Chronic illnesses	121
5.6.4 School transport	122
5.6.5 Admission of learners who are foreign nationals or non-citizens.....	123
5.6.5 Language issue	124
5.7 Chapter Summary	126
CHAPTER SIX	128
SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	128
6.1 Introduction	128
6.2 Summary of Findings	128
6.2.1 Availability of Grade R Admissions Policy in Schools.....	128
6.2.2 Strategies for implementation of Grade R Admissions Policy	129
6.2.3 Support and monitoring of the Grade R admissions policy.....	130
6.3 Challenges in implementing the Grade R admissions policy	131
6.3.1 Lack of parental involvement.....	131
6.3.2 Forceful demand for admissions and lack of accurate documents	132
6.3.3 Chronic illnesses	132
6.3.4 School transport	132
6.3.5 Admitting learners who were foreign nationals.	133
6.3.6 Language issue	133
6.4 Conclusion	134
6.5 Recommendations	135
REFERENCES.....	137

ACRONYMS

SGB	School Governing Body
SAQA	South African Qualification Authority
ECD	Early childhood Development
DoE	Department of Education
DoSD	Department of Social Development
ETDP	Education Training and Development Practices
SASA	South African School's Act
NDA	National Development Agency
SMT	School Management Team
DBSA	Development Bank of South Africa
FET	Further Education and Training
SADTU	South African Democratic Teachers Union
RSA	Republic of South Africa
GET	General Education and Training
CRC	Convention of the child
SASAMS	South African School Administration Management System
DBE	Department of Basic Education
DoE	Department of Education
SAIDE	South African Institute for Distance Education
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation.
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
MEC	Member of Executive Council
RSA	Republic of South Africa
NEPA	National Education Policy Act
HOD	Head of Department

LIST OF APPENDICES

Appendix A- Application for Ethical Clearance	166
Appendix B – Clearance certificate	167
Appendix C – Application letter to collect data	169
Appendix D – Respond from the Department of Education.....	170
Appendix E – Interview Guides	171
Appendix F – Consent Form	176
Appendix G - Editor’s Declaration	177

LIST OF TABLES

Table 4.1: Gender distribution of Principals, Teachers and Admissions Committee members	62
Table 4.2: Gender distribution of SGBs.....	63
Table 4.3: Age range of Principals, Teachers, Admissions Committee members and District Official	64
Table 4.4: Academic Qualifications of Principals, Teachers and Admissions Committee members	65

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

1.1. Introduction

The World Conference on Education for All (EFA) articulated the significance of early years of education. It is in that conference where it was emphasised that learning starts at birth (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisational) (UNESCO) 1990). Follow-up conferences on the importance of early years were held and nations realised the importance of having early education for children aged between four to six years (United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund, (UNICEF) 2007). This was after the realisation that the first six years are critical for brain development (UNESCO, 2013). On this note, Eagle (2008) contends that the early childhood period is a crucial time to introduce foundation education. This is because it is during this time that the cognitive, social emotional and language skills develop fast. The above views emphasise why it is imperative to have reception classes for learners in the first six years of life (UNICEF, 2012).

Children entering foundation phase in some cases do not enroll in pre-school or reception classes. In a study conducted by Chabbot (2013), it was found that 57% of young children in developing countries have no access to pre-school. Sub-Saharan Africa suffers the same fate. Statistics indicate that (83%) of preschool age learners are not attending formal reception classes. According to the Millennium Development Goal number 1 on Sustainable Education; governments were urged to initiate Early Childhood Development (ECD) classes to support the 250 million children aged 0-5 years who require pre-school education (UNESCO, 2013). Meanwhile, in the context of South Africa; the government introduced the Reception Grade (Grade R) admission policy in public schools to ensure children have an opportunity to go through preschool classes before they enrol in formal basic education.

1.2 Global context on admission for Grade R

Globally, admission into ECD classes is not easy, and it is largely characterised by discriminatory trends from various role players (Blatchford, 2014). In many developed countries, Grade R (preschool or kindergarten) admission policy is implemented with the permission of the school authorities. However, it has been noted that no government policy or departmental policy specifies how the admission and enrolment system should work (Dockett & Perry, 2009; Williams, 2004). The implications are that the school authorities are responsible for the formulation of education and admission policies for their respective schools and the relevant requirements for the learners (Chabbot, 2013). In America, admission policies follow an approach based on how children learn and develop (Lemmer, Meier & Van Wyk, 2008). There are specific requirements on how registration of children enrolling for these early grades should be met (Eisenbberg, Valiente & Eggum, 2010).

In United States of America (USA) the education code for admission policy for children's eligibility into grade R is five years of age. The policy also states that the child is only considered five years of age and eligible for preschool classes if he or she reaches the age of five before September 1 of the school year (Dockett & Perry, 2009). The admission policy in the USA, stipulates that the governing board of the school only admits children who have not reached the required age as prescribed. In the Wisconsin State, parents are required to produce written evidence that a child has received specific vaccinations before admission into a school (Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, n.d.). Moreover, it has been noted that admission into kindergarten in America is based on the student's emotional, academic and physical abilities as well as, the resources available in the school to meet the learner's needs. While the school does not discriminate students with special needs however, some services may not be available for them; hence this ultimately results in some of them being excluded (St Hedwig School, 2017).

In England, the first year of school is called reception (Grade R), and there is an admission policy which specifies those that should be enrolled. For instance, the policy specifies that children should be between four and five-years old to be enrolled in the reception class. This class is treated as a compulsory school year (Blatchford, 2014) and the government supports this initial education system. For example, parents can apply for fee assistance

from government (Michael Hall Admission Policy, 2017). In some cases, interviews and observations of the child are conducted by prospective teachers. Furthermore, there are formal applications with non-refundable application fees that are made, and are followed by assessments, especially for children going to class 1 within 12 months. The assessments are done by the school's Learning Support Department and Eurhythmics Therapy Department for special education needs and development. The admission policy also states that if places are full, prospective learners are placed on the waiting list with locally based applicants eligible for funding (Michael Hall Admission Policy, 2017). However, admission of learners in the reception class is fraught with challenges, on coordination and manipulation by authorities (OECD, 2013).

Studies conducted in Spain and Germany show that these countries have clearly laid out policies for the admission of children into the reception class which they call a preschool class. The policies are explicit that children enrolled in the preschool class should be aged from three to six years old (Dockett & Perry, 2009; Ben, 2010; 2009). The policy also says children in preschool classes take at least three years (Blatchford, 2014). In Argentina, Grade R is called pre-primary; and supports enrolment of children aged six. The policy says grade R is compulsory to all children of that age (Samuel, 2007). However, the new compulsory rule has not been enforced and there is no penalty for non-compliers. As a result, children can enrol in primary schools without having to go through pre-primary (Sebastian, 2007). In many developed countries, the admission policy for pre-schoolers is limited to public schools, though issues of registration for private and church run institutions is sanctioned by these policies (Ben, 2010).

1.2.1 Implementation policy in African countries

In the African context, ECD is a process that starts with the care and education of young children and continuing through lifelong learning. The essence of education in the African context is to empower the learners so that they have a better understanding of their society (Mwaura, 2009). The educational philosophy of the foundation phase in most African countries is that, young children must be nurtured to develop holistically so that their potential to learn can be enhanced (Republic of Kenya, 2005a). In Kenya, the government has a policy that compulsorily enforces all children aged 4 to 5 years to enrol

in ECD classes for two years which is also considered as reception years. Most of the ECD classes are attached to primary schools while, some are within surrounding communities.

In Zimbabwe, The Nziramasanga Commission of 1999 recommended a nine year Compulsory Basic Education for every child (Muzenda, 2011). In pursuit of this goal, a policy decision was taken by the Ministry of Education Sport and Culture (MOESC) as reflected in the Secretary's Circular Number 14 of 2004 for all primary schools to attach two ECD classes (Grades A and B) in phases with effect from 2005 (Muzenda, 2011: 1). Through this policy, children are required to spend at least two years in a preschool class nearest to their homes, before they enrol for grade one (Government of Zimbabwe, 2005). The government does not have restrictions for children enrolled in ECD classes and it prohibits school heads to turn away children for any reason (Government of Zimbabwe, 2005). Furthermore, another circular in 2007 universalised admission and enrolment of ECD children. According to this policy, primary schools were to establish two ECD classes (ECD A and ECD B). However, it was not an offense for parents and guardians to deny these children opportunities to enrol in ECD classes. A new rule was established in Zimbabwe in 2017 that pupils who did not attend ECD classes at registered institutions would no longer be able to proceed to Grade 1 and this new system was earmarked to be effective as from 2018 (The Herald, July: 20, 2017). This was announced by the Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, Dr Sylvia Utete- Masango because of the mushrooming of unregistered child care centres across cities and towns that caused problems. The policy further advised school heads and development committees to prioritise infrastructure development for ECD pupils, which Dr Utete said was yet to reach the required standards at most schools around the country (The Herald, 2017). According to this policy, proper infrastructure should be put in place especially for ECD pupils. However, regardless of government policies seeking to universalise foundation classes, studies show that there are many children aged 3-5 years who do not attend these preschools. A lot of reasons that contribute to this have been given, but these are probably not substantiated with any research, reason being early childhood development is still in its infancy. The policy further says that children who did not attended ECD would need to go to conventional institution and start from the

beginning at ECD like everybody else (The Herald, 2017). This is because observations have been made that a majority of schools tend to ignore the noble intentions of this policy, which is to promote lifelong learning (Muzenda, 2011).

1.2.2 South African Context

In South Africa, the introduction of the Reception Grade (Grade R) policy was meant to improve academic preparation for young learners before they enter Grade one (Goldman et al. 2015). This is in line with the national ideology on the right to education as enshrined in the South African Constitution of 1996, and also in the South African Schools Act of 1996, as amended in the Northern Province Schools Act No 9 of 1995. One of the reasons for the introduction of the reception class in South Africa was to avoid retrogressive situations, where children at home spent time with their unemployed uncles and brothers, who eventually abuse them sexually and verbally (The Herald, 20. 2017). The Admission Policy for Ordinary Public Schools states that all eligible learners of preschool school-going age must be suitably accommodated in schools (Erasmus, 2012). The policy also states that, ex-Model C schools are also public schools and should therefore; abide by the policy (Republic of South Africa, White Paper on Admission Policy, 2005). It is clear that the implementation for the Grade R admission policy is a social responsibility of the government to ensure that young learners in disadvantaged communities acquire relevant foundation in education (Department of Social Development, 2012). In terms of White Paper 5 (section 4:1) all primary schools are encouraged to admit Grade R learners to qualitatively expand access of Grade R to all children. It also states that there is no need for schools to force children to complete registration forms to admit Grade R learners. However, the Regional Office via the Circuit Manager should be informed of the intention to enrol learners before 30 September of the school year. Furthermore, the Education Amendment Act of 2006 on the “No Fee” school policy abolishes school fees in the poorest 40% of schools for Grade R learners. The policy states that schools that are not classified as No fee Schools may charge school fees, emphasising that no child should be disadvantaged if a parent does not pay the Grade R fees as per RSA regulations. In addition, the South African School’s Act of 1996 says that schools are not allowed to

refuse to register learners who cannot pay a registration fee. It also says that, if teachers talk about money during registration, parents should apply for exemption from the fees.

The policy states that the admission age of a learner to Grade 1 is 5 turning 6 by 30 June in the year of admission. The admission age of a learner to Grade R (Reception Year) is age four turning five by 30 June in the year of admission. The policy further says, if any parent wishes to enrol a learner below the age of four, he or she is free to make an application to the principal of the school. It further states that, such an application must be accompanied by a school readiness report, which could be a report from a psychologist or similar professional person, or an acceptable progress report from a qualified educator. The policy stipulates that should the principal of the school decide that it would not be in the child's best educational interest to be admitted to Grade R because of underage circumstance, then the parent must be furnished with reasons for this decision in writing and should be offered an opportunity to appeal to the Member of the Executive Council (MEC). From the above, it is clear that the policy provides clear guidelines on what is needed for the admission into Grade R in schools. The policy further contends that no child shall be tested for HIV and AIDS nor should they test for drug and language before being admitted (Education Rights Project Section 5 (3) of RSA, 1996; Jansen van Rensburg, 2015). Admission into Grade R is a basic human right to every South African Child, regardless of race, religion, creed or any affiliation. The admission policy of an ordinary public school must be consistent with the Act (RSA, 1996).

The implication is that, the Head of Department at every school must determine a process of registration for admission to oversee the admission of learners in a timely and efficient manner (National Education Policy Act No. 76 of 1996). The Head of Department and the school governing bodies should encourage parents to apply for the admission of their children before the end of the preceding year (RSA, 1996). The admission policy must not unfairly discriminate in any way against an applicant for admission. All eligible learners of compulsory school-going age must be suitably accommodated in schools (RSA, 1996). According to the admission policy, the only documents that parents need to show the school when they apply for a learner to be admitted are: the birth certificate, proof of immunisation and report or transfer card if the learner is from another school (RSA, 1996).

The principal of a public school must keep a register of admission of learners in the school as recorded in the register of admission. Officials of the provincial education must have access to the register of admission (RSA, 1996). The RSA document goes further to warn school authorities against seeking for the ability of learners to pay for school uniforms and books from learners (RSA, 1996). Furthermore, it also notes that no foreign learners should be denied admission to a school due to insufficient documents. Learners whose parents do not have a residence permit must be conditionally admitted to school.

1.2.3 The admission policy procedures

According to admission policy, preference of admission should be learners whose parents live in the feeder zone, in their own domicile, learners whose parents' work address is in the feeder area, while other learners are on a first come first serve basis (RSA, 1996). The policy states that the school cannot refuse admission to a learner from its feeder zone and it is the responsibility of the school and the HOD to ensure that all learners have places. The South African School's Act No 84 of 1996, also articulates that language cannot be used as a reason to refuse admission of learners. Therefore, the language policy must reflect the language or languages spoken by the learners while, the school must show how multilingualism is promoted (Oliver, 2011).

The purpose of the admission policy is to provide a framework to all provincial departments of education and governing bodies of public schools for developing the admission policy of the school (RSA, 1996). Thus, this is seen as just a guiding document that provincial, district and schools should possess.

Grade R policy for admission is clear with regards to what has to be done with parents, HODs, SGBs and the school principals in terms of enrolling learners. However, concerns have been reported by parents and interested stakeholders that in most primary schools there are challenges which hinder admission into Grade R which is compulsory. Parents are accused of not securing correct documentation hence their children are denied admission (Excell, & Linnington, 2011). Yet it is clearly stipulated that no learners should be denied admission to a school due to insufficient documents (RSA, 2011). This has resulted in a number of children that should be in grade R not being enrolled and with the

school authorities being accused of doing nothing, yet they are the custodians of the policy (Todd & Mason, 2005). In a study by Excell & Linnington, (2011), it was noted that most parents were concerned about the abuse of power by school principals, teachers, SMTs and HOD, as they are said to deny the children admission into grade R, based on nepotism, and fraud. Furthermore, there are also concerns that school principals in the 40 % No Fees category tend to demand a lot of things which is against the policy (Christie, 2008). Excell & Linnington, (2011) raised concerns with regards to the implementation of the admission policy citing irregularities such as admission of underage and sometimes turning down some children in their zones. Thus, it is not clear how the schools are implementing the Grade R admission policy, what strategies are used and if there is any support and monitoring mechanisms in place. Therefore, this study sought to examine how the admission policy for Grade R classes is being implemented in four schools in the Limpopo Province.

1.3 Statement of the problem

The Grade R admission policy in South Africa stipulates that all young children must be enrolled in the Reception class (Grade R). The policy further stipulates that admission of children into grade R is free and compulsory for all children turning 6 in June of that year (Samuels et. al., 2015). The admission policy is meant to assist children from low socio-economic backgrounds to have early stimulation opportunity by enrolling into grade R before they enter formal grade one. However, the admissions into Grade R is fraught with challenges as noted by parents, grey literature and interested stakeholders (Hyman, & Lazar, 2003). Parents are accused of forcing school authorities to enrol their children even when the children do not have appropriate documentation (Muthia & Ramadhari, 2016). Whereas, children that are supposed to be enrolled in Grade R are denied entry due to school authorities who have been labelled as corrupt. For instance, parents have accused school heads, teachers, parents and SGBs for not being fair with regards to admission of Grade R learners into public schools. In addition, part of the accusations is that, educational authorities that are expected to lead admission of children into Grade R are abusing their positions (Sayed & Soudien, 2015). Furthermore, other problems cited since the implementation of the policy are that, the strategies used, and the support

mechanisms in school to ensure seamless implementation of the admission policy appear to be fragmented. Moreover, concerns have been raised that despite the challenges that continue to affect admission of children into ECD classes year in year out little or no interventions appear to have been done for redress. The researcher therefore, sought to find out what exactly is happening on the ground regarding the implementation of the admission policy into grade R in four primary Mopani District, Makhutswe circuit in Limpopo province in South Africa.

1.4 Purpose of the study

The purpose of the study was to investigate how Grade R admission policy is being implemented in four primary schools in Mopani District, Makhutswe circuit in Limpopo province in South Africa.

1.5 Research Questions

1.5.1 Main research question

How is the Grade R admission policy implemented in Mopani District in Makhutswe circuit in the Limpopo Province of South Africa?

1.5.2 Sub-research questions

- What strategies are used to implement Grade R admission policy in four schools in Mopani District in the Makhutswe circuit?
- How is the Grade R admission policy supported and monitored by the in Makhutswe circuit in Mopani district?
- What are the challenges encountered in the implementation of the Grade R admission policy in Makhutswe circuit in Mopani District?

1.6 Objectives of the study

- To examine strategies employed to implement the Grade R admission policy in Makhutswe circuit in Mopani District.

- To assess how the Grade R admissions policy is supported and monitored in Makhutswe circuit in Mopani District.
- To identify the current challenges that hinders proper implementation of the Grade R admission policy in Makhutswe circuit in Mopani District.

1.7 Significance of the study

Early childhood development programme is a new phenomenon in most primary schools in Limpopo province. The newly introduced policy regarding admission policy of children into Grade R is facing a lot of challenges. Thus, this study may be assist school principals, parents and guardians on ways of minimising the challenges that are related to enrolment of children into Grade R. In addition, the findings of this study will assist the society in refining the implementation of Grade R admission policy in public schools and to ensure the policy is monitored and evaluated to promote effective implementation. The community and the DBE will also benefit from the findings of the study which might directly provide information on the strategies that can be put in place to advance and improve the gaps on the policy and which deter effective Grade R admission policy implementation. Therefore, the recommendations of the study will directly address the challenges that are encountered in implementing the policy. Resultantly, the findings will strike a chord in the policy formulation and implementation processes in the Department of Basic Education in South Africa.

1.8 Delimitations of the Study

The study was conducted in four primary schools in Mopani District in the Makhutswe circuit of the Limpopo Province in South Africa. Four principals, Grade R teachers, 5 SGB members per school and 2 admission committee members from each of the selected schools were selected to take part in the study.

1.9 Definition of terms

- Admission Policy

DoE (2008) describes an admission policy as a plan of action which involves admitting or allowing one to enter the premise or the system based on a set of requirements as stipulated by the relevant stakeholders.

- Implementation

Implementation is the realization of a policy, plan or idea. It is defined by Ham and Hill (198:104) as actions by the public individuals or groups that are directed at the achievement of the objectives set forth in prior policy decisions. Implementation in this study refers to the way admission policy for Grade R is put practised or put into action in schools.

- Grade R

This is a year-long programme where children aged 4 and 5 by the 30th of June in the year of admission to Grade R are provided with skills, competencies and knowledge opportunity as preparation to formal schooling (South African School's Act No 84, of 1984, regulation 5(4) of 2002).

1.10 Chapter Outline

This dissertation is made up of six chapters as follows:

Chapter One: Introduction and Background of the Study

This chapter covers the background of the study. The chapter further discusses the statement of the problem, objectives of the study, research questions, the significance of the study, delimitations of the study and the definitions of key terms.

Chapter Two: Theoretical Framework and Literature Review.

This chapter discusses the theoretical framework adopted for the study as well as the review of related literature. The literature focuses on the following headings: the reception class admission policy, strategies employed to implement the Grade R admission policy; monitoring and support mechanisms in place and the challenges associated with Grade R admission policy.

Chapter Three: Research Methodology.

This chapter presents the research methodology used in the study. It also discusses the philosophical assumption underlying various methodologies and the Interpretivist paradigm on which this study is based on. The research design, population and sampling procedures, research instruments used in data collection, data analysis and ethical considerations are also discussed.

Chapter Four: Data Presentation and analysis.

In this chapter, the researcher presents the data collected through interviews, focus group and the document analysis and these were be put together as findings for the study.

Chapter Five: Discussions of findings.

A summary of findings will be interpreted and discussed to give meaning on the phenomenon under study

Chapter Six: Conclusions and Recommendations.

- This chapter presents the conclusions that were arrived at from the findings and gives the recommendations based on the results of the study.

Chapter One Summary

This chapter gives a general introduction of the study. It also discusses the implementation of the Grade R admission policy in primary schools. This chapter also poses the research problem of the study, the aims, objectives and research questions raised in the research. Furthermore, the significance of the study, delimitations and definition of key terms are also tackled. A brief chapter outline of the study is also provided. The next chapter is on the review of the related literature.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

According to Tailor (2008:66), a literature review is an account of what has been published on a particular topic by scholars and researchers, an examination of how these studies were carried out, where they were conducted and the similarities and differences with the present study and the gaps that exist as carried out by the researcher. The first part of this chapter discusses the definition of policy and policy implementation by various scholars. The second part will look at the theoretical framework which informed the study. The theoretical framework which guided this study is the bottom-up theory and the top-down theory. The third part discusses what people have written about the implementation of Grade R admission policy. It examines the strategies employed to implement the Grade R admission policy; how implementation of Grade R admission policy is supported and monitored by stakeholders; and challenges encountered in the implementation of Grade R admission policy.

Policy

Policies are written statements or sets of statements that describe principles, requirements, and limitations that are characterized by indicating “what” needs to be done rather than how to do it. Such statements have the force of establishing rights, requirements and responsibilities (O’Toole, 2000). In concurring with this notion, Anderson (2006: 6) defines policy as “a relatively stable, purposive course of action or inaction followed by an actor or set of actors in dealing with a problem or matter of concern”. In simpler terms, Hill, (2000), Hill & Hupe (2006) assert that a policy is a process of decision-making leading to (or appearing to lead to) actions outside the political system. Similarly, Schofield, (2004) believes that policy-making plays a pivotal role in establishing clear objectives as prioritized by the government. In addition policy-making establishes programmes that will contribute towards development and the co-ordination between government institutions on various levels of government and the activities to be executed by these institutions (Paudel, 2009). From the above definitions one can deduce that

policy indicates the desires of those whose actions will be guided by the decisions taken. In other words, policies do not implement themselves, but require the implementer's knowledge and competences so that policy intentions can be translated into operational strategies (Schofield, 2004). As a result, public policymaking is often viewed as a conveyor belt in which issues are first recognized as a problem, alternative courses of action are considered, and then policies are adopted, implemented by agency personnel, monitored, evaluated, and finally changed on the basis of their success (Anderson, 2006, O'Toole, 2000, Pressman & Wildavsky, 1973).

Policy Implementation

Policy implementation is an important stage of policy making process. It is the execution of the law in which various stakeholders, organisations, procedures and techniques work together to put policies into effect with a view to attaining policy goals (Khan, 2016; Simon, 2010). Implementation can be viewed as a process, an output and an outcome and it involves a number of actors, organisations and techniques of control. It is the process of interactions between setting goals and the actions directed towards achieving them (Simon, 2010; Hill & Hupe, 2006). According to (Khan, 2016: 5) "Implementation put emphasis on understanding the success or failure of public policy by elaborating on factors that affect it". The foregoing definition suggest that policy implementation is a dynamic process which is expected to produce a number of outcomes through collaboration of both the policy makers and the policy implementers. Thus, for the purposes of this study, the researcher views policy implementation as the ability to diligently implement the stated goals and objectives as captures in Grade R admission policy.

2.2 Theoretical Frameworks

As stated in the above section, this study was informed by the top down and bottom up policy implementation models by Van Meter and Van Horn (1975) and Lipsky (1981).

2.2.1 Top-Down Policy Implementation Model

The top-down model whose proponents are Van Meter and Van Horn (1975) maintain successful policy implementation is the result of getting people to do what they are told to do; controlling all the stages of implementation; minimise conflict and deviation of goals by programme development and providing adequate resource in terms of human and financial resources (Parsons, 1995 & Olivier, 2011). According to Van Meter and Van Horn (1975) it is imperative that the goals of the policy are clearly articulated and understood, while resource are made available. According to Treib and Pulzl (2007), the top-down implementation model is represented by scholars such as Van Meter and Van Horn (1975); Nakamira and Smallwood (1980); and Sabatier (1983). These scholars contend that implementation in the top-down approach is the hierarchical execution of centrally defined policy intentions and represents the policy makers views (Paudel, 2009). The top-down model is a well-known model in the policy analysis arena (Anderson, 1979; Dye, 1978; Henry, 1975) and is based on the assumption that a small, elite group (usually government) is responsible for policy decisions and that this group governs an ill-informed public (the masses) who are expected not to ask any questions (Dubnick and Bardes, 1983). Policy decisions made by the elite flow downward to the population at large and are executed by the bureaucracy (Anderson, 1994). In other words, decisions are taken at the top and there is no popular participation which, means it is only the expression of values and choices of the privileged who dictate their views to the masses (Howlett and Ramesh, 2003). This is an approach where policy-making leaders act in an environment which is characterized by apathy; information distortion and governing of a large passive mass. It is where the society is divided into those who have powers and those who do not have powers. Those who have powers or the elites usually take the centre stage in leading the decisions that directly affect the masses or the society at large. This indicates that the majority of prevailing policies designed reflect the leaders' values which generally preserve the status quo (Pulzl & Treib, 2007). In this environment, the elites have higher income, are more educated and have higher statuses than the poor masses. Public policies are therefore viewed as the values and preferences of the governing elite. In the government of this type, public officials and administrators carry out policies decided on

by the elites and flow them down to the mass without considering their participation or listening to their views (Pulzl & Treib, 2007). The researcher is of the views that the enforcement of such mandates using the top down theory can assist in effective implementation of Grade R admission policy. This is because the theory is anchored on policy implementers being faithful and adhering to the policy makers' orders.

The strength of the top-down model rests with the assumption that policy implementation starts with a decision made by central government (Pulzl & Treib, 2007). Thus, policy makers view policy designers at national level as key and central to successful implementation. It means that bureaucrats are seen as best positioned to manipulate variables, direct and supervise implementation of service delivery. This perspective is stressed by Brynard, (2005:9) who postulates that "high ranking officials formulate policies and execute the decision making for lower level structures to implement". The implementers do not have input in the design and details of the policy, they have their policies cascaded down and are not expected to question but implement (Fraser et. al., 2006).

According to Paudel (2009) the Top-Down model assumes that policy goals can be specified by policy makers and that implementation can be carried out successfully by setting certain mechanisms. Implementation is enforced through the set mechanisms that ensure compliance to the policies. This line of thinking is confirmed by Urwin and Jordan (2007:183) who postulate that the "Top-Down model assumes the legislation and policies set explicit aims and objectives, providing a blueprint that is then directly translated into action". Similar statements come from Pulzl and Treib (2007) who state that the Top-Down model emphasizes that decision makers have the ability to produce unequivocal policy objectives and proceed to control the implementation of the decisions. The Top-Down model is policy centred and represents the views of the policy makers. The foregoing assertions suggest that, policy makers have the capability to exercise control over the environment and implementers (Paudal, 2009). Therefore, this theory was adopted because it is ideal in the early planning states of the policy implementation process. For instance, the Department of Basic Education (DBE) controls and act as guides to all schools in South Africa. Thus, the schools are also expected to draw from

the existing government policies on how to implement their own Grade R admission policies. While the strength of the Top-Down perspective is to ensure compliance, there are limitations to this stance. The Top-Down model takes the statutory language as their starting point. By this action they fail to take into account the significance of actions taken earlier in the policy making process (Gumede, 2008). Pressman and Wildavsky (1984) argue that if action depends upon a number of links in an implementation chain, then the degree of co-operation between agencies required to make those links has to be very close to a hundred per cent in order to avoid deficits in the process. Top down model advocates have been accused of seeing implementation as a purely administrative process and ignore the political aspects or try to eliminate them. For example, top down policies neglect to consider the attitudes of the implementers and sometimes even fail to clarify certain issues and take it for granted that the policy will be implemented according to intended plan (Gumede, 2008; Pressman & Wildavsky 1984).

Top-Down model put exclusive emphasis on the policy makers as key actors and also development of policy at macro level (Gumede, 2008). They overlook the fact that local service deliverers are experts and have the knowledge of the problems that exist on the ground. Therefore they are in a better position to propose purposeful policy (Paudel, 2009.).

According to Paudel (2009), the top-down model neglect reality of policy modification or distortion at the hands of implementers. This is because policy implementers interpret and implement a policy according to their own understanding even considering the available resources. They can divert from the original plan to suit the prevailing situation. Therefore, this study also sought to find out if the approved steps for implemented Grade R admissions policy are followed to the latter. There is an assumption that policy makers control the processes that affect implementation (Gumede, 2008). The Top-Down model is criticised because central decision makers neglect other actors. For example, private sector, local officials who are involved in the implementation process. The Top-Down model sees local actors as implementation agents, whose behaviour need to be controlled (Paudel, 2009; Gumede, 2008, Sabatier, 2007; Jans, 2007) observed that although good decisions are made at the top, bad implementation cripples this approach.

Multiple intermediary actors like government officials, agencies for policy implementation requires co-operation, monitoring and control (military chain of command). It implies that without co-operation and proper control there can be no successful implementation (Mescht, 2013, Elder, 2011, Gumede, 2008, Sabatier, 2007).

However, despite the criticisms levelled above, this theory fits the study because it clearly states what is expected to be done, the steps to be taken by the schools in implementing the Grade R admissions policy. Furthermore, the theory was commensurate with the study because it highlighted to the school management how the goals and objectives may be achieved, it further illuminates how these objectives may redress concerns that have been raised regarding how the policy is implemented in schools. Therefore, this study also sought to find out what role is played by the school management in implementing the admission policy, what strategies are utilised and if there are any monitoring and evaluation processes that have done since the admissions policy was implemented.

2.2.2 The Bottom-Up Policy Implementation Model

The Bottom-Up policy implementation model consists of everyday problem solving strategies of “street-level bureaucrats” (Mescht, 2013, Olivier, 2011, Urwin & Jordan, 2007, Herjn & Hull, 1982, Elmore, 1978), Urwin and Jordan (2007), refer to the Bottom-Up approach as the backward mapping approach which recognizes the importance of additional actors, other than policy makers at the top. The reasons for this is that the policy implementers also known as the street level bureaucrats normally interact with one another in congested spaces and eventual implement policies. According to Pulzl and Treib (2007) the Bottom-Up model criticizes the view that local bureaucrats are the main actors in policy delivery and see implementation as the negotiation processes within networks of implementers. Furthermore Pulzl and Treib (2007) contend that the aim of the Bottom-Up is to give accurate empirical description and explanations of interaction and problem solving strategies of actors involved in delivery and policy implementation. The Bottom-Up approach scholars argue that implementation cannot be separated from policy formulation. They pay attention not only to one stage of the system but to the whole

process on how policies are defined, shaped, implemented and redefined (Mescht, 2013, Elder, 2011, Pulz & Treib, 2007, Bell & Stevenson, 2006).

One of the reasons why this approach was adopted is because it is anchored in the participation process (Pulzl & Treib, 2007). Kumar (2009) is of the opinion that community participation, if done properly, almost always brings advantages for the said community. It can therefore, be noted that participation can ensure effective utilization of available resources where people and other agents work towards achieving their objective and local people become responsible for various activities (Williman, 2004).

The participatory process can have wider ramifications for the 'policy-owning' body as it helps create an institutional culture of openness and service. The foregoing views aligns with one of the study's objectives which sought to find who and how do policy implementers participate in implementing of Grade R admissions policy in schools. The process also encourages greater public attention in the way in which the policy is implemented, thus promoting accountability (Mescht, 2013, Bell & Stevenson, 2006, Eden, 1996). They further concede that participation in most cases brings a wider range of information, ideas, perspectives, and experiences to the process of policy formulation. Hudson (1989) in Pulzl and Treib (2007) argues that the power held by street level bureaucrats stretches beyond the control of citizen's behaviour. Lipsky (1980) further explains that the decisions of street-level bureaucrats, the routines they establish and the devices they invent to cope with uncertainty and work pressures, effectively become the public policies they carry out. As such, the bottom up approach works backwards to identify implementers and policy structures which may affect behavioural change (Konzo & Newig, 2014).

Brynard (2005:10) argues that the bottom-up approach views service delivery implementers as people on the ground, whose decisions on selecting variables matter because they face the challenges of the real situations and make decisions as the situation arises. Lipsky (1980) who is often referred to as the father of the Bottom-Up approach, cited in Urwin and Jordan (2007:183) posit that the bottom up model "is made

while it is being administered, decisions of street-level bureaucrats, the routines they establish and the devices they invent effectively become public policy that they carry out”.

Street level bureaucrats are considered to have a better understanding of what clients need because they have direct contact with the public. Lipsky (1980) argues this point by saying that street level bureaucrats enter the service tradition with some pressure and other constraints put them in positions of having to create coping mechanisms. Hence, the reason why the approach was adopted because its advantages is embedded in the formal and informal relationships of the various sub-systems that are involved in making and implementing the policy (Grade R admission policy). According to Hill and Hupe (2006) street level bureaucrats develop methods, adjust their work habits to reflect lower expectation of themselves and their clients. These views are supported by Barretti (2004) who advances that, the bottom-up theory is a way of studying policy design and implementation while considering the abilities of the lowest level implementers. Lipsky's (1980) theory of street level bureaucrats focuses on the discretionary decisions each field worker or street-level bureaucrat makes in relation to the delivery of policies to them. The discretion taken by the street level bureaucrats in service delivery or enforcing regulations makes them essential actors in implementing public policies. A few bottom-up approach advocates even suggest that the discretion at lower levels is not only inevitable, but also desirable because it is necessary for policies to be 'reinvented' so that they better fit local needs (Olivier, 2011. Palumbo, 1987, Parsons, 1995). It can be argued that the street level bureaucrats have considerable autonomy from their employing organization. Linked with the above, Wong (2007) states that normally it is the working conditions that actually allow for discretion and autonomy and the ability of the policy implementers to interpret the policy to ensure that they align with the specific demands of their work environment.

The source of the autonomous power thus stems from the considerable amount of discretion at their disposal. Expressing similar sentiments is Schofield (2004) who argues that the Bottom-Up perspective identifies many actors that are affected, make up relations between policy makers and implementers. In the process of networking, public and private sectors come together, analyse several policies that affect the same problem. This model then allows for checks and balances on groups to monitor or create healthy

competition (Stevenson, 2006, Schofield, 2004; O'Toole, 2000). In this regard, to influence and develop governmental decision-making, a group must have access and the opportunity to contact and express their views without fear of decision-makers. If the people are side lined and become unable to communicate with decision-makers, their chances of influence in affecting decision-making become very slim. All decisions should be created from the people at the grassroots level and agreed upon the top of the hierarchy of decision-making (Elder, 2011, De Leon & De Leon, 2002, Hull & Herjn 2000). In line, with the preceding views, the use of the bottom-up theory was justified for this study because it is participatory in nature and strives to make sure that the policy implementers in schools understand the objectives of the Grade R admission policy.

Another reason why the researcher chose this theory is because group representation provides the opportunity for those who are likely not to be heard without that representation to express their views and opinions and highlight their needs or interests as advocated by Pulzl & Treib (2007). Anderson (2006) sees the importance of this model as being where groups bring more diverse information and knowledge to bear on the question under consideration. He further argues that varied cultures, age groups and gender all add to the diversity of a group which gives varied perspectives and enhances the kind of ideas the group can come up with. Group differences do not only involve different needs, interests, and goals, but probably more important different social locations and experiences from which social facts and policies are understood. The group becomes the essential bridge between the individual and the government (Anderson, 2006).

Meanwhile, there are limitations to the bottom-up approach such as the methodological perspective that over-emphasizes the level of local autonomy. Although Lipsky (1980) emphasizes the importance of street-level bureaucrats while Hull and Herjn (1982) emphasize the local networking of this model in service delivery there can however be variations in implementation by the local people in the implementation phase. The results may not be achieved as citizens may resist implementing centralized policies. Similar sentiments were expressed by Paudel (2009) who contends that the bottom up perspective does not provide satisfactory solutions to the problems of public policy.

The behaviour of street level bureaucrats is also criticized as they usually overestimate the use of their discretion and overemphasize their autonomy versus top officials (Pulzl & Treib, 2007; Williman, 2004). The actions of the street bureaucrats are likely to disadvantage people with very little education and those with poor social background are less likely to benefit as they may not fully comprehend the meaning of the policies while the more educated elite are likely to benefit from the social services (Paudel, 2009). Brynard (2009:5) also argues that analysis should focus "on those who are charged with carrying out policies rather than those who formulate and convey them" This implies that effective policy formulation cannot be done without involving those that are affected by the problem. Regardless of the limitations raised above, the bottom-up theory was adopted because participation of the policy implementers means they have a sense of ownership and commitment to the successful implementation of the Grade R admissions policy. Moreover, Paudel (2009) advances that, alienation of the very implementers of the policy is prevented

2.2.3 Rationale for adopting the top and bottom up theories

Both top down and bottom up models of policy implementation will be used in this study to find out how schools are implementing Grade R admissions policy. There are crucial aspects like the understanding of the policy by the implementers at the school level and those at the higher level who are supposed to support and monitor them. Consequently aspects of both top down and bottom up models will be used to discuss issues emerging from the data like establishment of admissions committees; understanding of the policy by the members; how the committees function and important aspects like strategies used

by the committees to implement the policy; support and monitoring mechanisms in place as well as any challenges if any are encountered during the implementation process.

The major issues are that the investigation sought to find out how Grade R admission policy is being implemented. In such cases one will examine how the implementers understand the policy and adhere to the crucial aspects in the implementation and whether the objectives of the policy are being met. The models also enabled the researcher to explain the challenges. Moreover, the researcher opted to utilise both theories as a way of counter acting the limitations levelled against both theories. Both theories also allowed the researcher to tap on the on the views of both the policy makers and the policy implementers of the Grade R admission policy in schools under research. It is because of these attributes that the researcher opted for the study to be guided by both models.

2.3 Empirical Studies for Grade R Policy

2.3.1 Issues regarding admission policies

In the last 25 years, more than two-thirds of Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries have increased school choice opportunities for parents, and it is perhaps one of the most ardently discussed issues in the current education policy debate (Atmore et.al. 2012). School choice advocates often argue that the introduction of admission policies in education allows equal access to high quality schooling for all. Therefore, expanding school choice opportunities would allow all children – including disadvantaged ones and the ones attending low performing schools – to change to better schools (Franklin & McLaren, 2015; Hamari et. al., 2014). Since school choice has always been available to well-off families through residential mobility and through enrolment in private schools, advocates suggest that expanding school choice to all, including low-income and minority students, will increase equity. Choice of programmes can be perceived as leading to a general improvement in the quality of education, and fostering efficiency and innovation (Hamari et. al., (2014).

On the other hand, critics of school choice suggest that it can exacerbate inequities, as it increases sorting of children between schools based on their socio-economic status, their

ethnicity and their ability. As a result, quality can become increasingly unequal between schools. They argue that it further advantages those who already have had a better start in life because of their parents' socioeconomic status. In addition, critics of school choice suggest that school choice reduces the unique potential of schools as social cohesion builders, as schools are further segregated by children characteristics (Hamari et. al., 2014). It is an uncontested fact that there are vast disparities in the quality of education provided to children at different public schools in South Africa. Although there are some laudable exceptions, the quality of education provided at schools in more affluent areas is generally far better than the quality of education provided at schools situated in poorer areas (de Vos, 2013). Moreover, traces of apartheid education system have exacerbated the situation. Therefore as a way of redress, particularly in South Africa, new policies were put in place to redress inequalities in school admissions (Franklin & McLaren, 2015). Hence implementation of admission policies at all levels is supposed to take into consideration equity and non-discrimination in all aspects (Eastern Cape Department of Education, 2018; Mestry, 2017; Franklin & McLaren, 2015; Republic of South Africa, 1996). This aspect will be explored in this study by looking at the implementation of Grade R admission policy.

2.3.2 Admission of learners in South African Schools

Admission of learners in South Africa from Grades R to 12 has to be in line with the Constitution of South Africa, the South African Schools Act (SASA) of 1996 as amended, Admissions Policy for Ordinary Public Schools of 1998 and any other applicable provincial laws (Eastern Cape Department of Education, 2018; Mestry, 2017; Franklin & McLaren, 2015). The school Governing Body (SGB) of a school can decide on the admission policy of their schools as captured in Section 5(5) of the South African Schools Act (SASA) of 1996 which states that “the admission policy of a public school is determined by the governing body of such school”, However, this policy must conform to the standards set in the Constitution. According to the Constitution there must be no unfair discrimination against anyone on any of the following grounds, namely; race, gender, sex, pregnancy, marital status, ethnic or social origin, colour, sexual orientation, age, disability religious conscience, belief, culture, language or birth (Constitution of South Africa, 1996). Further

to this the Constitution of South Africa, in section 29(1) of the Constitution, states that “everyone has the right to basic education”. As such, the SGB must also conform not only with SASA but with the Constitution, regulations and any other relevant provincial law. The policy must be flexible enough to allow for the MEC to intervene when reasonable as highlighted in 3(3) and 3(4) of the Act which grants the MEC the power to determine the number of children to be admitted to each school.

Therefore, when deciding on the admission of a particular learner, the principal of the school will only make such a decision provisionally on behalf of the provincial head of department (Mestry, 2017 & South African School’s Act 1996) The MEC as the political head of the provincial department of education has the final say in admission decisions and has the power to overturn decisions (DBE, 2010; RSA, 1996). Despite having this power, the MECs have to exercise it in a fair and reasonable manner as the Department of Education (DoE) has lost a number of court cases in which it was sued by schools and individuals regarding implementation of school admission policies (Mestry, 2017; Manfield-Barry & Stwayi, 2016).

The SASA and the Department of Basic Education’s (DBE) Admission Policy for Ordinary Public Schools govern the rights of learners and schools with respect to the development of school admissions policies and the implementation of admissions decisions (Mestry, 2017; Manfield-Barry & Stwayi, 2016; RSA, 1996). Section 5 of SASA, which, among other things, empowers a school’s SGB to determine its admissions policy, prohibits schools from unfairly discriminating against learners during the admissions process. Furthermore, SASA prohibits public school SGBs, principals and other school administrators, from administering admissions tests related to the admission of any learners (DBE, 2010; RSA, 1996). This is due to the fact that schools have the obligation to assist all learners and not only those who will raise the marks of their schools by performing at high levels (Manfield-Barry & Stwayi, 2016). Finally, no learners may be refused admission to a public school on the grounds that his or her parents are unable to pay, or have not paid school fees, does not subscribe to the school’s mission statement or has refused to enter into a contract waiving claims for damages arising out of the

education of the learner (Department of Basic Education, 2011, South African School's Act 1998 & 1996). This is important in light of South Africa's legacy of apartheid and current reality of unequal access to education. For instance, "It is very important that admission policies enable achievement of universal and non-discriminatory access to education" (Manfield-Barry & Stwayi, 2016:7).

The DBE admission's policy for ordinary public schools sets forth additional powers, responsibilities and limitations with respect to Provincial Education Departments (PEDs) and SGBs in terms of the administration, determination and implementation of admission policies and decisions (Department of Education 2003; Department of Basic education, 2011). The policy also sets forth the admissions procedures that parents must follow when applying for admission to a school and also extends the right of admission to non-citizens when certain conditions are met. The procedures are as follows as highlighted in Circular 18 of 2018 on the administration of 2019 learner admissions: A parent must complete an application form for admission, which should be made available to him or her by the principal of the school together with the admission policy and the code of conduct for learners of the school. The principal must ensure that parents are given whatever assistance they may require to complete the form. Circular 18, further highlights that, parents must also present an official birth certificate of the learner to the principal of the public school. If the parent is unable to submit the birth certificate, the learner may be admitted conditionally until a copy of the birth certificate is obtained from the regional office of the Department of Home Affairs. The principal must advise parents that it is an offence to make a false statement about the age of a child.

The parent must ensure that the admission of the learner is finalised within three months of conditional admission. On application for admission, a parent must show proof that the learner has been immunised against the following communicable diseases: polio, measles, tuberculosis, diphtheria, tetanus and hepatitis B. If a parent is unable to show proof of immunisation, the principal must advise the parent on having the learner immunised as part of the free primary health care programme (South Africa, 2012). When a learner transfers from one public school to another, the principal must complete a

transfer card and hand it to the parent, or forward it to the principal of the receiving school. The learner's transfer card must be attached to the application form for admission to the receiving school. Furthermore, if the transfer card is not available the principal of the receiving school may admit the learner and place the learner in a grade on the basis of the following documentation: (i) the last report card issued by the previous school; (ii) other equivalent documentation from the previous school or a written affidavit of the parent stating the reason for not having the transfer card and the grade the learner attended at the previous school.

2.3.2.1 Admission of non-citizens learners

The South African Schools Act, 1996 and this policy apply equally to learners who are not citizens of the Republic of South Africa and whose parents are in possession of a permit for temporary or permanent residence issued by the Department of Home Affairs. A learner who entered the country on a study permit must present the study permit on admission to the public school. Persons classified as illegal aliens must, when they apply for admission for their children or for themselves, show evidence that they have applied to the Department of Home Affairs to legalise their stay in the country in terms of the Aliens Control Act, 1991 (No. 96 of 1991) and Refugees Act (No. 130 of 1996). In addition, the Department of Education, A public Policy School Guide 4 of 1996 states that, asylum-seeker and refugee children should be regarded as dependents of caregivers (who are not necessarily parents) and do not need to hold a study permit in addition to their refugee or asylum seeker permit.

2.3.2.2 Admission of learners with special education needs

The rights and wishes of learners with special education needs must be taken into account at the admission of the learners to an ordinary public school Department of Basic Education, 2011, South African School's Act, 1996). According to SASA schools are encouraged to make the necessary arrangements, as far as practically possible, to make their facilities accessible to such learners. This is also in line with what is outlined in White Paper 6 of 2001 regarding inclusive education in South Africa (Department of Education, 2001). Where the necessary support which would facilitate the integration of a learner

cannot be provided, the principal of the school should refer the application for admission to the Head of Department who will in turn have the learner admitted to a suitable public school in that province or to a school in another province. The National Commission of Special Needs in Education and Training (NCSNET, 1997). Before the Head of Department refers a learner as stated above, he or she must arrange for consultation with parents, educators and other support personnel concerned. These consultations must form part of the assessment of the learner before the learner is referred to another public school (Franklin & McLaren, 2015).

2.3.2.3 Admission of learners in feeder zones

Heads of Departments are empowered under the admissions policy, after consultation with representatives from school governing bodies, to determine feeder zones for ordinary public schools in order to control the learner numbers of schools and to co-ordinate parental preferences; Mestry, 2017, Department of Basic Education, Department of Education, 2003, South African School's Act, 1996).

Once created, preference for school admission is first given to learners whose parents live in the feeder zone, second to learners whose parents work in the feeder zone and third to other learners on a first come, first served basis. A school's capacity determination is also relevant in admissions decisions since it enables schools to limit the size of their classrooms. This is particularly relevant for wealthier schools that, either through inheriting superior infrastructure or having constructed additional classrooms via school fee funds, are able to offer, among other things, smaller classrooms by limiting the number of learners admitted (Mestry, 2017). Parliament amended SASA in 2007 to empower the minister to set norms and standards for school capacity in respect of the number of learners a school can admit (Franklin & McLaren, 2015; DBE, 2011). The Minister of Basic Education, however, has taken a long time to exercise this power and as a result, conflicts have emerged amongst schools who have implemented their own capacity policies to limit the number of learners who may be admitted in those schools (Mestry, 2017, Manfield-Barry & Stwayi, 2016). This means provincial education departments who are tasked with the responsibility of ensuring that all learners are able to enrol in schools have

not fulfilled their obligations to parents and learners who seek to vindicate their rights to attend quality schools that are not overcrowded (Franklin & McLaren, 2015). This study also explored the measures that have been taken by schools and the DBE to address this challenge.

2.3.3 The strategies used by schools to implement

Globally, there is a convergence of literature showing pre-schooling has profound positive effects on children's holistic development and future academic progress (Cascio et al 2013; Hood, et al, 2012). As such a call has been made that there is a need to identify strategies that will ensure that every learner is given the right to education through the implementation of admission policies. Writing from a Kenyan perspective (Whitehead, 2010) also advances that policies in any school environment require wider consultations with different stakeholders to guarantee that children, families, and community voices are included and to ensure a common understanding and ownership so that their sustainability is guaranteed. Thus, the foregoing assertions also imply that wider consultation can assist school stakeholder to identify effective strategies that will ensure a seamless implementation process. Moreover, the foregoing views also align with the top down and bottom up theories which highlight that, views of both the policy makers and the policy implementers of the Grade R admission policy in schools play a pivotal role in the whole implementation process. Further to this, research shows that those children who are unable to access preschool programs, especially those from poor socio-economic backgrounds, are most likely to suffer from poor growth and skills development retardation when they miss out on Grade R admission (Reid & Kagan, 2015).

According to Adema (2012) one of the effective strategies that are used in schools is to allow parent through the SGBs and through the emanated government policies to be involved in the education of their children. In Norway, it was revealed that (Sibley et al., 2015) while there are policies which seek to promote transparency in foundation phase admission, the strategies in place were less favourable to the development and participation of policy implementers. Thus, it may be inferred that, the issue of effective and efficient policy implementation for Grade R admissions is a global phenomenon.

In South Africa, Grade R is part of the Department of Basic Education's national curriculum. A child must be at least four years old to be registered for Grade R and must turn at least five on 30 June of his/her Grade R year (DBE, 2011; Manfield-Barry & Stwayi, 2016). While Grade R is not compulsory, the Department accepted a policy document in 2013 that could make it compulsory. If introduced, compulsory preschool education could lengthen school going years from 12 to 13 or 14 years, depending on whether the child is in Grade R for one or two years. The department is supposed to make Grade R compulsory by 2019 (Franklin & McLaren, 2015; DBE, 2011). This issue will be explored further in this study. Whereas in Zimbabwe, admissions to Grade R are regulated by the provisions of the Education Act of 1996 which was amended in 2006 and through Statutory Instrument Number 106 of 2005.

The implementation of Grade R admission policy has created opportunities for the upliftment of the children, the parents and the greater community (Atmore et. al., 2012). According to Whitehead (2010) writing from a Kenyan perspective, ECD policies and plans require wider consultations with different stakeholders to guarantee that children, families, and community voices are included and to ensure a common understanding and ownership so that their sustainability is guaranteed. For instance, in South African schools, principals of public schools must keep a register of admission at the school. All admissions of learners to the school must be recorded in the register of admission. The register must contain the name, date of birth, age, identity number, if applicable, and address of the learner as well as the names of the learner's parents as defined in the SASA, 1996 and their addresses and telephone numbers, where applicable. The teachers should also work with parents to ensure there are no challenges regarding admission of learners into Grade R class (Republic of South Africa, 1996; Eastern Cape Department of Education (ECDoE, 2008).

Grade R learners are admitted at the age of 4 and half turning five at the year of that academic year (Department of Education, 2005). The school principals select admission committee members from the staff, who are computer literate so that they may be able to capture the newly admitted learners in the South African School Administration and Management System (SASAMS) (Atmore et. al, 2012). In support of the above mentioned

Director Circular Number 48 of (2007) guides' schools with regard to the registration process. The selection committees are supposed to adhere to their kept minutes for admission processes and admission policy (RSA, 1996; Mestry, 2017). The committee must undertake quality assurance activities for learners' selection. Minimum entry requirements must be consistent with policy. (de Kadt, 2018; Mestry, 2017; Manfield-Barry & Stwayi, 2016). Regardless of stipulations on what needs to be done to effectively implement the Grade R admissions policies, concerns have been made through literature and electronic media that, a majority of children are either turned away, or the admission process is not transparent. In addition, though the children rights are prioritised through policy and legislation, these policies are often inefficiently implemented in schools (Ritcher & Dawes, 2008: 79)

As discussed in the above sections, in order for a learner to be admitted at a public school which also include Grade R, there are documents that are needed in order for the child to be captured in the system (DBE, 2006). The documents are immunisation card from the clinic, certified copy of birth certificate and certified copy of the guardian's identity book (Franklin & McLaren, 2015). The documents must be brought by a guardian who is to do an application for the child to be admitted (RSA, 1996). Linked with the foregoing, UNICEF in 2001 concluded that South Africa has a clear vision of its education sector on the steps that need to be followed during the admission process into Grade R with the aim of promoting children's rights as well as their full potential in all aspects of growth and development namely: cognitive, emotional, social, physical and moral (UNICEF, 2001).

Meanwhile, the admissions policy further states that schools that are not classified as No Fee Schools may charge school fees, emphasising that no child should be disadvantaged if a parent does not pay the Grade R fees as per SASA regulations. In addition, SASA of 1996 says schools are not allowed to refuse to register learners who cannot pay registration fee. It also says that, if teachers talk about money during registration, parents should apply for exemption from paying the fees (Republic of South Africa (RSA), 1996). Reason being, most of the children come from underprivileged communities (Biersteker,

2008). Therefore, once a learner is admitted to the total school programme, may not be suspended from classes, denied access to cultural, sporting or social activities of the school, denied a school report or transfer certificates (Franklin & McLaren, 2015).

In terms of White Paper 5 (section 4:1), all primary schools are encouraged to admit Grade R learners. It also states that there is no need for schools to force children to complete registration forms to admit Grade R learners (DoE, 2005). As stipulated in the South African Schools Act of 1996, all children between the ages of 7 and 15 are compelled to attend school. Parents and guardians should ensure that all learners of this age are registered to go to school and that their children attend school regularly. It is the responsibility of every parent and guardian to ensure that their children are registered for the following year, well before the end of the current school year (de Kadt, 2018; DoE, 2005; RSA, 1996).

It is however important to check the registration deadlines of individual provinces. There have been concerns as many provinces are not administering learner admissions policy including Grade R properly (Eastern Cape Department of Education, 2018; Kadt, 2018; Mestry, 2017; Manfield-Barry & Stwayi, 2016; DBE, 2011). These views are supported by (Ritcher & Dawes, 2008 :79) who posit that, though the children rights are prioritised through policy and legislation in South Africa, these policies are often inefficiently implemented. For instance, schools have been accused of using the wrong strategies such as admitting learners who are either over or underage in Grades R and as well as admitting learners up to the end of the first term of the academic year. It has been observed by studies that late admission impact negatively on the quality of teaching and learning and affects resourcing, contact time, task on time and learner performance (Eastern Cape Department of Education, 2018; Kadt, 2018; Mestry, 2017). This shows that there are some grey areas that need to be investigated. Proper administration of learner admissions will afford adequate resources, maximum contact time which will in turn improve the desired learner outcomes and performance (Eastern Cape Department of Education, 2018; Mestry, 2017). An earlier analysis by the National Department of Social Development concluded that schools were battling with inadequate infrastructure, and shortage of resources (NDA on 14 July 2015). As a result this may have led to some

flaws and loopholes in the admissions process. Another issue raised by studies is that in some provinces principals are admitting learners that are more than the figures declared in post provisioning norms distribution and that creates challenges in relation to the allocation of subjects and learning areas. It has been emphasised by provincial DoE that schools have to apply to the Departments if there are reasons to admit more learners (Mestry, 2017, Department of basic Education, 2011, Van Wyk, 2007).

Other schools through the SGBs and other concerned parents complained about the admission policy on the issue of age requirements and formulated their own admission policy for their schools which did not comply with SASA (Van Wyk, 2007). As a result, they use the parents' minutes book for their protection and references in future with their signatures and roll call for the meeting attendance attached (Van Wyk, 2007). The stakeholders that participated in this illegal procedure were the principals, parents, the SGBs, the educators as well as admission committee members of those schools. The foregoing align with bottom up theory, that policy implementers normally use their discretion and autonomy to implement any given policy. The selection committee are supposed to adhere to their kept minutes for admission processes and admission policy. As stated in the above sections, the committees are supposed to undertake quality assurance activities for learners' selection. Minimum entry requirements must be consistent with the policy, entry scores and quotas and also consistent with the selection rules published by the policy implementers. However, in many schools in different provinces this has not been the case (Julia de Kadt, 2018). The issue of children living in the feeder zones is also applicable to admission of Grade R learners (Mestry, 2017, Department of Basic Education, 2011, Department of Education, 2003 and South African School's Act 1996). However, the extant literature shows that feeder zone is not being used by some parents. Accordingly (Mabugu and Rakabe, 2015) highlight that though more than 4.8 million (73%) of eligible Grade R children live within a 5km radius of their schools yet parents opt to keep their children at home or delay enrolment at least until grade one.

2.3.3.1 The language issue

The implementation of admission policy goes hand in hand with the issue of language policy. SGBs have power to determine language policy but this power is not absolute, and must be subject to the Constitution and the Bill of Rights. The courts have also held that the HOD can intervene in the language policy of a school, under reasonable grounds, in order to uphold the learners' right to education (Mestry, 2017; Manfield-Barry & Stwayi, 2016). Section 29(2) of the Bill of Rights provides that everyone has the right to receive education in the language of their choice where reasonably practical, taking into account the need for historical redress because of past racially discriminatory laws under apartheid. In addition to this, the language policy of the school must take into account the broader needs of the community in which the school is located (Mestry, 2017, Manfield-Barry & Stwayi, 2016, Department of Basic Education, 2011, Department of Education, 2003).

The language should not be used as reason to refuse admission of learners and the language policy must reflect language or languages spoken by the learners. According to Hornberger, (2002) other schools use language as an excuse not to admit learners in the school, saying that the school does not accommodate the language of the child. As such, these schools do not adhere to the language policy and admission of learner's policy (Manfield-Barry & Stwayi, 2016, Hornberger, 2002). Language awareness campaigns are necessary in order to arouse public interest in language matters in terms of legislation; (Mestry, 2017, Manfield-Barry & Stwayi, 2016,, Department of Basic Education, 2011, Department of Arts and Culture, 2003). The school must accommodate learners who speak different languages by employing qualified teachers from different ethnic groups to accommodate multilingualism (Mestry, 2017, Manfield-Barry & Stwayi, Department of Basic Education, 2011, & South African School's Act, 1996).). However, (Msila, 2014, Preston, Cotrell, Pelletier & Pearce, 2012 and Msila 2014) state that many South African Grade R practitioners have no formal qualifications. It is also alleged that insufficient apparatus and resources, too little or no equipment and inadequately trained teachers all contribute to lack of effectiveness in implementing some of the suggested strategies with regard to use of language as a medium of instruction. Therefore, most developed nations

they are engaged in teacher development capacity programmes meant to capacitate teachers on policy implementation (OECD, 2013).

2.3.4 Monitoring and support mechanisms

Monitoring is defined as a continuing function that aims primarily to provide the management and main stakeholders of an on-going intervention with early indications of progress, or lack thereof in the achievements of results (Wilkerson, 2007 cited in Merten, 2010). Although there is a high level of interest in catalysing and implementing admission policies, studies have noted the issue of monitoring and provision of support programmes are in dearth. For instance, the South African National Integrated Early Childhood Development Policy (Department of Social Development, 2015) suggests that government is responsible for the development, monitoring, quality control of policies in schools and will therefore, in collaboration with relevant line departments, ensure appropriate quality and qualification norms and standards will be put in place. However, more guidance is needed on how this kind of monitoring is done and who these line departments are. These views align with one of the tenets of the top-down theory which clearly states what is expected to be done, the steps to be taken by the schools in implementing the Grade R admissions policy how the goals and objectives may be achieved. Therefore, as part of monitoring, the officials of that provincial education department must have access to the register of admission to check whether proper admission policy is applied (RSA, 1996). The DBE requires information primarily for planning and monitoring the performance of the education system on a regular basis. Most of this information is sourced from schools and usually through a school administration and management system like SA-SAMS. The district is supposed to advise the schools on how to set their own admission policy through discussions with their school SGBs. These views are in line with a study done by (Rubio-Codina & Araujo, 2016) that in most developed country, America included, parents represented through the SGBs and civic organisations are also important members of the monitoring and evaluation process. Participation of parents is commensurate with the bottom-up theory used in this study. The theory supports active participation of the policy implementers to promote sense of ownership and commitment to the successful implementation of the Grade R

admissions policy. Paudel (2009) further advances that, inclusion of policy implementers during the monitoring and evaluation process means avoiding alienating the very implementers of the policy.

In addition, monitoring and evaluation of the admission policies cannot be understated because some schools do not even understand admission policies (Franklin & McLaren, 2015). To achieve this, current literature advocates for the development and testing of integrated interventions such as monitoring and evaluation through policy (Yousafzai & Lopez-Boo, 2016). This will assist schools to promote best practices in their admissions policies. Therefore, the district also monitors admission of Grade R learners by requesting the schools to give them the following documents

- reports for Grade R;
- as well as asking the admission register for Grade R learners;
- to check if all the children's information exist, such as the name of the learner, the name of the parent or guardian;
- ID number of the child and of the parent as well as;
- the learners 'residential address; and
- to check whether the learner's required documents before admission have been certified before admission.

Other documents that must be in place during monitoring and evaluation using the Grade R admission policy as reference are immunisation card from the clinic, certified copy of birth certificate and certified copy of the guardian's identity book (Franklin & McLaren, 2015). The documents must be brought by a guardian who is to do an application for the child to be admitted (RSA, 1996). In other words, policies provide guidance to ECD centres and can protect and guide the centre in a number ways. There are a variety of policies that should be in place in schools and these should be readily accessible to all stakeholders (Clampett, 2016).

In terms of White Paper 5 (section 4:1), all primary schools are encouraged to admit Grade R learners. It also states that there is no need for schools to force children to complete registration forms to admit Grade R learners. However, it is also the

responsibility of the provincial Department of Education to ensure that they provide all the necessary support so that the implementation of admission policy is implemented properly. Important issues like ensuring that schools understand the policy by training SGBs and admission committee members is also very important. This is because, officials can only implement policies properly if they understand them (Pulzl & Treib, 2007; Williman, 2004). Moreover, policies provide guidance to schools and can protect schools in a number ways. A policy gives guidelines about how policy makers and implementers deal with admission issues (Kathyanga, 2011). Consequently, the research is of the view that admission policies are expected to illuminate in a transparent manner how monitoring and evaluation will be carried out, who is going to be involved and what will be their role. As discussed in the above sections in the case of monitoring it is the responsibility of the Head of Department to administer admission of learners to all public schools and further approve curriculum streams to be offered. However, as part of monitoring principals of schools are legally delegated to administer learner admissions as proxy of the HoD (Pulzl & Treib, 2007; Williman, 2004). Principals have to ensure that all eligible learners especially those of compulsory school going age access admission without any unfair discrimination. Further to this, the recent National Integrated Early Childhood Development Policy (2015:19) highlights that Government recognizes Grade R as a fundamental and universal human right to which all young children are equally entitled without discrimination and that the training practitioners. This will assist in ensuring that teachers, principals and SGBs are well versed on how to monitor the admission process, so that learner admissions are conducted according to age qualification, feeder schools/zones, work place and so forth. They also have to ensure all the required documentation is provided by parents.

In terms of supporting and monitoring the district need to come to the schools timeously in order to check whether the admissions have been properly done, such as whether the learners have been admitted at their correct ages, the required documents before admission have been certified or complete (RSA, 1996). The study also wanted to establish if really, there is political will, good governance, adequate resources and capacity building programs which have been identified as principal ingredients that are required support and monitor admission in schools. Support can be done by the district

in order to help the school to set their own admission committees at the school level (DoE , 2008)

The DBE has developed national business process for learner admissions to ensure that learner admissions including Grade R is implemented properly. It proposes that time lines for the admission of learners should clearly be spelt out. It also advocates the establishment of district learner admissions committees to effectively manage queries related to learner admission in the district. Unfortunately, these best practices are hindered by lack of transparency as well as lack of adequate resources to monitor admission processes (Atmore, et al., 2012; DiGirolamo & Stansbery, 2014). In other words, it is important to have a common understanding at various levels about how admission policies should be monitored and evaluated. This will assist the district director in ensuring that admissions are done within prescribed time frames in each district to enable teaching and learning to take place from the first day of school in the academic year. The national business process also redefines the roles and responsibilities of each level of the education sector in learner admissions, namely the roles of DBE, provinces, districts and schools. It is anticipated that it will enable all stakeholders involved to be able to ensure proper implementation of the policies including providing support to schools and adequate monitoring of the process (ECDoE, 2018).

2.3.5 Challenges encountered by schools

Implementation of Grade R admission policy is fraught with some challenges in South African schools (Spaull, 2013, Fleisch, 2008). These include misinterpretation of the policy as well as lack of understanding of the importance of Grade R (Spaull, 2013). Some studies found out that reception class teacher qualification also negatively hinder appropriate implementation of the admission policy. This might be the case when teachers are poorly qualified, not being able to deal with the young ones and not knowing exactly which learners are supposed to be admitted (Spaull, 2013, Fleisch, 2008). This has led to some learners who deserve admission being left out. The issue of teacher qualification has been mentioned by many studies particularly on Grade R, where the authors refer to this as a grey area needing immediate attention (NELDS, 2009; Biesterkes, 2008).

The admission policy goes with the age requirement for admission to ordinary public schools, published in the same government notice and it applies uniformly in all provincial departments of education and ordinary public schools (RSA, 1996). The foregoing views are commensurate with Van Meter and Van Horn (1975) top-down theory which maintain that successful policy implementation is the result of getting people to do what they are told to do; controlling all the stages of implementation; minimise conflict and deviation of goals by programme development and providing adequate resource in terms of human and financial resources (Olivier, 2011) & Parsons, 1995). Strategies that are employed by schools to implement the grade R admission policy in South Africa differ from schools to schools (James, 2005). Some schools do not follow the policy as it stipulates, but do their own policies in agreement with their SGBs and the teachers (James, 2005). As a result, one of the challenges has been that some of the schools admit learners according to their body build instead of their years stipulated by the policy. The admission committee members experience some difficulties as parents sometimes come and complain to them by telling them that learner A has been admitted but child B has been denied admission to Grade R whereas they are of the same age due to their body build (Benny, 2005). These are some of the challenges that the schools together with their SGBs and admission committee members encounter during the admission process of the Grade R learners in their schools. This implies that, there is need for coordination of key stakeholders to facilitate holistic implementation Grade R admission policy in schools.

Infrastructure in Grade R is a particular problem in the South African context, often framed as the biggest challenge in Grade R provisioning in the country (Human Sciences Research Council, 2010). Most of Grade R classes function without basic infrastructure such as running water, access to electricity or suitable sanitation. About 8% of all Grade R classes have none of these basic infrastructure requirements. The number of admitted learners in a Grade R class must not exceed 40 per class, as they need more attention than the older ones (Mestry, 2017; Franklin & McLaren, 2015). The foregoing views are supported by converge of literature which highlights that, government investment in most developing countries in Grade R remains low, the resources available in this phase are generally limited and in the process this has affected the number of learner that need to be admitted (Mangwaya et.al. 2012). Thus, the most governments have been accused of

parallel programming and planning by leading to limited coordination and duplication of resources and efforts. (Clampett, 2016).

Although much has been done to improve access and quality of early learning programmes in both ECD facilities and Grade R classrooms, there is a long way to go in the enhancement of service delivery (Department of Basic Education, Department of Social Development & UNICEF, 2010). Some of the prominent challenges and obstacles facing Grade R facilities include absence of learning materials and resources, especially within the classroom setting, minimal funding, lack of qualified teachers, inadequate security for children whilst at the ECD facility, as well as poor toilet amenities (Department of Basic Education, Department of Social Development & UNICEF, 2010). Meanwhile, in Zimbabwe (Mangwaya et.al, 2016) also accentuate that while classroom teachers were adequately qualified to implement the Grade R admission policies, teachers-in-charge were not. Whereas, school heads received limited induction for the introduction and implementation policies in the Grade R phase. In Zambia, Zuikowski et.al. (2012) posit that government investment in ECD education remains low and as such it is not clear how children are admitted into the system. This led to some scholars indicating that attempts to promote Grade R in Zambia, “may be premature and potentially damaging to an already tenuous education system” (Thomas and Thomas, 2009: 6). All these shortages and inadequate infrastructure and other resources has led to schools implementing the admissions policies as they see fit. In most cases children are left out because of lack of basic facilities and capacity to have a high number of learners (Kadt, 2018; Mestry, 2017; Human Sciences Research Council, 2010). For some parents even if, the choice of a local school is an obvious one, and the likelihood of admission to the selected school is high but because of lack of transparency during the admission process, there is always a great deal of uncertainty over whether they will get their child into the school they want (de Kadt, 2018). In other words, the Grade R admissions policy and supporting ratifications laid down in South Africa paper suggests failure to meet the need of the learners and this may play an imperative part in the intergenerational transmission of poverty as a majority of learners are left of the equation (Grantham-McGregor et.al, 2016). As a result, the extant literature shows that there is increasing recognition that best practices need to be implemented to avert this challenges.

Uncertainty is heightened because policies around admission are currently changing. In 2014, the Federation of Governing Bodies of South African Schools (FEDSAS) – a national representative organisation for school governing bodies – took the Gauteng Member of Executive Council for Education to court with a number of objections to the 2012 school admissions regulations. As part of this application, the NGO, Equal Education, submitted evidence against the default 5 km feeder zone on the basis that it replicated apartheid spatial inequality (de Kadt, 2018). The case reached the Constitutional Court, which in a May 2016 judgement upheld the regulations on the whole, but ordered the Gauteng Department of Education (GDE) to formally determine feeder zones, and move away from the 5 km default radius currently in use. The judgement provided no guidelines on how the regulations determining feeder zones should be revised, but gave the GDE a year to undertake the revisions. In May 2017, the GDE was given an extension until June 2018 to complete this process. While a new policy is being developed, in part through an extensive consultation process, admissions criteria related to distance from a school were not finalised in time for the 2019 enrolment process (de Kadt, 2018; Mestry, 2017). Thus, it is clear that there is lack of common standards in school and this makes it difficult to effectively implement the admissions policy regardless of stipulations in international, regional and national frameworks on the right of children particularly in education. Specifically in South Africa, observations have been made that, there is scanty research that tracks the standards of how schools work with parents, families and communities. Moreover, demarcating feeder zones and the revision of admissions policies has been cited as not only deeply political but also technically complex (Mestry, 2017; RSA, 1996). A finely tuned perspective, sensitive to both political and social concerns, and firmly grounded on hard evidence, is essential. GCRO's May 2018 Map of the Month illustrates some of the issues at play. Another admissions criterion is related to existing siblings enrolled in the school, which may override considerations of distance (RSA, 1996). Thus it is imperative that strict orders are given by the policy makers on what should be done in as much as the voice of the policy implementers should also be taken into account.

According to RSA (1996) no test for diseases should be done on the children as an entrance for admission to the school. However, it has been noted that, most schools are

still racially segregated and a number of children are subjected to admission/entrance test before they are given admission places. This is despite the fact that schools have been open to all population groups since 1994. In 2016 there were over 2 000 schools in Gauteng but 61% of these schools had only Black-African learners enrolled and 7% of these schools had more than 80% white learners. Just over 20% of Black-African learners were in former white designated schools, while 99, 7% of white learners remained in former white schools. Although approximately 30% of schools have a level of integration, this has largely occurred in historically white schools (de Kadt, 2018). This is regardless of government legislations and policies to reduce the gap between families in high versus those in low-socioeconomic status (SES). This raises the question of whether parents are attuned to government's policy goals and whether the policy intentions are accompanied by the necessary effort to activate concomitant actions among those responsible for equal rights to education and education for all.

Thus, the current challenges being faced paint a disconsolate depiction of what is taking place on the ground with regard to the strategies used to administer the admission policy and the manner in which monitor and support mechanisms are being effected (Azam et.al, 2014). Moreover, the situation indicates that attention needs to be directed towards Grade R programmes through capacity building measures so as to address capacity constraints in this sector. Thus, the researcher is of the view that such an approach will promote an environment in which school collaborations, and community leaders are knit together to form a coherent and integrative system that is transparent and is able to account for how children are admitted in Grade R.

2.4 Summary

This chapter presented the literature that was reviewed during the study and the theories that were incorporated into the research to investigate the implementation of Grade R admission policy. This chapter again outlined theoretical frameworks which informed the study. This chapter further reviewed other studies in line with monitoring and support mechanisms in place, challenges experienced, strategies employed to implement grade R admission policy. The following chapter discusses the methodology adopted by the study in order to find answers to the research questions.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter presented an overview of the research methodology and design that was used to answer the research questions. It consists of the research paradigm, research approach, research design, population, sample and sampling procedures. The chapter further highlighted on the data collection instruments and their credibility and trustworthiness as adopted in the study. An explanation of the methods of data analysis and ethical issues that were considered in the course of the study is given. The study mainly looked at the implementation of Grade R admission policy in four primary schools in Makhutswe circuit, Mopani District in Limpopo Province.

3.2 Research Paradigm

The first thing to be done by a researcher, according to de Vos (1998), is to outline the paradigm that underpins the study as a foundation of reference. According to Creswell (2007), a paradigm is a set of assumptions, values or beliefs about fundamental aspects of reality which give rise to a particular world view and serves as the lenses or organizing principles through which researchers perceive and interpret reality. Terre Blanche and Durrheim (1999) view paradigms as background knowledge that tells us what exists, how to understand it and most concretely how to study it. These scholars further advance that, paradigms are all encompassing systems of interrelated practice and thinking that define for researchers, the nature of their enquiry along three dimensions namely: ontology (what is knowledge), epistemology (how we know it) and methodology (the process of studying) (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 2006). According to Khumwong (2004), there are different paradigms used in research namely: positivism, interpretive and post-positivism. This study was anchored on the interpretive paradigm.

3.3 The interpretive paradigm

According to Maree (2007), a paradigm is a set of assumptions or beliefs about fundamental aspects of reality which give rise to a particular world view. A paradigm serves as the lens or organizing principle by which reality is interpreted. It is also seen as an anchor that underpins the researcher's underlying logic and guides one's views to follow why individuals differ in the way they view reality (Kuhn, 1962; Van Wyk, 2013). The study was located in the interpretive paradigm. The interpretive paradigm attempts to describe and interpret people's feelings and experiences. The interpretive researcher begins with the individual and sets out to understand his interpretations of the world around him. Terre Blanche and Durrheim (1999: 84), describes an interpretive researcher as a person who wants to make sense of feelings, experiences, social situations or phenomena as they occur in the real world and therefore want to study them in their natural setting. This paradigm is characterized by a concern with the understanding and experience of individuals, and with meaning. The central endeavour in the interpretive paradigm is to understand the subjective world of human experience (Cohen & Manion, 1989). To retain the integrity of the phenomena being investigated, efforts are made to get in the person's head and to understand from within (Cohen & Manion, 1989). Neiwenhuis (2007) claims that the interpretivist paradigm views the world as having multiple realities which can be observed through evidence detailed by those who inhabit the setting. Similarly, Terre Blanche and Durrheim (1999) argues that the interpretive paradigm provides relevant information to the researcher in terms of subjective reasons that lie behind social activities. The interpretive paradigm seeks to gain insights through discovering meanings by improving people's comprehension of the whole (O'Brian, 2006). The underlying assumption of the interpretive paradigm is that the whole needs to be examined in order to understand a phenomenon. It also proposes that there are multiple realities, not a single reality of a phenomenon, and that these realities can differ across time and place (O'Brian, 2006). With the interpretive paradigm, efforts are made to get inside the person and understand from within and this is done to retain the integrity of the phenomena being investigated. Therefore this paradigm was adopted because the study also sought to understand the subjective world of human experience as supported by (O' Brian, 2006).

According to Babbie and Mouton (2005), an interpretivist / constructivist researcher tends to rely on the participant's views of the situation being studied and recognizes the impact on the research of their own background and experiences. Constructivists do not generally begin with the theory (as with positivists) but rather they "generate or inductively develop a theory or pattern of meanings throughout the research process" (Dolbearers, 2010:78). The interpretive paradigm understands the everyday lived experiences of people in a specific area or historical setting (Fouché & Delport, (2011). It is about epistemology that advocates that it is necessary for the researcher to understand human roles as social actors and the meaning the humans give to these roles. Mertens, (2010) also asserts that the basic assumptions guiding the interpretive paradigm are that knowledge is socially constructed by people active in the research process, and that researchers should attempt to understand the complex world of lived experiences from the point of view of those who live it.

Located within the interpretive paradigm, the study explored, from the perspectives of participants, their experiences and concerns regarding the implementation of Grade R admission policy. Therefore, the goal of this study was to have an insight into how the admission policy was implemented from a variety of stakeholders such principals, educators, SGB members and admission committee members. As advanced by the interpretive paradigm, due consideration was given to subjective meanings of participants. In other words, different understandings and interpretations which they brought to the fore by the participants pertaining to the implementation of Grade R admission policy at the schools were taken into consideration.

The interpretive paradigm being qualitative in nature aligned with the study because it used data collection techniques such as in-depth interviews, focus group discussions and document analysis. This study used interviews, focus group discussions and document analysis. Finally, this paradigm enabled the researcher to describe, interpret and make sense of feelings, experiences and perceptions of the participants within their natural settings concerning the phenomenon under research.

3.4 Research Approach

The qualitative research involves an interpretive and naturalistic approach to the world (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense or interpret phenomena people bring to them. Creswell (2005) explains that the aim of the qualitative research approach is to explore and understand a central phenomenon. This has to do with understanding the processes, social and cultural contexts which work in line with exploring the “Why” “How” and “What” questions of research (Maree, 2007). In order to do this, the researcher should be able to enter the subject “life world” or “life setting” and place himself /herself in the shoes of the subjects. The approach used in this study was qualitative approach, and can be specified as exploratory, descriptive and contextualising. The purpose of qualitative research is to develop an understanding of individuals and events in their natural state, taking into account the relevant context (Leedy, 2001:91). Therefore, this approach enabled the researcher to seek a deeper understanding of the attitudes and behaviours of human being’s problems as supported by (Nieuwenhuis, 2007). This was achieved by investigating the views, experiences and the challenges of the participants concerning the implementation of Grade R admission policy. By using the qualitative approach, the researcher’s role was to gain a holistic overview of the context under study because one of the proponents of the qualitative approach is that, events cannot be isolated from their context. Qualitative research was predicated on the assumption that each individual, each culture and each setting is unique. In qualitative research, interpretation of data is done by means of set exterior in order to determine an amount of quality to the understanding of findings (Kolb, 1999:3). Procedures are not strictly formalized, scope is more likely to be undefined, and a more philosophical mode is adopted (Mouton & Marias, 1998:166).

The purpose of qualitative research is to develop understanding of individual and events in their natural state, taking into account the relevant context (Borg and Gall, 1993:26). Qualitative studies can produce thick description of an interesting phenomenon, discover relevant variables and generate hypothesis about the cause effect relationship between them. The researcher used the qualitative methodology because in-depth information on how the Grade R admission policy was implementation, which strategies were used and what challenges had been encountered in the process formed core of the study. The

researcher also borrowed from advocates of qualitative research on which the approach was ideal for the study. Thus, these advocates argue that their methods are particularly appropriate for the study of education and education practitioners because they are derived from social sciences and concerned with the study of human behaviour and thinking in various settings. Moreover, they make it easy for education practitioners to read reports of qualitative research and relate to the findings of their own situation (Vockelsen & Asher, 1995). Thus, the present study was commensurate with the category of qualitative research because interviews are characterized by qualitative research approach as suggested by (Vockelsen & Asher, 1995:196) and this was one of the data collection methods the researcher used in this study. The data collected emanated from open-ended interviews- and interviews did not follow numerical or statistical procedures. Thus, the focus of the study was on understanding and meaning through verbal narratives and interviews rather than through numbers.

3.5 Research Design

A research design is, “a reflection of the researcher’s plan of how he/she is going to proceed with the research” (Bogdan & Bikien, 1998:4). It provides the overall framework for collecting data. According to Leedy (2001:91) a research design is a complete strategy of attack on the central research problem. In simpler terms, a research design is a plan. A research design is also a logic that links data to be collected and the conclusions to be drawn to initial research purpose and research questions of a study. In other words, a research design insures coherence and should ensure clarity of what is to be achieved by case study. A research design according to (De Vos, 2005) is defined as a strategic framework for action which guides the conditions for the collection and analysis of data. It, therefore, provides a plan specifying the execution of the research which allows for the answering of the research questions. The design used in this study is case study design.

3.5.1 Case Study Design

A case study is regarded as a building block for data collection frequently associated with qualitative research (Burton, 2000). Therefore, a case study usually generates qualitative data which must be interpreted by the researcher. It is also an in-depth study of the

phenomenon of each case in its natural context as well as, the emerging views of participants, which will come out as they share their experiences, (de Vos et. al., 2011). In other words, a case study is conducted to shed light on a phenomenon, be it a process, event, person or object of interest to the researcher. A case study can also be described as an intensive description and analysis of a phenomenon or social unit such as an individual group, institution or community. It is a specific instance that is frequently designed to illustrate a more general principle (Cohen et.al., 2007; Nisbet & Watt, 1984). Case studies are mostly set in temporal, geographical, organizational, institutional and other contexts that enable boundaries to be drawn around the case. They can be defined with reference to characteristics of individuals and groups involved (Cohen et. al., 2007).

The case study research design was adopted because it allowed the researcher to gather rich and in-depth data on how the admissions policy is implemented in the school under study. To add on, a case study uses a number of instruments of data collection such as document analysis, observations and interviews, for example, which would allow the researchers to study the participants in their natural settings. In this study, data was collected through face to face interviews, focus group discussions as well as and document review. This was employed in order to triangulate the data and findings about the implementation of Grade R admission policy in four primary schools in Mopani District. To achieve this, the study was carried out through close collaboration between the researcher and participants while enabling participants to tell their stories within their natural setting as suggested by Lather (1992).

Despite the strength presented above, case studies also have limitations. Yin, (2003) discusses two types of arguments against case study design. The first one is that case studies are often accused of lacking rigour. Secondly, Yin (2003) notes that many times, the case study investigator has been sloppy, and has allowed oblique evidence or biased views to influence the direction of the findings and conclusion. Regardless of the foregoing limitations, the case study research design was adopted because it allowed the researcher to gather rich and in-depth information using different data collection techniques.

3.6 Population, sample and Sampling Techniques

3.6.1 Population

A population is defined as a collection of items of interest in research and it represents a group that a researcher wishes to generalise the research findings to (De Vos, 2005). Babbie and Mouton (2005) describe the population as the theoretically specified aggregation of study elements. According to Williman (2006) population is defined as the total quantity of things or cases of the type which are the subject of the study. It is usually a set of people or events from which a sample is selected. From the definitions above, it is clear that a population generally refers to a large collection of individuals or objects that are the main focus of a scientific inquiry. The population in this study comprised of principals, teachers, SGBs members and admissions committee members. It is from this population that the sample was chosen.

3.6.2 Sample and Sampling

A sample is a subset of a population selected to participate in the study, it is a fraction of the whole, selected to participate in the research project (Brink, 1996:133; Polit & Hungler, 1999:227). A sample is also the part of the population that is to be studied through a group of subjects chosen from the population using a particular sampling method, (Sarantakos, 1993). Cohen et. al., (2007) describes a sample as a smaller group or subset of the population where the researcher endeavours to collect information from participants in such a way that the knowledge gained is representative of the total population under study. According to Babbie and Mouton (2005) all members of a population can never be studied, and that is why a sample needs to be done. Furthermore, De Vos (2005) states that the goal of the sample is to find out the true facts about that particular sample that are true of the population. In the population given above, the sample size was 37 participants. These comprised of a sample of 4 principals, 20 SGB members (5 members from each sampled school), and 8 admission committee members from the four sampled schools, 4 Grade R teachers (one from each school) and one district official. Participants were chosen through purposive sampling technique.

According to Cohen et. al., (1989), purposive sampling is a form of sampling technique to obtain data from smaller group or subset of the total population. This sampling is generally used in case study research. Therefore, it explains sampling procedures and case selection, and defining characteristics of the study (Tashakori & Teddlie, 1998). The correct sample size depends upon the determination of the study and the natural surroundings of the population under study (Cohen et. al., 2007). The researcher used purposive sampling because the selected schools and participants were chosen because of their roles and responsibilities as well as their experiences in implementing the admission policy of Grade R. In purposive sampling, the researcher's concern is important and is expected to satisfy the study's specific needs dealing with admission policy implementation in primary school.

3.7 Data Collection Procedures

To carry out any type of research investigation, data must be gathered. Many different methods and procedures have been developed to aid in the collection of data. These procedures employ distinctive ways of collecting data. According to Kothari (1997:207), "Each [method] is particularly appropriate for certain sources of data, yielding information of the kind, and in the form that can be most effective". The use of various techniques allows the researcher to confirm the findings. For this study open-ended interviews, focus group interviews and document analysis were used by the researcher.

3.7.1 Open-ended interviews

The researcher used face to face interviews because they allowed the participants freedom to express their views. The researcher did not set time limits for responding to the interviews, duration for responding depended on the individual respondent. By using an open-ended interview, in-depth collection of data was made possible. The open-ended interviews were ideal for this study because they gave the researcher the opportunity to administer them personally to individuals. Further, they allowed participants to qualify their responses, give opinions and explain the Grade R admission policy in greater detail. This gave the participants the opportunity to reveal information that might otherwise not be offered because this type of interview is flexible and allows for probing. This is also

supported by Johnson (2000:44) in the literature review that “teacher’s (participants) opinions are based on direct experiences that tends to exert stronger influence on behaviour than those formed through hearsay”. Another reason why open ended interviews were adopted was the researcher was able to establish rapport, to explain the purpose of the study and to explain the meaning of items that may not be clear to participants in their own natural settings.

The interviews were held with admissions committee members in the four schools, principals of the four schools, district official and Grade R teachers. During this process, the researcher did not only give participants a chance to answer the structured questions, but also to give some comments on the Grade R implementation policy that they deemed appropriate. As the result, the participants were granted enough opportunity to express their in-depth thoughts their feelings, experiences and challenges if any about implementation of the Grade R admissions policy.

3.7.2 Focus group interviews

A focus group interview involves unstructured group interviews in which the focus group leader actively encourages discussion among participants on the topics of interest (Engel & Schutt, 2009). Morgan (1997) and de Vos (1998) describe focus groups as a research technique that collects data through group interaction on a topic determined by the researcher. It is also a means of understanding how people feel or think about an issue (De Vos, 2005). A focus group discussion is an interactive discussion between 6 to 8 pre-selected participants and led by a moderator with a focus on a specific set of issues (Hennink, Hutter & Bailey, 2011). Whereas, Gill, Steward, Treasure and Chadwick (2008) suggest that as little as 3 participants to as many as 14 participants can comprise a focus group. The group is focused by being involved through collective activity. The importance of a focus group discussion is that it gives an opportunity to observe a large amount of interaction on a topic in a limited time frame. It also provides direct evidence about similarities and differences in the participants’ opinions and experiences (Babbie & Mouton, 2005).

Krueger and Casey, (2009) explain that the researcher creates a tolerant environment in the focus group that encourages participants to share perceptions, points of view, experiences, wishes and concerns without pressurizing participants to vote or reach consensus. According to Krueger and Casey (2000), the purpose of the focus groups is to promote self-disclosure among participants. Focus group discussions were used in this study because they advocate what was advanced by (Kingry et. al., 1990) that they create a fuller, deeper understanding of the phenomenon being studied. Goodwin (2005) maintains that an effective researcher for a focus group begins by explaining the overall goals of the session and the ground rules for the discussion such as not dominating the discussion, taking turns, not to interrupt others as well as arguing. Group members must introduce themselves before the beginning of a focus group discussion (Stewart and Shamdasani, 1992), and say a little about themselves. On the other hand focus groups can be quite costly and requires researchers who are skilled in group process because bias may be a problem.

In this study, 20 SGB members participated in four focus group discussions. Therefore in each school 1 focus group was held with 5 members in each group. The participants shared their views and perceptions on the implementation of Grade R admission policy in public schools. A discussion guide which contained a series of questions and topics was also used by the researcher. This guide helped to keep the discussion focused on the research topic as well as ensured that the topics and questions were all covered during the discussion.

All interviews were tape-recorded after obtaining consent from the participants and subsequently transcribed. Notes were also taken for cross-checking purposes. At some schools the participants brought up issues that were mostly the focus of the study. All group interviews were conducted in a friendly way and in a good atmosphere, without interruptions and disturbances of some sort as supported by (Goodwin, 2005).

3.7.3 Document analysis

Document analysis is a data collection technique which is employed to find out if the necessary documents are in place and are in line with the official documents (Ary, Jacobs,

Razavieh & Sorensen, 2010). The author concludes that documents which are used as a data gathering technique focus on all types of written communication that may shed light on the phenomenon under investigation. In addition, the study employs documents to gather data. In this study, the researcher focused on all types of documents from the DoE that support enrolment of children in the reception year class. These included: Admission Policy for Grade R; minutes and agendas of admission committee members; meetings and other internal documents related to admission such as admission book for the school, including for the previous years. In the admission books the researcher looked at the previous admissions for Grade R learners; the biographical details of the learners' parents; the certified copies of their birth certificates as well as, their immunisation cards and also to check whether the learners had been admitted at their correct ages. Attention was given to the abovementioned documents with the hope that they would triangulate the information gathered through interviews and focus group discussions.

3.8 Data processing and analysis

Data analysis is a process of bringing order, structure and meaning to a mass of data collected (De Vos et al (2005). Zimmerman, (1992) refers to data analysis as a search for pattern in recurrent behaviour or object of body of knowledge.

In this study, the researcher broke down the data into basic units which were then broken down thematically into specific units which were later combined to give an overall view of the findings. With analysis the unique characteristics and structure of the data were uncovered so that they could be described, explained and interpreted to make sense of the data (Cohen, Manion & Morrison 2000:148). The interviews were transcribed providing a complete record of each encounter. Interviews were then analysed to find trends. This was done by identifying contributions that re-appeared in each of the interviews. Krueger, (1988:109) suggests that content analysis begins with a comparison of the discussions. This suggestion was used as a guideline in discussing the findings; however, the dominant strategy used in the data analysis was thematic analysis.

At this stage the researcher did data reduction, presentation and interpretation as advanced by (Sarantakos, 2000:210). The problems experienced with data analysis

depend mainly on the degree of structure given to the research process. The making of field notes can be made easier if standardized forms of report writing are available. Such forms should never, however, stand in the way of unexpected events that might crop up from time to time. The researcher also referred to the transcriptions, and arranged the data listed under each research question. By so doing the researcher was able to compile data sets for each research question. The study also came up with inductive themes related to each question. The same process was used to analyse data obtained through document analysis. Finally, some responses were reported verbatim while others were paraphrased in order to capture expressions, phrases and sentences as presented by the participants.

3.9 Trustworthiness and credibility of research instruments

3.9.1 Trustworthiness

In this study, trustworthiness is defined as a set of widely accepted moral principles that offer rules for, and behavioural expectations of the most correct conduct towards participants (Criticos, 2008). The researcher also established strong interpersonal relationship with participants. The advantage of a strong interpersonal relationship between the researcher and participants is that it neutralizes initial distrust. If the participant trusts the interviewer, there is no longer any need for any kind of role playing (Mouton, 1996). A trustworthy research must be credible and transferable to other contexts (Maree, 2007).

Trustworthiness was acquired through the use of interviews and focus group discussions as well as document analysis, prolonged engagement and multiple influences on the participants. The researcher also ensured that the participants were at ease by guaranteeing the confidentiality of information, as well as the participants' anonymity and privacy. The researcher requested humbly that the responses given by the participants be honest as much as possible in order to arrive at a conclusion that could hopefully assist everyone involved in the implementation of admission policy for Grade R learners.

3.9.2 Credibility

Credibility refers to that which can be readily believed, on the ground of rigorous evidence or argument, authority and so on (Maree, 2007). In enhancing the credibility of the research findings, the researcher made use of both types of triangulation. The researcher kept notes on research decisions, coded data and used member checking to verify findings and enhance credibility.

3.9.3 Dependability and conformability

Conformability is a technique used to show that clear data will be collected so as to overcome method and boundedness (Cohen & Manion, 1994). This will enable the results to be confirmed or corroborated by others, thus enhancing their dependability. Dependability and conformability can be determined by way of a properly managed inquiry audit in which reviewers examine both the research process and the product of the research for consistency (Lincoln & Cuba, 1985). The researcher firstly did member checking from the participants and peer review before.

In addition to ensure dependability and conformability of this study, the researcher quoted liberally from the data and systematically stored the audio cassettes that contained both one to one interviews and the focus group interviews. The typed transcripts and the final draft of the research project were also stored in a secure place for verification by any interested individual or participant.

3.10 Ethical considerations

Ethical issues in research concern beliefs about what is wrong and what is right from a moral perspective in the conduct of research (McMillan & Schumacher, 2001). Research ethics therefore imply compliance with acceptable research norms, morals, standards and principles. Ethics is defined as a matter of principled sensitivity to the right of others (Cohen et. al., 2007). Although ethical issues are not optional, they are a matter of necessity and importance in social science and education research (Wild & Diggines, 2009). Their importance lies in the fact that they protect the physical and mental integrity of participants and respect their moral and cultural values as well as, their religious and philosophical convictions. Ethical considerations protect the fundamental rights of

participants including respect for privacy whilst maintaining the highest level of confidentiality (Wild & Diggines, 2009).

3.10.1 Voluntary participation

All participants were made aware that on participatiwas voluntarily, that is of their free will, not by being forced or pushed and that they could withdraw from participating at any time they like. The objectives of the study were well explained to them in advance, before the start of the interviews and focus group discussions.

3.10.2 Avoidance of harm

It is important that during research study no participant should be harmed either emotionally, physically or psychologically. This ethical consideration was strictly adhered to during the investigation.

3.10.3 Anonymity and confidentiality

Confidentiality is an important issue that underpins all qualitative research, and privacy is highly valued and investigators are urged to ensure that participants' privacy is respected (Fraenkel, 1990). Personal information such as age, income, religion must not be entertained. The research ensured that, the identities of the participants were not linked to the actual data or responses and this is called anonymity. Moreover, confidentiality was guaranteed through a careful management of data to prevent participants' identities from being linked to their response to the questions or issues raised during the study. This explains why the names of the participants were not taken, nor were there any identity numbers linked to their responses. Therefore, confidentiality was clearly explained to all the participants. They were assured that no one would have access to the results except the supervisor who would not even know their names as participants in the study.

3.10.4 Informed Consent

Informed consent is a procedure for ensuring that research participants understand what is being done to them, the limits to their participation and awareness of any potential risks they incur (Corti et. al., 2000). Consent form is the procedure in which individuals choose

whether to or not to participate in an investigation after being informed of facts that would be likely to influence their decisions (Diener & Crandall, 1978). The objectives of the study and their own role in the study were duly explained to all the participants of the study. Participants were made aware of their right to refuse to participate; understand the extent to which confidentiality will be maintained; be aware of the potential uses to which the data might be put, and in some cases be reminded of their right to re-negotiate consent (Corti, Day & Backhouse, 2000).

3.10.5 Gaining entry

The researcher applied for ethical clearance from the University of Fort Hare, and thereafter received a letter from the university and handed it to Mopani district in order for the district to allow research to be conducted in the research sites. During the visit the letter of permission from Mopani District of Education, the letter of consent from the University of Fort Hare and the background of the study was presented to the principals when seeking permission to carry out the study in the schools. The letter of consent also made it explicitly known to the participants that they had every right to withdraw from participation at any level of their involvement should they wish to do so. They were made aware that they were not obliged in any way to continue participating in case they felt their comfort was under threat (Yates, 2004). A declaration to the effect that under no circumstances would the researcher interfere with the normal programme of the school was made and the fact that the identity of the school and of the participants would be kept anonymous at any level during reporting on the study was confirmed in the letter of consent as advanced by (Yates, 2004). Prior arrangements and appointments were made with principals before schools were visited.

3.11 Summary

Chapter 3 examined and justified methodology selected for the study to show its relevancy to the study. The following were covered; the interpretive paradigm, the qualitative approach, and case study design. Furthermore, this chapter presented interviews, and document analysis as instruments used to collect data. It finally covered purposive sampling procedure, trustworthiness and ethical considerations. The data from

different participants was collected, analysed and interpreted. The findings and discussions are presented in Chapter 4.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

4.1 Introduction

The previous chapter laid out the research design and methodology. This chapter focuses on the presentation of the qualitative data solicited from the participants through semi-structured interviews, focus group interviews and document reviews. The aim of this chapter is to present information collected using the main research question which is: How is the Grade R admission policy implemented in Mopani district, in Makhutswe circuit in Limpopo Province?

The data in this study was compiled from interviews which were then transcribed into written text. Participants comprised of 4 principals from the 4 primary schools, 5 SGB members from each school, 2 admission committee members from each school and 4 Grade R educators/teachers, one per school and a district official. There were four focus groups for SGB members. The data is presented according to the major themes emerging from the interviews.

The first section of this chapter presents the biographic data of participants. This is important as it has a bearing on their understanding and their knowledge of implementation processes of the Grade R admissions policy. Hence, one has to understand this background. The second section presents common forms of implementation in schools and causes of it. The third part presents information collected on strategies that are employed by the school to ensure effective implementation of admission policy. An outline on the information gathered on the support provided to schools to enable them implement learner admission policies is given in section four; and the last section presents data on the challenges encountered in implementing of admission policies. The participants have been coded and identified as follows:

Admission Committee members: ACS1-ACS4

Principals : P1-P4

Focus groups : FG1-FG4

SGBs : SGB1-SGB4

Teachers/ : T1-T4

District Official : DO

In addition schools were coded as SI-S4. The coding of participants is school-matched

4.2 Biographical data of the participants

The first section of this chapter presents the biographical data of the participants. Biographical details reveal the gender, age, academic and their professional qualifications whereas their experience in the teaching profession played a critical role on how best they understood how Grade R admission policy is supposed to be implemented in their schools. Therefore, it was assumed that the educational background provided by the participants would also give picture if the participants knew the strategies in place to implement the policy; support and monitoring mechanisms used; documents required for admission purposes and what challenges had been encountered in the process. The age of the participants is also profiled because, there is also a strong belief that gender and age also influence the manner in which participants may view a phenomenon under research.

4.2.1 Gender representation

The study also took into consideration gender representation of the participants. By using gender, the researcher was trying to find out if gender is considered at schools when distributing duties related to the admissions policy. The researcher was eager to know if both males and females were equally represented in the running of the school programmes such admission committee, giving explanations to the parents about the correct documents needed for admission processes as well as, the requirements for

admission at the school. Most importantly, it was paramount that the voices of not one but both genders were heard based on the assumption that men and women generally perceive things differently. Table one shows gender representation of the principals, teachers and admissions committee members.

Table 4.1: Gender distribution of Principals, Teachers and Admissions Committee members

Gender	P	%	T	%	ACS	%	DO	%
Male	3	75	0	0	3	75	1	100
Females	1	25	4	100	1	25	0	0
Total	4	100	4	100	4	100	1	100

Table 4.1 shows that out of the four schools that were sampled, a majority of the principals were males, this trend was also observed in the admissions committee members as most of them were males as compared to females. It may be concluded that in these schools there is no equal representation of both males and females particularly in leadership positions. This is an indication that, the critical mass of females in top position in schools is in dearth. Meanwhile, the table also highlights that there were no male teachers that were involved in the implementation of the admissions policy. The findings of this study align with the extant literature that teaching in the early grades is often accompanied by simplistic images of foundation phase teachers as simple caregivers. This is normally associated with a woman's rather than a man's role in society. Thus such views normally discourage males from training as foundation phase teachers. Hence the justification why the results illuminate a convergence of female teachers as compared to males. The researcher also analysed the gender distribution of the SGB members and this is shown in Table 4.2 below:

Table 4.2: Gender distribution of SGBs

Gender	S 1	%	S 2	%	S 3	%	S 4	%
Male	2	40	3	60	3	60	2	40
Females	3	60	2	40	2	40	3	60
Total	5	100	5	100	5	100	5	100

The study also sought to find out the gender distribution of the SGBs members. The findings showed that in S1 and S4 the majority of the SGB members were females. The finding of the study imply that in S1 and S4 there are more females who were representatives of the school governing body as compared to males. Meanwhile, in S2 and S3 males had a higher percentage as SGBs members as compared to females. The results gender mix in the schools under study. It is also critical to note that the representation of females as SGB members may be inferred as “healthy” taking into consideration that in the past SGBs normally comprised of males. However, what emerged from the findings was that even though there is a high representation of females as SGB members, the role of chairmanship in all the schools under study was male dominated. The results further suggest that even though there have been awareness and a call for gender equality and equity positive results are yet to be realised particularly in the composition of SGBs.

Table 4.3: Age range of Principals, Teachers, Admissions Committee members and District Official

Age Range	P1	%	T	%	ACS	%	SGBs	%	DO	%
	(n=4) f		(n=4) f		(n=4) F		(N=20)		(n=4) f	
20-29	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
30-39	0	0	0	0	0	0	8	40	0	0
40-49	1	25	1	25	3	38	11	50	1	100
50-59	3	75	3	75	5	62	1	10	0	0
Total	4	100	4	100	8	100	20	100	1	100

The results of the study show that the majority of principals (75%) were in the 50-59 and the 40 plus (25%) age brackets. The table further shows that only minority of teachers were in the age bracket 40-49 while a majority of the teachers were aged 50- 59 years old. This was the same trend with the admissions committee members with most members being aged between 50-59 years respectively. Meanwhile the age range of the DO was between 40-49 years. Of importance to note is the age range of the SGBs. For instance 40% of the members were aged between 30-39 years old, whereas a majority (50%) were between 40- 49 years. In totality, the findings of this study have significant implications on how the schools under study are governed to ensure that the admissions policy is implemented effectively. This is because, a glance at the above table shows that there is mixture of ages and representation of both more experienced and less experienced participants. For example, this implies that principals are largely experienced in policy admission matters and would proffer valuable responses regarding the effectiveness of SGBs, admissions committee members and the teachers in executing their duties in an effective and efficient manner. Furthermore, it should be noted that the age range of the SGBs is a representation of young and older adults. This implies that

the schools under study are exposed to a mix of varied expertise in terms of how the Grade R admission policy should be implemented.

Table 4.4: Academic Qualifications of Principals, Teachers and Admissions Committee members

Academic Qualifications	P1	%	T	%	ACS	%	SGBs	%	DO	%
	(n=4) f		(n=4) F		(n=4) f		(N=20) F		(n=1) F	
Bachelor of Arts	4	100	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
STD	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Bachelor of Education (B.Ed)	0	0	4	100	4	100	0	0	0	0
SPTD	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
TOTAL	4	100	4	100	4	100	20	100	1	100

The findings of the study revealed that a majority of principals have degrees. This finding means that the majority of principals are well qualified. The qualifications of the participants imply that they were experienced people with vast knowledge. This came in handy when collecting information regarding the strategies and challenges faced by the implementation of the Grade R admission policy in their schools. It was assumed that they have an understanding of elements that affect the implementation of the Grade R admission policy and which strategies may work for effective implementation. This means that all the principals in the selected schools were in a position to give a sound interpretation of the Grade R admissions policy as well as the school governance legislation and regulations on issues pertaining to admissions policy. The majority of educators also had degrees and the same trend was observed with the Admissions committee members who also had B.Ed degrees. The education level of the teacher and

the admissions committee members implies that they are in position to also interpret the policy and implement it as instructed by the policy makers. Moreover, it is also assumed that they are in position to explain to the parents all the necessary steps and explain which documentation is needed by the school for the child to be admitted. On the other hand, the academic qualifications of the DO may be a pointer that they may possess high analytical skills in explaining issues pertaining to the implementation of the Grade R admissions policy through ongoing workshops and training for the policy implementers.

According to the findings of the study, all the SGBs members in all the schools under study appeared to have low levels of education. Though it may be assumed that, these members were able to read and write, the question remains if they were really capable of making sound decisions in relation the admissions policy. For instance, of late, it has been noted that, elected SGBs should at least have a minimum education as education is highly dynamic and needs people who are able to rise up to the challenges especially if schools are to be run in an effective and efficient manner. However, it should also be noted that most of the time, SGBs are unemployed people as it becomes very impossible for working parents to avail themselves for SGB duties. This is because SGB meetings are time-consuming and need responsible, available and committed parents.

The following section presents responses of the participants on the implementation of the Grade R admission policy in schools using the key themes that emerged

4.3 The implementation of the Grade R admission policy in schools

Implementation is the nemesis of designers, it conjures up images of plans gone awry and of social carpenters and masons who fail to build to specifications and thereby distort the beautiful blue prints of progress which were handed to them. It provokes memories of “good” ideas that did not work and places the blame on second (and second-class) member of policy and administration team (Honalde, 1979, p.6). The presentation of data in this section follows specific topics/themes of discussion. These topics are formulated from the research questions of this study.

Therefore, each research question has been used as a heading to present the data collected from the participants. The first research question sought to understand the

strategies that the school principals use to implement Grade R admission policy from the participants. The second sub-question wanted to find out about the monitoring techniques from above concerning the implementation process. The last sub-research question wanted to find out about the challenges encountered in the implementation of the Grade R admission policy in the circuit.

4.3.1 Strategies used to implement the grade R admission policy in the schools

Research evidence suggests that early childhood development programmes that incorporate parents, children, and family factors promote the implementation, effective strategies, monitoring and utilization of early childhood education. As such governments have enacted policies to allow schools to participate in the education of their children and to enhance their education as well through such policies. Therefore, this section looks at the verbatim narratives of the participants on the strategies used to implement the admissions policy for Grade R.

The first question posed to the participants was whether their schools had Grade R admission policies. The participants gave similar answers and some of these are captured below. For instance, P4 claimed:

It is a must that we have it. We actually have a file for Grade R admissions where we store information about the learners. The policy document is on top. It is drafted from the main one from the Department to suit our own environment. We have both hard and soft copies. When the District officials come they ask for it.

P3 also agreed:

Yes, we have the Grade R Admission Policy. We made our own school policy from the one the Department gave us. Authorities always want to see the policy documents that we have.

In agreement, T4 also confirmed the existence of a Grade R admissions policy in their school:

In this school we have the policy. The principal told us to keep it.

It was encouraging to note that the schools had the policy in place as mandated by the Department of Education. There was chance that the guidelines were being followed in these schools.

Research shows that when a policy is being implemented it is important that the steps that were followed to implement the policy was made transparent. In this study, the researcher also sought to find out which steps were taken to inform the school stakeholders about the admissions policy. The findings of the study show that all principals used different strategies in informing, selection of admissions committee and the teachers to be in charge of implementing the policy. Below are the responses by the principals giving an outline on what is done. Principal 1 explained:

after receiving a memo from the department of education informing the schools about the policy, I called all staff to discuss this issue. It was agreed in a staff meeting that a parents meeting should be called to inform them about this policy. Thereafter, admission committee members were democratically elected in a staff meeting, following gender issues to deal with Grade R. Those who were elected were those who are computer literate so that they may be able to capture the admitted learners in a computer for the school afterwards. It was agreed as a school that even though the policy Grade R learners stated that learners should be admitted at age 4 and half turning 5 on or before the end of June, it was also important to consider the stature of a child. It was also agreed as a school that no child must be admitted to Grade R if that child did not attended a day care centre (crèche).

However P2 had a different strategy altogether and it could be deduced from his responses the school in question did not invite the parents, instead a staff meeting was called and it was during the meeting that the admissions committee was formalised. P2 advanced:

I called staff meeting only and no parents were invited and an admission committee was formulated by means of elections, considering gender and phases of the school. It was agreed that admission must stick to the information stipulated by the department of education, no compromise to be done. Even if the child is the granddaughter for the educator, proper and rightful procedures to be followed. The procedure for selecting admission committee members was through rising up their hands, and naming the people. Eventually gender was considered.

Of interest to note are the steps taken by P3, as no consultation was made in this school. This is evidenced by the responses given below:

P3 had this to say:

I elected the admission committee members on my own,

It may be concluded from the above responses that the principals from this schools used dictatorial leadership which aligns with the top down theory implemented in this study. Furthermore, the above response implies that less was said about the policy implementation to the teachers, the parents including the SGBs.

Meanwhile, it could be deduced from the explanation given by P4 that participatory involvement was employed and the view of the teachers during a staff meeting were sought. P4 explained as follows:

I called the staff meeting to discuss about the policy. She even asked the ideas of the other teachers to say if things are in this way, what we are going to do as staff, which is to teach the Grade R. Admission committee members were democratically elected in the same staff meeting to can help the parents when they come. The criteria we used to elect the admission committee members was through ballot papers (secret ballot), thereafter counting the ballots.

The researcher also took time to ask the teachers if indeed admissions committee were existence as stated by the principals in the schools under study. Similarly, all participants

confirmed that they had Admission Committees in the schools that had been selected by the principal and staff so that teachers could work together with the parents. a **sample** of such responses are capture below. Teacher 3 had this to say:

In our school we do have an admission policy, but sometimes it is not adhered to.

AC4 indicated:

Yes, we have the Admission Committee members in this school selected by the principal from the staff to help parents when they come to fill in the admission forms for the new Grade R learners.

FGD2: simply said, *the admission policy be adhered to”*

AC3 added:

Parents must be taught how admission processes are done.

In agreement FGD1 also confirmed:

Our school has an Admission Committee selected to assist with admission matters of Grade R learners. These are educators who work with SASAMs officers who capture details of learners in the school database.

However the researcher noted that when most of the SGBs members were asked about the admissions committee, they had a different story to tell. A majority of participants expressed their displeasure in the manner in which the DoE was sidelining their roles and responsibilities as SGBs. They felt they were not taken seriously. Below are some of the responses

For instance SGBs 1 stated,

The Department of Education took us as SGBs for granted, by not considering us as the voices of the parents.

SGBs 2 added,

Before implementing policies, Department of education must consider and involve us as SGBs.

SGBs 3 was of the view that,

We are not failures, but regarded as failures.

Thus it maybe deduced from the foregoing view that SGBs felt they played a very silent role when it can to the implementation of the admission policy. The results of the study align with the theoretical frameworks adopted in this study where by the policy makers make the rules and the policy implementers in the case the SGBs are expected to implement such rules with no questions asked.

Meanwhile, some of the admissions committee members and the principals also highlighted the roles and responsibilities of the admission committee members in implementing the Grade R admission policy. Their sentiments were similar, as such only a few responses are given as examples:

AC3 stated as follows:

As admission committee members we screen the documents required before a learner can be admitted at a school, such as the birth certificate, the immunisation cards, the parents or the guardian's certified Id copy as well as to check whether the child has got the required age for admission into Grade R as required by the Department of Education (Grade R admission requirements). As well as whether the child's physical address falls under the feeder zone for the school, so that if it does not belong to the feeder zone, such a learner to be admitted last.

P1 response echoed was is stated above and stated:

The admission committee deals with the Grade R admissions. They select eligible learners starting with those in our feeder zone; check documents such as birth certificate, identity documents of parents and guardians,

health cards. The committee adheres to the requirements of the admission policy.

From their responses participants showed that they try to follow what is prescribed within the Grade R admission policy. The process involves, among others, completion of forms, checking the accompanying documents to verify compliances in age, immunisation status and feeder zone.

The researcher also sought to find out how the policy was implemented and if they were consulted on how the policy should be implemented in schools. A majority of the participants had similar answers and said that the policy had never been introduced in their schools, but it just happened unannounced. Furthermore, it emerged that most of the participants felt they were forced to explain to the parents how the policy works and were thus forced to consult each other as policy implementers to see what was expected of them. Some of the sentiments are shown in the following statements by the participants:

P2 responded:

We never really introduced the policy to the stakeholders before implementing it. We just found ourselves implementing it and then tried to educate the parents about it.

AC1 also concurred:

In our school, our Principal called a meeting for parents and teachers where we were advised that there was an admission policy for Grade R so we needed to quickly form an Admissions Committee to spearhead the admission issues in the school. We were virtually clueless on what it was about and had been thrown in the deep end. All stakeholders read and consulted each other to try and understand the policy.

In agreement T2 stated:

For us this policy just came as a package. The principal just alerted us that there was an admission policy for Grade R learners that DBE wanted schools to follow. He then told us a bit about it and advised us to come to his office to check what it says. As a Grade R teacher I was interested to see it. I don't think other colleagues checked it. I know one who did not because she said she did not have time since she was teaching Grade 2.

With regard to the introduction of the implementation of Grade R admission policy in primary schools, it appears that the strategy was not properly introduced according to the participants. The schools were given a directive by the DBE to use the policy. It may be deduced from the responses that there was no consultation at all about how the policy should be implemented. The responses from the participants also indicate that the introduction of the policy was not taken seriously. On the other hand, there appeared to be consultation in some of the schools whereby parents and teachers as the policy implementers were given a chance to consult each other as supported by the bottom –up theory used in this study.

Creating a picture that there is consultation during and after policy formation is very important as this promotes ownership of the policy and consensus among the stakeholders. Therefore, when the participants were questioned about their involvement in the implementation of the Grade R policy. There were divergent views amongst the principals in as far as their involvement in the implementation process was concerned both at school and at district level. According to the decisions were taken on their behalf on what, how and when to do things in the process of implementation. For example,

P1 had this to say:

Policies are laid down autocratically without inviting the stakeholders to discuss and share with them. They are of the view that the DoE used the top down approach when communicating with the superiors of the schools. They said that if the policy is from the department of education, it needs to be applied to the schools. A consequence of this approach is that of an authoritarian ethos which persists at many South African schools is the fact;

it militates against the establishment of the free space in which creative interaction and deliberate exchanges are encouraged.

P2 also stated:

The department communicates with us through the meetings, informing us that with effect from this time such a thing is to be introduced, without the inputs of other stakeholders.

P3 further explained:

The schools rely on DBE policy when admitting and implementing the Grade R learners at the schools, as according to the policy, learners who are 4 and half years turning 5 on or before the 30th of June of the admission year are entitled for admission in Grade R class.

P4 also elaborated:

The age issue is not important to admission, most especially that one on the policy. Learners are sometimes denied admission to school due to age, as they (learners) later become problems to their schools due to their age. Those who are admitted at age 5 for Grade R; their foundation is strong and good for formal education.

From the above statements by Principals it can be seen that their general opinion of implementation of the Grade R admission policy had some flaws. Most of them claimed that stakeholders were not involved in crafting the policy. The principals highlighted that they were not given any opportunity to give their input, because what the department used was a top-down approach to policy implementation. Their views are in tandem with what is subscribed within the top-down theory that it is autocratic and views policy implementers as people who are supposed to follow orders. As a result, they felt the admission policy was just thrown to schools and that the DBE just lay down a policy with guidelines for the schools to follow. Another interesting feature that emerged in one of the schools was that children who were over age were being denied admission. One of the headmasters alluded to the fact that such children later on became problematic. These

foregoing views imply that, there may be many children out there who are not enrolled and thus leaving the future dreams of these children a mirage. This is because many parents, especially those from disadvantaged communities cannot afford the basics that are needed for a child to enrol such as school uniform as a result they end up going to seek admission into Grade R later than their age mates.

4.3.2 Ensuring smooth running of the implementation process

All the participants felt that despite the problems they encounter in the Grade R admission policy implementation like non-involvement by the DoE, they felt, they had the responsibility to see the smooth running of the programme.

P4 stated:

By forming our school admission policy, including as SGBs and teachers, we are involved in the implementation of Grade R admission policy in our school.

When further probed on the functions of the committee, the principal explained:

This committee sees to the proper operation of the programme by implementing the given policies which were decided for us by policy implementers.

P4 added:

We are only involved at school level, where we work as a team to ensure the smooth running of the implementation process, that it operates as it should be (implemented).

T1 noted:

The admission committees and SGBs see to the smooth running of the implementation process by providing resources that are needed during admission processes. Team work plays a crucial role.

P1 also added:

We as the stakeholders need to take ownership of the process and see to it that its objectives are met and the admission process benefits those for whom it is intended (learners). And there is no stealing and embezzlement of funds meant for Grade R learners.

When the same question was posed to the admissions committee, issues of non-compliance by parents were cited as affecting the smooth implementation of the admissions policy in schools. This is evidenced by the responses below.

ADCS 1 posited:

The parent do not understand the age issue, and as such, this gives us problems when admitting.

ADCS2 added:

Most of uneducated parents do not bring the required documents when they come to school to apply for their learners' admission for Grade R.

ADCS 3 stated:

Parents who are related to the principal do not respect our advices; they want to get more information from the principal.

ADCS 4 explained:

This is really a difficult job as at the end the parents can beat and kill you if they don't understand the conditions.

Linked with the foregoing responses, it may be suggested that SGBs in the schools under study appear to have challenges with regard to understanding their roles and responsibilities. For instance, Baruth (2013:288) found that SGBs are not well informed about what their roles and responsibilities entail; as such schools, admissions committee find it hard to enforce their laws. Lekonyane and Maja (2014:18) further posit interpreting national and provincial policies and translating

them to school policies require knowledge of and skill in policy development and formulation.

A glance at the responses, SGBs indicated that consultation was limited from the schools. This is despite the fact that the functioning of SGBs is closely linked with ensuring that they work together with the DBE, principals, teachers, learners and the parents as a team in pursuance of school governance responsibilities. Moreover, the SGBs is expected to enhance the achievement of goals and objectives of the school in which they govern. This includes SGBs' understanding of their key roles and responsibilities as listed in SASA and the implementation of the admissions is not an exception. The excerpts from SGBs are as follows:

FGP1 was of the view that:

The Department of Education implement policies without consulting educators as the masterminds for teaching, and as such it creates problems for the running of the schools as most people, especially the parent does not understand these policies.

FGP 2 posited:

It is not good to implement policies without consultation with the people on the lower level.

FGP 3 also alluded to the fact that:

Departmental officials are not doing enough to train and workshop the lower level before implementation process.

FGP 4 also added:

The above responses reflect that the participants felt obliged to perform their duties and be regarded as the important elements of the implementation of the Grade R admission policy in the school community. They all shared the sentiments that despite being ignored

and undermined by the DoE when drawing policies, and not involved in the decision making, they had to make the school operational and functional especially with regard to the implementation of the admission's policy.

When participants were asked to give strategies that the schools use in the implementation of the Grade R Admission policy. The responses given showed that there were number of strategies that were being adopted by schools to implement the admissions policy such as calling board meetings, tabling the policy to all stakeholders, using simplified language to accommodate everyone as well as reaching a consensus on how admission would be conducted to avoid corruption. The following were their responses:

P4 responded:

We try to bring all parents on board during parents meetings. The strategy works for the parents who attend the meetings.

In agreement, P2 had this view:

At this school, the SGB calls parents for meetings and we table issues of policies and explain them to parents in the simplest way. Some understand them but others do not.

In addition, P3 responded:

We collaborate with all stakeholders. It is a good strategy when implementing the Grade R admission policy because we want everyone to be involved so that we work together and avoid corruption.

T1 was of the view that:

Department of education must come with their own and better strategies that can help us to implement as we are failing.

ADCS 3 felt there was need to go back to the drawing board and come up with new strategies and stated:

We tried to use age, admission requirements, feeder zones, but we failed, as such we need help from the department of education.

FGP 1 had the same views:

there is need for a paradigm shift let us sit down and come up with new strategies", age requirements we fail, feeder zones, we fail.

From their responses it could be deduced that, there were two main strategies used namely, of awareness raising and collaboration. Their main vehicle of communication seems to be through meetings and the involvement of the SGB meetings.

4.3.4 Support and monitoring of the Grade R admissions policy

As new as the concept of implementation of Grade R admission policy in education, schools and educators are bound to face challenges in its execution. Therefore support and monitoring systems are important so that the schools are able to see if the aims and objectives of the implemented policies achieved vis-à-vis the national legislations, ministerial circulars and other supporting and monitoring frameworks to govern the implementation of grade R admission policy. These policies, support and monitoring systems will practically guide schools and all the relevant stakeholders in planning the implementation processes. Therefore when the participants were asked how the Grade R admission policy is supported and monitored ADCS 1 had this say

In most public schools in our circuit they send admission forms as prescribed by SASAMS to their feeder day care centres to complete and submit in the last quarter of the year for the following year.

P2 also added:

The day care centres facilitators make sure that all learners who are to be admitted for Grade R are from their crèches. They also check for Grade R readiness by honouring the children with certificates for completing day care centres attendance.

In addition, T1 stated:

In Makhutswe circuit, admission policy is supported and monitored but not to our satisfaction. Workshops by the District are mostly done after a long time while the Grade R educators need support timeously in order to cope with these learners. Schools are not provided fully with equipment necessary for the Grade Rs.

From the responses, it is evident that there is support from other stakeholders such as other crèches/ ECD centres that provide information on the prospective Grade R learners. The participants also added that though support was there from the district, it was somewhat limited. On the one hand, what is required are district managers who can provide structural framework required for distributed leadership in the implementation process. Distributed leadership can only come to fruition in a well-structured organization which is characterized by shared values and beliefs. In other words, monitoring and support mechanisms in place mean that all stakeholders have different roles to play as a way of creating ownership in the implementation of the admissions policy.

In line with this, ADCS2 further indicated:

The DoE and the District office solely provide teacher trainings for Cluster and implementation process in order to prepare for what is to come such as being ready for the Grade Rs at the schools. The Grade R teachers have to ensure that learners are ready for schooling in Grade 1. Because many children do not go to the pre-school and do not get the benefit of a structured pre-school environment, these children who then enter Grade R may already struggle to cope with the demands of the Grade R classes. Therefore teachers must help Grade R learners to develop emergent writing, reading which demand a high level of skill from the teacher.

ADCS1 further explained:

Teachers are not involved in the implementation of Grade R admission policy at their schools. They see themselves as the most important people in the school governance, but hardly recognised, hence we cannot say are

involved in monitoring and support of the policy as we do not know when it monitored and how this is done .

T2 brought in another dimension:

We need opportunities for continuous development so that we can improve in our roles as the implementers of the policy. If we can be developed, the schools will develop and so will be the whole nation as we are very influential people and have the abilities to share with others for developmental purposes.

T2's view is buttressed by ADCS5 when she stated:

In order for us to be effective, we need to be continuously involved in decision making policies as a result we find it difficult to be in support of the whole admissions process and also we are in the dark on how it should be monitored so that we know been implemented effectively.

Thurlow (2003) suggests that where educators feel confident about something in their own capacity, in the capacity of their colleagues and in the capacity of the school to promote professional development, school improvement is more likely to be effective. When the confidence of the educators has been built, the whole school morale is boosted. In this case, continuous development would help stakeholders in implementing the Grade R admission policy.

When asked what kind of support and monitoring the participants received from the Department of Education and the District office, all the participants said that the support of the department and that of the District office is very limited.

DO had this to say:

We were called by the Provincial education department for a workshop and briefing meeting to inform us about this implementation policy. There was nothing to add or to subtract as those who called us say this information is from above (National), as such ours was to comply.

T2's response was:

We don't get much support from the district. The District officials only come to observe and comment on how we handle the Grade Rs and comment on the teaching methods we use during teaching and learning, except that, we do not get any further support.

P1 also commented:

In most cases, teachers support each other. This is because there is really not much support and monitoring from the district office. As far as the decision making is concerned in the implementation process or monitoring support at district, provincial and national level, teachers and SGBs are not involved at all.

In agreement to the above statement T1 claimed:

We are not involved at all, because what has to be done is only communicated to us through school principals, nobody is interested and talking with us or hear our opinions before the policy can be implemented.

P2 brought in another idea that the principals oversee the operations of the admissions committee in implementing the Grade R admissions policy. They have to be involved in decision making at all stages of the process. He stated:

As the overseer of the admission committee in the school, about the implementation of the policy, I am supposed to be involved in each and every decision-making step taken in the admission process, as the most important people who have the child's interest at heart.

It was clear from the above responses that the teachers and SGBs were neither involved nor consulted in the formulation of the policy of admission. These responses from all the stakeholders echoed their frustrations and despair of their non-involvement in the implementation process, decision making, policy making and administration of admission process at district and provincial level. Hence it was easy for a majority of the participants

to say there were no support and monitoring mechanisms in place. According to them full participation will make the stakeholders own these decisions and abide by them. Grade R is part of the Foundation Phase but is not always serviced in the same way as the rest of the Foundation Phase as such the participants felt the support that was given to them was very limited. In support of this assertion, P2 claimed:

In the majority of provinces Grade R is managed by a separate pool of officials who do not only have the responsibility of curriculum support and implementation but are also responsible for all other areas of implementation, funding, monitoring and payment of subsidies. The Grade R classes are not always part of the monitoring and support functions of the districts, particularly those that are based at community-based sites as it is argued that they fall under the jurisdiction of the Department of Social Development.

P1 also added:

The government officials take decisions suitable to themselves that they have copied from other countries, which could have been avoided were the stakeholders involved (teachers).

To sum this up, T3 said:

Policies have to be discussed and agreed upon by all involved before their actual implementation takes place.

Linked with the above, the participants were asked to elaborate on what should be their roles in ensuring that policies are implemented at their various schools.

P4's response was:

We are to follow the district orders which are from the province.

In agreement P1 stated:

There are orders which are given to us by the government officials and we can never deviate from them, yet they were never discussed with us as the said stakeholders.

SGB2 added:

Our involvement is to monitor whether the policies from the Department of Education are properly implemented and done well at school by being part of all decisions and steps taken in the implementation. Good procedures should be followed when implementing so that the admission committee members should abide by the procedures.

SGB3 stated that:

The Department of Education needs the schools to have SGBs, but they don't recognise us when they formulate policies for the schools.

SGB 1 was of the view that:

Education Department side-line us as the SGBs, so why do they instruct the schools to elect us?

SGB 4 explained:

We must formulate our own policies and stay away from those of the Department of Education in the near future for the benefit of our children.

ADCS1 stated:

One day the parents are going to kill us, thinking that these policies are formulated by us.

ADCS2 said:

Things should be discussed first, before they can be implemented".

ADCS3 explained:

Parents are hard to understand even minor issues.

ADCS4 posited:

The Department of Education use its powers to implement, it does not do some consultation first.

It seems clear, from the participants' responses that educators are not getting enough support and monitoring from the Department of Education and the District office. What clearly came out was that the policy implementers were expected to follow the orders, not deviate but abide from what they are told to do and how to implement the policy. It could be noted from their responses that the DoBE was silent about the support to be given to school to make sure that the policies are implemented efficiently. Moreover, a majority of the responses revealed that the policy implementers were not sure how the DoBE planned to monitor effective implementation of the policy because they had not being consulted right from the inception. The support system and monitoring programs of the Department, even though necessary, are lacking within the school and at the District level. One participant seemed to share a different sentiment on why they do not get support.

P1 stated:

We do get invitations as the school for district trainings about the Grade R implementation policy but to be honest; we don't attend because of limited time.

Unlike the other responses that placed the blame on the department officials, P1's response places the blame on the stakeholders who get invitations to attend training on policy implementation but fail to attend due to time constraints.

When they were asked about the support and monitoring that they give to teachers, the District officials said that they really do not have time to offer such support as and monitoring because of the limited time.

DO answered:

We do not have enough time to support and to monitor; we do that through the cluster meetings. The importance of consultation and collaboration between professionals in schools with a view to achieving the common goal of improved educational outcomes for learners has resulted in a significant change in the role of the SLT in schools. In addition, the current focus on inclusive education in South Africa has created a dire need for support of both teachers and learners (South African School's Act No 84 of 1996).

From the above responses by the DO, it may be inferred that due to lack of adequate financial and human resources, district officers claimed not to have enough time to move around to give support to individual schools but attend to them collectively in clusters. By this, they aim to relay standardised information on the implementation of the Grade R policy to implementers in their cluster.

4.3.5 The challenges encountered in the implementation of the Grade R admission policy.

When implementing a policy the implementers encounter various challenges and at different stages of the implementation. The participants responded to a question on the challenges they encountered in the implementation of the Grade R admission policy. Various themes were identified from the participants' responses. Lack of parental involvement is presented first.

4.3.5.1 Lack of parental involvement

Lack of parental involvement came out as one of the major challenges in the implementation of the Grade R admission policy. A majority of the participants in schools under study had similar responses. Below are a few examples: One participant, T1 had this to say:

The most severe challenge that we encounter is the lack of parent involvement in the implementation of the Grade R admission policy and in the education of their children in general. Parents don't want to be involved.

They just send their kids to school and do not follow up. Almost every month we have new kids whose parents we have never seen. They do not care; they do not even come to meetings. They do not want to pay school fees that have been agreed upon by parents so that the school can be able to run.

Furthermore, one of the causes of teacher work related stress cited by participants in the study was lack of parental involvement.

T2 added:

Parents do not attend meetings on the admission of their children as a result when they come to school for registration of their children they bring inadequate documents. At our school we have a list of requirements that we give to parents but many parents do not attend the meetings and end up not knowing what is needed. These parents end up complaining because they have to go back to get other documents.

ADCS1 seconded what is stated above and also alleged that:

Another challenge we face as the admissions committee is that parents do not attend our meetings. We always ask them to come to school but they always never come. They do not even send an apology. The few that attend already know the requirements. The ones that absent themselves are the ones that bother us with numerous questions when they want admission for their children. In addition they will bring inadequate documents.

In agreement P2 added:

Parents give us headaches when they want us to admit their children. They will come at the last moment and will be complaining yet they do not avail themselves when there is still time. Some do not even know their children's dates of birth. These are probably absent fathers. Involvement or participation in meetings on the Grade R admission policy is essential so that we do not waste time doing the same thing. You repeat the same

information to many parents that one could have shared in one meeting, parents should get involved.

When the SGBs were asked what caused lack of parental involvement, they had this say:

SGBs 1 stated:

Most of the parents even if they can be called to school for parents meetings, they don't come and according to them (parent) it is time consuming to come to school.

SGB 2 explained:

The parents have elected us but they do not support us.

SGB 3 advanced:

The parents must help us in the running of the school by being actively involved in school activities.

SGB 4 simply said:

We must be united as the community to run our school".

From the statements above, the SGBs seem to be disheartened by the parents' non-participation in meetings. As a result, this forced the schools to keep repeating the same information, something which they felt could have been addressed at once had the parents attended the meetings.

4.3.5.2 Forceful demand for admissions

Another challenge identified from the responses was the forceful demand for admissions by parents and guardians. This assertion was evidenced in the some responses. For example P3 and P4 had similar views. P3 said:

Yhoo when it is admissions time we have many parents trying to force us to admit their children. Some children are still young. The learners are still very

young to attend formal school and are still not ready when coming to start attending school, either in terms of behaviour (attitude), some parents bring learners who did not attend day-care centres at all to Grade R and as such these bring a challenge to educators and us. Sometimes you find your name in the media for false accusations, that you refuse to give parents places.

P4 added:

You sometimes wonder what parents and guardians want. They want to force us to admit learners not following the policy. We are also bound by law and ethics.

Additionally T2 also had this to say:

Parents try to force learners into Grade R. Most kids do not even know how to handle a pencil or crayon, and as such this gives the educators a challenge at school. They need to check what the requirements are.

ADCS1 said the following:

Some parents think they own the schools. They come with incorrect information. For instance the learner's birth certificates' information is different from how they are called. The surname's spelling mistakes are not corrected by their parents from Home Affairs while the learners are still young, they wait for the children to start school, and as such it becomes an embarrassment to the learners when their information differs from their certificates.

SGBs 2 stated:

Parents must learn to comply to the rules of the schools, e.g.: when the school say they need certain requirements for admission, they must comply with that.

ADCS 2 further added:

It is a difficult job to work with people who are hard to understand the policies.

ADCS 4 was of the view that:

Let department of education bring their own admission committees well trained by them for a certain period.

The teacher's responses revealed that some parents wanted their children to be granted admission despite having inadequate documentation. The above responses also highlighted that most parents were not prepared to follow protocol but wanted shortcuts and also had no concern for accurate records which are needed as prescribed in the admission policy.

4.3.5.3 Lack of accurate records

Inaccurate records were a challenge in the Grade R admission process. For instance, parents who lived in different places, their children did not know what to tell their educators when asked about their parent's address so that the information could be written as the biographical details of their parents. The following were the comments from participants:

T3 also added:

As teachers we have concerns about learners who are orphans. Those learners are greatly neglected by their relatives. Sometimes in terms of admission they do not have proper documents as the extended family members may not secure birth certificates for them. At times a relative comes in to seek admission mid-term because the child has no one to look after him or her. This brings in challenges to us. Classes will be overcrowded. The same parents and guardians end up complaining about the overcrowded classrooms. According to educators each class must at least have +-35 learners, but due to a large number of learners it ends up being more than that.

ADCS4 gave another challenge encountered in the implementation of the admission policy. The participant said:

Parents always try some tricks during the Grade R admission. They know ECD is expensive and want their children to enrol early into Grade R. Some parents even go to the extent of getting reports that show that their children are ready for Grade R. Due to the Grade R admission policy that allows for that, some learners are admitted at a younger age than expected. As such, some learners are immature and lose their belongings during break, forgetting where they have put them. Most of them don't differentiate a school and a crèche.

When the same question was posed to SGBs, they had this to say:

SGB1 said:

Don't admit learners inappropriately as they will create problems to the whole school.

SGB2 stated

Better to follow the policy than to experience problems later in the course of the year.

SGB3 added

Better to formulate our own policy and get away with that one from the department of education.

SGB4 posited:

Prevention is better than cure, if we cannot prevent fraud, we can get ourselves in hot water. Meaning that they must oblige to the departmental policy of admission.

ADCS 1 stated:

Better to follow that we have agreed upon as staff of the school and the parents of the community, and not to deviate, the staff meeting minutes will protect us as well as the minutes of the parents meeting.

ADCS 3 said:

Let us revise the admission policy and see whether we cannot make some other inputs and subtraction on it.

T2 articulated:

Teaching is now becoming a disaster as today is this, tomorrow is that and next week is going to be this and we as teachers we are at the centre of all this things.

DO explained:

There is nothing to do apart from complying, let's learn to be on a paradigm shift, is then that things is going to be simple to us.

The participants directed the challenges being faced to inaccurate records that were brought in by the parents, some of which were even captured wrongly due to the parents' fault during the admission process. The responses also illuminated that some parents knew ways of cheating the system by getting fake documents that their children were ready for school to avoid paying fees in EDC phase. This resulted in some learners getting admission into Grade R before they reach the required age. The schools under study seemed to shun being saddled with immature learners who still want to learn more through play which they felt was not their responsibility since a crèche learning is more play-based.

Furthermore, it was revealed by the participants that some of the Grade R policy stipulations also brought out other challenges as discussed in the sections below. The themes identified and discussed in this section are:

4.3.5.4 Chronic illnesses

The policy stipulates that the learners should not be discriminated in terms of illnesses. It clearly states that there should not be any tests that are carried out to determine the illnesses the children have. As such, the participants were asked to give their views on this issue.

T3 had this to say on the issue of chronic illnesses:

We are supposed to admit all children irrespective of how sick they are and thus experience some form of impairment and have additional care needs as a result of their sickness, but as educators have no guidelines or legal clarifications on how to deal with these circumstances, such learners need to be provided with special care; conditions to ensure the child's dignity, self-reliance and active participation in the community; and the provision of the child with the necessary support services however is not possible due to lack of training and other matters related thereof. As such the implementation of Grade R admission policy created a problem to schools as the schools are supposed to admit even the sick learners, and give them their medication during the day in the presence of other learners.

P3 also commented:

The Grade R admission policy states that all children should be admitted into the Grade R class- whether sick or not. All children of the appropriate age should get the opportunity to get into the class. We are not even allowed to neither carry out our bus stop diagnosis nor ask the learners to be tested for any illness. Ours as a school is to admit the learners. It is good for not discriminating learners but in the long run the teachers and the school have to look after the child when she or he falls sick.

The above views were seconded by SGBs 1 who stated as follows

It is going to be difficult for the educators to work with ill children.

SGB 2 further added:

How can the educators work with ill children.

On the other hand, one of the members from admission committee felt that all the learners had the right to education.

ADSC1 was in agreement that all learners were supposed to be given a chance to learn:

The sick learners must be given chance to study.

T2 simply said:

How can we teach sick learners?

Response from District Official highlighted the important of what the right to education mean regardless of the health status of a learners. The DO advanced:

Learners must carry their medication when coming to school on a daily basis, show it to the teacher so that the teacher can give a learner at the right time.

From the responses the researcher could tell that the participants were saddened by the situation at hand and yearned for multi-stakeholder support in implementing the admission policy. The responses further illuminated that schools were implementing what is stated in the Constitution that no learner should be discriminated. The results suggest that there is inclusive education. However, challenges are foreseen in the practical application of the Grade R admission policy as the school is expected to attend to the learner who falls ill in its premises. The responses above imply that, some of the participants might have felt that it was not their duty to take care of sick learners, an indication that the participants may not be aware or chose to ignore the clause in SASA which clearly stipulates that teachers and principals are the “*loco parentis*” of the learners.

4.3.5.5 School transport

The Grade R admission policy also creates another challenge of transport. Schools are encouraged to enrol children in their feeder zone. However, the guidelines on Distance give options as was explained by P2 in the following statement:

The guidelines relating to planning for public school infrastructure recommend the provision of “either transport or hostel accommodation on a progressively phased and pro-poor basis” for learners that have to walk more than 5 kilometres to their closest public school. So as such, due to the implementation of the Grade R admission policy, most of the Grade R learners due to their age, are not used to walking long distances, frequently cried during the morning before they go to school and ultimately absent themselves as they waste their brothers and sisters’ time on the way to school as they are not used to hurry up in the mornings particularly during winter mornings.

T2 added:

The preceding commitments of transport supply which have not yet been met, nor have the guidelines been followed, as such, the lack of available safe and affordable transport remains a significant and common barrier preventing the most vulnerable and marginalised children from accessing schools.

In addition T4 indicated that another challenge due to the implementation of the Grade R policy was living with disabilities as their schools do not have inclusive education. T4 explained:

Parents bring children to the local schools even though they are disabled. Some of them cannot walk properly; some do not hear properly, some don’t talk properly, while some are albinos. So, all these bring challenges to the school as they are afraid to tell the parents that they must take their children to the right schools. The teachers experience problems in the classes as some learners tease the disabled ones and as such, this is a challenge to the school authorities. Parents should be guided and be told about the special schools for the different types of disabilities.

Further to the foregoing T4 had this to say:

If they don't know they will just ask for admission in ordinary public schools, of which problems are abound to arise because a majority of village schools do not practice inclusive education. The participants indicated that if the department of education can fund them for inclusive education, it will not be a problem to admit learners with disabilities as the school will be able to do the school suitable for disabled learners such as the stairs for wheelchairs, the medication for albinos as well as the care-takers for those who are limping.

T3 also commented:

Due to lack of understanding of inclusive education in the schools, it is a problem to admit learners with disabilities, whereas the parent's views are that their learners should be admitted at their nearby schools even though they are disabled. Educators at our school have not been exposed to special needs classrooms and as such this can be a disadvantage to the school. Before learners with disabilities can be admitted in the schools, educators need to coordinate efforts and understand the needs of the classroom in terms of developing skills and lesson plans, of which presently they know nothing about. However, we just admit learners with disability with no ramps, for example.

SGBs 3 was of the view that:

The department must empower learners with disabilities with the relevant institutions, and let their parents know where to take them for schooling.

ADCs 3 felt the parents could not understand why most of their children were being denied admission despite the fact that the school were said to be mainstream schools and offering including education:

Parents are taking us not being good to them when we tell them that their disabled children have their own schools.

P1 stated that dealing with parents was not easy as parent has a tendency of making and breaking the rules as and when it suited them. The Principal had this to say:

Parents take themselves as the owners of the schools, by thinking that even the disabled can come to any school of their choices.

The foregoing assertions indicate that even though schools are meant to implement inclusive education, participants felt it was not ideal due to the problem associated with lack of resources and qualified personnel to assist such learners.

4.3.5.6 Migrant parents

The South African Schools Act, 1996 and Grade R admission policy apply equally to learners who are not citizens of the Republic of South Africa and whose parents are in possession of a permit for temporary or permanent residence issued by the Department of Home Affairs. For instance, the Aliens Control Act, 1991 (No. 96 of 1991) states that learner who entered the country on a study permit must present the study permit on admission to the public school. Persons classified as illegal aliens must, when they apply for admission for their children or for themselves, show evidence that they have applied to the Department of Home Affairs to legalise their stay in the country. With reference to the above mentioned, the participants were questioned on what was done in admitting foreign nations. There emerged mixed responses. While other participants said that there were a number of children with expired documents, other felt despite lack of necessary document every child had the right to education. The verbatim responses are highlighted below concerning the admission of migrant Grade R learners. P4 had this to say:

Another challenge is the children of migrant parents. Increasing numbers of people migrate to South Africa from neighbouring African countries, including Somalia, The Democratic Republic of Congo as well as Zimbabwe.

As a result of having to renew their permits every few months and the long-term closure of three out of the six urban refugee reception centres, a large number of asylum-seekers are without documents or with lapsed

documents, making them effectively illegal in South Africa. The parents, therefore will need their children to be admitted in schools, and due to the fact that they don't have the necessary documents for admission, it becomes a problem to the parents and to the schools as well because the parents do not take this as fair on their side, as they regard the schools as denying admission to their children.

Another participant, P2 elucidated that:

in terms of South African School's Act No 84 of 1996, and the admission Policy for ordinary public schools, no child may be excluded nor denied admission into a school on the ground of his or her race or nationality, or lack of identification documents, but our schools don't accept that, they need proper admission documents, and these poses a challenge to the parents who knows the admission policies and admission laws. According to admission policy, all children from migrant parents need to be admitted in all ordinary public schools, even though they don't have required documents for admission, and the principals must in the meantime try to help the parents to find the relevant documents for admission while the children are learning (South African School's Act, 1996).

SGB4 also added:

We as parents in the community do not understand the policy concerning the foreign Grade R learners in detail. I just know every child is supposed to be in school whether South African or a foreigner. The Principal and teachers know better. The English is deep for me there.

SGB 2 said

The foreign learners must be given opportunities to attend school even though they don't have the required documents as they can be threats to the community if they don't attend school.

SGB 3 added a different aspect and said

They can steal from the community members if they don't attend school.

T 2 simply gave an example of the SASA and said

The foreign children have a right to school according to South African School's Act.

T1 said:

Let them be given a chance to go to school with other learners while still young.

T3 opined:

Children should not be punished for the mistakes of their parents not bringing the require documents for admission.

The Grade R admission policy seems to accommodate all children irrespective of nationality and upholds the children's right to education. It allows for provisional admission for those trying to regularise their stay by seeking the relevant permits. Although some of the participants alluded to the fact that they did not understand the language used in the admissions policy documents, of importance to note is that they knew every child had a right to learn in school.

4.3.5.7 Inadequate training on the admission policy

In interviewing certain members of the admission committee members and SGBs about implementation of Grade R admission policy, the researcher found negative responses. There were feelings that much still needed to be done on the policy and there were some challenges faced by the admission committee and SGBs in the implementation of the policy. One participant ADCS3 stated:

The department before implementation must stop undermining us and come and visit our schools to make sure that the policy can work.

The participants further added that those problems would always be encountered as long as the stakeholders were not involved in decision making processes such as policy formulations. There appears to be no stance taken to grant stakeholders greater formal authority to initiate and formulate policy in the central domains of budget, personnel and program implementation.

From the participants' responses, it appeared as if some teachers did not want to teach or attend the training on the Grade R admission policy because they felt there is no value added in attending such training. It was further revealed that some teachers refused to cooperate with those who were adopting new policies for implementation, thereby undermining the authority of the District officials, whose primary task is to ensure that teachers are following the school policies that are introduced timeously. The responses given by the teachers are below. T3 said:

The challenge regards the fact that, when we go to workshops to learn about the Grade R admission policy our learners are left alone as no one needs them as according to other teachers, Grade Rs are noisy, ill disciplined, young as well as stressing. As a result we feel it is better for us to attend to our learners rather than attend the training.

P3 added another negative observation:

Even when we are from the workshops, we don't come with ideas because the people who workshop us, are also not good on what they say. They just obey the rules from above and even tell that they are also workers and not have a say on the policy implementations. We feel we can contribute and improve a lot in the implementation programme but are degraded, frustrated and dismayed by partial involvement by DoE.

The above statements also prove that the DoE takes a high-handed autocratic approach when it comes to making decisions that affect schools on the Grade R implementation process.

When questioned on why do problems still exist in the implementation of the policy of Grade R admission:

P1 responded:

It is due to the fact that decision making is centralized. As long as stakeholders are not invited when decisions are to be taken regarding the implementation policy, problems will always be there.

On the other hand most of the teachers, SGBs felt the reason why most of the problems were because of issues of pertaining to training. Below is an example of one of the responses:

We are called for training, but most of the time even the facilitators are not sure about what they are telling us.

SGBs4 had this to say:

Most for the time must be spent on teaching the learners not going up and down for training.

However, the district officials was not in agreement with the views of the teachers and the SGBs and advanced as follows:

We call meetings for training purposes; teachers are reluctant to attend even if they do not know what all is about.

On the other hand, ADCS4 stated:

We are doing dangerous jobs of admitting Grade R learners as most of the parents do not understand the admission policy. We need to be trained on how to handle such situations.

From the responses it may be deduced that participants did not see it worthwhile to attend trainings on the implementation of the Grade R policy because they feel belittled by authorities yet they can offer valuable contributions to its improvement. They also seemed

to undermine their trainers and suggest that they are not as knowledgeable as they claim. Other participants felt they were wasting their learners' time by attending the trainings.

4.3.5.8 Language issue

On language, the Grade R admission policy states that language should not be used as reason to refuse admission of learners. The participants considered this a challenge when they look at implementation of the Grade R admission policy.

P2 commented:

When we look at the policy stipulation it tries to embrace multiculturalism, language differences, however, when it comes to classroom practice it becomes a problem. For example, on starting school, children find themselves in a new physical environment. As such, the classroom is new, most of the classmates are strangers, and the centre of authority (the teacher) is also a stranger too. The structure of way of learning is also new. If in addition to these things, there is an abrupt change in the language of interaction, then the situation can get quite complicated.

Participant from admission committee, ACS2 also commented:

Indeed it can negatively affect a child's progress. However, by using the learner's home language, schools can help children navigate the new environment and bridge their learning at school with the experience they bring from home.

Teachers voiced their mixed feelings on the issue on language. For example:

T4 added:

We do not mind admitting learners of varied language backgrounds but our language policy also stipulates that we should teach using the child's mother tongue in lower grades for the child to learn maximally. How then am I expected to teach the learners using their different languages. I do not even know some of these languages. As a teacher I feel disempowered.

In agreement, FGD3 commented:

It is true the admission policy wants us to enrol children irrespective of language spoken at home. It does not look at the challenges it creates for the teacher.

All the participants from the four schools were of the same idea that, by using the learner's home language, learners are more likely to engage in the learning process. The interactive learner centred approach-recommended by all educationists-thrives in an environment where learners are sufficiently proficient in the language of instruction. It also allows learners to make suggestions, ask questions, answer questions and create and communicate new knowledge with enthusiasm. It gives learners confidence and helps to affirm their cultural identity. This in turn has a positive impact on the way learners see the relevance of school to their lives. However, there are negatives too such as the burden the teacher has in teaching Grade R Learners in their "mother tongue" yet they come from different backgrounds which use different mother tongue .

Another issue that emerged was that Admission policies call for schools to capture biographical data of learners, however, not too much detail is captured to assist teachers in dealing with different learner's backgrounds. Some of the young learners admitted for Grade R at the primary schools do not have proper guardians at home due to work related issues or the death of their parents due to the chronic illnesses of today. This was brought to the fore by one participant T2 who said:

The admission policy allows us to capture details of learners; however, we do not capture much. We discover their issues along the line. For example, many of our learners lost one or both parents. You sometimes notice children crying. When we try to calm them or try to talk to the children they start to cry by saying my mother is dead please don't shout at me.

This causes a problem to the Grade R educators because they are unable to impose discipline to the learners as they also feel pity for the young ones. Yet these are some of

the issues that should be picked out right from the start so that the schools may have an idea of the unique background information that each may possess.

4.4 Document analysis

With regard to involvement of the stakeholders in decision-making processes document analysis failed to reveal any invitation to a circuit or district meeting where decisions were made. The researcher requested and asked for permission to view the SGB minute books to validate the statements and so as to support them. The only evidence that could be found were report back meetings where all the school principals had given reports to SGBs on matters from district meetings and implementation of the admissions policy matters were found in these minutes. The researcher tried in vain to get hold of the implementing official from the district. Many appointments were set up, but were not honoured by the district official. This was an attempt to validate the perceptions made by the stakeholders but to no avail.

4.5 Chapter summary

This chapter presented the analysis and interpretation of the data that were obtained through semi structured interviews, focus group discussions and document analysis in four primary schools in Makhutswe circuit in Mopani district, Limpopo province on the implementation of Grade R admission policy. Thematic content analysis was used. The findings of the study show that the Grade R admission policy was formulated without the participant's knowledge and consultation. As a result, the challenges that experienced were due to lack of consultation of the policy implementation as well as clear strategies to adopt during the implementation process. The results showed that the school were responsible for policy implementation. There was evidence of some schools under study to implement the policy as directed. The study also indicated that though there was training being offered by the District office on how to implement the admission policy, most of the teachers who are the policy implementers tended to abscond from such trainings while other teachers highlighted that the training were not only limited but the facilitators lacked adequate knowledge on how the policies should be implemented. Thus, due poor facilitation of the workshop and training they saw this as a waste of time.

Meanwhile though there were a number of challenges that were highlighted by schools in implementing the policy such as lack of adequate documents, inclusive education, multiculturalism of importance to note was that all the policy implementers knew that every child had the right to education as stated in the constitution of the country. The study indicated that in all the four schools, the DoE took decisions without consulting the stakeholders. This in turn frustrated the stakeholders as they felt useless in being not given the respect due to them. The data stated that where stakeholders were not involved in the implementation process policy formulations, there will be challenges that will come out. Stakeholders were of the view that their involvement would drive them to be participatory participants in the programme. Thus it may be inferred that by consulting the principals, the DoE appeared to be cutting corners on how the admissions policy should be implementing instead of mobilizing SGBs, the teachers and the admission committees at once.

The emerging results also illuminated that, there is need for the stakeholders to be involved, capacitated and monitored in all levels of school governance because they are the ones who are answerable to all school happenings. However, this appeared to be limited by gauging with the responses of the participants. The majority of the participants felt that by being involved, they are empowered to own, monitor and make improvements to the implementation process so as to boost their morale and commitment in implementing the policy. The next chapter discusses the findings of the study.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the data presented in the previous chapter and is anchored on the main aim of the study which was investigating the implementation of the Grade R admissions policy in primary schools. As such three main research questions and objectives were formulated to guide the study. In this chapter, each broad theme is in line with the sub-research questions which clearly demonstrate issues pertaining to the phenomenon under study.

5.2 Availability of Grade R Admissions Policy in Schools

The study sought to find out from the participants if the schools under study were in possession of the Grade R admissions policy. The findings of the study revealed that both the policy makers and policy implementers in schools under study had both hard and the soft copies of the admissions policy which they had customised from the main policy which had been rolled out by the Department of Education. The findings of the study are in line with the top-down theory adopted in this study which represents the policy makers views (Paudel, 2009) as well the bottom up theory which represents the voices of the policy implementers (Lipsky, 1980).

Another important factor that emerged from the principals was that the District Officials always demanded to see the policy documents during school visits. The above findings demonstrate a link between the district officials and the school principals to ensure that the admissions policy for Grade R is known by all the stakeholders. Moreover this shows a link between the schools and what was mandated by DBE when introducing the Reception Grade (Grade R) admission policy in public schools to ensure children have an opportunity to go through preschool classes before they enrol in formal basic education.

5.3 Implementation of Grade R Admissions Policy

According to Woods and Miles (2014) the involvement of policy makers and the policy implementers in policy making and implementation addresses the problem of policy makers on deciding what should be the best for its employees instead of involving them in the policy. In this study, the findings revealed that there were number of strategies that were adopted by school principals to ensure that the admissions policy was implemented which ranged from selection committee to nomination of teachers to be in charge of the admissions policy. The findings of the study are in line with (Blatchford, 2014) who posits that Grade R admission policy is implemented with the permission of the school authorities. The findings of the study are also in tandem with what is captured in extant literature that the school principals are responsible for selecting an admissions committee members from the staff, who are computer literate so that they may be able to capture the newly admitted learners in the South African School Administration and Management System (SASAMS) (Atmore et. al, 2012; Franklin & McLaren, 2015).

Meanwhile, it also emerged from the findings that even though the policy for Grade R learners stated that learners should be admitted at age 4 and half turning 5 on or before the end of June, it was also important to consider the stature of a child. Moreover, some of the schools under study further highlighted that that no child must be admitted to Grade R if that child had not attended a day care centre (crèche). The foregoing sentiments are also seconded by other scholars that even though some of the government policies or departmental policies specify how the admission and enrolment system should work (Dockett and Perry, 2009; Williams, 2004), a majority of the schools tend to customise the admissions policy to suit their needs. Blatchford (2014) also endorses the above and posits that globally, admissions into early childhood development classes is not easy, and may be largely characterised by discriminatory trends from various role players.

Meanwhile, the findings of the study also showed that some of the school heads did not consult with the parents who formed part of the SGBs on how the policy should be implemented. According to Franklin and McLaren (2015: 53) the South African Schools Act provides for democratically elected School Governing Bodies (SGBs) to preside over all public schools in South Africa. As such, as a way of maintaining the school as a community-based institution, each SGB is empowered under SASA to determine the

school's admission policy as captured in section 5(5) of the SASSA of 1996 which states that "the admission policy of a public school is determined by the governing body of such school".

However the findings of the study show that the majority of the schools under research were failing to abide with this directive. For example, most of the SGBs members when questioned showed their displeasure and felt they were being side-lined and that their roles were not being taken seriously. As such if the SGBs are not involved this means that they are not capable of playing their roles and responsibilities effectively. According to Mason & Carter, (2016) advance that involve all subordinates is critical particularly in cases whereby there is need to make an agreement over priorities as this makes it easier to understand the complexities of the policy making process by all stakeholders.

The foregoing views are in line with the related literature that policy implementation is an important stage of policy making which requires all stakeholders to be involved so as put policies into effect with a view to attaining the policy goals (Khan, 2016; Simon, 2010). Furthermore, the results of the study are not in line with what is supported by the bottom-up approach adopted in this study that the policy implementers are considered to have a better understanding of what clients need because they have direct contact with the public. Hence, the reason why the approach was adopted because its advantages are embedded in the formal and informal relationships of the various sub-systems that are involved in making and implementing the policy (Grade R admission policy).

Meanwhile some of the responses that emerged particularly from the focus group participants revealed that not only was there lack of consultation from the DBE but that departmental officials were not doing enough to train and workshop the lower level policy implementers before implementation process. As a result, the SGBs had been eliminated in the process. Findings of the study indicate that there was a need to conduct training for policy implementers as to know how, when and who was responsible for implementing the admissions policy. In support of the foregoing views are Martensson and Roxa (2015) and Council of Higher Education (2015) who posit that training programs should take place through organised workshops by the department or school leadership. Nadler (2013:3) indicates that training serves the purpose of helping employees learn what they should do

for the achievement of the organisational goals. In this case the organisational goal is to ensure that not only is the admission policy flawlessly implemented but should involve all the relevant stakeholders in the implementation process.

On the other hand, the results of the study also revealed that a majority of the teachers also felt that there were gaps in how the admissions policy was introduced to them whereas the principals felt they had not been given the opportunity to give their input, due to the top-down approach to policy implementation that had been adopted by the DBE. Their views are in tandem with what is subscribed within the top-down theory that, this theory is discriminatory, hierarchical in nature hence, too controlling (Van Meter & Van Horn, 1975). As a result, they felt the admission policy was just thrown to schools and that the DBE just laid down a policy with guidelines for the schools to follow. Thus, the findings of the study imply what is advanced by Pulzl and Treib, (2007) that the majority of prevailing policies designed, tend to reflect the leaders' values which generally preserve the status quo and the Grade R admission policy is not an exception to these sentiments.

5.4 The roles and responsibilities of the admission committee

Another important issue that emerged from the study was that the admissions committee had clear cut roles and responsibilities to ensure that the policy was implemented effectively and efficiently. For example it could be noted that some of the roles involved members screening of the required documentation before admission such as birth certificate, the immunisation cards, the parents or the guardian's certified ID copy as well and the age of the child. The issue of feeder zone also emerged as critical. From their responses, participants showed that they tried to follow what was prescribed within the Grade R admission policy as mandated by the DBE. The process involved, amongst others, completion of forms, checking the accompanying documents to verify compliance in age and immunisation status.

As highlighted in the literature review, admission of learners in South Africa from Grades R to 12 has to be in line with the Constitution of South Africa, the South African Schools Act (SASA) of 1996 as amended, Admissions Policy for Ordinary Public Schools of 1998

and any other applicable provincial laws (Eastern Cape Department of Education, 2018; Mestry, 2017; Franklin & Maclaren, 2015). Furthermore, it was highlighted that one of the responsibilities of the admissions committees was adherence to feeder zone policy. These views are supported by a number government documents where it is clearly articulated that determining feeder zones is based on the premise of controlling the number of learners in schools and to co-ordinate parental preferences in ordinary public schools (Mestry, 2017, Department of Basic Education, 2011, department of Education, 2003, South African School's Act, 1996). However, some schools have been accused of implementing their own feeder zone policies to limit the number of learners who may be admitted (Manfield-Barry & Stwayi, 2016). On the other hand, the default 5 km feeder zone has been viewed as a replication of the apartheid spatial inequality (de Kadt, 2018). Thus, as highlighted in the review of related literature that, demarcating feeder zones and the revision of admissions policies has been cited as not only deeply political but also technically complex Mestry, 2017 & South African's School's Act, 1996).

Of importance to note was that some of the learners were denied admission due to over-age and were termed to be problematic children. However, this study does not support the issue of discriminating learners and denying admission to Grade R because of their age as advanced by (Eastern Cape Department of Education, 2018; Mestry, 2017; Franklin & McLaren, 2015; Republic of South Africa, 1996). Though the foregoing scholars highlight that the implementation of admission policies at all levels is supposed to take into consideration equity and non-discrimination in all aspects, there are some researchers that counteract these views. For instance, de Kadt, (2018); and Manfield-Barry & Stwayi, (2016) suggest that quality assurance activities for learners' selection cannot be understated as such minimum entry requirements must be consistent with policy.

Furthermore, literature from both developing and developed countries suggests that children who are admitted to Grade R perform far better as compared to those who are denied admission. Reason being, Grade R is an investment in early childhood and a powerful and sound economic strategy (Bukaliya and Mubika, 2012; Mustard, 2010;

Hertzman 2010; Shonkoff, 2009 and Masse & Barnett, 2002:157). Further to this, research shows that those children who are unable to access preschool programs, especially those from poor socio-economic backgrounds, are most likely to suffer from poor growth and skills development retardation when they miss out on Grade R admission (Reid & Kagan, 2015).

Moreover, the issue of the right to education as prescribed in Section 7(2) of the South African Constitution mandates that the state must respect, protect, promote and fulfil the rights to basic and further education and Grade R is not an exception to this. The Constitutional Court has therefore held that the right to a basic education imposes a positive obligation on the state to provide and make basic education available to every person regardless of sex, age, race and religion. (Masse & Barnett, 2002:157). The results indicate that children in (Grade R) consistently performed far better than those in the control group who did not receive the services. Hence, implementation of admission policies at all levels is supposed to take into consideration equity and non-discrimination in all aspects (Eastern Cape Department of Education, 2018; Mestry, 2017; Franklin & McLaren, 2015; Republic of South Africa, 1996).

On the other hand, a different perspectives was raised by some of the committee members and the school principals who highlighted that some parents failed to bring the necessary documents during the admission process. As such, this has led to misunderstanding between the parents and the members of the admissions committee, with some parents threatening the schools authorities. Writing from a Kenyan perspective it was highlighted in the review of related literature by Whitehead, (2010) that policies in any school environment require wider consultations with different stakeholders. This will guarantee that children, families, and community voices are included to ensure a common understanding and ownership of the policy. The findings of the study further infer that the school authorities were not well versed with how the policy should be implemented neither had they disseminated information to parents concerning the processes and the document required for grade R admissions. In support of the foregoing assertions the South African Schools Act (Republic of South Africa, 1996); and Eastern Cape Department of Education (ECDoE, 2008) posits that teachers should also work with

parents to ensure there are no challenges regarding admission of learners into Grade R class. This is because, the implementation of Grade R admission policy has created opportunities for the upliftment of the children, the parents and the greater community (Atmore et. al., 2012). Accordingly Hyde and Kabiru (2012:43) echo the above sentiments and advance that, for South Africa to implement efficient policy, that is operational and effective in providing education to young children, it is important that all role-players are involved. Unfortunately, research shows that even though the children's rights to education are prioritised through policy and legislation, these policies are often inefficiently implemented in schools (Ritcher & Dawes, 2008: 79). Therefore, it may be concluded that there is need for schools under study to abide with guidelines given by the Director Circular Number 48 of (2007) which guides' schools with regard to the admission process.

5.5 Support and monitoring of the Grade R admissions policy

Research shows that where there is support and monitoring of the admission policy, accountability and transparency is not only enhanced but competent feedback systems, political will is also promoted so that the goals and objectives are realised (Castilla, 2016). As such, when asked how the Grade R admissions policy was supported and monitored, it was found that most of the schools adopted divergent monitoring and support mechanisms. It was revealed in the study by majority of participants that monitoring was observed through admission forms as prescribed by SASAMS given to feeder day care centres to complete and submit in the last quarter of the year for the following year. The findings of the study highlight that these schools follow what was prescribed back in 2001 by White Paper 5 on Early Childhood Development. The findings are also buttressed by the South African National Integrated Early Childhood Development Policy (Department of Social Development, 2015) that government is responsible for the development, monitoring, quality control of policies in schools. Therefore, it is imperative that all the relevant line departments, ensure appropriate quality and qualification norms and standards that should be put in place.

In essence, it may be implied that these schools work hand in hand with the surrounding day care centres to ensure that no child is left behind in the admissions process and that

the parents are well aware of the terms and conditions required for the admission process. Furthermore, the results of the study are in support of what is advanced in the extant literature that it is critical that all the children are given the opportunity to attend Grade R to avoid achievement gaps. Consequently, those children who are unable to access preschool programs, especially those from poor socio-economic backgrounds, will most likely start foundation phase behind those who did attend preschool programs, leading to achievement gaps (Garcia & Weiss, 2015; Reid & Kagan, 2015).

It further emerged from the participants that as a way of monitoring effective implementation of the Grade R policy, surrounding feeder zones crèches also checked for Grade R readiness by honouring the children with certificates for completing day care centres attendance. However some studies refute the findings of the study and argue that chronological age cannot be used as a measure for school readiness due to different socio economic status that the children may be exposed to such as emotional and environmental deprivations (Edward, 1999).

Although Palaiologou, (2016:134) argues that early years education and care should prepare children to be 'ready' for school, Wood and Moss (2007:14) are of the view that the word 'readiness' has amassed scores of different meanings, provoked legions of debates and confused parents and teachers. Therefore, the researcher is of the view that issuing of certificates after completion by day care centres may not be effective in gauging if the child is ready for Grade R admission more so, whether the parents will be aware of the requirements for Grade R admission.

Accordingly, Mabugu and Rakabe, (2015) highlight that more than 4.8-million – 73% – of ECD-eligible children live within a 5km radius of an ECD centre and yet parents opt to keep their children at home or delay enrolment at least until grade one. Thus, it may be assumed that the SGBs fall short of promoting the importance of ECD as a result, support towards adherence of the admission policy tends to be limited. Rubio-Codina, Araujo, Attanasio, Munoz and Grantham-McGregor, (2016) posit that parents represented through the SGBs and civic organisations are also important members of the monitoring process as such, should be well versed of the policies in place. In essence what is highlighted by these scholars is commensurate with what was highlighted by admission

committee members, teachers and the principals in a majority of schools under study that a majority of the parents were not aware of the requirements of the admissions policy.

However, Hoadley (2013) writing on Building Strong Foundations: Improving the quality of early education.' South Africa Child Gauge stresses that support and monitoring of Grade R admission policy will be difficult because much of the home background and preparedness of learners is closely related to issues of poverty, such as access to books and parental engagement. Therefore, this scholar stresses that effective support and monitoring of the admission policy requires offering earlier interventions as such making Grade R compulsory. Further to this, research shows that those children who are unable to access preschool programs, especially those from poor socio-economic backgrounds, are most likely to suffer from poor growth and skills development retardation particularly if they miss out on Grade R admission (Reid & Kagan, 2015; Franklin & McLaren, 2015; DBE, 2011).

Meanwhile, it is the role of the district to advise the schools on how to set their own admission policy through discussions with their school SGBs. Accordingly, Taylor (2011) further advances that the capacity of SGBs cannot be understated to ensure that they are able to effectively exercise the duty to, among other things, select effective school leadership and oversee that their schools are managed properly. The findings of the study are in line with the foregoing assertions that the DoE and the District Office as part of advising the schools on how to implement the admission policy provide teachers with ongoing training and workshops for implementation process.

However, some of the participants reported that though the admission policy is supported and monitored but it was not to their satisfaction and support was very limited. Though participation of teachers is commensurate with the bottom-up theory used in this study the findings of the study from the other schools painted a very different picture. For instance it emerged from one of the admission committee that teachers are not involved in the implementation of Grade R admission policy at their schools and neither did they know when and how the policy was monitored. In this study an analysis of the results shows that lack of involvement in decision making made it difficult for the teachers to support the whole process. As such, Franklin & McLaren, (2015) posit that monitoring

and evaluation of the admission policies cannot be understated because some schools do not even understand admission policies. Moreover, the review of related literature shows that there is a need for development and testing of integrated interventions such as monitoring and evaluation through policy (Hurley, Yousafzai & Lopez-Boo, 2016). It is envisaged that taking such a stance this will assist schools to promote best practices in their admissions policies such as promoting communities of practice among all stakeholders. According to Maloney and Koza (2011) there five key characteristics for effective communities of practice namely:

- Clear vision and mission;
- Commitment of school leadership to the learning process;
- Shared practice;
- Team work and group problems; and
- Supportive conditions;

Furthermore, ensuring that schools understand the policy by training SGBs and admission committee members and calling parents meetings is vital. Reason being, policy implementers can only implement a policy properly if they understand it and what is expected of them (Pulzl & Treib, 2007; Williman, 2004). A policy gives guidelines about how policy makers and implementers deal with admission issues (Kathyanga, 2011). Thus, the findings of the study differ from what is advocated for by the bottom-up theory which supports active participation of the policy implementers to promote a sense of ownership and commitment to the successful implementation of the Grade R admissions policy. Paudel (2009) further advances that, inclusion of policy implementers during the monitoring and evaluation process means avoiding alienating the very implementers of the policy. Instead lack of involvement of the teachers who are the policy implementers is commensurate with the top-down theory whereby policy implementation is seen as taking place in a chain, starting with the policy message from the policy makers. This is in tandem with the findings of the study because the implementation process of the admission policy in schools is also assumed to start from the DBE to the provincial level and then district level and this should be in line with the policy stated goals and objectives.

Another important issue that emerged was that support from the District office was very limited and that during the visits by the District Officials comments were made on how Grade Rs should be handled and which teaching methods to use and nothing was said about the admissions policy. This is despite the fact that SASA clearly stipulates that as part of monitoring, District Officials must have access to the register of admission to check whether proper admission policy is applied (RSA, 1996). Moreover, the District Office is also expected to monitor admission of Grade R learners by requesting the schools to give them the following documents

- reports for Grade R;
- as well as asking the admission register for Grade R learners;
- to check if all the children's information exist, such as the name of the learner, the name of the parent or guardian;
- ID number of the child and of the parent as well as;
- the learners' residential address; and
- to check whether the learner's required documents before admission have been certified before admission. (RSA, 1996; Franklin & McLaren, 2015).

However, from what emerged from the study, it may be suggested that the District Officials were failing to visit schools timeously in order to check whether the admissions have been properly done, whether the learners have been admitted at their correct ages, and if the required documents before admission had been certified or complete as called for by SASA (RSA, 1996). In support of the foregoing sentiment is the DoE (2008) which advances that support can be done by the district officials in order to help schools to set their own admission committees at the school level. For instance, the establishment of district learner admissions committees to effectively manage queries related to learner admission in the district has been advocated for. A study by Robinson (2015) supports the above view and advances that full participation of Districts Officials is vital and the district coordinator for Grade R teachers is obliged to support schools by holding workshops. Furthermore, Whitworth and Chiu (2015) state that any support and

monitoring activities must be well aligned with the national state, district and school policies. Unfortunately, these best practices are hindered by lack of transparency as well as, lack of adequate resources to monitor and support admission processes (Atmore, et al., 2012 (Stansbery & Lung'aho, 2014) as highlighted in the review of related literature. As a result, it may be inferred that schools under study are failing to take into cognizance the early childhood policy of No Child Left Behind, (UNESCO, 2014) because some learners remain locked out of the system due to lack of adequate support and monitoring mechanisms.

Some of the school principals further highlighted that as far as the decision making is concerned in the implementation process, monitoring and support at district, provincial and national levels, teachers and SGBs were not involved at all. It further emerged from the results of the study that some of the SGB members felt that their involvement was to monitor whether the policies from the Department of Education were properly implemented at school level. Simply put, the consistency in the findings of the study with regard to the phenomenon under study versus the reviewed literature is indicative that political will from all the stakeholders who are involved in the implementation, monitoring and support of the admission policy needs to be promoted. As such, the findings suggest adoption of both top-down and bottom up theories by Van Meter and Van Horn (1975) and Lipsky (1981) which anchored this study.

The foregoing findings are not in support of what is highlighted in the review of related literature by the South African National Integrated Early Childhood Development Policy (Department of Social Development, 2015) that government is responsible for the development, monitoring, quality control of policies in schools. As such, these findings raise eyebrows if at all the parents, teachers, admission committee and the principals are attuned to government's policy goals and whether the policy intentions are accompanied by the necessary effort to activate concomitant actions among those responsible for Grade R admission policy. As such Mestry, (2017) is of the view that the principals should be able to strike a balance between instructional leadership and management so that they are able to build good relations with the community as well as complying with the educational policies and Acts. Consequently, this calls for (Schachter, 2015) on-going

support and monitoring to avoid lack of synergy between policy and implementation (Steyn, 2011 Lemmer & Manyike, 2012).

Meanwhile the DO alluded to the fact that in as much as they want to offer support and monitor the implementation of the admission policy it was also difficult for them to do so but to comply with the district education office which also followed directives from national level. In light of the above, Franklin and McLaren (2015) suggest that school management and support systems need to be developed, so that the extant policy framework are attuned to the successful performances by all role players. These include teachers, principals, SGBs, school communities, district offices, national and provincial education departments to ensure adequate monitoring and support. Therefore, it may be inferred that the findings of the study suggest that district office fails to advise the schools on how to set their own admission policy through discussions with their SGBs. Hence, a majority of the participants stated that there were limited support and monitoring mechanisms in place. This is regardless of the fact that the DBE (2013) clearly outlined the roles and the responsibilities of the district offices as highlighted below:

- Planning, which District offices fulfil by collecting and analyzing school and district data and assisting schools with compiling and implementing school improvement plans;
- Support, whereby District offices provide schools with physical resources and targeted support necessary for schools to comply with education law and policy. District offices are responsible for supporting principals and teachers to improve the quality of teaching and learning through school visits, classroom observation, feedback, provision of curriculum experts such as Subject Advisors and the provision of professional development programmes;
- Oversight and Accountability through holding principals and schools accountable for their performance and accounting to the PED for the performance schools; and
- Engaging with the public.

As a result scholars such as Winter, (2003) advance that policy implementers should not accept the policy implementation rules without questioning them. But, it is also critical that they employ discretion to customize policies (admission policy) as this will build on their political will. Moreover, this will be promoting their responsiveness to any arising issues that pertain to the monitoring and support of the Grade R admission policy. However, the researcher is also of the view that if implementers are not informed about a policy or they do not understand it they will implement as they understand it themselves. In the process they might make mistakes and implementation will fail. As such people will not benefit as anticipated as was the situation in this study whereby a number of the participants alluded to lack of consultation behind to poor implementation process of the Grade R admissions policy.

5.6 Challenges in implementing the Grade R admissions policy

5.6.1 Lack of parental involvement

Positive impacts of parental involvement have not only been recognized by school administrators and teachers, but also by policy-makers who have interwoven different aspects of parental involvement in the new education initiatives and reforms (Graves & Wright, 2011; Laroque et.al, 2011). In this study lack of parent involvement came out as one of the major challenges in the implementation of the Grade R admission policy as cited by most of the participants. For instance it emerged that a majority of parents did not attend meetings related to admission of their children into Grade R and as a result, they brought inadequate documents during the registration process. The findings of the study contradict with what is highlighted by the DBE (2010) which states that parents know their rights and also those of their children. Reason being, failure to attend meeting implies that some of the parents are not interested in the education of accessing proper admission for their children. However, recent research by Valdés, (2017) advances that lack of parental involvement is not because they are not interested but aligned to social issues such as parental illiteracy, poverty and unemployment. As a result, the implementation of Grade R admission policy continues to be fraught with some challenges in South African schools (Fleisch, 2008; Spaull, 2013) and misinterpretation

of the policy as well as lack of understanding of the importance of Grade R (Spaull, 2013). This suggests that policy implementation of Grade R was done using the top-down approach, an indication that admissions policy reflects the leaders' values which generally preserve the status quo without considering the participation or listening policy implementer's views (Pulzl & Treib, 2007).

Other issue that was revealed was failure by parents to pay fees and this affected their involvement. The Education Amendment Act of 2006 on the "No Fee" schools policy abolishes school fees in the poorest 40% of schools for Grade R learners. The policy states that schools that are not classified as No fee Schools may charge school fees, emphasising that no child should be disadvantaged if a parent does not pay the Grade R fees as per RSA SASA regulations (RSA, 1996). In addition, the South African School's Act of 1996 says that schools cannot refuse to register learners who are unable to pay registration fees. However, the findings of the study are dissimilar with that is prescribed in the policy documents and what is written by other scholars. For instance, the province where the study was conducted is one of the poorest in South Africa and as such these schools fall under the 40% No Fees category. However, concerns have been raised that school principals in the 40% No Fees category tend to demand a lot of things which are against the policy (Christie, 2008). Furthermore, educational authorities that are expected to lead to admission of children into Grade R have been accused of abusing their positions (Sayed & Soudien, 2015) and also failing to involve the parents. An earlier study by Desforges (2003) advances a dearth of parental involvement can be curbed by:

- providing parents with information;
- giving parents a voice; and
- encouraging parental partnerships with schools.

On the other hand, the issue of school fees, and the provision of adequate funding and human and physical resources to schools serving learners who do not pay fees continues to substantially impact the ability of learners to access schools of an adequate quality (DoE, 2006). This may also be the reason why the schools under study were demanding that parents pay fees as a way of ensuring that they are able to provide quality education

for the learners. Woolman and Fleisch (2006) have commented extensively on how SGBs have a vested interest in intimidating parents into paying fees beyond their means and in dissuading parents who cannot pay those fees from seeking admittance for their children.

5.6.2 Forceful demand for admissions and lack of accurate documents

Another challenge identified from the responses was issue of forceful demand for admissions by parents and guardians. The participants revealed that parents brought children that were either too young to be admitted or children that had not attended day care centres at all. In addition, one of the principals alluded to the fact that they were forced by parents to admit learners not following the policy yet they were also bound by law and ethics. However, research studies indicate that collaboration between the schools and parents is substandard, and haphazard leading to both parties questioning each other on how other children are admitted and others are denied admission yet they will be of the same age (Maluleke, 2014). As a result, a study by Excell and Linnington, (2011) advances that most parents were concerned about the abuse of power by school principals, teachers, SMTs and HOD, as they were accused of denying well qualifying children admission into Grade R, based on nepotism, and fraud. In support of the foregoing, it has also noted that a lack of common standards concerning admission of learners into Grade R despite the existence of the legislations and policies has exacerbated the whole admission process (European Commission, 2011, Clampett, 2016). As noted, these differing practices make it difficult to agree on exactly what needs to be done or for parents to know before the children enter Grade R (Sibley, Dearing, Toopeliarg, Mykletun, & Zachrisson, 2015). Hence, this may be the reason why some parents forcefully sought admission for their children.

Furthermore, some of the SGBs and admissions committee members felt that some parents thought they owned the schools and as such did not bother to secure required and accurate documents for their children. Though, it is clearly stipulated that no learners should be denied admission to a school due to insufficient documents (RSA, 2011), research by Excell and Linnington, (2011) highlights that parents are accused of not securing correct documentation hence their children are denied admission.

The responses also illuminated that some parents knew how to cheat the system by getting fake documents that their children were ready for school to avoid paying fees in EDC phase. This resulted in some learners getting admission into Grade R before or after they reached the required age. The above gets support from a study by Murray, Cooper, Arteche, Stein and Tomlison, (2016) which found out that families from lower-income to middle income earners and the less educated families rarely participated in ECD programmes as compared to those from high socio-economic backgrounds (European Commission, 2011). Thus, while governments enact policies to promote and protect disadvantaged children, especially those affected by socioeconomic gaps, there is little on the ground to support these efforts globally leading to parent or guardians coming up with tactics to cheat the system (Camilli, Vargas, Ryan & Barnett, 2010).

5.6.3 Chronic illnesses

According to (UNESCO, 1994) every education system should be designed and have in place educational programmes that are implemented to take into account the wide diversity of the characteristics and needs of children. In addition, SASA prohibits public schools, SGBs, principals and other school administrators, from administering admissions tests related to the admission of any learners (DBE, 2010; RSA, 1996). The foregoing assertions are in line with the findings of the study that schools were forced to admit all children and not discriminate as stipulated in the policy irrespective of how sick a learner was or if they were living with some form of impairment or disability. Though the responses of the all the participants showed that the schools under study recognised inclusive education, the problem that emerged was that there were no guidelines or training on how to deal with these circumstances as some of these learners needed special care. These responses show that it is important that teachers have adequate training and sufficient support to successfully implement inclusive education even during admission processes (DoE, 2001). This will assist them to screen learners at the beginning of every new school through admission of learners as well as, in the beginning of each phase as supported by the DBE, (2014). In support of the foregoing views is Brown, (2015) who posits that one of the most crucial role of District Based Support Team (DBSTs) is to orient management and professional staff on inclusive education and

establish early identification of procedures in primary schools' foundation phase (Grade R - 3) so that the *loco parentis* role can be fully realised. However, Blanks (2014) suggests that lack of professional training and adequate resources and development by school authorities and lack of support (Walsh, 2018) are the key reasons for failure to cater for all children hence some of the learners are denied admission to Grade R. As such, reference is made on what was highlighted earlier that some parents bring incomplete documents and this makes it difficult for school to have updated learner profile. This is regardless of the fact that the DBE (2014) clearly outlined that during admission of Grade R in South Africa, it is paramount that screening is used to see if a learner is at risk through learners' profile which is done on admission for first timers. The following documents are required on admission in new school.

- Road to Health document;
- Birth certificate;
- Form completed by the parents;
- Transfer card (last report, affidavit and document from previous school);
- Proof of parents' ID/ Document legal relationship; and
- Most recent report (DBE, 2014).

Thus from the above it is clear that the rights and wishes of learners with special education needs must be taken into account at the admission of the learners to an ordinary public school (RSA, 1996; DBE, 2011). According to SASA, schools are encouraged to make the necessary arrangements, as far as practically possible, to make their facilities accessible to such learners. This is also in line with what is outlined in White Paper 6 of 2001 regarding inclusive education in South Africa (Department of Education, 2001).

5.6.4 School transport

The Grade R admission policy also creates another challenge of transport. Schools are encouraged to enrol children in their feeder zone. However, the guidelines on distance give options whereby there is provision for either transport or hostel accommodation on a progressively phased and pro-poor basis for learners that have to walk more than 5 kilometres to their closest public school (Franklin & McLaren, 2015). However, one major

challenge was lack of commitment of transport supply. In addition, safe and affordable transport remained a significant and common barrier preventing the most vulnerable and marginalised children from accessing schools. In line with the findings of the study is a report in 2014 by the South African Human Rights Commission. The report highlights that the nexus between learner transport and the right to a basic education remained questionable due to failure to provide subsidised transport to learners traveling over 5 km to school in some provinces in South Africa. Meanwhile referring to lack of commitment on learner transport, Motshegka in 2015 stressed that learner transport was key in ensuring access and retention of learners in basic education system. Hence, scholar transport should be reliable and ensure the safety of learners while in transit. Furthermore, the DBE (2015) advances that there have been some shortcomings in the provisioning of learner transportation to insufficient budgets, increasing learner transport need, lack of capacity in provincial learner transport units, use of un-roadworthy vehicles and overloading of vehicles.

5.6.5 Admission of learners who are foreign nationals or non-citizens

Another challenge that emerged was admitting learners who were foreign nationals. There emerged mixed responses. Some participants said that there were a number of children with expired documents and this resulted in these children being denied admission. The findings of the study are in line with what is captured in the South African Schools Act, 1996. This policy applies equally to learners who are not citizens of the Republic of South Africa and whose parents are in possession of a permit for temporary or permanent residence issued by the Department of Home Affairs. A learner who entered the country on a study permit must present the study permit on admission to the public school. On the other hand, some of the participants felt that despite lack of necessary documentation every child had the right to education whether South African or a foreign national. The responses of these participants is commensurate with Section 7(2) of the South African Constitution which mandates that the state must respect, protect, promote and fulfil the rights to a basic and further education. Moreover, the findings of the study show that the participants were aware that South Africa is signatory of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR); International Covenant on Economic, Social and

Cultural Rights (ICESCR) which recognise the right to education without qualification. Whereas, the Economic, Social and Cultural Rights general remarks on the right to receive an education (known as the 4 A-s) and stresses that education in all its forms and at all levels shall exhibit the following interrelated and essential features: availability; accessibility, adaptability and acceptability. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Child Rights Convention) also recognises that children have the right to education. Regionally, Article 11 of the African Union's African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, Aliens Control Act, 1991 (No. 96 of 1991) and Refugees Act (No. 130 of 1996) makes further provision for every child to have the right to a basic education which, among other things, is free and compulsory. Therefore all learners, be it they are classified as illegal aliens, nationals and foreigner nationals when they apply for admission should be given the opportunities to attend school. On the other hand provisional admission should be allowed for those trying to regularise their stay by seeking the relevant permits.

5.6.5 Language issue

In the Grade R admission policy it is clearly stated that language shall not be used as reason to refuse admission of learners. Moreover the World Bank (2005) further stresses that learning in one's own language holds various advantages for learners, including increased access, improved learning outcomes, reduced chances of repetition and drop-outs and socio-cultural benefits. In this study, the findings revealed that the Grade R admissions policy embraced multiculturalism, language differences. Hence, it was critical that the learner's home language was used in schools to assist children to navigate their new school environment and bridge their learning at school with the experience they bring from home. The DBE in its 2010 report on the Status of Language of Learning and Teaching (LOLT) in South Africa stressed that where learners do not speak the language of instruction, authentic teaching and learning cannot take place and that such a situation largely accounts for school ineffectiveness and low academic achievement experienced by students in South Africa. The findings of the report by the DBE 2010 also illuminates the findings of the current study whereby some of the participants highlighted that teaching using the child's mother tongue in lower grades for the child to learn maximally

was not a problem, the challenge was to teach the learners using their different languages. As a result, the teachers said they felt disempowered as they did not know some of these languages. However, a convergence of literature show that the language policy of the school must take into account the broader needs of the community in which the school is located (Mestry, 2017; Manfield-Barry & Stwayi, 2016; DBE, 2011; DoE, 2003; RSA, 1996). As such, as highlighted in the review of related literature, language should not be used as reason to refuse admission of learners and the language policy must reflect language or languages spoken by the learners to avoid a situation whereby schools fail adhere to the language policy and admission of learners policy (Hornberger, 2002; Manfield-Barry & Stwayi, 2016). Language awareness campaigns are necessary in order to arouse public interest in language matters in terms of legislation (Department of Arts and Culture, 2003; DBE, 2011; Manfield-Barry & Stwayi, 2016; Mestry, 2017). The language policy must reflect the language or languages spoken by the learners. The school must accommodate learners who speak different languages by employing qualified teachers from different ethnic groups to accommodate multilingualism (Mestry, 2017; Manfield-Barry & Stwayi, 2016; DBE, 2011; RSA, 1996). However, (Preston et.al. 2012 & Msila 2014) state that many South African Grade R practitioners have no formal qualifications and training to teach African languages in South Africa. The same views are echoed by Taylor, and Coetzee, (2013) who advance that:

There is a shortage of teachers in the system qualified and skilled at teaching in African home languages;

- SGBs are responsible for determining the school's language policies including LOLT and many parents prefer their children to be taught in English even if that is not the language spoken at home; and
- teaching materials are often not properly procured for learners speaking African home language, which accounts for the vast majority of South Africa's learners.

Consequently, the above mentioned factors have been used by some school as excuses of not admitting Grade R learners into the system. Therefore, it is important to adopt what is highlighted Section 29(2) of the Bill of Rights that everyone has the right to receive education in the language of their choice where reasonably practical, taking into account the need for historical redress because of past racially discriminatory laws under

apartheid. (Mestry, 2017; Manfield-Barry & Stwayi, 2016; DBE, 2011; DoE, 2003; RSA, 1996).

5.7 Chapter Summary

In this chapter significant findings were discussed based on the implementation of Grade R admission policy in primary schools in Limpopo Province. The results of the study highlighted that all the schools had in place operational Grade R admission policy. Though the findings of the study showed that the policy was formulated in line with the South African constitution and SASA, however concerns were that top-down and bottom-up consultations had not been made with regard policy formulation and implementation. As a result, this had hindered promoting transparency in goals and objectives of the admission policy for Grade R. The results highlighted that the school principals, admissions committee and the District Official were responsible for ensuring that this policy was implemented.

The outcomes of the study further showed that there were different strategies that had been adopted by the schools under study to implement the policy. It was however, indicated that no child must be admitted to Grade R if that child did not attend a day care centre (crèche). The findings of the study also showed that some of the school heads did not consult with the parents who formed part of the SGBs on how the policy should be implemented. Moreover, concerns were raised that departmental officials were not doing enough to train and workshop the lower level policy implementers before implementation process due to the top-down approach to policy implementation that had been adopted by the DBE as well as some of the principals in schools. The study revealed that the admissions committee had clear cut roles and responsibilities such as screening of the required documentation to ensure that the policy was implemented effectively and efficiently though it was raised that some parents failed to bring the required documentation. The issue of feeder zone also emerged as critical.

On issues pertaining to support and monitoring of the admission policy, accountability and transparency were enhanced through admission forms as prescribed by SASAMS given to feeder day care centres to complete and submit in the last quarter of the year for

the following year. In addition, surrounding feeder zones crèches also checked for Grade R readiness by honouring the children with certificates for completing day care centres attendance though there was dissatisfaction concerning support given particularly from the district office.

Lastly, this chapter revealed that there are number of grey areas that need attention from schools under study for the purpose of progress towards finding solutions concerning effective and efficient implementation of the admissions policy, these included: admission of learners with chronic illnesses; use of mother tongue as a medium of instruction for learner admitted into Grade R; lack of adequate documentation, forceful demands for admission; and admission of foreign learners. A detailed summary of the study conclusions and suggested recommendations in relation to the findings of the study are discussed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER SIX

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Introduction

A summary of the research findings on the implementation of the Grade R admissions policy is given. In order to bring findings of the study into perspective, the last part of the chapter gives recommendations for relevant authorities and stakeholders which are pertinent for future research concerning the phenomenon under study.

6.2 Summary of Findings

Globally, there is a convergence of literature showing pre-schooling has profound positive effects on children's holistic development and future academic progress. To narrow the gap of early years development disparities, governments that support early childhood development programmes, have enacted policies to ensure children aged 0-8/9 years are enrolled, supported and their growth is systematically monitored. These programmes ensure that every young child develops to his/her potential growth and development with a potential of making positive differences regarding future academic and life success. However, literature indicates the lack of common standards in the implementation of admission policy despite the existence of the legislations and policies which act as guidelines in primary schools. Based on the above mentioned, a summary of the findings of the study in relation to the objectives of the study is given in this section.

6.2.1 Availability of Grade R Admissions Policy in Schools

The findings of the study revealed that all the schools possessed both the hard and the soft copies of the Grade R admissions policy which had been customised from the main policy as rolled out by the Department of Education. It was further highlighted by a majority of principals of the schools under study that District Officials always demanded to see the policy documents during school visits. However, it was revealed from the study that not all of the schools under study had carried out school wide consultations. Moreover, some of the principals felt they had not been given the opportunity to give their input, due to the top-down approach to policy implementation that had been adopted by the DBE. As such,

evidence of the top-down and bottom-up consultations indicating synergetic relations between the District Office and the schools was questionable.

6.2.2 Strategies for implementation of Grade R Admissions Policy

In this study, it was noted that there were a number of strategies that were adopted by school principals to ensure that the Grade R admissions policy was implemented effectively and efficiently as prescribed. Furthermore, it emerged that the schools principals were in charge of how the policy would be implemented. As a result, some of the schools involved the SGBs and parents, teachers, and selection of admission committee. On the other hand, the results showed that in some schools only the principal was in charge of nominating the responsible personnel for the implementation of the policy. Of importance to note was that though the policy clearly stipulated that Grade R learner's admission was 4 and half years turning 5 on or before the end of June, however, some of the participants alluded to the fact that it was also important to consider the stature of a child. Further to this some of the participants stated that a child should be denied admission if they had not attended a day care centre (crèche). It was also established from the study particularly from the focus group participants that not only was the lack of consultation from them but that departmental officials were not doing enough to train and workshop the lower level policy implementers before implementation process. This had led to the identification of some flaws concerning the implementation of the admissions policy.

With respect to the implementation of the Grade R admissions policy, findings showed that of those schools that had selected the admissions committee to assist in the implementation of the admission committee, there were clear cut roles and responsibilities to ensure that the policy was implemented effectively and efficiently. Such roles involved: members screening of the required documentation before admission such as: birth certificate, the immunisation cards, the parents or the guardian's certified ID copy as well and the age of the child. However, some of the committee members and the school principals highlighted that some parents failed to bring the necessary documents during the admission process leading to serious misunderstanding and

accusations of nepotism between the parents and the members of the admissions committee. The issue of feeder zone also emerged as critical and that it was vital that the admissions committees adhered to the feeder zone policy. On the other hand, it was stated that some of schools had been accused of implementing their own feeder zone policies to limit the number of learners who may be admitted in those schools.

Of importance to note was that there were some discriminatory tendencies in some schools. For example, some of the learners were denied admission due to over-age and were termed problematic children. This is an implication that equity and non-discrimination in all aspects was not being taken into consideration. This is despite what is prescribed in Section 7(2) of the South African Constitution mandates that the state must respect, protect, promote and fulfil the rights to basic and further education and Grade R is not an exception to this.

On the other hand, different perspectives were raised by some of the committee members and the school principals who highlighted that some parents failed to bring the necessary documents during the admission process. As such this had led to misunderstanding between the parents and the members of the admissions committee, with some parents threatening the schools authorities.

6.2.3 Support and monitoring of the Grade R admissions policy

The study found that most of the schools adopted divergent monitoring and support mechanisms. It was established in the study by a majority by the participants that monitoring was observed through admission forms as prescribed by SASAMS. These forms were given to feeder day care centres to complete and submit in the last quarter of the year for the following year. Furthermore, monitoring effective implementation of the Grade R policy was achieved by making sure that the surrounding feeder zones crèches also checked for Grade R readiness by honouring the children with certificates for completing day care centres attendance.

However, it was illuminated by the participants that a majority of the parents were not aware of the requirement of the admissions policy. Whereas, some of the school

principals further highlighted that as far as the decision making was concerned in the implementation process, monitoring and support at district, provincial and national level, teachers and SGBs were not involved at all. Consequently, the fault was directed to the DoE and the District office who were accused of failing to advise the schools on how to implement the admissions policy hence support was termed as very limited. Thus, an analysis of the results shows that lack of involvement in decision making made it difficult for the teachers to support the whole process. The results of the study also showed that though DO wanted to offer support and monitor the implementation of the admission policy it was also difficult for them to do so but to comply with the district education office which also followed directives from national level. This had led to lack of political will and promoting all the stakeholders to any arising issues pertaining to the monitoring and support of the Grade R admission policy.

6.3 Challenges in implementing the Grade R admissions policy

6.3.1 Lack of parental involvement

Lastly, the findings of the study showed that there are a number of challenges that hindered effective implementation of the Grade R policy. For example lack of parental involvement towards implementation of the Grade R admission policy was cited by most of the participants. A majority of parents did not attend meetings related to admission of their children into Grade R and as a result they brought inadequate documents during the registration process. Other issue that was revealed were failure by parents to pay fees and this affected admission of their children and also caused limited involvement in issues pertaining to the admissions policy. Moreover, the findings of the study further inferred that a majority of the parent due to lack of parental involvement were not aware that the schools where they sought admission for their children fell under the 40% No Fees category. As a result, this had given room for some school authorities to make demands that were against the policy.

6.3.2 Forceful demand for admissions and lack of accurate documents

Forceful demand for admissions and lack of accurate documents were identified as another challenge that schools under study encountered through parents and guardians. Parents were cited as bringing children that were either too young to be admitted or children that had not attended day care centres at all. As such this led to some parents forcing admission of their children despite the extant policies that bound the schools policy to abide by law and ethics. Furthermore, some of the SGBs and admissions committee members felt that some parents thought they owned the schools and as such did not bother to secure required and accurate documents for their children. Further to this, some parents were accused of knowing how to cheat the system by getting fake documents which showed school readiness for their children as a way of avoiding paying fees in EDC phase. This resulted in some learners getting admission into Grade R before or after they reached the required age.

6.3.3 Chronic illnesses

The participants also highlighted the implementation of the policy was hindered by the fact that schools were forced to admit all children and not discriminate as stipulated in the policy irrespective of how sick a learner was or if they were living with some form of impairment or disability. Though the responses of the all the participants showed that the schools under study recognised inclusive education, the problem that emerged was that there were no guidelines or training on how to deal with these circumstances as some of these learners needed special care. As such reference is made on what was highlighted earlier that some parent bring incomplete documents and this makes it difficult for school to have updated learner profile. As such, this affected timely and early screening to see if a learner is at risk through learners' profile which is done on admission for first timers

6.3.4 School transport

The Grade R admission policy also creates another challenge of transport. Therefore, another major challenge was lack of commitment of transport supply as well as, lack of available safe and affordable transport remained a significant and common barrier preventing the most vulnerable and marginalised children from accessing schools. Lack of scholar transport was cited as part of the factors that caused learner dropout and absenteeism as young learners found it difficult to walk longer distances.

6.3.5 Admitting learners who were foreign nationals.

Another pertinent issue that was revealed as a challenge was admission learners who were foreign nationals. Findings showed that through there were a number of children with expired documents leading to denial of admission, a majority of the participants were in agreement that every child had the right to education whether South African or a foreigner. The responses of these participants is commensurate with Section 7(2) of the South African Constitution, which mandates that the state respect, protect, promote and fulfil the rights to a basic and further education.

6.3.6 Language issue

In this study the findings revealed that the policy embraced multiculturalism, language differences. Hence, it was critical that the learner's home language was used in schools to assist children to navigate the new environment and bridge their learning at school with the experience they bring from home. The findings of the current study further highlighted that teaching using the child's mother tongue in lower grades for the child to learn maximally was not a problem. The challenge as highlighted by the participants was to teach the learners using their different languages as a majority of the teachers were incapacitated to do so.

Consequently, the above mentioned factors have been used by some school as excuses of not admitting Grade R learners into the system. Therefore, it is important to adopt what is highlighted Section 29(2) of the Bill of Rights that everyone has the right to receive

education in the language of their choice taking into account the need for historical redress within the South African education system

6.4 Conclusion

The following conclusions emanated from the study which examined the implementation of Grade R admission policy in Primary schools in Mopane District. The researcher also found out that there were admission policies in all the schools under study and these had been implemented as directed by the DBE and the District Offices. The enactment of these policies may have been encouraged by the fact that the South African Constitution and SASA also supports and encourages that schools must not only implement these policies but must use these policies as redress towards the right to education for every child. Moreover, there were different strategies that had been implemented by all the schools under study to ensure effective and efficient implementation of the policy. Such strategies were being used as signposts to ensure that the implementation process was adhered to. The overall findings also showed that of those schools that had selected the admissions committee to assist in the implementation of the admission committee, there were roles and responsibilities such as screening of the required documentation before admission. However, there were also pitfalls during the screening process as some parents failed to bring the necessary documents during the admission process. Consequently, this led to serious misunderstanding and accusations of nepotism, discriminatory tendencies particularly on admission age between the parents and the members of the admissions committee. The issue of feeder zone also emerged as critical and that it was the role of the policy implementers to adhere to the feeder zone policy.

In addition, the study revealed that, though the schools under study had implemented the policy, the problem was that there was minimal involvement of the SGBs, parents and teachers in some schools. As such these stakeholders felt that as the policy implementers they had been sidelined by the policy makers. This depicted some of these schools as failing to implement the policy in a systematic manner. Though it was also good to note the schools under study had made efforts to support and monitor the implemented

policies through admission forms as prescribed by SASAMS to feeder day care centres and Grade R school readiness. Unfortunately, there were a number of challenges that were experienced by a majority of the schools during the implementation process. For instance there was lack of effective and monitoring of the Grade R policy to assist in tapping and or identifying progress made. In addition, some of the challenges were lack of adequate training and workshop by District Office on how the policy should be implemented leading to unsystematic implementation of the admission policy particularly on issues relating to language policy; admission of foreign national; chronic illnesses; scholar transport. Lack of consultation of policy implementers was also cited as one of the major challenges which had resulted in lack of parental involvement in the implementation of the Grade R admission policy. These findings were similar in a majority of the schools under study.

The overall findings of this study which are based on the core research questions on the four selected primary schools are indicative there have been tremendous efforts made in promoting the implementation of Grade R admissions policy through a number of strategies and support mechanisms. However, the findings of the study also show that the schools under study still have some pockets of blind practices that require redress. As such this calls for recommendations of the study.

6.5 Recommendations

The following recommendations are proffered and these are based on the findings of the study findings and review of related literature:

- Active participation of policy makers and policy implementers should be promoted. This may create transparency in the implementation of the Grade R admissions policy.
- In addition, there should be on-going training and workshops that are spearheaded by the District office on how the policy should be implemented, supported and

monitored. This will promote particularly the policy implementers commitment towards effective and efficient implementation of the admissions policy. Moreover, such a stance will reflect on the steps that schools under study would have taken to promote the right to education to all learners regardless of citizenship.

- Parents should play a more visible role in conjunction with the SGBs, teachers and principals. They must be consulted and included in the planning of the implementation of the admissions policy and all the schools must intensify their training and workshops that are earmarked for parents who have children that are ready for Grade R admissions. These must be on-going for continuous awareness of the required documents and screening purposes for both local and foreign national learners.
- There should be adequate human and financial resources to assist in the professional training of teachers that have to admit and teach Grade R learners with special needs so as to enhance inclusive education. These should be provided by the Department of Education in conjunction with the district office.
- School under study should make necessary arrangements in providing efficient scholar transport. This may to address the problem of feeder zones as well as ensuring that every child has the opportunity to attend school.
- There should be formalized monitoring and support mechanisms that are not only systematic but these should be done on a regular basis to gauge the progress made, the strengths and the weaknesses of the implemented admissions policy for Grade R.

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Appendix A- Application for Ethical Clearance

P.O Box 141
TRICHARDTSDAL
0890

13 April 2018

Dear Sir/Madam

Re: Application for Ethical Clearance letter

I Paulina Lebea, a Masters student in Education, student number 201614201, do apply for an ethical clearance letter to conduct a research. My study is based on “The implementation of Grade R admission policy”.

The information that is supplied on my proposal and to the ethical clearance form is true and it belongs to me. I promise to notify the GMRDC in advance of any proposed ethically significant variations to my study.

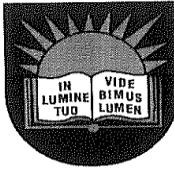
The study will be undertaken in four primary schools in Makhutswe circuit in Mopani district, Limpopo province. I have attached the following documents to my application: Summary of the proposed research, Interview guide, Budget for transport and printing as well as the Researcher’s CV.

I hope my request will be approved.

Kind regards

(Mrs) Lebea Paulina (201614201).

Appendix B – Clearance certificate



University of Fort Hare
Together in Excellence

ETHICAL CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE **REC-270710-028-RA Level 01**

Certificate Reference Number: REM021SLEB01

Project title: **Implementation of Grade R admission policy: A case study of four primary schools in Makhutswe Circuit, Mopani District in Limpopo Province.**

Nature of Project Masters in Education

Principal Researcher: Paulina Lebea

Supervisor: Prof S. Rembe

Co-supervisor: Dr J. Shumba

On behalf of the University of Fort Hare's Research Ethics Committee (UREC) I hereby give ethical approval in respect of the undertakings contained in the above-mentioned project and research instrument(s). Should any other instruments be used, these require separate authorization. The Researcher may therefore commence with the research as from the date of this certificate, using the reference number indicated above. This certificate is valid for a year from the date of approval; thereafter, the Principal investigator/s will be expected to apply for renewal.

Please note that the UREC must be informed immediately of

- Any material change in the conditions or undertakings mentioned in the document;

Implementation of Grade R Admission Policy

- Any material breaches of ethical undertakings or events that impact upon the ethical conduct of the research.

The Principal Researcher must report to the UREC in the prescribed format, where applicable, annually, and at the end of the project, in respect of ethical compliance.

Special conditions: *Research that includes children as per the official regulations of the act must take the following into account:*

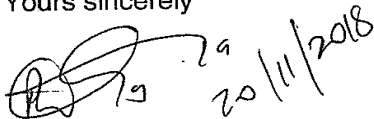
Note: The UREC is aware of the provisions of Department of Health Charter of Ethics in Health Research Principles, Processes and Structures; DOH 2015, signed by the Minister of Health in March 2015. This certificate is granted in terms of the provisions of the above-mentioned document.

The UREC retains the right to

- Withdraw or amend this Ethical Clearance Certificate if
 - Any unethical principal or practices are revealed or suspected;
 - Relevant information has been withheld or misrepresented;
 - Regulatory changes of whatsoever nature so require;
 - The conditions contained in the Certificate have not been adhered to.
- Request access to any information or data at any time during the course or after completion of the project.
- In addition to the need to comply with the highest level of ethical conduct principle investigators must report back annually as an evaluation and monitoring mechanism on the progress being made by the research. Such a report must be sent to the Dean of Research's office.

The Ethics Committee wished you well in your research.

Yours sincerely



Professor Pumla Dineo Gqola
Dean of Research

12 November 2018

Appendix C – Application letter to collect data

Faculty of Education
School of Further and Continuing
Education

Stewart Hall, Alice

Phone: Alice: 040602412

I Email: nmayiya@ufh.ac.za

10 August 2018

Dr L. L.Mafenya

District Senior Manager

Mopani District

Private Bag x578

GIYANI 0826



Dear Sir,

Re: Permission to Collect Data: Mrs P. Lebea (Student Number 201614201)

This is to confirm that Mrs Lebea is pursuing MEd degree at the University of Fort Hare. Her research title is "The implementation of Grade R Admission Policy: A case study of four primary schools in Mopani District Limpopo Province". She is supposed to collect data from the district and schools. Kindly grant her permission. I would also be grateful if you could kindly provide her with documents that may assist with information regarding the area of her study.

I would like to assure you that any information that will be collected will remain confidential and no name of a person will be disclosed. The student will ensure that she does not disrupt on going activities during the period she will be collecting data.

Sincerely

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to be 'S. Rembe', is written over a light blue horizontal line.

Prof. S. Rembe

Supervisor

Faculty of Education, Alice Campus

University of Fort Hare

Appendix D – Respond from the Department of Education



DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

LIMPOPO PROVINCE

Enquires: Mnisi V Telephone: 015 290 7680 Fax: 015 290 9416

P O Box 2428
GIYANI
0897
Tel: 073 1314 054

Dear Sir/Madam

Application for permission to conduct Research Study in schools at Makhutswe Circuit

1. The above matters refer:
2. The Limpopo Department of Education acknowledge receipt of your letter
- . 3. We therefore grant you permission to conducting a study in schools at Makhutswe circuit in the purpose of Grade R admission policy implementation in primary schools.
4. After the completion of the study, we will appreciate a copy of your research which will serve as resource for the department.

Regards

Date: 2018/10/04

B. Mutheiwana (Head)

Appendix E – Interview Guides

THE IMPLEMENTATION OF GRADE R ADMISSION POLICY: A CASE STUDY OF FOUR PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN MOPANI DISTRICT IN MAKHUTSWE CIRCUIT LIMPOPO PROVINCE.

INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR ADMISSION COMMITTEE MEMBERS

(EDUCATORS)

My name is Paulina Lebea and I am a Masters 'student in the Faculty of Education carrying out a study on the topic: The Implementation of Grade R admission policy: A case study of four primary schools in Mopani District in Limpopo province. Participation in this study is voluntary.

You are kindly requested to assist in providing answers to the questions that follow. I would be tape recording and taking notes when you are responding to the questions. All responses will be used for academic purposes only. I assure you that whatever information that you would provide will remain confidential and anonymity is guaranteed. If you accept to participate in this study, please sign the informed consent form. Thank you for accepting to participate in this study.

PERSONAL INFORMATION OF PARTICIPANT

1. What Grade are you teaching at this school?

1. How is the Grade R admission policy implemented in Mopani District in Makhutswe circuit?

- How was Grade R admission policy introduced to your school?
- Who was involved in formulating it?
- What part did the school play in formulating it?

2. What strategies do schools use to implement Grade R admission policy to enhance education?

- What does the policy say about the Grade R admission policy?
- What steps are being used in your school to implement grade R admission policy for those who are to be enrolled?
- How the admission committee members are selected?

Implementation of Grade R Admission Policy

- What are their roles as admission committee members?
- What assessment procedures are being used to measure the learner's ability to be admitted?
- What are your suggestions to the school and the district regarding the implementation of this admission policy?

3. How is the Grade R admission policy implementation supported and monitored by the stakeholders in Makhutswe circuit in Mopani District?

- What part has the district play in the whole process of admission?
- What form of support do you get from the educational district in terms of implementing Grade R admission policy?
- How have you been monitored by the education district during the implementation of the Grade R admission policy?
- How does the policy been monitored by the district to observe the smooth running of admission process?
- What kind of support do you get from other stakeholders?
- What support do you get from SMT during the implementation of the Grade R admission policy?
- How have you been monitored by the SMT during the implementation of the policy?

4. What are the challenges encountered in the implementation of the Grade R admission policy in Makhutswe circuit in Mopani District?

- Explain the challenges you face from the SMT in the implementation process.
- What steps are being used or taken in your school to implement the Grade R admission policy for those who are going to be enrolled?

INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR THE PRINCIPALS

PERSONAL INFORMATION OF PARTICIPANTS

Location of the school : Urban ☐ Rural ☐

1. Gender : Female ☐ Male ☐
2. Age group : 41-50yrs ☐ 51-65yrs ☐
3. Teaching experience : 6-10yrs ☐ 11yrs and above ☐
4. Marital status : Single ☐ Married ☐ Widow ☐
5. Highest professional qualification

Bachelor of Arts + Post-Graduate Certificate in Education:

Certificate/Diploma in Education Bachelor of Education:

Master's in Education:

Any other, please specify:

Length of service in the principal position:

1. How is Grade R admission policy implemented in Mopani District in Makhutswe circuit?

- How was Grade R admission policy introduced to your school?
- What do you have for the educators?

2. What strategies do you use as the principal to implement Grade R admission policy in your school?

- What steps are being used or taken in your school to implement Grade R admission policy for those who are to be enrolled?
- How are educators responding to these strategies?
- What assessment procedures are being used to measure the learner's ability to can be admitted?

Implementation of Grade R Admission Policy

- What kind of educational materials used in your school during the implementation policy?
- Who is the provider of the materials?
- What are your suggestions as the principal to the school regarding the implementation of this admission policy?

3. How is the Grade R supported and monitored by the stakeholders in Makhutswe circuit in Mopani District?

- What form of support do you get from the education district in terms of implementing this admission policy?
- How have you been monitored by the education district during the implementation process?
- What type of support do you get from other stakeholders?

4. What are the challenges encountered in the implementation of the Grade R admission policy in the circuit?

- What other challenges do you face during the implementation process?
- Which challenges do you face from the parents whose children are not accommodated?

Thank you for your participation in the interview

INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR PARENTS (SGB)

Introduction

I am a Masters' student in the Faculty of Education carrying out a study on the topic: Implementation of Grade R admission policy: A case study of four primary schools in Mopani District in Makhutswe circuit. Participant in this study is voluntary.

You are kindly requested to assist in providing answers to the questions that follow. I would like to inform you that I will be tape recording and taking notes when you are responding to the questions. All responses will be used for academic purposes only. I assure you that whatever information that you would provide will remain confidential and anonymity is guaranteed. If you accept to participate in this study, please sign the informed form. Thank you for accepting to participate in this study.

Biographical Information

What is your educational qualification?

The questions are the following:

1. Please explain the process of the admission policy implementation.
2. Which workshops have you undergone with regard to the implementation of admission policy?
3. Please explain whether you are satisfied with the training about this policy (admission) you have received.
4. Is the Department of education supporting them in the implementation?
5. What challenges are in the implementation of the admission policy?

Thank you for your cooperation and participation

Appendix F – Consent Form

CONSENT FORM

I _____ a teacher at _____ give a consent that I agree to participate in the research under the title: The Implementation of Grade R admission policy: A case study of four primary schools in Mopani district, Makhutswe Circuit in Limpopo Province.

☐ I understand that my participation in this research is not obliged; that I have a right not to answer certain questions, and that I can withdraw from the study/participation any time.

☐ I understand the purpose of this study and know about the benefits that this research entails.

☐ I understand that the information provided will be treated with confidentiality.

☐ I understand that the study involves the implementation of Grade R admission policy; therefore with respect to publication, communication, and dissemination of results/performance of teachers my participation will remain anonymous.

I have studied all the above information and understand my participation in this regard. I therefore freely consent and voluntarily agree to participate in this research.

Name (printed): _____

Date: _____

Signature: _____

Appendix G - EDITOR'S DECLARATION

EDITOR'S DECLARATION LETTER

I, **BELLITA BANDA-CHITSAMATANGA** hereby confirm that I have proof read and edited the following **MASTER OF EDUCATION** Dissertation for

LEBEA MATSATSI PAULINA

TITLED

**THE IMPLEMENTATION OF GRADE R ADMISSION POLICY: A CASE STUDY OF
FOUR PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN MOPANI DISTRICT LIMPOPO PROVINCE**

The Windows 'Tracking' System was used to reflect my comments and suggested corrections for the author to action.

During the process of the proof reading and editing, the following changes were recommended: punctuation, grammatical and sentence construction. In addition suggestions were given concerning consistency in use of abbreviation, referencing style and capitalization, use of current literature and also to improve on recommendations given by the editor. Although greatest care was taken in the editing of this document, the final responsibility for the product rests with the author.



17/01/2020

Editor's signature

Date

Dr. B. B. Chitsamatanga

Language and Writing and Editing Consultant (UFH)

Intermediate Certificate in Business English & Communication (Pitman Qualification, UK)

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Cell Number : 083 755 7084 or 073 105 4838

Email : chitsamatangabellitabanda@yahoo.com