

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

### CHAPTER 1

<b>BACKGROUND, PROBLEM FORMULATION AND AIMS</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>1.1 INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>1.2 PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN EDUCATION</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>1.3 RURAL COMMUNITIES, PRESCHOOL AND PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN NAMIBIA</b>	<b>3</b>
1.3.1 Contemporary rural communities	3
1.3.2 Rural communities in the Kavango region	5
1.3.3 Preschool education in rural Namibia	5
<b>1.4 CLARIFICATION OF TERMS</b>	<b>7</b>
1.4.1 Parent	7
1.4.2 Rural Namibia	7
1.4.3 Preschool	8
<b>1.5 PROBLEM FORMULATION</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>1.6 AIMS OF RESEARCH</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>1.7 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>1.8 THE USE OF A QUALITATIVE APPROACH</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>1.9 LIMITATION OF THE STUDY</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>1.10 THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY</b>	<b>12</b>

1.11	CHAPTER DIVISION	13
1.12	CONCLUSIONS	14
CHAPTER 2		
	PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN PRESCHOOL EDUCATION	16
2.1	INTRODUCTION	16
2.2	PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN PRESCHOOL EDUCATION	16
2.3	PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN PRESCHOOLS IN RURAL AREAS	19
2.4	IMPROVING PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN RURAL PRESCHOOLS	21
2.5	APPROACHES TO PARENT INVOLVEMENT PROGRAMMES	23
2.5.1	Home-based parent involvement programmes	23
2.5.1.1	<i>The mother-child home programme (Verbal Interaction Project)</i>	27
2.5.2	School-based parent involvement programmes	30
2.5.2.1	<i>Parent-cooperative nursery schools</i>	34
2.5.3	Comprehensive parent involvement programmes	37
2.5.3.1	<i>The Epstein theory of parent involvement</i>	40
2.6	BENEFITS OF PARENT INVOLVEMENT	43
2.6.1	Benefits to learners	43
2.6.2	Benefits to parents	44
2.6.3	Benefits to teachers and schools	46
2.7	BARRIERS TO PARENT INVOLVEMENT	47
2.7.1	Teachers not appropriately trained to work with parents	47

2.7.2	Lack of time and resources	48
2.7.3	Lack of appropriate role definition and school policy	48
2.7.4	An uninviting atmosphere	48
2.7.5	Cultural and social barriers	49
2.7.6	Problems relating to teachers and parents' beliefs in professionalism	50
2.7.7	Psychological barriers	50
2.7.8	Barriers to parent involvement in a rural environment	50
2.8	CONCLUSION	52
CHAPTER 3		
	EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION PROVISION IN NAMIBIA	53
3.1	INTRODUCTION	53
3.2	PROVISION OF BASIC EDUCATION IN NAMIBIA SINCE 1990	56
3.3	EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION IN NAMIBIA SINCE 1990	58
3.4	MINISTERIAL POLICY ON PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN EDUCATION	60
3.5	THE SITUATION OF YOUNG CHILDREN IN NAMIBIA	61
3.6	EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMES IN NAMIBIA	62
3.6.1	Centre-based ECD programmes	62
3.6.2	Home-based ECD programmes	63
3.6.3	The role of the churches and non-governmental organisations in ECD	66
3.6.4	The role of parents in the provision of ECD programmes	67

3.6.5	Role of the government in the provision of ECD programmes	70
3.7	GOVERNMENTAL RESEARCH ON ECD PROVISION IN NAMIBIA	71
3.8	BENEFITS OF PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN ECD IN NAMIBIA	74
3.9	CONCLUSION	75
CHAPTER 4		
	RESEARCH METHODOLOGY	77
4.1	INTRODUCTION	77
4.2	QUALITATIVE RESEARCH	77
4.2.1	The choice of qualitative research for this study	78
4.2.1.1	<i>The researcher works in natural settings and tries to understand people from their own frame of reference</i>	78
4.2.1.2	<i>The researcher is the key instrument</i>	79
4.2.1.3	<i>Qualitative research is hypothesis-generating and descriptive</i>	79
4.2.1.4	<i>Qualitative research is concerned with process rather than outcomes</i>	79
4.2.1.5	<i>Small samples are used</i>	79
4.2.1.6	<i>Qualitative research aims to extend understanding within the context of a particular situation</i>	80
4.2.1.7	<i>Studies may be designed and redesigned</i>	80
4.3	DATA COLLECTION STRATEGIES FOR THIS RESEARCH	80
4.3.1	Observation	80
4.3.2	Interviews	81

<b>4.4</b>	<b>QUESTIONS OF SUBJECTIVITY</b>	<b>82</b>
<b>4.4.1</b>	<b>Status</b>	<b>82</b>
<b>4.4.2</b>	<b>Language</b>	<b>82</b>
<b>4.4.3</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>83</b>
<b>4.5</b>	<b>DESIGN OF THE PRESENT STUDY</b>	<b>83</b>
<b>4.5.1</b>	<b>Background and preliminary research</b>	<b>83</b>
<b>4.5.2</b>	<b>Choice of schools and negotiation of access</b>	<b>84</b>
<b>4.6</b>	<b>CHOICE OF PARTICIPANTS</b>	<b>87</b>
<b>4.7</b>	<b>DATA GATHERING AND PROBLEMS ENCOUNTERED</b>	<b>89</b>
<b>4.7.1</b>	<b>Observation in preschools</b>	<b>90</b>
<b>4.7.2</b>	<b>Interviews</b>	<b>90</b>
<b>4.7.2.1</b>	<i>Interviews with teachers</i>	<b>90</b>
<b>4.7.2.2</b>	<i>Interviews with parents</i>	<b>91</b>
<b>4.8</b>	<b>ANALYSING THE DATA</b>	<b>92</b>
<b>4.9</b>	<b>PRESENTATION OF THE DATA</b>	<b>93</b>
<b>4.10</b>	<b>VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY</b>	<b>93</b>
<b>4.11</b>	<b>LIMITATIONS TO THE PRESENT STUDY</b>	<b>94</b>
<b>4.12</b>	<b>SUMMARY</b>	<b>94</b>
<b>CHAPTER 5</b>		
<b>PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF KEY THEMES</b>		<b>95</b>
<b>5.1</b>	<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>95</b>

<b>5.2</b>	<b>THE VILLAGES AND THEIR COMMUNITIES</b>	<b>95</b>
<b>5.3</b>	<b>THE ECD CENTRES</b>	<b>96</b>
<b>5.4</b>	<b>THE TEACHERS INCLUDED AS PARTICIPANTS</b>	<b>99</b>
<b>5.5</b>	<b>PARENTS INCLUDED AS PARTICIPANTS</b>	<b>101</b>
<b>5.6</b>	<b>RELATIONSHIPS AMONG EARLY CHILDHOOD CENTRES, PARENTS AND THE COMMUNITY</b>	<b>104</b>
<b>5.6.1</b>	<b>Organisation of early childhood centres</b>	<b>104</b>
<b>5.6.2</b>	<b>Lack of written policy on parent involvement</b>	<b>108</b>
<b>5.6.3</b>	<b>Parents see preschool as a way of preparing children for school success</b>	<b>109</b>
<b>5.6.4</b>	<b>The financial needs of the centres cannot be met by parents</b>	<b>111</b>
<b>5.6.5</b>	<b>Poverty impinges on the successful running of the centres</b>	<b>114</b>
<b>5.6.6</b>	<b>Role players have a limited understanding using volunteers</b>	<b>117</b>
<b>5.6.7</b>	<b>Role players are very reliant on the government to solve issues at the preschools</b>	<b>118</b>
<b>5.6.8</b>	<b>The substantial role of the church in the community and preschools</b>	<b>121</b>
<b>5.6.9</b>	<b>Community support is narrowly defined and difficult to obtain</b>	<b>123</b>
<b>5.6.10</b>	<b>Little provision is made to assist parents in their parenting tasks</b>	<b>125</b>
<b>5.6.11</b>	<b>Teachers are not adequately trained for their task</b>	<b>126</b>
<b>5.6.12</b>	<b>Role players have a limited understanding of how learning can be supported at home</b>	<b>130</b>
<b>5.6.13</b>	<b>Ample opportunity is provided for informal communication</b>	<b>132</b>
<b>5.7</b>	<b>BARRIERS TO PARENT INVOLVEMENT</b>	<b>134</b>
<b>5.7.1</b>	<b>Socio-economic conditions</b>	<b>134</b>
<b>5.7.2</b>	<b>Lack of time</b>	<b>136</b>
<b>5.7.3</b>	<b>Lack of knowledge of parent involvement</b>	<b>137</b>
<b>5.7.4</b>	<b>Lack of ownership of centres</b>	<b>138</b>

<b>5.7.5</b>	<b>Parents' lack of confidence and dependency</b>	<b>140</b>
<b>5.7.6</b>	<b>Lack of leadership</b>	<b>142</b>
<b>5.7.7</b>	<b>Lack of training of role-players</b>	<b>143</b>
<b>5.8</b>	<b>SUMMARY</b>	<b>145</b>

## **CHAPTER 6**

<b>OVERVIEW OF THE INVESTIGATION AND GUIDELINES ON IMPROVING PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN RURAL COMMUNITIES</b>	<b>146</b>
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<b>6.1</b>	<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>146</b>
<b>6.2</b>	<b>OVERVIEW OF THE INVESTIGATION</b>	<b>146</b>
<b>6.2.1</b>	<b>Parent involvement in early childhood education</b>	<b>146</b>
<b>6.2.2</b>	<b>Early childhood provision in Namibia since 1990</b>	<b>148</b>
<b>6.2.3</b>	<b>The research design</b>	<b>150</b>
<b>6.3</b>	<b>SYNTHESIS OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS</b>	<b>150</b>
<b>6.3.1</b>	<b>Organisation of early childhood centres</b>	<b>151</b>
<b>6.3.2</b>	<b>Lack of written policy on parent involvement</b>	<b>152</b>
<b>6.3.3</b>	<b>Parents have high expectations of preschools</b>	<b>153</b>
<b>6.3.4</b>	<b>Parent involvement is narrowly defined</b>	<b>154</b>
<b>6.3.5</b>	<b>Poverty impinges on the successful running of community-based ECD centres</b>	<b>155</b>
<b>6.3.6</b>	<b>Role-players in community-based ECD centres are reliant on government support</b>	<b>155</b>
<b>6.3.7</b>	<b>The church as well as community need to support community-based ECD centres</b>	<b>156</b>
<b>6.3.8</b>	<b>Parents need assistance in fulfilling their role as parents</b>	<b>157</b>
<b>6.3.9</b>	<b>Teachers lack skills on how to involve parents</b>	<b>159</b>

<b>6.4</b>	<b>BARRIERS TO PARENT INVOLVEMENT</b>	<b>159</b>
<b>6.5</b>	<b>RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH</b>	<b>160</b>
<b>6.6</b>	<b>CONCLUSION</b>	<b>161</b>
	<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY</b>	<b>162</b>

**TABLES:**

<b>TABLE 4.1:</b>	<b>SUMMARY OF PRESCHOOLS</b>	<b>86</b>
<b>TABLE 5.1:</b>	<b>TEACHERS AT CENTRE A</b>	<b>99</b>
<b>TABLE 5.2:</b>	<b>TEACHERS AT CENTRE B</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>TABLE 5.3:</b>	<b>TEACHERS AT CENTRE C</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>TABLE 5.4:</b>	<b>TEACHERS AT CENTRE D</b>	<b>101</b>
<b>TABLE 5.5:</b>	<b>PARENTS AT CENTRE A</b>	<b>102</b>
<b>TABLE 5.6:</b>	<b>PARENTS AT CENTRE B</b>	<b>102</b>
<b>TABLE 5.7:</b>	<b>PARENTS AT CENTRE C</b>	<b>103</b>
<b>TABLE 5.8:</b>	<b>PARENTS AT CENTRE D</b>	<b>103</b>

**APPENDICES:**

<b>APPENDIX I:</b>	<b>OBSERVATION: CHECKLIST</b>	<b>175</b>
<b>APPENDIX II:</b>	<b>INTERVIEW GUIDE: PARENTS</b>	<b>178</b>
<b>APPENDIX III:</b>	<b>INTERVIEW GUIDE: TEACHERS AND HEAD TEACHER</b>	<b>180</b>
<b>APPENDIX IV:</b>	<b>GENERAL INFORMATION: TEACHERS</b>	<b>182</b>
<b>APPENDIX V:</b>	<b>GENERAL INFORMATION: HEAD TEACHERS</b>	<b>183</b>
<b>APPENDIX VI:</b>	<b>GENERAL INFORMATION: PARENTS</b>	<b>184</b>
<b>APPENDIX VII:</b>	<b>INTERVIEW BETWEEN J SIKONGO AND HEAD TEACHER FROM CENTRE B</b>	<b>185</b>
<b>APPENDIX VIII:</b>	<b>INTERVIEW BETWEEN J SIKONGO AND PARENTS FROM CENTRE B</b>	<b>192</b>
<b>APPENDIX IX:</b>	<b>LETTER FROM MINISTRY OF BASIC EDUCATION, SPORT AND CULTURE</b>	<b>198</b>



## **CHAPTER 1**

### **BACKGROUND, PROBLEM FORMULATION AND AIMS**

#### **1.1 INTRODUCTION**

Since its independence in 1990 education reform in Namibia has received considerable attention, as the government grapples to shape an education system which would reflect the aspirations and needs of the emerging nation. Early childhood education has been singled out by government as of particular importance. However, it has not been possible for the government of Namibia to fund all the envisaged educational reforms, and parents in particular and the community in general are regarded as important education stakeholders who are expected to supplement the efforts of the government in providing education to all Namibians (Ministry of Education and Culture (MEC 1993d:179). Thus, the National Early Childhood Development Policy (NECDP) of the Government of the Republic of Namibia (GRN) (1996:37) decrees that early childhood education provision in Namibia is a community-based undertaking in which parents are expected to play a leading role. Moreover, parent involvement in early childhood education programmes is regarded as the foundation on which early childhood provision in Namibia should be built.

#### **1.2 PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN EDUCATION**

Parent involvement in education has been of concern to schools, governments and families, particularly as research has shown that parent involvement in education benefits both schools and families (Chavkin 1993:2; Bastiani 1988:38). Thus, Swap (1993:1) argues that parent involvement across all populations is the key to more successful learners and more effective schools. Stacy (1991:76) reaffirms that the majority of parents, whatever their backgrounds, are concerned about their children and when asked to help educationally are willing to do so.

The literature indicates that educationists have been focussing on the concept of parent involvement in education for some time. However, it seems that parent involvement is difficult to define. Thus, Tizard, Mortimore and Burchell (1981:4) show that any discussion of parent

involvement in education is hindered by a lack of consensus on the meaning of parent involvement as educationists have diverse views and opinions on what constitutes involvement. Pugh (1989:5), for example, refers to parent involvement as a working relationship which is characterised by a shared sense of purpose, mutual respect and a willingness to negotiate. Perry and Tannenbaum (1992:105), on the other hand, observe levels of increasing involvement from parents who are aware of what is happening in the school to active participation in the classroom. Likewise, De Villiers (1988:149) argues that parent involvement refers to the role which parents play with the purpose of improving learning conditions of the child. Postma (1987:125) concurs, adding that true parent involvement means partnerships between parents and teachers with the sole purpose of assisting children in their educational endeavours. Squelch (1994:1) adds that parent involvement is the active and willing participation of parents in a wide range of school- and home-based activities. It is therefore clear that not all researchers are in agreement on what constitutes parent involvement. However, Tizard et al (1981:5) conclude that despite the differences in the meaning given to parent involvement, most advocates of parent involvement share the belief that the relationship between home and school should be changed in such a way that parents take a more active role in the education of their children than is formally the case. Jowett and Babinski (1991:4) concur, stating that researchers have one common theme in their explanation of what constitutes parent involvement, namely that all seek to bring together in some way the separate domains of home and school.

Although consensus has not yet been reached, it is now becoming more widely accepted that positive parent involvement is a prerequisite for effective schooling and that cooperation between home and school can raise educational achievement (Tomlinson 1993:131). Thus, Henderson (1987:1), Chavkin (1993:2) and Bastiani (1988:38) conclude that positive parent involvement in education helps to improve children's school achievement. Thus, by improving the school climate and involving parents the achievement level of children from poor families can be raised (Haberman 1992:33). This means that children from different socio-economic backgrounds can benefit from parent involvement in their education.

The literature also emphasises the positive effects of improved home-school relations on parents. Aspects listed include: parents feel more positive about their own abilities to help their children (Epstein & Dauber 1991), have a better understanding of what is happening in school (Swap 1993:10), experience strengthened social networks and have better access to information and materials (Davies 1993:206).

Further, research shows that teachers also benefit when there is parent involvement in education. Leitch and Tangri (1988:72) show that teachers report more positive feelings about teaching and about their school when parents are involved in the school. Moreover, Swap (1993:10) agrees that "in programmes where parents and teachers work successfully together, teachers report experiencing support and appreciation from parents and a rekindling of their own enthusiasm for problem solving." It is therefore reasonable to conclude that parent involvement in education is beneficial to all stakeholders concerned. Of equal importance to note is that these benefits are achievable within all communities as research shows that the majority of parents, *whatever their background*, are concerned about their children and when asked to help are eager to do so (Stacy 1991:76).

### **1.3 RURAL COMMUNITIES, PRESCHOOL AND PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN NAMIBIA**

#### **1.3.1 Contemporary rural communities**

Although rural communities are to be found in both developed and developing countries, many people still have little understanding of rural communities. Thus, Burkey (1993:41) calls for a demystification of the "harmony model" of rural community life because rural communities in the developing world are not homogeneous entities as perceived by those outside them. For example, the situations in rural communities might be influenced by disruptions such as civil war or civil unrest which have a major impact on rural life. Likewise, colonialism and other external interventions might also have eroded communal bonds and values as well as reduced access to resources (Nilsson 1993:7). Therefore, rural life can only be understood against the

background of the socio-economic developments in the particular rural community. Moreover, an understanding of rural life should not be reached in isolation of what happens in the urban communities of the particular country as both rural communities and urban communities have an influence on each other.

Burkey (1993:41-42) argues that every rural society has some form of socio-economic structure. As an example a rural development group in Uganda evolved the following model for analysis of the socio-economic structure in the area:

- the labourers who lack access to land and thus survive by working for others,
- the poor peasants who have insufficient land and livestock to meet their own needs,
- the middle class who have sufficient land and livestock to meet their own needs,
- the wage earners,
- the capitalists who have sufficient capital to invest in productive assets,
- and the bureaucratic capitalists who have acquired capital through corruption, or favouritism.

In rural Namibia, this clear division is not so apparent and poverty seems to be the main dividing line with approximately 60 percent of Namibian rural households being classified as poor (NGhiitwika & Nowaseb 1994:8).

Rural life in most parts of the world has also been affected by global socio-economic changes such as high unemployment rate, high inflation rate, increasing poverty, a loss of family values, and the slow pace of economic growth in the world. As a result of these changes, rural migration has been observed as one of the common social challenges facing rural communities. Often poverty and high unemployment are cited by those migrating as the main reasons for their decision. Rural Namibia is no exception.

### **1.3.2 Rural communities in the Kavango region**

The Kavango region is one of the thirteen political regions in Namibia and is situated in the north eastern part of Namibia. In terms of population, the 1991 census estimated a population of 137,000 people in the Kavango region. This constitutes 10 percent (10%) of the national population. This relatively large population can partly be attributed to the settlement in recent years of an estimated 30,000 to 40,000 refugees from neighbouring Angola (Garon, Janssen & Maamberua 1992:10). In terms of the socio-economic situation in the Kavango region, Garon et al (1992:6) show that the region faces the following socio-economic problems: high unemployment rate, inadequate water supply, a lack of markets for crop produces, a small amount of available land and a lack of entertainment. Thus, in spite of the Kavango's relatively large population, the region has generally remained underdeveloped, both in terms of human resource development and the economy as a whole.

Education provision in the Kavango region is generally poor. Nilsson (1993:7) shows that almost half of the Kavango region has no or only lower primary education and nearly three quarters of the school age population has no access to secondary education. In addition, the duration of school attendance in the Kavango region, often depends on how much the parents can afford and the availability of lodging facilities for children. On a positive note, education in rural Kavango has become more acceptable to parents than in the past, and efforts are being made to keep children in school as long as possible. However, these efforts are often hampered by inadequate education facilities in the rural areas of the Kavango region. Garon et al (1992:175) states that a lack of adequately trained personnel and a general lack of parental interest in the education of their children exacerbate the problem.

### **1.3.3 Preschool education in rural Namibia**

In Namibia, preschool education refers to education programmes which are available to children between the ages of three and six years. The aim of preschool education programmes is to help children to develop to their full potential so that these children are able to become healthy, happy, curious, interested and able to communicate with other children and with

adults. Furthermore, through preschool education, children would be equipped to get the best out of school and indeed out of life (MEC 1995:1; GRN 1996:22).

Historically, the provision of early childhood education, which includes preschool education programmes, was initially a social responsibility in which education stakeholders such as the church, the government and non-governmental organisations were involved. This meant that the church and the non-governmental organisations were running preschools alongside the government's preschools. However, by 1994, some of the preschools which had been run by the Ministry of Education and Culture (Namibia) were attached to primary schools, while the rest were run as autonomous institutions. Soon after the government, through the Ministry of Education and Culture, suspended its support of preschool classes under the control of the government. This meant that although the government recognised the need to provide a quality preschool experience for all children in Namibia, it also realised that it could not afford to do so (GRN 1996:23).

The government subsequently developed a National Early Childhood Development Policy which was released in 1996. In terms of this policy, the government, in partnership with the stakeholders in education, are jointly responsible for early childhood provision in Namibia. According to this policy, the parent communities have the primary responsibility for implementing early childhood programmes, while the government is to play a facilitating and supportive role. For this reason, early childhood provision in Namibia can be described as a community-based undertaking (GRN 1996:27).

With regards to the conditions in preschools of Namibia, particularly rural preschools, evidence shows that, preschools in Namibia are characterised by a poor basic infrastructure and a shortage of competent personnel for this level of education. Moreover, preschool classes are overcrowded and there is a lack of water, toilet facilities, poor safety standards, shortage of relevant equipment for children to play with and a lack of food for children at the early childhood education centres (ECD). In addition, according to a survey of early childhood centres, the teachers are inadequately trained (Ministry of Regional and Local Government and Housing (MRLGH) 1996:10).

Despite the unfavourable learning conditions in most rural preschools, parents are increasingly becoming aware of the significant role they can play in early childhood provision and consequently parents and members of the community are involved in a multitude of activities in early childhood centres. However, this is largely in terms of material support (MRLGH 1996:50). It is therefore reasonable to conclude that early childhood provision in Namibia is still in its infancy and parents in particular face the new challenge of running early childhood education programmes. Moreover, both the government and the parents are engaged in redefining their respective role in early childhood provision in Namibia.

## **1.4 CLARIFICATION OF TERMS**

### **1.4.1 Parent**

In the context of this study, parent is not defined according to the dictionary definition of a parent, but rather used in a broader sense of a parent as the person who has custody and control over and concern for the child (Wolfendale 1992:20). Moreover, parent does not only refer to the nuclear family but also includes adults and caretakers because contemporary realities are very different and infinitely more complex regarding what constitutes a family (Duncan 1992:10). Furthermore, in the Namibian context as well as for the purpose of this study, the rural parent is not only defined in terms of the biological origin of a child. This is because in many instances children find themselves in the care of relatives, rather than the mother or father.

### **1.4.2 Rural Namibia**

In this study, rural Namibia is used to refer to the rural areas in the Kavango region (Namibia). The Kavango region is predominantly a rural area and currently there is only one town (Rundu) in the entire region. Rundu as such has not yet been proclaimed as a town and therefore can be classified as a rural settlement. However, for the purpose of this study, rural areas refer to all the rural areas outside Rundu in the Kavango region.

### **1.4.3 Preschool**

Within this context, preschool refers to a centre or institution which provides education programmes to children of non-schooling age, normally between the ages of three and six years. Such education programmes are integral parts of early childhood development programmes, as defined by the Government of the Republic of Namibia (1996).

## **1.5 PROBLEM FORMULATION**

Since Namibia's independence in 1990, education has been one of the top priorities and many see the reforms of the education system and improved access to schooling as a means of promoting development and eradicating the social and economic inequalities inherited from previous dispensations in Namibia. Thus, since 1990 basic education has undergone several reforms such as the introduction of community-based early childhood development programmes (ECD) in Namibia. This is in line with a worldwide trend which recognises such programmes as critical to the child's intellectual, emotional and social growth. Moreover, it is also recognised that involving parents in this phase of education will affect the relationship between parents and teachers and bring rights and responsibilities to both parties (Wolfendale 1989:18).

Against the above background, a need exists to investigate the relationship between the home and preschools in the Kavango rural areas, with a view to addressing certain problems associated with the provision of community-based early childhood development programmes in rural areas of Namibia.

The following questions facilitate the demarcation of the problem more clearly:

- What are the theories on parent involvement, particularly within rural communities?
- What provision is being made for preschools in rural areas of Namibia and in what way are parents involved?



- How do teachers and parents experience parent involvement in rural preschools, with special reference to the Kavango region?
- How can these findings contribute to the improvement of home-school- community partnerships in the rural areas of the Kavango region?

## 1.6 AIMS OF RESEARCH

In the wake of the above research problems, the following objectives for this research may be identified:

- To provide a theoretical background to the role and place of parents in education in general and within rural communities in particular.
- To investigate early childhood provision and parent involvement in rural areas of Namibia since the time of Namibia's independence in 1990.
- To investigate the present relationship between the home and preschool in a rural community in the Kavango.
- To recommend ways in which these findings can contribute to improving home-school-community relations within early childhood development programmes in rural preschools in the Kavango region of Namibia.

## 1.7 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This subsection of chapter 1 provides a brief outline of the research methodology and methods employed to gather relevant data and for subsequently data analysis. A fuller exposition of the research methodology is covered in chapter 4.

In an attempt to determine the role and place of parents in preschool education a **literature study** of mainly overseas and local (southern Africa) literature is undertaken. Because of the unavailability of related local literature, much of the literature is international. The focus of this phase of the research is on previous research findings about parent involvement in preschool education in rural settings. Particular attention is, however, paid to disadvantaged rural

communities. The sources targeted in the literature study describe situations which, although not identical, relate in many ways to prevailing conditions within rural communities in Namibia.

Furthermore, the focus of the research is on **early childhood education provision in Namibia** and thus, a literature study of the following is undertaken: Ministerial policy on the notion of parent involvement in preschool education in particular and education in general, official documents of the Ministry of Basic Education and Culture and the Ministry of Local Government and Housing (Namibia), educational directives and educational reports.

To investigate the extent of parent involvement in preschool education in rural Namibia, a **qualitative approach** is used, employing data gathering techniques such as in-depth interviews and observation. Although a criticism against a qualitative approach to research is that a small sample is employed for gathering data and it therefore cannot be said to be representative of all the rural preschools in Namibia, this kind of research tends to produce relevant descriptive data. Qualitative research is defined as "any kind of research that produces findings not arrived at by means of statistical procedures or other means of quantification" (Strauss & Corbin 1990:17).

## 1.8 THE USE OF A QUALITATIVE APPROACH

A qualitative approach is used in this study because little research has been conducted in this field. In this study, four preschools (kindergartens) are selected, which may be said to resemble other preschools in the Kavango region. The preschools which are selected are all located in the rural areas of the Kavango. The selection of both teachers and parents as interviewees is done by means of network sampling (or snowball sampling) which Cohen and Manion (1994:87) describe as the method whereby researchers identify a small number of individuals who have the characteristics that they require. These people are then used as informants to identify others who qualify for inclusion and these, in turn, identify yet others. This is known as snow-balling.

In this study, participant observation is first conducted followed by semi-structured interviews. The rationale for following these steps lies in the fact that it is important for an outsider to gather background information about the participants selected before interviews can take place. Such an approach gives the opportunity to develop personal knowledge about the participants which might be useful during interviews (Bogdan & Biklin 1982:3). Participant observation is conducted during working hours at the selected preschools. In an effort to facilitate the process of data collection during participant observation, a checklist is utilised. Extensive notes are also made by the researcher. This forms part of the data.

During the interviews use is made of an interview guide consisting mainly of open-ended questions which are designed to encourage the participants to speak freely. The interview guide is used only to ensure that the most important aspects are covered in the interview, but in no way dictates what is discussed and participants are encouraged to raise topics and explore aspects they consider important. Although the interview questions are originally planned in English, the interview sessions are conducted in the local language, namely Rukwangali, which is the lingua franca in the Kavango. The interviews are recorded on audiotape and the tapes are later transcribed for closer examination. Analysis and interpretation of the findings takes place at the same time and not only after data collection (Lemmer 1992:14).

The data is finally analysed by a process of systematically searching and arranging field notes and other materials assembled by the researcher to increase his understanding of them and to enable the researcher to present that which was discovered to others (Bogdan & Biklin 1982:145). In the final analysis, the research is designed to be exploratory and descriptive and therefore no attempt is made to establish cause and effect. The initial aim of the study is to understand and describe the relationship between the home and preschool in the rural areas of the Kavango.

## 1.9 LIMITATION OF THE STUDY

As the study is conducted only in the preschools of rural Kavango, the findings of the study may not be generalised to the whole of rural Namibia.

### 1.10 THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The present policy of the Ministry of Basic Education and Culture (Namibia) on the relationship which should exist between the home and school, is that it should be based on the principle of a "partnership" (MEC 1990a:3; MEC 1993d:179). The study therefore derives its importance from the prelude above. The literature also support the significance of this study.

- (i) Research shows that student teachers worldwide are not well prepared during their initial training to work with parents and as a result many serving teachers around the globe lack the skills, experience and confidence on how to incorporate the home into the activities of the school (Tizard et al 1981:97). Thus, the intended research findings of this study could serve as resource base for teachers working within this field.
- (ii) Research evidence (Wolfendale & Bastiani 1996:20; Berger 1991:116) shows that parent involvement in the education of children has a positive impact on the academic achievements of their children. Within this context, it is expected that the intended research findings of this qualitative study would help both the parents and the preschool teachers in the Kavango rural areas to develop a deeper understanding of parent involvement in the learning and development of preschool children. Such an understanding could serve as a motivating factor towards improved relationship between the two parties.
- (iii) Furthermore, the relevance of this study to educational settings lies in the fact that the home can be informed on how to render assistance to preschool in general and to their own children in particular. As the Ministry of Basic Education and Culture (Namibia) is no longer directly responsible for preschool education provision (GRN 1996:23), a need exists in Namibia for a closer relationship between the home and preschool education.

- (iv) Although the policy of the Ministry of Basic Education and Culture (Namibia) on home and school is that of fostering closer relationship between these two parties (MEC 1995), little has been done to find out how the home and school relate to each other, particularly after the outsourcing of preschool education in Namibia. It is therefore envisaged that the findings of this study would provide evidence to stakeholders in education assisting them in making informed decisions and policy regarding preschool education provision in rural Kavango.
- (v) Lastly, research has shown that preschools globally experience problems in relation to the home, and as a result of these problems, the relationship between the home and preschool is not always based on the principle of partnership in education (Wolfendale 1989:7). It is therefore envisaged that the findings of this study would help to bring to light some problems or constraints that might hinder a closer relationship between the home and preschool in the Kavango rural areas.

## 1.11 CHAPTER DIVISION

The study is divided as described below:

**Chapter 2** deals with theories and previous research findings about parent involvement in preschool education in general and within rural communities in particular. Theories and research relating to parent involvement in all phases of schooling and in all types of communities will also be included.

As parent involvement directly relates to the education system in a given community, early childhood provision and parent involvement in Namibia in general and in rural areas of Namibia in particular are discussed in **Chapter 3**. The results of a survey of early childhood centres in Namibia which includes parent involvement in ECD centres are included.

**Chapter 4** features a further discussion of the methodology used to investigate parent involvement in rural preschools, and the following aspects of research methodology are

included: the rationale for the use of qualitative methodology, choice of participants, data analysis strategies, description of research tools and data collection strategies.

**Chapter 5** entails a discussion of the data analysis in chapter 4. In the final section, findings about the relationship between the parents and preschool teachers are presented.

**Chapter 6** provides a summary of the study as well as conclusions and recommendations derived from the study.

## 1.12 CONCLUSIONS

Namibia's independence in 1990 brought rights and responsibility to each citizen, one being the right to education. It is therefore a primary responsibility of the government to provide education for all, including preschool education.

However, it is difficult for the government to achieve this ideal, due to financial constraints, and consequently, parent involvement in the education of children becomes increasingly important in Namibia's education system. With the introduction of ECD policy in 1996, Early Childhood Education has become a community-based undertaking, which requires a relationship between parents and teachers which is based on the concept of partnership, as postulated by the Ministry of Education and Culture in its directive no. 001/01/095.

Research evidence shows that parent involvement in the education of children has a positive impact on both teachers and learners and thus parent involvement is important to the current Namibia education system. This is particularly relevant to early childhood education which is more community-based than in the past. Furthermore, involving families in the education of children has become both a short and long term goal for stakeholders in Early Childhood Education. It is also important to look at family life conditions in Namibia, as a large proportion of Namibian families live in rural areas. The study is motivated by the need for parent involvement in preschool education in the rural areas of the Kavango region, for the sake of improved schooling for children from disadvantaged families. Finally, this study is

designed to address the lack of research in parent involvement in the rural areas of the Kavango.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN PRESCHOOL EDUCATION**

#### **2.1 INTRODUCTION**

Parent involvement in education is regarded as important by most education stakeholders and in many countries education policies are being reformed, in order to include parents in education provision. This is among others because there is a general recognition that not only are schools important to parents and families, but schools also need the support of parents in order to achieve optimal success (Berger 1991:233). Swap (1993:20) concurs that parent involvement across all nations is the key to more successful children and effective schools.

Many benefits of effective parent involvement in education are listed in the literature and are discussed later in this chapter (cf.2.6). For example, Epstein (1991:262) points out that there is consistent evidence that proves that parents' activities, encouragement, interest at home and their participation at schools affect their children's achievement. Similarly, the available evidence shows that parent involvement has a profound effect on a child's success or failure at school (Coleman 1987; Clark 1988; Bastiani & Wolfendale 1996). Dauber and Epstein (1993:33) agree that research conducted for nearly a quarter of a century has shown that parent involvement in education is crucial for children's learning, attitudes about school and aspirations. Moreover, children tend to be more successful at all grade levels if their parents are involved. Thus, Dowling (1995:3) argues that parent involvement needs to be established during the early stages of the preschool child's school career.

#### **2.2 PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN PRESCHOOL EDUCATION**

Young children, regardless of their backgrounds, have something to learn from their parents, either informally or formally. Parents are therefore universally regarded as the primary teachers of their own children. Moreover, parents are seen as the first socialisation agents of their children. In terms of this, parents have an obligatory role to play in early childhood programmes. Thus, Campbell and Miller (1995:5) show that parents' knowledge, skills and experiences need to be acknowledged by preschool teachers. Bastiani (1988:54-55) agrees that



parent involvement in preschool education is the key ingredient of success and will positively influence children's achievement and intelligence over the long term. It also affects parents' attitudes to education and the particular role they play in their children's education. In addition, parents provide the critical elements that combine to create growth and learning opportunities for the preschool child and provide guidance for children in their interactions with new environments. Moreover, parents provide young children with an initial framework to use in negotiating developmental and ecological issues (Swick 1991:8). Similarly, Campbell and Miller (1995:17) show that parent involvement in early childhood education programmes helps teachers to understand children's potential.

Further, Powell (1989:6) highlights the importance of parent involvement in preschool education as follows: improved competence of the child, improved cognitive skills of the child, and reduced incidence of child abuse and child neglect. Similarly, parent involvement in preschool contributes toward the parents' growth and development as people and provides additional resources to early childhood education programmes through parent services and support. Looking at the central role that parent involvement plays in early childhood programmes above, it is justifiable to conclude that the educational goals for preschool children can best be achieved if parents are involved in early childhood education programmes.

In light of the above, many educationists agree that parents are important role players in early childhood education provision and have different roles and functions to fulfil during the period. Moreover, theories and research also point to the significant role parents might play in preschool settings. For example, Eldering and Leseman (1993:143) indicate that parents at preschool level can provide linguistic environments that are enriched enough to support their children's development of the decontextualised language skills.

Further, Swick (1991:8) shows that parents have a major role to play in early childhood education provision by providing in the basic needs of the child, ensuring that the well-being of the child is protected and promoted and by providing the foundation on which children initiate and sustain their growth during their early years. Parents can also influence the development and learning of young children in a positive way, and provide warmth, security

and harmony that facilitate the child's integration in preschool. In addition, parents fulfil the role of being partners of preschool teachers. Within the family, parents may nurture the parent-child relationship, act as models for children, and play the role of teachers of their own children.

The literature also shows that parents provide continuity to preschool children's learning and development, whereas a lack of parent involvement may result in discontinuity. Berger (1991:2) defines continuity and discontinuity as follows: "Continuity is a coherent whole or an uninterrupted succession of development while discontinuity is defined as a lack of continuity or logical sequence".

Powell (1989:33) agrees that if parents are isolated from school, their child might experience discontinuity which might result in low-academic achievement. This is particularly important as regards children from disadvantaged backgrounds.

With regard to parent involvement strategies, the literature shows that there are a variety of parent involvement techniques or strategies available which can be applied to foster parental roles and functions in preschool education settings (Swick 1991; Powell 1989; Bastiani 1988). However, parents and preschool teachers should choose appropriate strategies which best suit their local condition. Thus, Tizard et al (1981:149), for example, illustrate that each early childhood education institutions need to develop their own methods for communication, as well as negotiating suitable times for parent meetings and classroom visits. Likewise, if parents are to be used as teacher aids and volunteers, strategies suitable to the needs of the community will need to be developed by parents and preschool teachers.

Swick (1991:100) shows that due to the changing nature of family life over the years, it has become critically important for teachers to explore the use of a variety of parental involvement strategies. Strategies such as home visits, training programmes, study groups, conferences, newsletters and communication are given as examples in this regard. Squelch (1994:56) maintains that open communication is one of the most essential strategies for maintaining sound relationships between parents and teachers.

In conclusion, the literature clearly shows that parents are important role players in preschool education provision. Moreover, it is also evident that preschool education goals can best be achieved if parents are accorded their central place in the preschool education setting.

### **2.3 PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN PRESCHOOLS IN RURAL AREAS**

Parent involvement in preschool education has a positive impact on children in both rural and urban settings. Likewise, research indicates that establishing a positive school climate and involving rural parents/low-income parents improves children's achievement as well as enhancing their self-concept and motivation (Haberman 1992:33). Shari, Nedler, Oralie and McAfee (1979:13) concur, adding that children from low-income families such as rural children are better able to meet the minimum requirements of their preschool, if their parents are involved. However, it is also evident from the literature that parent involvement in preschool education faces many challenges which often limit the successful implementation of parent involvement programmes in a rural environment (Dorsey 1991:76; Brown 1991:190).

Tizard et al (1981:21) also conclude that the home backgrounds of all children is the most single influential factor that has an impact on young children's achievement in both rural and urban early childhood programmes. Other factors include: social status of parents, number of children in a family, parent's educational background, and parent's attitudes towards their child's education and achievement. In other words, the type of family and the home environment will have a direct influence on the development and learning of a preschool child (Swick 1991:17).

The literature also indicates that there are a variety of factors which have an impact on the rural parent's capacity to become involved in education of their children. Of these, the socio-economic status of the parents is seen as the most influential (Dorsey 1991:76). This is of importance regardless the country within which research is conducted. For example, Bastiani and Wolfendale (1996:153) point out that rural families in the developed world such as the USA and Britain generally have a poor socio-economic status, which results in children being disadvantaged in terms of education. In the developing world, such as Africa, this problem is

profound and most rural parents suffer socio-economic hardships which have a negative impact on the parent's ability to provide support for their children's education (Brown 1991:191). Moreover in rural areas, fewer resources are available for parents, there is a high rate of illiteracy among parents and a lack of political influence.

When one considers the socio-economic situation of rural families above, a conclusion can be drawn that although parent involvement in preschool education is a universal phenomenon, parent involvement in rural preschools has its own distinctive nature. Bastiani and Wolfendale (1996:136) conclude therefore that in Britain's rural areas parent involvement in early childhood education programmes has been patchy and in some places non-existent. However, this does not imply that rural parents are reluctant to become involved in their child's education. Thus, Bastiani and Wolfendale (1996:158) show that active parent involvement in rural schools can be realised if parents are supported. Such support ranges from parent education, access to information as well as other support networks. Rural parents in Britain, therefore, need to be supported and encouraged so as to enhance their participation in early childhood education programmes. Brown (1991:270), writing about rural communities in Africa echoes these findings, and states that parents' involvement in the education of their children is generally hampered by the poor socio-economic conditions found in rural Africa. However, both Bastiani and Wolfendale (1996:159) as well as Brown (1991:200) conclude that rural parents have a positive attitude towards their children's education, and would be more involved if supported.

Brown (1991:271) also shows that political ideology, and the social structures in a given country has a profound effect on a parent's involvement in education. In rural societies where social and educational inequalities are deep rooted, parents and communities may not have access to sufficient information to make effective decisions regarding the education of their children. However, if the political ideology allows the people to organise themselves so as to make demands on the state, parent involvement in their child's education is enhanced. Thus Brown (1991:271) concludes that in an authoritarian state the partnership between parents and teachers is likely to be unequal.

Regarding rural India, Sudarshanan (1991:143) shows that parents perceive school as a useful instrument for children's development. However, the majority of rural parents think that teachers do not work for the development of the villages, and interaction between parents and teachers is almost absent. Moreover, findings show that in rural India, there is a general feeling of alienation between teachers, school children and village people. Thus, parent committees which are intended to provide a forum for interaction between parents and teachers are mainly ornamental.

The situation indicated above is also generally reflected in Botswana's education system. In this context, the National Commission on Education (Government of Botswana 1993:379) shows that in Botswana, poor communication between parents and teachers has contributed to the poor involvement of parents in their child's education. Further, the Parent-Teacher Association in Botswana has done little in closing the communication gap between parents and teachers. The most common feature of parent involvement in rural areas in Botswana, is thus, the relatively poor interaction between parents and teachers.

Although parent involvement in early childhood development is seen as beneficial in both rural and urban settings, it is apparent that parent involvement in rural settings is more difficult to achieve and needs the concerted efforts and commitment of all concerned.

## **2.4 IMPROVING PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN RURAL PRESCHOOLS**

The literature indicates that rural parents from all backgrounds can actively become involved in their preschool child's education. However, such parental involvement needs to be organised, nurtured and supported regularly by all stakeholders involved. Rural parents can contribute positively to their preschool child's education, even though such parents are economically disadvantaged. Against this background, evidence from several studies shows that rural parents or disadvantaged parents can play a significant role in their child's preschool education if a few basic principles are adhered to.

In the first place parent involvement activities need to be **organised**. In this regard an assessment of parent-teacher partnership programmes in rural areas shows that by organising parent involvement at preschool level in such a way that it draws the rural parents into the centre of their child's learning, the potential for creating a supportive orientation in the parent-child relationship is greatly increased, while parents and teachers improve their mutual relationship (Swick 1991:94).

Furthermore, Swick (1991:139) points out that it is of significant importance for preschool teachers to **understand the home background of parents and their children**, in order to implement parent involvement activities in a rural environment. Thus, the teacher should take cognisance of factors such as poverty, illiteracy, malnutrition, family pathologies, poor health care, low support resources, unemployment, and alcohol/drug abuse. Although rural families are generally poor, Swick(1991:140) stresses that it is critical for preschool teachers to recognise that rural families have the potential to become successfully involved in their preschool child's education if encouraged to do so.

Eldering and Leseman (1993:231-321) add a third dimension by arguing that in order for rural or disadvantaged parents to become involved in their preschool children's education, **parent involvement activities need to be structured**. This structure can be either centre-based or home-based. Further, the home environment of families should serve as the foundation on which such parent involvement activities are built. It is therefore correct to conclude that rural parents have the necessary potential to contribute positively to their preschool children's development and learning. However, rural parents need to be recognised and assisted in this crucial endeavour.

As already mentioned most rural parents are socio-economically disadvantaged, and as such often find it difficult to provide support to their children's education. However, Schleicher (1992:28) contends that although the learning process and success of children depend more on the home than on the school, it correlates more with **parent's psychological support** for their children than with the socio-economic status of the family. Moreover, it also strongly relates

to the parent's cooperation with the school. Rural parents who are economically disadvantaged can thus still play a significant role in their preschool child's education.

In recognition of the rural/disadvantaged family's potential to provide substantial support to their young children, various parent involvement programmes for disadvantaged families have been developed to meet the educational needs of disadvantaged parents and their children. Parent involvement programmes such as Follow Through and Head Start, are examples of programmes which attempt to support disadvantaged families (Gordon 1977:71).

## **2.5 APPROACHES TO PARENT INVOLVEMENT PROGRAMMES**

Although parent involvement in general, and in rural areas in particular may differ, most parent involvement programmes in preschool setting fall into three categories namely:

- home-based programmes,
- school-based programmes,
- and comprehensive parent involvement programmes (Shari et al 1979:13; Berger 2000:281).

In this study, these three categories of programmes will be considered as possible approaches to parent involvement in the preschool setting.

### **2.5.1 Home-based parent involvement programmes**

Many home-based parent involvement programmes were initiated in the USA during the 1960s (Shari et al 1979:136; Berger 1991:268; Berger 2000:325). Such programmes were originally aimed at assisting young children from low-income/disadvantaged families. Although the initial idea was that of helping children from poor families, the literature also shows that home-based programmes are increasingly being used for families from all socio-economic backgrounds. This is due to the fact that home-based programmes have proven to be beneficial to all children and their parents (Berger 1991:272; Berger 2000:327).

Home-based programmes can be regarded as educational programmes which are designed to serve young children and their parents and mostly take place within the homes of the parents concerned. To clarify: home-based parent involvement programmes are home intervention programmes which assist parents to be better parents, and also help parents to become more effective teachers of their own children (Tizard et al 1979:138; Berger 1991:268; Powell 1989:97). Many home-based programmes are based on the theory of Coleman (1987:35) which argues that both the family and school provide different inputs for the socialisation process of children. Family provides inputs such as *attitudes, effort and conception of self*. The school provides inputs which can broadly be described as *opportunities, demands and rewards*. Thus, Scoff-Jones (1988:67) argues that the child's attitudes toward and expectations of education are started in the home. The same applies to the effort the child needs to make in order to learn. The concept of self-esteem is also shaped in home. In terms of the child's education, families, therefore, provide the building blocks that make learning possible (Coleman 1987:36).

Coleman (1987:36) argues that families provide the *social capital* needed by schools to optimise learners' outcomes. Comer (1987:36) sees *social capital* as the "norms, the social networks, and the relationships between adults and children that are of value for the child's growing up". The failure to bridge the social and cultural gap between home and school may lie at the root of the poor academic performance of many poor children (Comer 1988:25).

The *social capital theory* of Comer (1987; 1988) clearly indicates a need for home-based parent involvement programmes, which aims to strengthen the family's capacity to provide social capital to their children. Coleman (1988:37) sums up:

Altogether, the social capital in family and neighbourhood available for raising children is declining precipitously. The cost will of course be borne by the disadvantaged of the next generation - for the loss of social capital in the community hurts most the children with least human and social capital in their families.



With this in mind, a variety of home-based parent involvement programmes have been developed to meet the needs of disadvantaged children. Recently, home-based parent involvement programmes have been extended to all families irrespective of their social-class.

According to Gordon (1977:72), there are three underlying themes central to home-based programmes:

- The home is important and is the foundation for human development.
- Parents need help in creating a conducive environment for child development.
- Early years of life are important for lifelong development.

Berger (2000:327) agrees that

Both urban and rural residents, as the first teachers of their children, need the educational support and knowledge necessary to provide an enriched, positive environment for their children.

Greenwood and Hickman (1991:280) show that with home-based programmes the school reaches out to families. Through home visits, families, and school are joined together. Moreover, in these programmes, the home visitor works with family members within the family home. Thus, the emphasis is on assisting parents in being teachers of their own children in their home environment (Binford & Newell 1996:233). Swap (1992:580) concurs that in home-based programmes teachers expect from parents to become involved in aiding their children's learning and spending enough time with their children to transfer cultural capital to them. Epstein (1987:120) agrees that the effectiveness of home-based parent involvement programmes can be achieved when parents of children at risk are asked to reinforce at home those behaviours, values, and attitudes which teachers believe would lead to school achievement.

Although different home-based programmes have been developed, Shari et al (1979:138) states that most have the following in common:

- **Setting:** Home-based parent involvement programmes are primarily aimed at parents that have children younger than school age. Moreover, such programmes take place exclusively in the home. However, it is the right of families to decide either to opt for home-based programmes or centre-based programmes where a similar programme is offered at a community centre or school. Berger (2000:327) and Swap (1991:233) concur that home-based programmes use the home as the base, through home visitors who help parents to become teachers of their own children.
- **Goals:** Home-based parent involvement generally aims at the following:
  - (i) to improve parents' skills in teaching their own children.
  - (ii) to improve parent responsiveness and sensitivity to their child.
  - (iii) to improve the home environment with special emphasis on the child's health and nutrition.

This is supported by research which shows that the creation of a positive learning environment at home has a powerful impact on learner achievement (Henderson 1987:6).

These aims are generally achieved by making the caregiver of the child aware of the needs of young children.

- **Parent and teacher roles:** The teacher plays the role of parent educator by either directly teaching parents at home, or via a home visitor. On the other hand, parents play the role of a learner, and will be taught teaching skills, home management skills, and other relevant skills, which are needed in raising young children at home (Berger 2000:329; Swap 1992:58).
- **Content:** Although there are a variety of home-based parents programmes, the content of all generally centres around building rapport and trust between parents and parent

educator, providing information on home management, mother-child interaction, and meeting the needs of the particular family (Berger 2000:331; Swap 1992:58).

- **Method:** Home-based programmes use one primary method namely, home visits by parent educators or home teachers. The home visitor teaches by example, demonstration, and through involvement (Shari et al 1979:140; Berger 2000:330).

A variety of home-based programmes are found in the literature. One which receives positive comment is the *mother-child programme*.

#### 2.5.1.1 *The mother-child home programme (Verbal Interaction Project)*

The mother-child home programme is a home-based programme that relies on positive verbal interaction between the young child, usually in the age-group two to four years, and the primary caregiver. The primary caregiver might be the biological parent, or any adult who has the primary nurturing responsibilities of the child. This programme is based in a child's home. The home visitor (toy demonstrator) visits the home twice per week for half-hour sessions. This continues over a two year period. The school year covers seven months. The toy demonstrator use 12 books, and 11 toys each year (Berger 1991:291; Berger 2000:327). The characteristics of home-based programmes are all applicable to the mother-child home programme. Berger (1991:292) and Shari et al (1979:140) mention the following:

- **Setting:** This programme takes place exclusively in the child's home. The parents of the targeted homes together with their young children are involved in such home-based programmes. However, the parent in this programme does not refer to the mother or father only, but refers to any adult within the home, who has the primary responsibilities of raising the child. The programme targets young children between the age of two to four or five years and their primary caretakers. The parents/caregivers and their children work closely with a home-visitor (toy demonstrator), who gradually leads them through the programme. Although the initial emphasis is placed on both the

parents, in most cases the home-visitor will work mainly with the mother and her child (Berger 2000:328).

- **Goals:** The goals are inter alia the following:
  - (i) To help parents to become better teachers of their own children.
  - (ii) To help parents increase their concept-rich verbal interaction with their children.
  - (iii) To help the child to raise his/her general and verbal intelligence.

Through this programme parents are therefore taught how to increase their verbal communication with their children, thereby also enriching the parent's education. Likewise, by increasing the child's verbal interaction with his/her parents, the home visitor improves the child's verbal intelligence, thereby contributing to the child's education. Berger (2000:328) agrees that the goal of parent-child home programmes is to increase the caregiver's interaction with the child in a natural dialogue that can enhance the child's home environment. Moreover, research results show that the parent-child home programme is effective with at-risk parents, but is not needed for families in which parents already have strong, verbal interaction with their children (Berger 2000:329).

- **Parents and teacher's roles:** In this programme, parents play the role of teachers of their own children. Moreover, parents become learners by learning more about effective parent-child interaction patterns. Parents learn through modelling, demonstrations and involvement. The parent may also use their acquired skills in teaching their own children. Thus, Swap (1992) adds that a secondary expectation is that parents will spend enough time with their children to transfer cultural capital to them.
- **Content:** The content includes the following: verbal, cognitive, social and motivational techniques which are considered necessary to help parents to teach their own children. Thus, specific content of such programmes includes verbal interaction surrounding

selected books and educational toys that are given to promote perceptual-motor skills, imaginative play, problem solving, social concepts as well as language and concept development. This is in line with Delpit's argument (1988:285) that some children do not have the discourse patterns, instructional styles and spoken and written codes that will allow them success in the larger society.

- **Method:** Modelling and demonstrating the desired parent behaviours are the main methods the toy demonstrator uses in this programme. Moreover, the family is provided with selected toys and books which encourage continuing home education of the child between visits and when the programme is over. The mothers are gradually drawn into play sessions which emphasise play and conversation focussing on toys and books. Berger (2000:329) agrees that the home visitor uses modelling as teaching strategy during home visits.

In summary, the mother-child home programme is organised around the family and their children who are not in school. The emphasis of the programme is on the development of both the parents and their children. The programme takes place exclusively in the participant's home. The teacher (home visitor, toy demonstrator) has to visit the home several times per week. Such home visitors could be a volunteer, a paid teacher or a paid professional (Berger 2000:329).

The ultimate long term goals of this programme are mainly two-fold. The first one is that of preparing parents to become teachers of their own children. The second goal is that of helping the child in terms of development and learning while still at home. Similarly, Swap (1992:58) agrees that in the school-to-home transmission model, educators specify what parents should do to support their children's learning at home. Parents will spend enough time with their children to transfer cultural capital to them.

Furthermore, this programme is based on the philosophy that children from disadvantaged or poor families are generally disadvantaged in terms of their learning and development as young children. The latter supports Gordon's Family Impact Model that assumes that the family wants

to participate in the system but does not know how to socialise and helps its children acquire the necessary prerequisites for success. Thus parent education is provided (Berger 1991:216). Moreover, this kind of parent involvement programme finds its meaning in the research which indicates that parent involvement in preschool education (both home-based and school-based parent involvement programmes) has a positive impact on the children and parents, particularly these belonging to poor families (Greenwood & Hickman 1991:280; Berger 1991:5; Binford & Newell 1991:233).

With regard to the effectiveness of the mother-child home programme, evidence shows that this programme is successful in raising the general and verbal intelligence of the child. As an example, children who attend this programme for a period of two years retain intelligence gains in the first grade, while their parents show improvement in their verbal and social interaction with their children (Shari et al 1979:128). Likewise, Berger (2000:329) concurs that research show that such a programme is effective with at-risk parents, the positive modelling along with books and toys enable at-risk parents to be positive parents.

Although all home-based parent involvement programmes have merit, the programmes are based on the assumption that families want to participate in the system but do not know how to socialise and help their children acquire the necessary prerequisites for success, so parent education is offered (Berger 1991:183). Issues and concerns that arise from this model pertain to questions of how to reconcile differing opinions of expertise, doubts as to whether or not alien values are being imposed on parents, and whether or not educational efforts address superficial rather than root problems (Frisby 1992:135).

### **2.5.2 School-based parent involvement programmes**

In many communities, parents have little understanding of what their children do in schools. Thus, schools and homes sometimes try to establish communication and understanding between the two parties. Schools may attempt to improve communication with families by making use of strategies such as newsletters, visiting days and parent conferences in order to foster mutual understanding between the school and parents. This is often appreciated as both parents and

teachers have a strongly vested interest in the success of children in schools (Swap 1992:62; Berger 2000:281). Parents want their children to develop into productive, intelligent young adults, while schools want to provide the environment that facilitates and teaches children (Berger 1991:233). In order to achieve the desired educational goals for school children, parents need to develop an understanding of the school and subsequently provide support to schools in general, and to their own children in particular (Gordon 1977:76).

Considering the importance of parent involvement in school activities, such as that of assuring children's school success, and the promotion of a better understanding between parents and school teachers, numerous school-based parent involvement programmes have been developed. These programmes have distinctive characteristics and generally refer to a host of parent involvement programmes which attempt to help parents understand and support the school's educational programme. This is in line with Swap's *curriculum enrichment model* that recognises both parents and teachers as important for continuity between the home and school. In this regard, the initial social and cultural task assumed by all families and their primary education function are recognised (Swap 1992:62). In addition school-based programmes advocate that parents be brought into school as instructional assistants and volunteers in the regular school programme. Thus, it is argued, parents become supportive of the school as a whole, among others by developing an understanding of school activities (Greenwood & Hickman 1991:281; Gordon 1977:77).

The underlying assumption in school-based parent involvement programmes, is that if teachers become more attuned to the family and the culture of the home, there will be a better working relationship with parents, and greater effectiveness of educating school children is achieved (Gordon 1977:76-77). Thus, in school-based parent involvement programmes, teachers learn from parents while parents learn from teachers. Moreover, teachers as professionals learn new attitudes and new skills (Swap 1993:38).

Gordon (1977:76) also shows that in this kind of involvement, parents are involved in the school as volunteers, or in parent advisory committees. This is done in effort to change the

school, so that it becomes more responsive to the needs of the home (Greenwood & Hickman 1991:281).

The common characteristics of school-based programmes include the following:

- **Settings:** In general, school-based parent involvement programmes can take place when young children go to school. Thus, such programmes can be implemented in private nursery schools, independent parent-cooperative nursery schools, public kindergarten, daycare centres, special schools, as well as in primary schools. The primary target group in these programmes are the parents. Thus, parents are expected to visit schools/centres, in order to learn and render support to schools involved. School-based programmes are thus meant for early childhood programmes and primary schools (Shari et al 1979:164). This is in line with Gordon's *school impact model* that advocates parental influence in school (Gordon 1977:76).
- **Goals:** Shari et al (1979:165) indicate that school-based programmes aim at helping parents understand and support schools. Moreover, through these programmes parents may also learn how to be better teachers of their own children. The latter goal is usually secondary to the first goal. The goals of school-based programme include: to address the needs of individual children, to develop cooperation and communication between parent and teacher, to increase parent cooperation, support and understanding of the school and its programmes, to help schools understand the community, help teachers to be more effective, and to encourage parents to contribute to the welfare of their children, schools and community (Gordon 1977:77; Swap 1993:38; Berger 2000:285).
- **Parent and teacher roles :** In school-based programmes the role of the teacher is to instruct both children and parents, plan the overall instructional programme, organise the classroom, decide what activities will be available, assess children's progress, plan what parent's role should be, teach parents how they should perform their tasks, guide and supervise parent's work, share with parents both the pleasure and difficulties of teaching a group of children, lead and direct other members of the teaching profession.



A variety of roles are shared by parents and teachers. Thus, under the supervision of professional teachers, the volunteer parents divide up work according to the difficulty of the task, competency of individuals involved, characteristics of children, size of the group and other considerations. Moreover, parents as non-professionals play a leading role in the overall supervision of children. The literature also shows that professional teachers in school-based programmes may attempt to distinguish between the role of professionals and that of paraprofessional or non-professional assistants. This takes place because of the belief that only professionals can deliver professional services. Volunteers and parents are largely only given clerical and supportive role such as typing, filing, preparing art materials, repairing books and supervising (Gordon 1977:77; Shari et al 1979:166; Berger 2000:283).

- **Content:** The content in school-based parent involvement programmes depends on whether parents are directly involved in the teaching-learning activities and supervisory tasks, or only involved in out-of-school supportive services. Thus, when parents are involved in classroom activities, parents learn to assist in teaching tasks and interact with children on a regular basis. Thus, the content in the school-based programme centres around the principle that parents should develop, understand, and support the school (Shari et al 1979:166). Likewise, Berger (2000:283) agrees that in school-based parent involvement programmes, parents may be involved with schools on seven different levels inter alia: parent as active partner and educational leader at home, parent as decision maker, parent as an advocate for the school, parent as liaison between school and home, parent as supporter of the educational goals, and parent as recipient of education and support.
- **Method:** The parents may learn some of the desired skills and attitudes through direct teaching by a trained teacher. However, teachers use mainly demonstration, and example as teaching strategies (Shari et al 1979:167). Similarly, Berger (2000:293) points to several methods such as active participation, observation, teacher visits to parents' home and home-learning activity booklets for the usage by parents.

In this study, *parent-cooperative nursery schools* serve as an example of a school-based parent involvement programme.

#### **2.5.2.1      *Parent-cooperative nursery schools***

The primary aim of such programmes are to help parents understand and subsequently become involved in the provision of and support to schools. However, parents need skills and guidance to become involved (Berger 2000:285).

The parent-cooperative nursery school programme was initially started in the USA by a parent community, who wanted their young children to go to nursery school and who wanted to learn more about being parents. As the establishment of this programme was the initiative of a group of parents, parents elect representatives to the parent board. The representatives of the parents write a constitution and bylaws for the school, and also agree on general operating procedures. Further, they hire the staff, locate a facility (often church hall), recruit children, and do all the organisation. The hired teacher plans the educational programme for children, using mothers and fathers as assistants. Parents continuously become involved in parent-cooperative nursery school by working on a rotating basis in the nursery school. Parents receive training and education, provided by the staff of the nursery school. Different parent involvement strategies such as parent meetings are utilised by the staff, in order to get parents more involved in what takes place in the school. In this programme, parents not only work closely with teachers but they also work closely together as parents. Parents also become involved in all other facets of the school, hence the school is created by parents themselves (Shari et al 1979:128). Parent-cooperative nursery schools have many common characteristics with other centre-based programmes such as School on Saturday and Head Start, as all these programmes promote cooperation and mutual understanding between parents and teachers (Berger 2000:293).

The characteristics of school-based parent involvement programmes are also applicable to the parent cooperative nursery school programmes.

- **Setting:** Parent-cooperative nursery school as centre-based parent involvement programme involves both parents and their children in the centre/school. The children are usually three to five years old. The parents and their children are targeted in this programme. The parent involvement activities take place mostly in the centre. Parents need to visit the centre in order to be trained and to provide services to the centre as a whole (Shari et al 1979:29). In other school-based parent involvement programmes such as School on Saturday and Head Start, both parents and their children are targeted. Moreover, parent involvement activities take place largely in centres or schools (Berger 2000:293).
- **Goals:** This parent-cooperative nursery school programme aims at the following:
  - (i) To help parents increase their understanding of children's growth and development.
  - (ii) To help parents learn more about how to teach young children and about their needs and behaviour.
  - (iii) To educate parents through having them on advisory and policy boards which control the school (Shari et al 1979:129).

Other school-based parent involvement programmes such as School on Saturday and Head Start have similar goals which can be listed as follows:

- To provide education programmes that can help four year old children succeed in schools,
- To involve parents in the education of their children,
- To provide support for families,
- To increase parent participation at all levels, insuring that parents are provided the opportunity to work with their children in partnership with teachers,
- To improve parents' ability to assist their children in terms of education and development (Berger 2000:293,295).

- **Parent and teacher roles:** Parents act as volunteer assistants in classroom, learn to teach young children and deal with their needs and behaviour. Parents also play the crucial role of serving on advisory and policy boards which make centre policy (Berger 2000:285; Greenwood & Hickman 1991:281).

The teacher acts as instructor, model, and supervisor of parent volunteer. Teachers also act as planners and leaders of parent meetings. The teacher also acts as implementor of school policies, and may act as active participant on the advisory and policy board. Further, the teacher in this programme plays the role of parent-educator. However, the teacher is expected to perform his/her routine tasks as a professional teacher (Shari et al 1979:129). Thus, the role of parents and teachers in parent-cooperative nursery school is supported by Swap's curriculum model which is built on the philosophy of interactive learning, mutual respect between parents and educators and mutually developed objectives (Swap 1992:61; Swap 1993:38).

- **Content:** The content in this programme centres around the following: child guidance, interaction techniques, principles of child development, human development, human relations, organisation and running of programmes (Shari et al 1979:129). In similar school-based programmes such as Gordon's school impact model, the content is listed as follows: Teachers and school administrators learn new attitudes towards parents, new skills in communication, group processes and sharing (Gordon 1977:77). Likewise, in Swap's curriculum model, the content includes shared projects between parents and teachers, and parents as volunteers in the classroom (Swap 1992:62).
- **Method:** Because of the many facets in this programme, several methods are used. In the classroom situation, the teacher as instructor uses demonstration, modelling, direct instruction and reinforcement. In parent meetings, a teacher may use films, lectures, discussions and role-playing. In policy board meetings, parents set their own tasks, assign committees, research and debate issues (Shari et al 1979:129). Similar methods are used in other school-based programmes such as School on Saturday (Berger 2000:293).

The parent-cooperative nursery schools have many advantages. However, to be successful, all parents must be committed to help and have both the time and expertise to do so. In many communities, particularly deprived communities, both time and expertise may be lacking.

### **2.5.3 Comprehensive parent involvement programmes**

This is the third type of parent involvement programme found in preschools. The main assumption in comprehensive parent involvement programmes, is the belief that parents and schools have to share responsibilities regarding the education of school children, and that a variety of ways should be offered to parents to become involved. As parents and school teachers have shared responsibilities in educating the child, the expectations are, *inter alia*, that parents and teacher need to develop a partnership relationship which is characterised by an emphasis on coordination, cooperation, complementarity of schools and families, two way communication and collaboration between schools and the families (Epstein 1988b:76). Further, teachers and parents are believed to share common goals for children that can be achieved effectively only when teachers and parents work in partnership. Swick (1991:116) concurs that parents and teachers have mutually complementary roles to play in the education of children. Such complementary roles can be achieved if both parents and teachers recognise each other's roles. Teachers therefore reconstitute their view of teaching to be inclusive of learning from parents and having a mutually cooperative relationship with parents. Thus, in a comprehensive parent involvement programme, both the families and school teachers are recognised as important in helping the school child to succeed at school.

It is assumed that through comprehensive parent involvement programmes, continuity in terms of child's learning experience and active cooperation between individual home and the child's classroom is achieved. Thus, comprehensive parent involvement entails the deliberate involvement of parents in a variety of home-based and school-based parent involvement activities, so as to increase the parent's participation in the child's schooling activities. Likewise, partnership relationships between the home and the school are regarded as a fundamental component of a child's success. Moreover, teachers regard parents as assets and resources for the success of school children (Swap 1992). It is thus the main assumption in this

approach that there are mutual interests and influences of families and schools that can be more or less successfully promoted by the policies, programmes and actions of parents and schools (Epstein 1987:130). This is in line with Comer's School Development Programme that promotes development and learning by building supportive bonds that draw together teachers, community members, children, parents, school and other professionals (Comer 1988:24). In this regard, Comer's School Development Programme (SDP) strives for maximum participation of all education stakeholders in all the affairs of the school, for the best interests of the children (Comer & Haynes 1991:272).

The characteristics of comprehensive parent involvement programmes, include the following according to Shari et al (1979:189) and Epstein (1990:104):

- **Setting:** Since this parent involvement approach is based on sharing of responsibilities between parent and teacher, some of the comprehensive parent involvement programmes place more emphasis on the home, some more on the school, and some are fairly evenly balanced. However, both the home and school are regarded as equally important to children's learning and development. One common feature of this parent involvement approach is that all programmes attempt to link the home and school into a coordinated, cooperative learning environment for the child. This lends support to Comer's approach of involving parents in every facet of school life, including daily participation in school endeavours, policy and management issues and general school support (Haynes & Comer 1993:168; Berger 2000:286).

This approach is regarded as suitable for all phases of schooling. It is also the intended objective of this approach to help children and their parents with educational needs resulting from poverty, discrimination and language differences. In this context, this approach is inclusive as it targets children, parents, teachers and the community at large, hence it is referred to as a comprehensive approach.

- **Goals:** According to Shari et al (1979:189) and Epstein (1996:215-216), the goals of comprehensive parent involvement approach concentrate on three areas namely: the

home-school relationship, parents as teachers of their own children, and children as learners. Thus, the following objectives can be enumerated:

- (i) To develop continuity and active cooperation between the individual home and the child's classroom.
- (ii) To expand children's opportunities for learning school-related skills and attitudes even when children are not in school.
- (iii) To enhance parents' skills as teachers of their own children.
- (iv) To develop in parents, positive attitudes relating to their role as teachers of their children at home, and in school. A comprehensive parent involvement approach finds its goals in the model of inter-institutional interactions and ecological designs that emphasise the natural and necessary connections between individuals and their groups and organisations (Christenson et al 1992:36). The goals indicated above are also found in Comer's School Development Programme (SDP). Such goals centre around building supportive bonds that draw parents, children, teachers and community members into school life and work (Berger 2000:286; Comer 1988:24).

- **Parent and teacher roles:** As the assumption in a comprehensive parent involvement approach is shared responsibilities between parents and teachers, the roles of parents and teachers are mainly that of complementing each party's role in the education process of the child. The following roles are therefore identifiable: Parents are expected to create an intellectually stimulating learning environment in the home, one that complements and supplements what children learn in school. Further, parents are also expected to actually become involved in various activities relating to voluntary work in the classroom, decision making, two-way communication and collaborative activities with the rest of the community. The teachers' role in this parent involvement approach is primarily that of parent educator. However, teachers are tasked with other function such as developing and maintaining two-way communication between the home and school, acting as team leader, supervising parents in the classroom. The teacher as a home visitor teaches children in the classroom and then shifts attention to

teach parents at home. Teachers also attempt to link the families and school together, through active cooperation and coordination of activities of the two institutions (Shari et al 1979:190; Berger 2000:287)).

- **Content:** The content in this parent involvement approach centred around school-related learning. Parents learn that they can help their children both at home and in classroom. Further, parents learn that they have a shared responsibility with school teachers, to educate children. Parents also learn that they can work for the overall improvement of their child, school and community. Thus, parents develop and learn new attitudes towards themselves, their child and school (Epstein 1987b:121; Shari et al 1979:191).
- **Method:** Because the comprehensive approach involves a variety of activities, methods used will likewise need to be diverse. In the case of the Epstein approach, for example, methods will need to be developed to assist parents in their parenting task, to establish and improve two-way communication between the school and the home, and to recruit and train parent volunteers. Strategies also need to be developed to include parents in decision making and to assist them on ways of supporting learning at home. In this approach methods must also be found to involve the community.

A good example of a comprehensive approach is the programme developed by Epstein. Epstein (1996:215-216) shows that there are a variety of parent involvement practices that illustrate the shared responsibilities of parents and teachers in a child's education.

#### **2.5.3.1      *The Epstein theory of parent involvement***

In the 1980's Epstein developed a theoretical model to explain parent involvement (Epstein 1996:214). Underlying this Epstein identified three perspectives which guide researchers and practitioners in their thinking about family and school relations. The perspectives are according to Epstein (1987b:121), the following:



- Separate responsibilities of families and schools;
- Shared responsibilities of families and schools;
- Sequential responsibilities of families and schools.

Epstein (1990:104) shows that when teachers and administrators view parents and teachers as having separate responsibilities regarding the education of school child, emphasis is put on division of labour in their mutual relationship. Such a tendency might separate the school and family, decrease overlap, and restrict interaction between parents and teachers. However Epstein (1987b:131) also points out that when teachers and parents emphasise their shared responsibilities, they support the generalisation of skills required by teachers and parents to support children's learning. Thus, parents and teachers share teaching-learning responsibilities, and their joint efforts pushes the spheres of family and school influence together. This results in increased interaction between teachers, parents and the school child. All these interactions result in school-like families and family-like schools.

Finally in the third perspective, the sequential perspective, the critical stages of parents' and teachers' contribution to child development are emphasised (Epstein 1987b:121). Parents teach needed skills to the time that the child enters formal education. At that time teachers assume the primary responsibility for the child's education. Thus, there is a tendency for the role of parents to start decreasing as their children enter formal schooling. It is therefore important to establish sound home-school relationships in the foundational phase of learning.

Initially Epstein only applied the theoretical perspective to schools and families. In later years, Epstein (1990:503) added the community as a third sphere. Communities together with parents create school-like opportunities for children to experience. The underlying argument above is that family, teachers and community have a shared responsibility for children's success in schools. Thus, a comprehensive parent involvement approach aims at involving parents and community in most aspects of schools. Epstein (1996:215) developed six types of involvement and argues that there will be more or less overlap and shared responsibility depending on whether many or few practices of the six types of involvement are working. Likewise, each practice that is implemented opens opportunities for varied interaction of teachers, parents, learners, and others across contexts. Epstein (1996:215-216) describes the six types (known as Epstein's typology of family-school-community involvement) as follows:

**Type 1: Parenting**

Assist families with parenting and child-rearing skills, family support, understanding child and adolescent development, and setting home conditions to support learning at each stage and grade level.

**Type 2: Communication**

Communicate with families about school programmes and student progress with home-to-school and school-to-home communication.

**Type 3: Volunteering**

Improve recruitment, training, work and scheduling to involve families as volunteers and audiences at school or in other locations to support students and school programmes.

**Type 4: Learning at home**

Involve families with their children in learning activities at home, including homework, and other curricular activities and decisions.

**Type 5: Decision making**

Include parents as participants in school decisions, governance, and advocacy activities through parent committees, councils and other parent organisations.

**Type 6: Collaborating with the community**

Coordinate the work and resources of community, business, colleges or universities, and other groups to strengthen school programmes, family practices and student learning and development.

When Epstein's typology of parent involvement theory is reviewed, a conclusion can be made that such an approach is comprehensive and presumably motivated by the needs of today's

students, which are complex (Chapman 1991:355-35). However, it should also be pointed out that many schools do not have the capacity or expertise to involve parents in all areas as shown above. This may, however, be seen as an ideal towards which schools may move.

## **2.6 BENEFITS OF PARENT INVOLVEMENT**

The discussion of parent involvement in preschool education clearly shows that parent involvement in education has a multitude of benefits for parents, children, teachers and schools alike. Moreover, substantial research shows that children from poor or disadvantaged families can benefit greatly from parent involvement in education (Henderson 1987:17). Further, researchers have consistently shown that children from all backgrounds stand to benefit from parent involvement in their education, particularly with regard to children's academic achievement (Dauber & Epstein 1993:53, Duncan 1992:12). Parent involvement is therefore crucial for school success for all children. In general, the literature distinguishes between benefits for learners, parents, teachers and schools.

### **2.6.1 Benefits to learners**

The literature indicates that children from different backgrounds benefit from parent involvement in education. In terms of young children's transition from home to school, Dowling (1995:23) shows that when parents are involved in the child's initial transition, their child is less likely to experience trauma during this transition period. Further, numerous research studies have shown that parent involvement has a positive impact on children from poor or disadvantaged families. This includes: improved language skills, improved academic performance, improved behaviour, improved interaction between parents and children and increased intelligence gains (Shari et al 1979:128; Henderson 1987:17; Berger 1991:5-6).

Research also indicates that children from all grade levels are successful at school if their parents take part in school activities which might be home-based or school-based activities or within a comprehensive programme. Moreover, parents' educational backgrounds and social class do not play a role in this regard (Dauber & Epstein 1993:53; Duncan 1992:12; Dixon 1992:16). Bastiani (1988:54-55) concurs and quotes a study that shows that parent involvement in preschool programmes contributes to children's achievement and intelligence. While Berger (1991:24) and Dowling (1995:16) point to several benefits such as: children's

self-esteem is enhanced, children become more aware and responsive, children gain more problem-solving skills, young children are able to vocalise in early years, and children become stronger socially and emotionally. Shari et al (1979:23) agree that parent involvement in the child's education helps the child to improve his/her IQ scores, and that such children learn faster and much better.

Further, Swap (1993:3) points to the positive effect on the achievement of children in grades K-12 in the USA and argues that this is the result of parent involvement in providing learning support to their own children. Hamby (1992:59) agrees that increased achievement is sustained across grade levels for disadvantaged school children, as well as children from middle-class families if their parents are involved in their education.

In terms of children's attitudes towards their education, Henderson (1987:4) and Haberman (1992:33) agree that parents' participation in their children's education promotes positive attitudes in children, which they regard as the key to school achievement. Similarly, evidence shows that changing school climate and involving parents can raise the achievement of disadvantaged children. Moreover, Epstein (1990:111) shows that when parents and teachers are frequently involved in a wide range of parent involvement activities, school children tend to develop positive attitudes which are necessary for children's success in schools.

Epstein (1991:261-276) shows that parent involvement in learning activities such as reading and language development at home improves children reading scores. Similarly Shari et al (1979:191) agree that parent involvement in learning activities of their children has a positive influence on children's learning such as: children get additional attention, and children gain additional knowledge, information, and skills from their parents.

### **2.6.2 Benefits to parents**

Parent involvement in education is recognised as beneficial to parents. Bastiani and Wolfendale (1996:74) argue that when parents are involved in their child's education, such parents tend to increase in self-confidences, and they also develop a better understanding of school activities. Moreover, Rich (1987:12) and Swap (1993: 10) agree that parents feel empowered when they are involved, particularly those parents who were previously disempowered.

The literature also shows that when teachers make parent involvement part of their profession, parents increase their interaction with their children at home, and feel more positive about their own potential to help their children (Epstein & Dauber 1991; Hamby 1992).

Binford and Newell (1991:234) also point to numerous benefits to parents which include: parents improve their abilities to develop skills that result in more positive home-school relationships, parents' personal-life endeavours are enhanced, parents' ability to teach their children is improved, parents improve their own educational backgrounds, parents become active participants in school, parents experience better family relations, develop positive feelings about themselves, increase their ability to think more rationally, learn to control their emotions, achieve career development, and become more aware of their place and function in their respective communities.

Moreover, Davies (1993:206) also points to several benefits for parents which come from parents' involvement in the education of their child: appreciation of their own crucial role in educating their child, strengthened social networks, access to information and materials, personal efficacy and motivation to continue their own education. Jackson and Cooper (1992:36) concur that parent involvement helps to improve communication between parent and child, and between parent and school. Further, Swap (1993:11) points out that collaboration between parents and teachers, reduces the characteristic of isolation of their roles. Thus, it is reassuring for parents to know that teachers share their concerns about their children.

Other benefits for parents are indicated as follows: parents develop a sensitivity to their child's emotional, social and intellectual development, greater acceptance of their children, a greater enjoyment of their children and effective use of community agencies (Berger 1991:24). Moreover, Wolfendale (1992:9) agrees that parents benefit by being alerted to different and more effective ways of creating learning opportunities and stimulating experiences for their children.

Further, Henderson (1987:17-18) points out that parent involvement helps parents to develop more positive attitudes about school as a whole, helps parents to gather support from the community, become more actively involved in community affairs and develop increased self-confidence. When the benefits indicated above are considered, a conclusion can be made that parents through parent involvement activities are able to improve their expertise as teachers

of their own children. Moreover, parents improve their educational levels which earn them respect and appreciation.

### **2.6.3 Benefits to teachers and schools**

The literature indicates that parent involvement in education is also beneficial to teachers and the school as a whole. Such benefits range from teachers' acquisition of new skills and outside support, while the school is provided with extra resources for its operations. Swap (1993:10) shows that in parent involvement programmes where parents and teachers work successfully together, teachers experience support and appreciation from parents and a rekindling of their own enthusiasm. Rich (1987:21) agrees that parent involvement helps teachers to receive higher status from parents.

Furthermore, Bastiani (1988:38) shows that teachers are able to gain knowledge and develop an understanding of children's home-backgrounds and out-of-school activities. Epstein (1990:112) also shows that teachers who frequently involve parents in their children's education rate all parents including less-educated and single parents as helpful. Similarly, Swap (1993:38) points out that teachers' collaboration with parents results in teachers' perspective being broadened and also increases teachers' sensitivity to varied parent circumstances.

Davies (1991:289) indicates that parent involvement helps teachers to manage their work easily, while parents who are involved in teachers' work develop positive attitudes toward teachers and the school and tend to provide support to the school as a whole. Moreover, with parent involvement in school activities, teachers become more proficient in their professional activities, devote more time to teaching, and develop a child-oriented approach in their teaching activities (Henderson 1987:7-18).

Should the involvement of parents include the use of parents as volunteers in the classroom teachers are able to provide individual attention to each child as parents provide extra human resources. Moreover, in including parents in the classroom, teachers acquire new teaching skills, develop a positive working relationship with parents, develop cooperation and communication links with parents, and become more effective in their professional duty (Shari et al 1979:166).

The schools as institutions also stand to benefit substantially from parent involvement programmes. In this regard, the following benefits can be indicated: schools acquire extra expertise from parents which is useful in helping schools to develop in terms of infrastructure and academic development and parents provide linkages to partnerships with institutions outside the school, which might provide additional resources and expertise to schools. Through parent involvement in school-based meetings or in legislative sessions, the interests of children and school as a whole are advanced. Schools also benefit when parents contribute to schools as volunteers or paid aides as parent's skills and interests are additional resources for classroom and the schools as a whole. Likewise, parent's skills and expertise contribute to the enrichment of school curricula. Finally, by improving parent involvement schools are also helped to provide the needs of children with special educational needs (Shari et al 1979:167; Swap 1993:11; Jackson & Cooper 1992:33).

In conclusion: the above literature indicates that effective parent involvement in schools in general and in preschool in particular have many benefits and is a topic worthy of further research, particularly in deprived rural communities where such benefits are desperately needed.

## **2.7 BARRIERS TO PARENT INVOLVEMENT**

Although evidence shows that parent involvement has benefits for children, parents, and schools, the literature also clearly points to factors within and outside schools, which limit or impede parent involvement in education. The following factors are cited in the literature.

### **2.7.1 Teachers not appropriately trained to work with parents**

Tizard et al (1981:97-98) point out that teachers are usually not trained to involve parents in their child's education. Moreover, teachers lack the necessary experience and skills regarding working with parents at home and in schools. Moles (1993:32) agrees that most teachers get little help in developing their skills and knowledge for working with parents. Moreover, few teachers receive training in parent involvement in the course of their initial training. In-service training for teachers often does not compensate for this lack of initial training in parent involvement. Tizard et al (1981:98) also argue that few teachers are trained in assessing the

effectiveness of their parent involvement practices and consequently such teachers do not know how to address problems in their parent involvement practices.

### **2.7.2 Lack of time and resources**

Both parents and teachers often lack the time necessary to establish or improve relationships between the home and the school. Thus, Moles (1993:32) and Duncan (1992:12) agree that parents and teachers must often contend with other demands on their time as in many families both parents work outside the home. Such conditions make it difficult for parents and teachers to attend school conferences, and meetings.

Moreover, schools lack adequate resources to accommodate parents as teachers in classroom, or as volunteers in schools. Tizard et al (1981:99) show that preschools usually lack even the most primitive means of mass producing attractive written or visual materials for parents.

### **2.7.3 Lack of appropriate role definition and school policy**

Tizard et al (1981:99-100) show that the role of teachers in many schools is mainly seen as that of working with children in classroom situation. Moreover, working with parents is rarely given priority either in teacher training or in any subsequent assessment of teacher's work. Thus, most schools lack a school policy and practice regarding parent involvement in education of their child. This often impedes the implementation of parent involvement programmes.

Dauber and Epstein (1993:61) agree that school programmes and teacher's practices are the strongest and most consistent predictors of parent involvement at school and at home. Parents are more likely to become partners in their child's education if they perceive that the schools have strong practices that involve parents both at home and at school.

### **2.7.4 An uninviting atmosphere**

Moles (1993:33) indicates that some schools have an uninviting atmosphere such as locked doors and unfriendly notices. Moreover, many parents do not always feel as if they belong, or that the teachers care. Regarding the poor or disadvantaged parents, Moles (1993:34) points out that the limited education and difficulties which they experienced themselves cause many



to fear and mistrust schools, not expecting them to help their children to succeed. Moreover, schools tend to communicate with parents mainly when their children are in trouble. Thus, communication between disadvantaged parents and school is largely of a negative nature. In this way the difficulties of disadvantaged children and bad news from schools serves to reinforce parent's anxieties (Davies 1993:207).

### **2.7.5 Cultural and social barriers**

Cultural differences between parents and teachers can contribute to poor parent involvement in the education of their children. Tizard et al (1981:102) show that when cultural differences exist between parents and teachers, parents find it difficult to become involved in their child's education. This is so because parents and teachers have different conceptions of childhood, parenthood, play, toys and schooling. Moreover, such problems are intensified if teachers and parents do not speak a common language. Further, parents become discouraged by failures to communicate with teachers and this can result in parents abandoning most parent involvement activities offered to them.

Likewise, Shari et al (1979:103) show that difficulties between parents and teachers can arise if the two parties have vast differences in their educational backgrounds. Thus, the less educated parents may find it difficult to become involved in some school activities, which depend on shared ideas and common experiences between parents and teachers. Davies (1993:208-209) concurs, adding that parents and teachers may both be victims of cultural barriers caused by differences in language, values, method of education, and definition of appropriate roles. Moreover, many teachers have a negative perception of low-income families, having a low regard for their abilities to become involved in their children's education.

Further, Ritter, Mont-Reynaud & Dornbush (1993:108) argue that although parents and schools share many common goals the family culture of minorities has often been considered as dissonant with the culture of the school. Thus, the cultural gap between parents, disadvantaged parents in particular and teachers makes it difficult for parents to become supportive toward schools.

### **2.7.6 Problems relating to teachers and parents' beliefs in professionalism**

Teachers sometimes feel that parents who are not well educated cannot be expected to contribute towards schooling, and that this should best be left to the professionals (Tizard et al 1981:104). Moreover, in order to maintain professional status, it is considered unacceptable for teachers to share or teach professional skills to parents. Such teachers are not willing to be guided by parents regarding their aims for school, or their aims for a particular child. As a result of this perception, parents cannot be involved in any curriculum implementation process.

### **2.7.7 Psychological barriers**

Davies (1993:208) shows that many teachers and school officials express a standardised view of the proper role of parents in schooling and as well as supporting a conventional middle-class model of what constitutes a 'good' family and 'proper' child rearing. Poor or disadvantaged families are not seen as appropriate models for good families and proper child rearing. Moreover, teachers view disadvantaged parents as overwhelmed with problems and thus, teachers have little faith in these parents' ability to follow instructions from teachers.

Moles (1993:33) agrees that disadvantaged parents and teachers might be entangled by various psychological obstacles to mutual involvement, such as misunderstandings, negative expectations, stereotypes, intimidation and distrust. These psychological barriers are seen as preventing disadvantaged parents from being involved in school activities. Likewise, Chavkin (1993:5) and Davies (1993:208) argue that parents from minority groups are often perceived as lacking knowledge about school protocol. Further, Jackson and Cooper (1992:31) indicate that many disadvantaged parents find it difficult to provide support to their children's education because they only have limited education or a lack of proficiency in English. In spite of these problems, Dixon (1992:15) argues that the barrier to more parent involvement is not apathy or the overwhelming problems facing disadvantaged parents, it is rather a lack of support from teachers.

### **2.7.8 Barriers to parent involvement in a rural environment**

In a rural environment the above mentioned barriers are also apparent. However, the literature highlights problems more specific to rural areas which could form additional barriers to parent

involvement. These include: a lack of social services, a lack of transport, inadequate information networks, a lack of parent education, a lack of political influence, educational inequalities, a lack of policy that promotes partnership, ineffective Parent Teacher Association, underdevelopment condition in rural areas, absolute poverty, education which is not relevant to the community, a lack of expertise in the field of parent involvement, parents' fear of the possible negative consequence of becoming involved in education, a lack of time, and a lack of parent support network (Bastiani & Wolfendale 1996:155; Brown 1991:189; Sudarshanan 1991:179). Likewise, a lack of expertise in the field of parent involvement makes it difficult for rural parents and teachers to engage in any form of parent involvement activities.

In conclusion: The literature points to a wide range of barriers to parent involvement which are prevalent in both rural and urban areas. Such barriers can be summarised as follows: a lack of expertise in the field of parent involvement, a lack of time and experience by both parents and teachers, a lack of policy statement regarding parent involvement, a lack of a defined role and function regarding parent involvement, parents' lack of confidence to take part in school activities, teachers' negative attitudes toward parents, teachers' dislike of being observed by parents in classroom situation, parents and teachers who do not see the value of parent involvement, a commonly held belief that the child's education should be left to trained teachers, parents are just parents, parents' fear of being blamed by teachers, parents and teachers' feeling of incompetent when they come together, parents and teachers' disagreement regarding school curriculum, racial differences between parents and teachers, phases of school which some parents and teachers do not deemed necessary for parents to become involved, and disagreement regarding the role of parents in parent involvement programmes (Bastiani & Wolfendale 1996:155; Makoanyane 1989:44; Wolfendale 1989:2; Moles 1993:34-35; Dauber & Epstein 1993:60; Henderson 1987:2). However, Dauber and Epstein (1993:61) report that school programmes and teacher practices are the strongest and most consistent predictors of parent involvement at school and at home. This means that preschools and early childhood centres in rural areas can also overcome many of the barriers referred to above and implement meaningful parent involvement programmes if they have a policy to this end and practices adapted to the community they serve.

## 2.8 CONCLUSION

There is consistent evidence that shows that parent involvement has a profound effect on children's success at school and is beneficial to all education stakeholders concerned. It is also clear from the literature that parent involvement in preschool education needs to be established during the early stage of preschool child's school career. The preschool child's chance to succeed at school is greatly enhanced if parents are involved in preschool education programmes. Berger (1991:25-26) agrees that parent involvement in preschool education has a positive impact on a preschool child's success. It is therefore reasonable to conclude that parent involvement in preschool education promotes a preschool child's learning and success. However, this may prove more difficult in rural areas where many barriers to parent involvement have been listed. It is, therefore, clear that rural parents need to be supported in order to become active participants of their children's education.

In most education systems, parent involvement programmes relating to early childhood education fall into three categories inter alia: home-based, school-based, and the comprehensive parent involvement programmes. Moreover, it is clear from the indicated programmes that parents are recognised as important role players in the education of their child. Further, it appears that most parent involvement programmes are hampered by a lack of appropriate experience and skills on the side of parents and teachers (Tizard et al 1981:97). To address this within the Namibian context, a clearer understanding of early childhood programmes in rural areas in Namibia is needed. This will be discussed in the following chapter.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION PROVISION IN NAMIBIA**

#### **3.1 INTRODUCTION**

Education provision in Namibia has been impacted by developments in the history of the region. In Namibia, as in many parts of Africa, the establishment of schools and, indeed, Western education itself was virtually a monopoly of the Christian missions during colonial rule (Bassey 1999:27). However, in Namibia (then called South-West Africa), the German education policy in the region stated that Africans were to be trained as labourers without political and economic skills (Bassey 1999:35). Thus, although missionaries were allowed to open schools in Namibia, such schools were to follow a general education curriculum (Bassey 1999:35), of which the main objective was to allocate Africans to subordinate roles in the colonial system. Little changed when the South African government took over the region in 1915 (Kustaa 1997:835). It was only when Namibia gained independence in 1990, that the ideals of the people in the region could be fully realised within the education system. As is often the case, parent involvement in schools was influenced by both the political system in the region as well as the approach to education of the ruling powers.

The political system in colonial Namibia, which was based on the apartheid philosophy of the former South African government had a major effect on education provision in Namibia (MEC 1993d:2). Thus, colonial Namibia, in line with South Africa, was forced to adopt “Bantu Education” in the 1970s (Kamatuka 1987:43). This particular education system was designed to perpetuate white supremacy in colonial Namibia. Bantu education, also known as “apartheid education” was provided to black Namibians and was primarily aimed at training black Namibians for the subservient jobs reserved for blacks in the region (Mbuende 1987:39). The Bantu education system was also seen as the means through which racial segregation was to take place. Kamatuka (1987:44) states that “under the apartheid policy, society has the shape of a pyramid with the Africans relegated to the lower level”. Moreover, severe disparities among the various ethnic education systems prevailed. The black schools to the north of Namibia, that is, Ovambo, Kavango and Caprivi were most disadvantaged (MEC 1990b:3).

Following the introduction of the Bantu education system in Namibia, education for black Namibians was characterised by unqualified teachers, high dropout rate, lack of classroom space and an irrelevant curricula. On the other hand, education in Namibia for white learners was provided with qualified teachers, adequate funding and government support for their schools. Thus, conditions in the former white schools were utopian with adequate facilities (Kamatuka 1987:43; White-Kaba 1996:14; MEC 1990b:5). Against the above backdrop, the South African government appointed an administrator-general to Namibia in 1977. The administrator-general was empowered to issue education acts and also to repeal or amend the education acts of South Africa to make them applicable to Namibia. In terms of this new development in colonial Namibia, two education acts were introduced, inter alia: the National Education Act (Act no. 30 of 1980), and the Tertiary Education Act (Act no. 13 of 1980). These two Acts together formed the legal basis for education in Namibia during the period of 1980 to 1989 (Salio-Bao 1991:20).

The Education Act no. 30 of 1980 had a profound effect on education in Namibia. The following are a few examples of the extent of the changes to education which were included in the Act:

- (i) Education came under the control of eleven ethnic governments in Namibia. However, many of the ethnic governments were unable to meet the financial commitments this required. Kustaa (1997:865) agrees that with the adoption of Proclamation Number 30 of 1980, the National Education Act and the Proclamation Act 8 of 1980, the Namibian educational system was not only divided along racial lines but it was also fragmented along ethnic lines.
- (ii) Education was compulsory for white but not for black Namibians.
- (iii) Separate educational facilities for white and blacks in Namibia were to be established. However, this provision was unequal and most white schools were well resourced in comparison with education provision for black Namibians.

- (iv) Differences in classroom facilities, practices, teacher training programmes, teacher's salaries, teacher/pupil ratios, and differences in the amount of money spent per pupil per year, was also found when comparing the different racial groups.

Thus, the Education Act of 1980 served to perpetuate white privilege while denying the black ethnic groups education of quality. (Kamatuka 1987:39; Le Roux & Harlech-Jones 1989:5).

The provision of early childhood education was also affected by the political provision of colonial Namibia as well as prevailing socio-economic conditions. Thus, Salio-Bao (1991:45) shows that during the 1980s, the ethnic governments in Namibia were responsible for early childhood education. However, out of the eleven ethnic governments in colonial Namibia, only five ethnic governments accepted the challenge of providing for early childhood education. These included the Administration for Damara, the National Education Authority, Administration for Coloureds, and Administration for the Kavango and the administration for whites. All other ethnic governments were not equipped or so poorly funded that they were unable to become involved in the education of children prior to their entrance to formal schooling. Thus, in 1988, there were only 5 288 preschool pupils in Namibia, of whom 2 220 pupils belonged to the white minority ethnic group (Salio-Bao 1991:46). Similarly, the United Nations Development Programme (1989:4) shows that by 1988, formal education in Namibia covered only 22 pre-primary schools. These enrolment figures clearly show that the majority of preschool children in Namibia did not have access to early childhood programmes. Moreover, the African children were largely excluded from early childhood education provision.

When Namibia became independent in 1990, the new government inherited an education system which was fragmented and unequally funded. In this context, White-Kaba (1996:17) shows that: "despite the euphoria of victory, the post independence government faces a difficult challenge in administering, and trying to promote equity, in a country which under apartheid had evolved essentially as two separate nations i.e. a White nation and a Black nation." It, therefore, became a major challenge to the post colonial government in Namibia to shape an education system which would reflect the aspirations and needs of the emerging nation.

Parent involvement was also affected by the previous dispensation in Namibia. Thus, McGill (1967:210) claims that the notorious Bantu education system in colonial Namibia, deliberately discouraged parent involvement in the education of their children, particularly the African parents. In contrast, the education policies adopted after independence of Namibia in 1990 have sought to introduce a policy of partnership between parents and schools in education provision. These policies underpin the fundamental educational role parents can play in the education of their child (MEC 1995). This means that in the Namibian context, parents in particular and the community in general are regarded as important education stakeholders who are expected to supplement the efforts of the government in providing education to all Namibians (MEC 1993d:179). Against the above backdrop, early childhood education provision in Namibia since 1990 is investigated in this chapter. Moreover, parent involvement in early childhood education provision serves as the basis of this inquiry.

### **3.2 PROVISION OF BASIC EDUCATION IN NAMIBIA SINCE 1990**

Wesley and Snyder (1991:7) show that when Namibia achieved independence in 1990, educational provision was polarised. Thus, on the one end of the pole there were former white schools with superior educational facilities while on the other end, there were former black schools with inferior and inadequate facilities. In this regard, independent Namibia inherited an education system which is highly fragmented and designed on the basis of race and ethnicity (MEC 1990:3). Further, in 1990, the provision of basic education was still being administered by eleven ethnic directorates, with the white ethnic directorate having the advantages over the black ethnic directorates in terms of funding, facilities and qualified staff members (Wesley & Snyder 1991:5; White-Kaba 1996:14). This meant that the provision of education remained unequal and that many black Namibians were denied formal education.

This changed when the Constitution of the Republic of Namibia was approved by the Constitutional Assembly in 1990 and education became the right by law of everybody in Namibia (MEC 1993d:2; The Constitution of the Republic of Namibia 1990:12). Thus, article 20 of Namibia's Constitution provides that "All persons shall have the right to education, primary education shall be compulsory and the state shall provide reasonable facilities to render



effective this right for every resident within Namibia by establishing and maintaining state schools at which primary education will be provided free of charge".

Likewise, article 20 specifically shows that education is compulsory to the end of primary education, which implies grade one to grade seven. This was considered the minimum education a learner would be required to successfully complete. However, since then basic education in Namibia is seen to refer to schooling from Grade 1 up to Grade 10 i.e. primary education and junior secondary education (White-Kaba 1996:28; Kaplan 1993:30). It is therefore reasonable to remark that basic education provision in the early 1990s was still the privilege of the white population of Namibia. However, this was reversed when the Constitution of the Republic of Namibia was approved and educational reforms became essential as a means toward achieving education for all Namibians (MEC 1991:1). Such reforms and changes were primarily aimed at rooting out the inequalities in education and consequently to shape an education system which is founded on the Constitution of the Republic of Namibia (MEC 1993d:20).

White-Kaba (1996:28) shows that the government of Namibia through the ministry of Education and Culture firstly merged eleven ethnic education directorates into one ministry. This new ministry became known as the Ministry of Education and Culture in 1990. However, this new ministry was since divided into the present Ministry of Higher Education, Vocational Training, Science and Technology, and the Ministry of Basic Education and Culture. With regard to the new Ministry of Basic Education and Culture, this ministry administers non-formal education, primary and secondary education including senior secondary education (grades 11-12).

Further, basic education in Namibia is theoretically divided into three phases namely:

- junior (or lower) primary grades, which are from Grade 1 to 4,
- the senior (or upper) primary level which are from Grade 5 to 7,
- the junior secondary level, which are Grades 8 to 10 (MEC 1993d; White-Kaba 1996).

Grades 11 and 12 fall under the senior secondary phase and are not part of basic education although this phase is also administered by the Ministry of Basic Education and Culture.

### **3.3 EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION IN NAMIBIA SINCE 1990**

The provision of early childhood education in Namibia is historically a social responsibility (MEC 1993d:70; GRN 1996:10). In this respect, community involvement in early childhood provision has been the foundation of most such endeavours. Thus, the National Early Childhood Development Policy (GRN 1996:10) shows that Christian missionaries took the first initiative in providing education programmes to the young people of Namibia. Such education programmes were in the form of kindergartens (preschools) for children between the ages of three and six years. These programmes provided educational experience within the context of centre-based programmes (GRN 1996:10). The missionary churches such as the Lutheran Church, Catholic Church, and the Anglican Church are some of the older private institutions in Namibia which provided early childhood education well before 1990, and have continued doing so after independence (GRN 1996:11).

However, non-governmental organisations such as the Red Cross, have also been involved in providing similar programmes to the young children in Namibia. In addition, the government, through the Ministry of Basic Education and Culture, was involved from 1990 to 1994 in providing a one-year preprimary programme to some children at its various preschool classes (White-Kaba 1996:29; MEC 1992). However, the Ministry of Basic Education and Culture subsequently suspended preschool education provision on the grounds that this service was being unequally provided to the young children of Namibia. The Ministry argued that, as was the case prior to independence, early childhood education was only provided to a small number of children, while the majority of the young children was excluded from such provision, particularly within disadvantaged areas. The lack of adequate funds also motivated the suspension of early childhood education by government (GRN 1996:23; MEC 1991:10). The Ministry did, however, follow up this announcement with the development and subsequent release of a new national early childhood development policy in 1996. This national policy is based on the principle of partnership in education. Thus, early childhood education provision

has since 1996 become a **community-based undertaking**. This also means that parent involvement has become the cornerstone in the provision of early childhood education (GRN 1996:27). Likewise, the sector of early childhood education is one of the areas where government needs parental and community involvement, while government is required to provide support services (Otaala, Mostert, Kruger & Shaimemanga 1999:107).

Following the implementation of the National Policy of 1996, new community-based early childhood centres (ECD centres) were created in many areas of Namibia. Likewise, the government has encouraged the establishment of ECD centres in previously disadvantaged communities (Ministry of Local Government and Housing (MRLGH) 1996b:4).

Against the above background, early childhood provision in Namibia, has become a community-based endeavour. The government provides support to the communities, while the communities themselves are expected to organise and manage their own ECD centres (GRN 1996:27). In this endeavour, parents need to play an important and active role.

In conclusion, it is also important to note that the GRN (1996:13) defines early childhood as the period of a child's life from birth to the age of eight years. This is based on, among others, psychologists' arguments that there is a continuum of child's development during the period of 0 to eight years, while children above the age of nine years view the world differently. A second reason is that children between the age of six to eight years experience transition, either from home or from preschool into the primary school. Therefore, if preschool programmes are to be effective, there needs to be an interface between what happens in the preschool and the lower primary school (GRN 1996:12-13). However, in terms of the National Early Childhood Development Policy (GRN 1996:22) early childhood education is restricted to young children between the age of 0 to six years, while children beyond the age of six years are referred to primary schools and are dealt with by the Ministry of Basic Education and Culture. Thus, in the context of this study reference to early childhood education will imply education to children under the age of six who have as yet not entered formal basic education as provided by the government.

### 3.4 MINISTERIAL POLICY ON PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN EDUCATION

In the light of the expanding educational needs, and the need to achieve the educational goals, the Ministry of Basic Education and Culture in Namibia is constantly issuing directives which spell out ministerial policy on parent involvement in education, and the rationale for having parent involvement entrenched in the Namibian education system. At present the policy emphasises that the relationship between the home and school should be based on an equal partnership (MEC 1993d:179; MEC 1995).

In terms of parental role in the education of their child, Circular no. 001/016/095 of the Ministry of Basic Education and Culture stresses that parents should encourage children to attend school; show interest in their child's achievement and progress; provide in the basic needs of their children, and take part in the election of school boards. Parents should also become involved in the general management of the school, and act as partners of teachers in particular, and the government in general in all aspects of education provision. In an attempt to foster closer links between home and school in Namibia, the Ministry of Basic Education and Culture encourages the establishment of school boards. In this context, Kaplan (1993:33) shows that each school should have a democratically elected school board which includes parents and teachers. In a more recent development, education forums in each of the thirteen regions have been established to represent the community at large. According to Directive 001/016/095, the establishment of student representative bodies is encouraged by the Government of Namibia (MEC 1995:2).

The Educational Code of Conduct for Namibian schools (1990a:3) concurs that the right of every Namibian to develop his or her abilities can only be realised if schools and communities create and implement positive measures to support order and harmony which is based on the principle of democratic life as embodied in the Namibian constitution. Similarly, the Ministry of Basic Education and Culture's Efficiency programme (MEC 1996g:10) shows that parental support of their child's education helps to develop a positive attitude of pupils towards their education, and also fosters a sense of learning among children. In this respect, parents are

required to show interest in their children's school work and give priority to school related activities in preference to requiring children to work within the home or in the fields.

The Ministry of Basic Education and Culture (MEC 1992:20) concludes that communities will be given certain powers to take an active interest in the education of their child. Moreover, in *Towards Education for All* (MEC 1993d:80) it is further evident that the Ministry of Basic Education and Culture's policy on parent involvement is based on the active participation and cooperation of parents in the education of their children.

### **3.5 THE SITUATION OF YOUNG CHILDREN IN NAMIBIA**

Many people around the globe face similar daunting problems such as poverty, hunger, unemployment, poor health and inadequate educational opportunity (Otaala et al 1999:104).

Thus, the situation of the young children in Namibia is impacted on by the socio-economic condition of their parents. Nghitwika and Nowaseb (1994:8) show that almost half (47%) of Namibian households live in poverty, and 34 percent are ranked as poor while 13 percent are classified as very poor. In rural households close to 60 percent can be classified as poor, while in urban areas only 22 percent of households are poor.

Against this backdrop, the GRN (1996:8) as well as the Ministry of Health and Social Services (MOHSS 1992:2) states that most children in Namibia are living in poverty. Moreover, many young children live in overcrowded housing and have an inadequate food supply. Likewise, these children have no clean drinking water, nor sanitary facilities, particularly in rural areas of Namibia. Many children also suffer from malnutrition, malaria, diarrhoea, acute respiratory infections and measles. Moreover, 29 percent of Namibian children suffer from malnutrition while the infant mortality rate in 1992 was 56,6 percent (MOHSS 1992:2).

Furthermore, the GRN (1996:9) shows that the dislocation of the population during the liberation war has negatively impacted on Namibia's young children. Families have been separated, and consequently children are without the traditional extended family support system. Moreover, there has been an increase in female headed households resulting in

difficulties for children in these families. The National Guidelines for Early Childcare (MEC 1993c:2) concurs that children in Namibia do not receive adequate care and attention, lack appropriate social development and stimulation, and that there is a high illiteracy rate and unemployment rate among parents in the country. The situation is more pronounced in the rural areas of Namibia.

The above situation for children is particularly severe among the poor, displaced and newly settled families. Thus, the majority of the young children in Namibia find themselves in an unfavourable situation which warrants early intervention by ECD programmes. However, it remains to be seen whether the community-based early childhood education provision is viable in all parts of Namibia, considering the socio-economic circumstances and illiteracy rates of most of the parents.

### **3.6 EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMES IN NAMIBIA**

In terms of the National Early Childhood Development Policy (GRN 1996:22), programmes for young children can take a variety of forms. Moreover, such programmes can include parent education programmes which are offered individually to parents through home visits, or in the form of parents' groups. This is in line with global trend regarding early childhood provision (Berger 2000:281). Thus, early childhood programmes can take place in centres for children (centre-based) or in parental homes (home-based). Further, early childhood programmes are aimed at both the parents and their children. In accordance to GRN (1996:22), ECD programmes refer to all educational interventions with young children and their families.

#### **3.6.1 Centre-based ECD programmes**

Most ECD programmes in Namibia, are centre-based programmes. However, parents in particular, and the community in general are empowered to decide on the type of early childhood programmes they would like to establish (GRN 1996:37). Further, the centre-based programmes are generally managed by the centre committee which represents the parent community. As a result of the practice above, centre-based programmes are in the hands of the

respective parent communities or any other organisations, such as churches or non-governmental organisations (NGOs) which might take the initiative in the establishment of centre-based ECD programmes (GRN 1996:40). Some examples of centre-based programmes in Namibia are creches, daycare-centres, and preprimary schools. Creches refer to programmes which provide full daycare for children from infancy to three years of age. Daycare centre programmes provide full day programmes for children between the ages of three to six years. On the other hand, preprimary programmes refer to early childhood programmes for children between the ages of five and six years prior to their entry into primary school (GRN 1996:22).

### **3.6.2 Home-based ECD programmes**

ECD programmes in Namibia, also include parent education programmes. The National Early Childhood Development Policy (GRN 1996:37-38) and Pillay (1993:2) show that parent programmes can include strategies such as home visits where an early childhood worker (teacher) works on a one-to-one basis with a family. Moreover, home-based programmes can also entail the creation of play groups where parents come together with their children. Another alternative is that of offering parent education courses. As an example, parent education courses on child development could be offered regularly over a period of weeks. The organisation of home-based ECD programmes in Namibia lends support to the principle in home-based programmes that indicates that with home-based programmes the school reaches out to families and through home visits families and school are joined together (Greenwood & Hickman 1991:280).

The National Early Childhood Development Policy (GRN 1996:38) also shows that resources can be made available to parents through a toy lending library. This is provided by means of a mobile van that moves from one community to the other. Moreover, local radio stations are regarded as useful tools for parents in remote areas to provide them with messages and relevant information.

Another example of home-based programmes for children are mothers or families who agree to look after neighbour's young children. The parents making use of such services pay for this

care in cash or in kind (GRN 1996:38). These care-centres are based within the homes of the person offering the service.

Home-based ECD programmes are therefore directed to both the children and their parents. In the case of parents, such programmes attempt to help parents to acquire basic knowledge about child development and other knowledge regarding child learning and development. Parents can, for example, acquire basic teaching skills and knowledge which might be used to help their own child to learn. In general terms, parents through home-based programme improve their own educational background and, in the long run, improve their life standards (GRN 1996:37-38). Similarly, home-based programmes aimed at providing learning opportunities provide a service to those young children who are unable to attend centre-based programmes (Pillay 1993:7).

As a practical example of a home-based programme in Namibia, the Council of Churches in Namibia introduced a home-based education project in Katutura in Windhoek some years ago. This project aims at the following:

- (i) To increase parental awareness of the vital role of parents, families and communities regarding child development.
- (ii) To train a core of women to improve child development activities with parents in their neighbourhood.
- (iii) To strengthen home-based daycare services to young children through offering support services and local networks (Pillay 1993:7).

In order to achieve these aims, home visitors are hired and trained for this purpose (Pillay 1993:8). After training, the home visitors work in their neighbourhoods for four days per week. On the fifth day they meet at the project office to report, share experiences, exchange advice, and discuss any problems arising (Pillay 1993:9).



Pillay (1993:9) concludes that in order for the programme to succeed, home visitors need to have insight in the context of the families and communities. This includes the home backgrounds, parents expectations and needs. Pillay (1993:4) also remarks that the home-based education project has generated considerable interest as a method of promoting early childhood development in communities. It has also placed Namibia in line with parent communities around the globe who are increasingly being motivated to take up the responsibility of early childhood provision for their own children. Home-based early childhood programmes for young children are being promoted as an alternative for early childhood programme particularly in the disadvantaged communities (Berger 1991:268). Similarly, Pillay (1993:1) shows that in South Africa's disadvantaged communities in Durban, home-based early childhood programmes such as play-bus programmes, toy library, play group programmes have been tested and the results have been positive. Such home-based programmes have the following objectives: to organise disadvantaged communities to address their own educational needs, to extend early childhood education programmes to the disadvantaged children and their parents, and to increase parental involvement in early childhood provision of their own children.

With regard to the play group programme, Pillay (1993:3-4) shows that the programme is designed to bring mothers and their children together for an educational session. Leader mothers are identified in the community and they are asked to host the first session. Moreover, children and mothers in the street are also invited to join the play groups. The results of this programme show that more parents and their children are reached by the programme, the programme operates at lower cost as no large buildings and expensive materials are needed and that parents' interest in the play group programme increases.

The experiences above clearly show that parents, including disadvantaged parents, are keen to become involved in the education of their child. Moreover, it is evident that parents have vast experience and resources which can be utilised in home-based early childhood programmes (Shari et al 1979:141; Clark 1988:93-98).

### 3.6.3 The role of the churches and non-governmental organisations in ECD

As indicated above, the Namibian churches have historically been involved in early childhood provision (GRN 1996:10,11,52-53). Thus, churches such as the Lutheran Church, Catholic Church and Anglican Church were involved in ECD programmes prior to independence. These local churches provided formal programmes, generally referred to as preschool programmes, for children of three to six years of age. The involvement of churches in early childhood provision continued after Namibia achieved independence in 1990 (MRLGH 1996b:9). However, the involvement has decreased and the survey (MRLGH 1996b:9) shows that currently only 6,2 percent of ECD centres are run by churches. This decline is attributed to a lack of the needed funds and facilities to support ECD centres. However, many church groups still provide training courses for ECD workers (teachers). In this regard the survey of Early Childhood Centres serving 0 to six year old indicates that the Council of Churches in Namibia (CCN) has sponsored 29,3 percent of all the training for teachers in early childhood programmes. This is clearly an indication of the church's continued commitment to support the provision of early childhood education (MRLGH 1996b:43).

With regard to other non-governmental organisations, the survey shows that a number of NGOs such as the Red Cross, S.O.S. children's village, ERONGO, Pro-child initiative Development Agency from People to People (DAPP) and the Michelle McClean foundation are all involved in early childhood provision. The involvement of NGO entails the establishment of new ECD centres, provision of funds and materials to the needy ECD centres and the provision of training courses for ECD workers attached to ECD programmes such as the home-based ECD programmes (GRN 1996:52).

In terms of the National Early Childhood Development Policy (GRN (1996:53), churches, organisations and NGOs are expected to become members of the national ECD committee and thus provide all necessary inputs in ECD programmes nationwide, help to create and oversee the implementation of the ECD policy, provide training for teachers working in ECD programmes, and help the local communities to establish community-based ECD programmes. In short, churches and NGOs are important partners in the provision of early childhood

education in Namibia and provide the necessary funds and expertise needed to provide early childhood education to all the children of the country.

#### **3.6.4 The role of parents in the provision of ECD programmes**

The National Early Childhood Development Policy (GRN 1996:27) shows that the family provides the child's first learning environment. The family provides the child with critical early experience that is the basis for later learning and functioning. Further, parents are naturally motivated to provide the best experience to their children and have knowledge and skills to impart to their children. Thus, early childhood programmes in Namibia are built upon parent's vast experiences and resources.

In order for parents to provide early childhood education to their children, the government provides support to the families. Therefore, the government through its Ministries such as the Ministry of Basic Education and Culture, and the Ministry of Regional Local Government and Housing provide expertise and material support to the various parent community, so that these communities may establish suitable ECD centres for their own needs (GRN 1996:44). Furthermore, once the parents have defined their needs, an alternative solution to the issue is explored. For example, parents have the option of choosing centre-based or home-based early childhood programmes to be established in their communities. In this regard, the initiative and decision to establish ECD programmes rests in the hands of the parent community.

In addition, the parent community is empowered to elect centre-committees for each ECD centre. These committees represent the parents and need to manage the centre on their behalf (GRN 1996:38) according to guidelines for establishing ECD centre (MRLGH 1996a:5). The centre-committee (parent-committee) is tasked with determining in what way parents can contribute to the establishment and running of the early childhood centres. This could include providing a venue for the ECD programme, funding the initiative, providing equipment and materials, contributing to the teacher's salary, providing food for the children and taking care of the maintenance and security at the centre. Moreover, the centre-committee recruits early childhood workers, arranges training courses for the appointed teacher, determines the role and

function of the teacher, asks for external donations and support to the ECD centre, raises funds for the centre through centre-fee collection, and administers the ECD centre, makes sure that children get proper care and stimulation as well as supervising teachers. In addition, parent-committees ensure that ECD programmes for children are followed, that teachers are paid regularly and that fundraising activities are organised and hold regular meetings with parents (GRN 1996:39).

The evidence above clearly shows that early childhood provision in Namibia is largely in the hands of the parents themselves. Thus, the parents need adequate resources and skills in implementing ECD programmes in their respective communities. Considering the disparity in income which characterises the Namibian society, early childhood provision in Namibia could be unequally provided, unless the gap between the rich and poor is minimised.

Parents are therefore the basic providers of early childhood education in Namibia. However, the provision of early childhood education is driven by parents' motivation and capacity to provide all kinds of support to the ECD programmes in their communities (MRLGH 1996b:5). Furthermore, the role of the parents in early childhood education provision is determined by the kind of ECD programmes the parents want to establish in their respective communities.

Should the community choose a centre-based programme, parents will have to fulfil the following:

- (i) **Provision of material and financial support to the centre-based programmes in their communities:** The guidelines on standard for establishing ECD centres (MRLGH 1996a:2) show that parents are initially responsible for the provision of material and financial support to their community-based centres. However, this can be done in partnership with other stakeholders such as the government, NGOs and the private sector. The survey of early childhood centres serving 0 to six year old children in Namibia (MRLGH 1996b:45) agrees that parents are involved in providing material and financial support to their respective ECD centres.

- (ii) **Development of partnerships with the government, NGO and the private sector:** Parents have the responsibility of creating partnership relationships with other stakeholders in early childhood provision. Such partnerships are significant as it enables the parents to acquire resources, expertise as well as guidance which are of vital importance to community-based ECD programmes, to operate effectively. Thus, centre-committees play an important role in developing working relationships with external agencies, particularly the government ministries, the churches and the NGOs (GRN 1996:28).
- (iii) **Running of ECD centres:** The guidelines on standards for establishing ECD centres (NRKGG 1996a:5-6) indicates that parents through their centre-committee are responsible for the administration, maintenance and management of their respective centres. The survey on early childhood centres serving 0 to six year old children in Namibia (MRLGH 1996b:9,45-55) shows that 79,3 percent of the centres in Namibia are run by parent communities under the leadership of the centre-committees (parent committee).
- (iv) **Parent involvement in parent educational programmes:** In terms of the National Early Childhood Development Policy (GRN 1996:37), parents need to be provided with parent education programmes. Early childhood workers (teachers) are therefore responsible for providing relevant training and education to parents. Such training and education programmes might centre around: teaching methodology, skills learning and development, nutrition and health issues. However, the parents' needs determine the kinds of parent educational programmes being provided. Furthermore, the state, NGOs and the churches are also entitled to provide parent education programmes as requested (GRN 1996:60-61) and Pillay (1993:7-11). Thus, parents are expected to apply the acquired knowledge, and skills in improving their own situation as well as in becoming involved in the learning and development of their young children both at home and in the centre.

- (v) **Communication and contacts:** The National Early Childhood Development Policy of 1996 (GRN 1996) does not prescribe specific methods and strategies for communication and contacts, between parents and ECD workers. It is, however, also evident that communication and contacts between parents and teachers in early childhood settings are highly regarded by the government. It is also evident from the Guidelines on Standards for Establishing ECD Centres (MRLGH 1996a:11) and from the survey of early childhood centres (MRLGH 1996b:47) that parent meetings are the major method for communication and contacts between parents and ECD workers. The survey indicated above shows that 77,4 percent of parents country wide attend parent meetings on a regular basis. It is therefore reasonable to remark that the parent communities have a role to play in promoting closer relationship between parents and ECD workers through a two way communication process between the two parties.

From the above it is apparent that early childhood education in Namibia is almost totally reliant on cooperation between parents, the community and the ECD programme which has been established in the area. Because of poverty, lack of commitment, lack of knowledge and education, many parents may be disinclined to become fully involved. Doing research to determine the extent of involvement and the problems being experienced is a logical step in addressing the issue.

### **3.6.5 Role of the government in the provision of ECD programmes**

The government also plays a role in providing early childhood education in Namibia by developing national policy on the provision of early childhood education and setting up the national early childhood development committee which is responsible for compiling relevant policy (GRN 1996:40). Further, the two Ministries of the Government, inter alia: the Ministry of Basic Education and Culture and the Ministry of Regional Local Government and Housing are directly involved in early childhood provision. Other ministries of the government provide general support only (GRN 1996:50). Moreover, the National Early Childhood Development Policy (GRN 1996:48) and Towards Education for All (MEC 1993d:71) list additional roles for government such as developing the transition curriculum which is implemented when

children enter primary school, certifying non-governmental training organisations institutions involved in early childhood training, developing ECD capacity in the national teachers resource centres which provide training to ECD teachers and parent communities, developing training guidelines and training materials, and monitoring and supervising ECD programmes in the regions. It is therefore evident that the Ministry of Basic Education provides mainly leadership, training, and direction to those parent communities which are actually involved in ECD provision.

On the other hand, the Ministry of Regional and Local Government and Housing, as the lead Ministry, is responsible for over-seeing the development of ECD programmes, setting standards and regulations for ECD programmes, providing training to community activators, helping to develop curricula, liaising and collaborating with other ministries, assuring the mechanisms for the implementation of ECD programmes nationwide, responding to the communities requests e.g. technical and financial assistance, raising funds, providing parent education programmes and training centre-committees (GRN 1996:44; MEC 1993d:71). Further this Ministry provides the national and regional administration of the ECD programmes through coordination and training of the stakeholders in early childhood education.

Thus, these two ministries' roles are interrelated and parent communities are expected to interact with the two ministries regularly. It is therefore reasonable to point out that parents in general and the parent-committee in particular need the necessary information, and guidance on how to develop working relations with the two government ministries indicated above.

### **3.7 GOVERNMENTAL RESEARCH ON ECD PROVISION IN NAMIBIA**

The National Early Childhood Development Policy (GRN 1996:23) indicates that there is a lack of data on current ECD provision in Namibia. However, the Ministry of Regional Local Government and Housing has been conducting ongoing survey of early childhood centres serving 0 to six years old children in Namibia since 1990. The research shows that the number of ECD centres serving 0 to six years children in Namibia, has increased since the time of Namibia's independence. Moreover, these ECD centres are being run by the parent

communities. In the latter regard, 75,8 percent of the Namibian ECD centres are run by the communities. Furthermore, this study concluded that because of a lack of set regulations (in progress, but not yet put in practice) for quality control, many ECD centres do not pay attention to the number of children they can accommodate and thus, teacher-children ratios are not adhered to. Similarly, the study concluded that those communities which have established ECD centres have little knowledge of the rules, regulations and standards which ensure a safe place for young children.

Furthermore, evidence shows that 75,8 percent of the ECD centres are called kindergartens by the communities. Thus, the study concluded that kindergartens are the most common type of ECD centre in Namibia. However, the research also shows that the type of ECD centre does not necessarily indicate the type of service or programme being offered at the centre. With respect to the operational hours of the ECD centres, the study found that less than half of the ECD centres operates five days a week and 38,7 percent of the centres for only 2,5 to three hours per day. Thus, the average time ECD centres are open is three hours and forty five minutes (MRLGH 1996b:8). Thus, it seems reasonable to conclude that although the parent communities are eager to establish their own ECD centres, such established centres might lack quality service since parents still lack the necessary knowledge and skills in running their ECD centres independently.

The survey also shows that 79,3 percent of the ECD centres in Namibia are organised and managed by the parent communities themselves, while 6,2 percent are run by the churches. The rest are run privately, mainly by NGOs and the Red Cross organisation (MRLGH 1996b:9). It is therefore evident that parents are increasingly becoming involved in early childhood provision while the historical providers of early childhood education such as the churches are decreasing their role in early childhood education provision.

Regarding the condition of ECD centres, the study shows that 37,3 percent of the centres in Namibia has no formal structure or building and many are run under a tree. The study also shows that out of the 844 centres surveyed, 73,8 percent does not have any kind of toilet facilities for children. Furthermore, in 51,7 percent of cases water is not available to children



in the immediate vicinity. Likewise, 72,8 percent of the children brings their own water from home (MRLGH 1996b:11). The findings above once again point to the disparity among the Namibian communities, with a minority being served by well resourced ECD centres while the majority of the children are compelled to attend ECD centres with little or no facilities.

Regarding learning materials, the study shows that 41,6 percent of the centres has some toys, while 71,6 percent ECD centres indicated that they did not have enough toys. In addition, most ECD centres (68,7% of the total) indicated that the toys they had were mostly broken and in a poor condition. While 79,4 percent of the centres has an outdoor space for children to play the majority (76,5%) indicates that they do not have any outdoor equipment for use by children (MRLGH 1996b:16). The findings of this survey point to the gap between the poor and rich families, and indicate that much still needs to be done to supply equitable ECD opportunities for all people in Namibia. These findings are particularly pronounced in the rural areas.

Another area of concern is that in 1996 only 9,9 percent of all children between the age of 0 to five years were attending ECD programmes in Namibia. Furthermore, the study concluded that despite the increase in the number of ECD centres which is almost four times, the service offered is generally of a poor standard. Moreover, evidence shows that more girls are attending ECD programmes than boys. In addition few young children are enrolled in early childhood learning programmes with children between the age of four and five years having the highest enrolment. In addition the study shows that children older than six years are attending ECD programmes, although this is against the policy of the government. With regard to disabled children, the study shows that 1,03 percent of the children in ECD centres are children with disabilities (MRLGH 1996b:23) which shows that children with special needs may not be adequately cared for in the pre-school years.

The study also shows that the child/teacher ratio is unfavourable, and is not in accordance to the set regulations. In this regard, 11,8 percent of the centres has more than 40 children per one teacher, 66,5 percent of the ECD centres has one teacher, 24,6 percent has two teachers, and 5,2 percent of ECD centres has three teachers per ECD centre (MRLGH 1996b:33). In addition, the survey shows that many teachers are not adequately trained and that 70 percent

of the training offered to teachers in Namibia depends on the sponsorship from NGOs (MRLGH 1996b:43). Once more the findings clearly show that early childhood provision in Namibia is hampered by a lack of teachers, classrooms and other needed facilities. Likewise, the findings above show that the Namibian society is an unequal society and therefore early childhood education is also unequally distributed across the country.

The statistics discussed above are of great value to all working within the field of ECD in Namibia. However, what the report above fails to capture are the experiences of the role-players at grass-root level. It is hoped that the present research will in some small way rectify this.

### **3.8 BENEFITS OF PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN ECD IN NAMIBIA**

The benefits of parent involvement were discussed in chapter 2. However, in terms of the Namibian situation, parent involvement or participation in community-based early childhood provision holds many benefits for stakeholders such as the parent community, their children and the community in general. Thus, the National Early Childhood Development Policy (GRN 1996:15) point to several benefits such as: parents improve their educational backgrounds, parents become involved in the educational activities of their own child and consequently better performance of the child is achieved, parents help to sustain ECD programmes in the long run and broad coverage of early childhood provision can be achieved at low cost. Further, it helps to prevent the feelings of alienation and powerlessness; it sensitises parent communities about their rights and needs and promotes close targeting of the disadvantaged children. In addition, indigenous knowledge and expertise are utilised to the benefits of children and ECD centre in general. Parents become less dependent on professionals with regards to teaching and learning of children. It helps to build local capacity to identify needs and seek solutions and helps to create ownership and accountability among the parent community. It encourages unity and strength within the community and encourages parent community to become independent in terms of resources.

Within the above indicated context, children are provided with learning experiences by both parents and teachers (ECD workers), which helps them to learn and develop. On the other hand, teachers (ECD worker) improve their professional skills. Moreover, parents become better parents of their own child with regard to education of their child.

Similarly, the community decreases their dependency on the state, builds local capacity to identify their needs and consequently seek solutions, ownership and accountability is created regarding early childhood provision. It encourages unity and strength within the community, enhances the probability that decisions will be implemented and that programmes will be maintained in the long run even without external support and empowers communities to make decisions (GRN 1996:14).

These benefits, together with those discussed in section 2.6 indicate that parent involvement in ECD provision is worthwhile and ways need to be sought to address any problems in this regard.

### **3.9 CONCLUSION**

In summary, early childhood education provision in Namibia is mainly provided in two forms namely, home-based and centre-based ECD programmes. Moreover, parent involvement in early childhood provision is the foundation on which the two forms of early childhood are built. Parent involvement in ECD provision refers to a broad spectrum of parental involvement activities in both the centre-based and home-based ECD programmes. Furthermore, childhood education provision in Namibia is a community-based undertaking. The parent communities in partnership with the government, NGOs, churches and the private sector are responsible for early childhood provision. However, it is also clear from the literature that early childhood provision has not yet reached all young children in Namibia.

ECD programmes are directed at both parents and their young children's education and development. Furthermore, it is evident that early childhood education provision in Namibia is influenced by the socio-economic status of the parent communities which are the main

providers of ECD programmes. In this context, the historical disparity in the Namibian society, has contributed to the inequity in early childhood provision. It is also evident that the lack of basic resources, and qualified manpower in ECD centres negatively affects ECD operations. However, it is also evident that the parent communities country wide play a significant role in providing assistance to their community-based programmes.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

#### **4.1 INTRODUCTION**

In chapter 2, a literature review of parent involvement in early childhood education (ECD) programmes was provided. In chapter 3, the discussion of the provision of early childhood education in Namibia included the government's stance on the issue as well as the increased reliance of parents to take the initiatives in this regard. Both chapters 2 and 3 served to identify the important issues pertaining to ECD within the Namibian context as well as the role of parents in this endeavour. The literature also indicated the current gaps in the existing knowledge on parent involvement in rural areas of the Kavango and other rural regions in Namibia. This research addresses some of these questions through in-depth interviews with selected parents, teachers and heads of early childhood centres in the Kavango region.

The main steps in the gathering of data for this research are described in this chapter as well as providing justification for the data gathering techniques and the analysis thereof.

#### **4.2 QUALITATIVE RESEARCH**

Schwartz and Jacobs (1979:5) show that a qualitative research approach finds its roots in a phenomenological perspective of social reality. In order to understand this reality, the researcher needs to understand the life-world of the individual or group from their own frame of reference. Bogdan and Biklen (1982:31-32) concurs that phenomenologists attempt to gain entry into the conceptual world of their subjects in order to understand how and what meaning they construct around events in their daily lives. Within this context, Patton (1990:10) points out that phenomenologists seek understanding through qualitative methods such as in-depth interviews, written documents and participant observation.

Strauss and Corbin (1990:17) define qualitative research as any kind of research that produces findings not arrived at by means of statistical procedures or other means of quantification. Rist (1977:44) explains that the inner understanding associated with qualitative research enables a

comprehension of human behaviour in greater depth than is possible from a study of surface behaviour which is often the focus of a quantitative research approach. Qualitative researchers are fundamentally concerned with understanding behaviour from the participant's point of view and frame of reference. Thus, qualitative research data is characteristically rich in description of people, places and conversations. Subsequently, such data cannot be handled by statistical procedure (Bogdan & Biklen 1982:2).

#### **4.2.1 The choice of qualitative research for this study**

The primary objective of this research is to determine the extent of parent involvement within the context of a rural community. The absence of clarity regarding this issue, dictates that an exploratory methodology which would enable the problems explored and the questions asked to become more specific be used.

Qualitative research is considered appropriate for the present study due to its following characteristics:

##### **4.2.1.1 *The researcher works in natural settings and tries to understand people from their own frame of reference***

Qualitative research is concerned with life as it is lived, things as they happen, and situations as they are constructed on a daily basis. Thus, Smith (1987:174) shows that qualitative researchers study qualities or entities and seek to understand them in a particular context. Edson (1988:46) concurs that qualitative research is context specific. Likewise, the researcher tries to understand reality as others experience it. The researcher therefore includes personal experience and empathetic insight as part of the relevant data. On these grounds, qualitative research is considered appropriate for the present study where the situation is specific to the area under investigation.

#### **4.2.1.2      *The researcher is the key instrument***

In qualitative research the researcher is regarded as the instrument in the sense that much depends on what the researcher sees and also on the researcher's ability to observe and to listen. In this regard, the researcher needs interpersonal skills that facilitate the negotiation of access both into private places and private thoughts (Hammersly, Gomm & Woods 1994:4-59). In this research the researcher therefore needed to build a relationship of reciprocal trust and rapport with his subjects as the quality of the data depends on this rapport in so far as it increases the likelihood of participants sharing authentic knowledge of their life-world with him (Measor 1985:57).

#### **4.2.1.3      *Qualitative research is hypothesis-generating and descriptive***

Vulliamy, Lewin and Stephens (1990:110) argue that qualitative research does not aim at testing preconceived hypotheses as is the case in quantitative research. However, qualitative research aims at generating hypotheses and theories from the data that emerges. Further, qualitative data is usually in the form of words rather than numbers. The data is detailed, thick description, using quotations to capture people's personal perspectives and experiences (Patton 1990:40). This makes qualitative research appropriate in this study where the salient issues are not sufficiently clearly visible at the onset.

#### **4.2.1.4      *Qualitative research is concerned with process rather than outcomes***

Edson (1988:46) shows that qualitative enquiry is not merely a search for knowledge for knowledge's sake but a search for the significance of knowledge. Thus qualitative researchers are concerned with the process whereby certain behaviour is realised rather than merely with outcomes of behaviour. Such an approach was followed in the present study.

#### **4.2.1.5      *Small samples are used***

Lemmer (1992:294) argues that although qualitative research does not exclude the use of large samples, most qualitative research studies use small samples hence such research focuses on

the details and quality of individuals or small group's experiences. This was also done in the current study.

#### **4.2.1.6      *Qualitative research aims to extend understanding within the context of a particular situation***

Fraenkel and Wallen (1990:379) point out that the objective of a qualitative researcher is not to generalise results to other situations but to extend understanding within the context of a particular situation. This was also done in the present study.

#### **4.2.1.7      *Studies may be designed and redesigned***

Rather than testing preconceived hypotheses qualitative research aims to generate hypotheses and theories from the data that emerge. Thus, Burgess (1984:8) shows that all methods within qualitative research are characterised by their flexibility. Subsequently, researchers can formulate and reformulate their work. This was also applied in the current study.

### **4.3      DATA COLLECTION STRATEGIES FOR THIS RESEARCH**

Patton (1990:10) shows that phenomenologists seek understanding through qualitative methods such as written documents, participant observation and in-depth interviews. On this basis, observation and interview were selected as research tools in the present study, as they were considered to be appropriate in eliciting the relevant descriptive data that could lead towards a deeper understanding of parent involvement in a rural preschool setting.

#### **4.3.1      Observation**

The primary aim of the present study is to investigate the extent of parent involvement in a rural preschool setting. In order to investigate and clarify preschool contexts, observation was used to study the teachers, the pupils and any parents present. Such observations provided the opportunity to the researcher to acquire experience of the preschool and its practices.



Further, each participating preschool was observed as a separate educational institution and the researcher spent some time in each preschool in order to observe what was taking place. Such an undertaking assisted the researcher in broadening his understanding of the reality in rural preschools.

Similarly, observation was chosen as it accorded the researcher the opportunity to learn more about the life-world of the participants. This also facilitated the development of a positive working relationship between the researcher and the participants in the current study.

The data elicited through the observations were also used to crosscheck data gathered through the interviews.

#### **4.3.2 Interviews**

Fontana and Frey (1994:361) point out that interviewing is one of the most powerful ways one can use to try to understand fellow human beings. In the field of research, interviewing provides the chance to enter into the participants' perspective. Through interviewing, meaning is constructed which can be understood by others (Bogdan & Biklen 1982:31; Patton 1990:278). For this reason interviewing was selected as research tool in the present study.

Furthermore, interviewing as data collection strategy was relevant to the present study because the participants' feelings, ideals, beliefs, thoughts and actions can be revealed to the researcher. Such revelation produces results which can extend the researcher's understanding and insights (Fraenkel & Wallen 1990:379).

An interview guide was used in the interviews with both parents and teachers. However, the researcher did not use the guide to limit the participants' discussion of aspects which they consider of importance.

#### **4.4 QUESTIONS OF SUBJECTIVITY**

Patton (1990:14) indicates that in qualitative research, the researcher is the instrument and the validity of the research depends on the competence, skills and rigour of the researcher. Moreover, the characteristics of the researcher's own background could constitute important points of difference between the researcher and the subjects. On the other hand, the researcher's background could facilitate data gathering (Lofland & Lofland 1984:16).

##### **4.4.1 Status**

Fontana and Frey (1994:37) show that the emphasis in interviewing is shifting to allow the development of closer relationship between the interviewer and the participants. Such an approach assists the participants to speak freely and it also provides a greater spectrum of responses as well as a greater insight in the life-world of the participants. For this reason, the researcher conducted observations first before the interviews. During the observations, the researcher tried to develop a positive working relationship with parents and teachers as participants in the current study. Consequently, the researcher spent some time with the participants before the commencement of each interview. At the time of the interviews, both the researcher and the subjects were known to each other.

##### **4.4.2 Language**

The researcher and the participants of the present study come from the same cultural background. In this regard the researcher and the subjects speak the same language. The cultural harmony that prevailed between the researcher and the subjects contributed toward the open conversations during the interviews. The fact that the researcher speaks the same language as the subjects eliminated most of the problems that one can expect in interviews where use has to be made of a translator.

#### **4.4.3 Gender**

Parent involvement in education is generally associated with women. In the current study, the researcher is a male. A male researching parent involvement was initially expected to be problematic. Moreover, participants in this study were all females. Although there was no gender balance, the question of gender never seemed to have any inhibiting effect on any of the discussions during the interview process. In this context, the researcher addressed both male and female participants as equal partners who have the responsibility of supporting their children's education.

### **4.5 DESIGN OF THE PRESENT STUDY**

#### **4.5.1 Background and preliminary research**

Prior to the actual data gathering process, two explorative meetings were held with the officials in the Ministry of Regional and Local Government and Housing. Both officials are based in Rundu. The meetings were aimed at exploring issues such as parent involvement in early childhood education programmes, the role of the government in early childhood education provision and problems in ECD centres within the region. The interviews with the two officials took place separately and were conducted in their respective offices. The meetings took place in the form of semi-structured interviews. The researcher put several questions to the officials to which they responded while the researcher recorded their responses in writing.

The interviews with the officials in the Ministry of Regional and Local Government and Housing, provided valuable background information and led to a greater understanding of ECD in the region. In addition, the information they provided was valuable as a means of crosschecking the findings of the present study in the following ways:

- (i) Providing extra information on parent involvement in ECD centres within the whole Kavango region.

- (ii) Guiding the researcher in the type of questions which need to be asked and what to be aware of when observing the actual situation in the ECD centres.

Thus, through this preliminary research, the researcher was able to develop some initial understanding of the current issues in ECD centres at the local level.

Furthermore, the researcher piloted the interview guide at Nkure-Nkuru village prior to going to the selected ECD centres. This exercise served to familiarise the researcher with the art of interviewing, showed which questions were difficult for participants to interpret correctly and illuminated aspects which the researcher had not included in the original interview guide. The final interview guide and the checklist for observation were only developed after the indicated pilot study had been completed.

#### **4.5.2 Choice of schools and negotiation of access**

The people in the Kavango region are predominantly rural people who live along the Kavango river. Rundu is the main settlement in the Kavango region, but is surrounded by a number of smaller villages. The researcher chose to conduct research in four such villages lying to the west of Rundu, namely Rupara, Sitopogo, Karangana and Nkure-Nkuru villages. This was done mainly because the people to the west of Rundu speak the same language i.e. Rukwangali, which is the lingua franca in the Kavango region, whereas villages lying to the east of Rundu, do not speak Rukwangali. This was considered important as the researcher speaks Rukwangali. The decision to conduct the research at Rupara, Karangana, Sitopogo and Nkure-Nkuru villages also rested on the researcher's familiarity with the people of the four villages. Having been a long time resident of Nkure-Nkuru the researcher is known to residents of this village as well as in the villages in the vicinity. As such the researcher is accepted and welcome in these villages making access to and research of the ECD centres acceptable to all involved. This is in line with Measor (1985:55) who argues that selecting educational settings and negotiation of access to the participants is one of the crucial task a researcher has to undertake.

The selection of ECD centres followed. In the first place the researcher consulted the directory of ECD centres in Namibia in order to learn more about the ECD centres which are located in the selected area. In choosing the particular ECD centres, the researcher was assisted by the community mobiliser, an official in the local office of the Ministry of Regional and Local Government and Housing at Rundu. This official is well known to the people west of Rundu. After going through the list of the preschools, the researcher and the community mobiliser agreed to select Rupara, Sitopogo, Karangana and Nkure-Nkuru preschools. The four centres were judged to be both accessible and willing to be used in the study. After the centres were selected, the researcher visited all four centres in order to introduce the proposed research and negotiate terms of access.

At all the four centres the researcher agreed with the teachers that all the staff members of each centre be oriented to the purpose of the study, its requirements and the time schedule involved. Moreover, it was also agreed that all the teachers of each centre be solicited for the interviews. The head teachers of each centre were also tasked with suggesting parents who might be approached to be part of interviews and that the purpose of the research should also be explained to the parents. In the end the researcher explained to all the staff members that all the information to be provided will be treated as confidential. The head of each centre was also tasked with informing parents about the principle of confidentiality of the information.

Regarding the choice of preschools, the researcher found it appropriate to study preschools because preschool education provision in Namibia is a community-based undertaking (cf. chapter 3) and thus should involve many parents. In addition, when choosing the preschools, the researcher considered factors such as accessibility to the preschools and the willingness of parents and teachers to participate. In conclusion, the researcher found it necessary to select preschools where the participants and the researcher are known to each other as this facilitated communication between the participants and the researcher.

A summary of the particulars of the four ECD centres are provided in table 4.1. More details of these preschools are provided in chapter 5 (5.2).

**TABLE 4.1: SUMMARY OF PRESCHOOLS**

	Preschool A	Preschool B	Preschool C	Preschool D
Medium of instruction	Rukwangali	Rukwangali	Rukwangali	Rukwangali
Number of children	23	30	30	33
Number of teachers	2	1	1	2
Other staff	None	None	None	None
Office for head of centre	None	None	None	None
Staffroom	None	None	None	None
Number of classrooms	1	1	1	1
Telephone	None	None	None	None
Toilet facilities	None	None	None	None
Electricity	None	Available	None	None
Running water	None	None	None	None

## **ECD CENTRES**

### **(i) Centres A and C**

ECD Centres A and C look the same in terms of buildings and facilities. Thus, centre A consists of one big classroom only. Classroom facilities at centre A include chairs for children, table for the teachers' usage and numerous self-made teaching and learning aids. Centre C has got similar facilities as centre A, as these facilities were donated to both centres by a local development company which is based in Rundu. Centre A is located just outside the missionary station and is still new. Centre C is situated on the premises of the local missionary station. Both centres A and C are not finished to be built as some works on the walls are still outstanding. In terms of facilities, both centres A and C lack facilities which are needed in ECD centres. However, some basic facilities such as classroom and chairs are available in centres A and C.

(ii) **Centre B**

Centre B is attached to a local primary school and consists of one classroom. Thus, centre B shares the same school premises with a local primary school. In this regard, children of centre B and the local primary school use/share the same playground and other facilities which belong to the primary school.

In terms of facilities, centre B has few facilities for the usage of children and their teacher. Children sit on old broken desks which are the remains of the local primary school. Likewise, the teacher makes use of one of the desks. Apart from the desks, centre B has no other facilities. As in centres A and C, the available teaching aids in centre B are self-made and most of them are the leftovers of the local primary school. What is obvious is a shortage of basic facilities in centre B.

(iii) **Centre D**

Regarding centre D, this centre is situated about 300m from a local primary school. Centre D consists of three traditional huts. On the playground some few modern playing equipments are fixed. In the huts (classrooms) children sit on self-made chairs as well as their teachers. Like in the other centres, teaching and learning aids are self-made. In this regard, the teachers of all the four centres use to collect leftover materials from local schools for the use in the centres. Centre D is also characterised by a shortage of basic facilities.

#### **4.6 CHOICE OF PARTICIPANTS**

The researcher decided to choose parents and teachers as participants in the present study because the two parties are considered to be influential in early childhood provision in Namibia (cf. chapter 3). During the orientation of the teachers of the four selected preschools, it was determined by the researcher that the four ECD centres' teaching staff consisted of only six teachers including the head teachers (cf. table 4.1). On this basis, the researcher decided to select all the teachers of the four centres as participants in the present study.

Parents as participants were selected by means of snowballing (Cohen & Manion 1994:87). In this regard, the teachers of each centre as the first participants of the present study were tasked by the researcher to identify parents to each centre for participation in this study.

Considering the size of the teaching staff at the four selected centres (cf. table 4.1) as well as the fact that qualitative method produces a vast amount of information (Patton 1990:371), the present research included the following:

**(i)      Preschool A**

At preschool A, both teachers (cf. table 4.1) were interviewed simultaneously. While two parents of preschool A were also interviewed together in order to stimulate recall and conversation. With both parents and teachers semi-structured interviews were utilised by the researcher in order to elicit relevant information.

**(ii)     Preschool B**

The teaching staff at preschool B consists of one teacher only (cf. table 4.1) and subsequently the teacher at preschool B was interviewed individually by the researcher. Two parents of preschool B were interviewed together so as to stimulate recall and conversation. Semi-structured interviews were also used by the researcher for both parents and teachers.

**(iii)    Preschool C**

The only teacher at preschool C (cf. table 4.1) was interviewed individually by the researcher, utilising semi-structured interviews. Moreover, two parents of preschool C were interviewed together just as it was the case with other preschools indicated above. Semi-structured interviews were also used for both parents and teachers.



(iv) **Preschool D**

At preschool D, both teachers (cf. table 4.1) in preschool C were interviewed together, while four parents were also interviewed together in a group in order to stimulate recall and conversation. The researcher also made use of semi-structured interviews in order to interview both parents and teachers at preschool D.

Thus, a total of six teachers and ten parents were interviewed. This, together with the research undertaken prior to the study as well as the period of observation produced enough data to suggest reliable findings which would allow for a number of recommendations to be made regarding parent involvement in ECD.

Prior to the interview, parents and teachers were asked to complete a questionnaire. This was done in the presence of the researcher and with the assistance of the researcher. The questionnaire was used to gather information regarding parents and teachers. Such information ranged from personal information to professional circumstances. (The questionnaires are included as Appendices IV, V & VI). In order to gain the trust and confidence of parents and teachers, the researcher produced a letter from his supervisor at work. The letter states the aims of the present study and urges parents and teachers to provide information. It also assures all participants that the information provided will be treated confidentially. This letter is included as Appendix IX.

#### **4.7 DATA GATHERING AND PROBLEMS ENCOUNTERED**

LeCompte and Preissle (1993:158) show that the complexity and variability of human life in its natural habitat mandates that those who study it, must collect rich and diverse data. On these grounds as well as to comply with issues of validity and reliability, the researcher was motivated to use more than one data collection strategy.

### **4.7.1 Observation in preschools**

In order to conduct observation in preschools, a checklist was developed by the researcher (Appendix I). This was only used as a guide by the researcher and sensitised the researcher to aspects which should be taken note of. In February 2001, the researcher went to the selected preschools in order to conduct the observations. The researcher spent a number of days in each preschool in order to observe what takes place in these preschools. Different situations were observed such as interaction in the classroom, on the playgrounds, et cetera. During the observations, the researcher posed some unstructured questions to the staff members present. Such questions sought clarity on some of the elements which were observed. The observations were recorded in writing at the time of the observation. After some time in the preschools, it appeared as if the role players became less aware and the researcher was able to observe interactions in a natural setting. During the observations, no major problems were experienced by the researcher and the teachers and community members present were kind and helpful towards the researcher.

### **4.7.2 Interviews**

In this study, similar strategies were adopted by the researcher in interviewing parents and teachers, and no problems were experienced with either groups. Furthermore, as the local language was used in interviewing both parents and teachers, communication between the participants and the researcher was excellent. In interviewing both parents and teachers, the researcher used a guide (interview guide). In this regard, a separate interview guide was developed for both parents and teachers (cf. Appendices II & III). However, at no time did these guides dictate what was to be discussed and all participants were free to raise issues or elaborate on points of discussion which they deemed to be important.

#### **4.7.2.1 *Interviews with teachers***

Considering the relatively small size of the teaching staff at the four selected centres, all the teachers of the four centres were included as participants in this study. Thus, a total of six

teachers took part in the interviews (cf. table 4.1). Furthermore, in interviewing the teachers, the researcher made use of semi-structured interviews. This implies that the researcher used a interview guide (interview schedule) in order to assist him to cover the main points during the interviews. However, the researcher allowed the participants the freedom to discuss issues and aspects which they felt were important. Moreover, the teachers as centre-heads were asked additional questions relating to their role as centre-heads. Regarding the latter, Appendix III was utilised by the researcher as a guide. The interviews with teachers were conducted in the afternoon after the centres had closed for the day. The duration of each interview was mainly determined by the amount of information the participants were willing to share with the researcher as well as the time available. At centres A and D, the teachers were interviewed in groups of two teachers per preschool while at centres B and C each teacher was interviewed individually. On the whole, interviews with teachers proceeded smoothly.

#### **4.7.2.2      *Interviews with parents***

In conducting interviews with parents, the researcher also made use of semi-structured interviews. This means that the researcher used an interview guide (interview schedule) in order to assist him cover the main points during the interviews. This guide (cf. Appendix II) did, however, not limit either the researcher or the parents to talk about what was important to them.

The interviews with parents were convened at the homes of the parents as participants and were conducted both in the morning as well as in the afternoon. At centres A, B and C, parents were interviewed together in groups of two parents per centre/preschool, while at centre D, parents were interviewed together in a group of four parents. A total of ten parents were subsequently interviewed by the researcher.

Furthermore, all the interviews with parents and teachers were recorded on audiotape and the tapes were later transcribed. In addition, notes were also taken by the researcher during the interview process. Such notes helped to facilitate the process of transcription as well as data analysis and interpretation.

## 4.8 ANALYSING THE DATA

Patton (1990:371) argues that the process of data collection is not an end in itself. The data collected needs to be analysed, interpreted and findings presented. Bogdan and Biklen (1982:145) view data analysis as the process of systematically searching and arranging interview transcripts, field notes and other materials which were accumulated by the researcher in order to increase his/her understanding of the data. There are a variety of ways of handling and analysing data (Bogdan & Biklen 1982:146). In the present study, the researcher adopted Hycner's guidelines as set out in Cohen and Manion (1994:293-296) for analysing the data. As the basic principle in qualitative research is understanding, the researcher was consequently guided by this principle throughout the data analysis process.

In this research the data consisted of the transcriptions of all interviews, the notes made during the interviews and the notes made during observation. As indicated above, the data was analysed by adopting Hycner's guidelines for data analysis. The guidelines were utilised as follows: Initially the transcripts and the notes were read several times in order to gain familiarity with them. Moreover, the researcher listened to all tape recordings of the interviews, at the same time trying to develop some initial understanding and also checking the accuracy of the transcriptions. At this stage, the researcher used the data to think with in order to identify specific units of meaning from the data. Likewise, the identified units of meaning were reduced to units of meaning relevant to the research objectives. Furthermore, the researcher tried to determine if any of the units of relevant meaning could be naturally clustered together and whether there were common themes. Subsequently these units of relevant meaning were clustered together and stored.

Likewise, the researcher went on to examine all the clusters of meaning in order to determine themes from the clusters of meaning. The themes that emerged from the clusters of meaning were set apart. Furthermore, the researcher identified general and unique themes from the themes that emerged, placing these themes within the overall context from which these themes emerged. In this regard, data pertaining to each theme indicated above, were firstly marked with a specific colour and then stored under the relevant themes. Finally, the researcher wrote

separate composite summaries of the data under the different themes. In arriving at each composite summary, the researcher rigorously compared and contrasted each theme with the other themes.

#### **4.9 PRESENTATION OF THE DATA**

In the presentation of the data, numerous examples of raw data and original discourse were included. Consequently, the data collected were organised into readable, narrative descriptions with major themes and illustrative case examples. As all interviews were conducted in Rukwangali and therefore had to be translated to make the information accessible to a wider public. This was done by the researcher.

#### **4.10 VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY**

Measures to enhance reliability involve a complete description of the research process, so that independent researchers may replicate the same procedure in compatible settings (Schumacher & McMillan 1993:385). For this reason, the researcher included a detailed description of the present study (cf. 4.2-4.8).

Validity is concerned with the accuracy of scientific findings. Thus, Schumacher and McMillan (1993:391-393) suggest a lengthy data collection period, encouraging participants to tell their stories 'in their own words', conducting participant observation and in-depth interviews in 'natural settings' and for the researcher to do constant 'self-monitoring'. All these suggestions were adhered to. The researcher spent considerable time interviewing officials and studying the relevant documentation on ECD provision in Namibia, prior to entering the field. Sufficient time to become familiar with the context was spent as observer, prior to the interviews. Both parents and teachers were interviewed in their 'natural settings'. The period of observation, as well as the interviews with a total of sixteen participants convinced the researcher that the data were saturated. Throughout the research the researcher was aware of the fact that validity in qualitative methods hinges to a great extent on the skill, competence, and rigour of the researcher. Likewise, the researcher heeded the warning of Bogdan and Biklen 1982:42) that

the researcher should appreciate the complexity of situations and should portray a multiplicity of dimensions rather than narrowing the field. Thus, the researchers goal is to add to knowledge, not to pass judgement on settings.

In an attempt to further increase the validity of this study, triangulation was used. Patton (1990:187) concurs that most researchers use triangulation in order to increase the validity of their studies. In this regard the researcher compared the data elicited through observation with the data elicited through interviews, as well as comparing data from interviews with teachers with that obtained from interviewing parents. In addition, the information obtained from interviewing officials from the Ministry of Regional and Local Government and Housing was compared with that found in the selected preschools.

#### **4.11 LIMITATIONS TO THE PRESENT STUDY**

The present study does not claim to identify all issues associated with parent involvement in a rural setting, neither does it propose to isolate causes and effects. However, this research aims at gaining some understanding of the complexity of the problem and issues and of the extent of parent involvement as experienced by parents and teachers. In this way the gaps in the knowledge concerning parent involvement in ECD centres in rural Namibia can be filled.

#### **4.12 SUMMARY**

Chapter 4 described the rationale for the choice of a qualitative approach for the study of parent involvement in rural preschool education in the Kavango region. Likewise, chapter 4 described the methods employed in gathering the data. A discussion of the design of this study is also included. In chapter 5, the data gathered and consequently analysed will be presented and discussed.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF KEY THEMES**

#### **5.1 INTRODUCTION**

In previous chapters the provision of early childhood education in rural Namibia was discussed as well as the role of parents in this phase of education. In this chapter the data gathered during interviews and observations are described and discussed. As all interviews were conducted in Rukwangali the lingua Franca in the Kavango, all the data had to be translated. This was done by the researcher. No attempt has been made to correct language usage and all translations are faithful to the course of the conversation. The ensuing sections (cf. 5.2-5.7.7) present significant themes which emerged from the interviews and in many instances the words of the participants are quoted directly. Where this has been done, no attempt has been made to correct language usage.

#### **5.2 THE VILLAGES AND THEIR COMMUNITIES**

The four community-based ECD centres included in this research are located in four villages west of Rundu in the Kavango region (Namibia). The villages are Nkure-Nkuru, Nankudu, Rupara and Karangana. Each community-based ECD centre is named after the village in which the centre is situated. The centres are therefore called Nkure-Nkuru Community Kindergarten, Nankudu Community Kindergarten, Rupara Community Kindergarten and Karangana Community Kindergarten. Although current statistics on population size in the four villages are not available, Nkure-Nkuru, the largest of the four, is estimated to have 700 inhabitants. In the other three villages, the population size is approximately 300 per village.

All four villages are underdeveloped both in terms of human resources and the economy as a whole (Garon et al 1992:6-39). Economic activities in the village consists mainly of subsistence farming. Only a few villagers are employed as government officials. A general dealer, which stocks items frequently used by the inhabitants of the village is located in each village. For all their other needs, the villagers have to travel to Rundu.

All land within and surrounding the four villages included in this study is classified as communal land and is owned by the state. This means that the villagers may make use of the land for farming purposes and are thus not obliged to purchase land. Thus, the land remains the most important asset to all villagers, for without this subsistence farming many would starve. In times of drought, such as is presently the case, most villagers face a daily struggle for survival.

Health facilities/centres such as hospitals and clinics are also located either within the villages or in nearby villages. Thus, three of the villages included in this research have some form of health care within the village, the exception being the Karangana village. However, a neighbouring village has a clinic which is within walking distance of the people of Karangana. The villages of Nkure-Nkuru and Rupara each have a medical centres/clinics while a district medical hospital is situated in Sitopogo/Nankudu. As the health centres/clinics in the villages do not have their own medical doctors, patients are often referred to the district hospital or to the regional hospital, if in need of further medical care.

Education provision in the area is basic. One primary school is located in each village; a secondary school is also situated in three of the villages. Secondary school children from Karangana village, however, need to attend school in the neighbouring village. Thus, children in the four villages included in this study are fortunate in having access to both primary and secondary schools in their own villages, or vicinity. This is not always the case in the rural areas of the Kavango. However, most primary and secondary schools do not have adequate accommodation for all the pupils of the vicinity and are overcrowded. Thus, children from these villages are often compelled to attend schools in areas far from their home villages.

### **5.3 THE ECD CENTRES**

One community-based ECD centre has been established in each of the four villages included in this research. For purposes of this study they shall be called centres A, B, C, and D. The characteristics of the centres were described in chapter 4 (cf. Table 4.1). Centres A, B and C were established in 1995, while Centre D, the youngest, and was only established in 1999. Each



parent community took the initiatives to establish its own community-based ECD centre. A parent at centre A explains: "We held a meeting in order to discuss the establishment of our kindergarten." In this regard, the respective parent communities held several meetings which culminated in the establishment of the centres. In the case of centres A and C the local church (Evangelical Lutheran Church in Namibia) at first provided classrooms to the parent communities to serve as their ECD centres. As the head teacher of centre A explains: "Our church supported us by providing a classroom to be used as our centre." The only teacher at centre C also recalls: "We did not have our own centre, we used the classroom of our church." Clearly, the local church plays an important role in supporting the local communities initiatives, in terms of early childhood education provision.

The two parent communities were eager to build their own ECD centres, and elected a committee for this purpose. Subsequently, each centre-committee was charged with the task of soliciting funds for their respective construction projects, while parents as individuals were requested to contribute financially or materially and also asked to assist in the actual construction of the new centres. Fortunately, each centre-committee managed to solicit funds from a local development company based in Rundu. A teacher at centre C remarks; "We used the fund to buy building materials." In addition, a father of one of the children in centre A donated some building materials. Although all the parents with children in centres A and C supported the idea of building their own preschool and had been requested to assist in the actual construction thereof, not all parents were involved. At centre C parents were willing to become involved in the actual building process. Thus, these parents had to be paid a small amount from the funds which had been donated by the company in Rundu. A teacher of centre C explained: "We paid them because they did not want to work free of charge."

At centre A parents seemed more committed to complete the task. The head teacher of this centre explains: "Parents worked very hard to complete the project and we did not pay them anything."

It was therefore the commitment of a few parents which enabled each parent community to realise the goal of building new ECD centres.

With regard to centre B, the local primary school provided a classroom to serve as an ECD centre. The only teacher of centre B explains: "Up to this moment we don't have our own centre." Subsequently, centre B is attached to a local primary school, and neither the parents or children therefore have access to a building they can call their own. As was the case with centres A and C, the parent community realised the need to have their own ECD centre, and consequently, decided to also build a new centre. The only teacher of centre B adds that "A place was also found." However, in spite of this, the centre-committee could not managed to raise funds for this project. This was necessary as the parents themselves were not in a financial position to support the building of an ECD centre. A parent of centre B explains that parents are poor and thus unable to find resources which can be donated to their centre. Because of a lack of funds at centre B, a second decision was taken by the parent community that local material should be used in the building process. However, this decision was never implemented, and the centre has thus far not been built. Moreover, the teacher at centre B explains that an additional problem was the inability to pay parents who would be doing the building. This became a problem when it became apparent that parents were unwilling to render their services free of charge. This was reiterated by a parent who explained: "Parents want some kind of reward." Thus, centre B remains attached to a local primary school.

Centre D was also realised through the parent community's initiatives. A teacher at centre D explains that the parent community took a common decision to build a community-based ECD centre of their own, adding that most parents were eager to support this idea. Centre D was subsequently built by parents themselves. The centre is situated in the near vicinity of a local primary school and it consists of three traditional huts. The teacher at centre D recalls: "Parents collected grass from the forest (bush)." Thus, traditional building materials were used in the construction of centre D, and parents had to, among others, cut local grass for the building of their centre. Parents and teachers of centre D are presently satisfied with their centre as they feel that such an institution is long overdue. As one proud parent remarked: "We are happy

with our present centre, it is still new!" However, most parents and teachers remark that centre D still needs to be improved in terms of facilities but that they lack the necessary resources.

The discussions of the establishment of the four ECD centres above clearly indicates that each centre operates as a community-based institution and has been established in terms of Namibia's policy on early childhood provision. In this regard the National Policy on Early Childhood Provision stipulates that parent communities are responsible for establishing and running of their own ECD centres, while government, NGOs and the church provide support to parents' initiatives and efforts to run such centres (cf. 3.6.3-3.6.5).

#### 5.4 TEACHERS INCLUDED AS PARTICIPANTS

In this subsection relevant background information which is needed to understand the participants' responses to questions are included in Tables 5.1 to 5.8.

The teachers are all from the local community and therefore speak the language and are known to the local inhabitants. The following tables set out general characteristics of the teachers at the various ECD centres in the four villages.

**TABLE 5.1: TEACHERS AT CENTRE A**

TEACHERS	(i)	(ii)
Gender	Female	Female
Age	52 years	25 years
Marital status	Widow	Unmarried
Qualification	Grade 7	Grade 10
Teaching experience	6 years	2 years
Position in centre	Centre-head/teacher	Teacher
Children in preschool	0	0
Place of residence	Nkure-Nkuru village	Nkure-Nkuru village

**TABLE 5.2: TEACHER AT CENTRE B**

<b>TEACHERS</b>	<b>(i)</b>
Gender	Female
Age	32 years
Marital status	Unmarried/single
Qualification	Grade 10
Teaching experience	2 years
Position in centre	Centre-head/teacher
Children in preschool	0
Place of residence	Nankudu village

**TABLE 5.3: TEACHERS AT CENTRE C**

<b>TEACHERS</b>	<b>(i)</b>
Gender	Female
Age	27 years
Marital status	Single/Unmarried
Qualification	Grade 11
Teaching experience	6 months
Position in centre	Centre-head/teacher
Children in preschool	0
Place of residence	Rupara village

**TABLE 5.4: TEACHERS AT CENTRE D**

<b>TEACHERS</b>	<b>(i)</b>	<b>(ii)</b>
Gender	Female	Female
Age	33 years	31 years
Marital status	Married	Married
Qualification	Grade 8	Grade 12
Teaching experience	2½ years	2½ years
Position in centre	Centre-head	Teacher
Children in preschool	0	0
Place of residence	Karangana village	Karangana village

All the teachers interviewed are women, and fall within the age group 25 to 33 with the exception of one head teacher aged 52 years. Only two teachers are married. One teacher is a widow. None of the teachers at the four ECD centres are qualified teachers and their highest qualifications range from Grade 7 (one teacher) to Grade 12. The majority of the teachers interviewed have less than three years teaching experience. Only one teacher has been teaching for six years. The least experienced teacher has only been teaching for six months.. All the teachers interviewed live in the village in which their ECD centre is situated. They are therefore well known to both the children and parents affiliated to the centres.

### **5.5 PARENTS INCLUDED AS PARTICIPANTS**

The parents included in the research were all approached on the recommendation of the teachers in the centres. This was done on the grounds that they would be "information-rich" and would provide the researcher with the data needed to understand parent involvement in ECD provision in their respective communities.

**TABLE 5.5: PARENTS AT CENTRE A**

<b>PARENT</b>	<b>(i)</b>	<b>(ii)</b>
Gender	Female	Female
Age	33 years	41 years
Marital status	Divorced/single	Married
Biological children in centre	2	1
Father living at home or not	No	No
Highest qualification	Grade 9	Nursing Diploma
Presently employed	No	Yes
Daily routine of participant	Attends to family's needs such as food and water. Works in the fields. Collects fire wood/water. Prepares food.	Works at local clinic

**TABLE 5.6: PARENTS AT CENTRE B**

<b>PARENT</b>	<b>(i)</b>	<b>(ii)</b>
Gender	Female	Female
Age	33 years	34 years
Marital status	Divorced/single	Married
Biological children in centre	1	1
Father living at home or not	No	Yes
Highest qualification	Grade 7	Grade 9
Presently employed	No	No
Daily routine of participant	Attends to family's needs. Works in the fields. Collects fire wood/water. Prepares food. Visits friends/relatives.	Attends to family's needs. Works in the fields. Collects fire wood/water. Prepares food. Visits friends/relatives.

**TABLE 5.7: PARENTS AT CENTRE C**

<b>PARENT</b>	<b>(i)</b>	<b>(ii)</b>
Gender	Female	Female
Age	25 years	30 years
Marital status	Divorced	Married
Biological children in centre	2	1
Father living at home or not	No	No
Highest qualification	Grade 7	Grade 10
Presently employed	No	Yes
Daily routine of participant	Attends to family's needs. Works in the fields. Collects fire wood/water. Prepares food. Visits friends/relatives.	Attends to family's needs. Works in the fields. Collects fire wood/water. Prepares food. Visits friends/relatives.

**TABLE 5.8: PARENTS AT CENTRE D**

<b>PARENT</b>	<b>(i)</b>	<b>(ii)</b>	<b>(iii)</b>	<b>(iv)</b>
Gender	Female	Female	Female	Female
Age	38 years	36 years	39 years	32 years
Marital status	Divorced	Married	Married	Married
Biological children in centre	1	2	2	1
Father living at home or not	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Highest qualification	Grade 7	Grade 6	Grade 1	Grade 7
Presently employed	No	No	No	No

Daily routine of participant	Attends to family's needs. Works in fields. Collects fire wood/water. Prepares food. Visits friends/relatives.	Attends to family's needs. Works in fields. Collects fire wood/water. Prepares food. Visits friends/relatives.	Attends to family's needs. Works in fields. Collects fire wood/water. Prepares food. Visits friends/relatives.	Attends to family's needs. Works in fields. Collects fire wood/water. Prepares food. Visits friends/relatives.
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All the parents interviewed are females and of the ten mothers interviewed four are single parents. Except for one parent who completed Grade 1 only, most completed at least Grade 6. Only one parent has a professional qualification, namely a Nursing Diploma. This is the only parent interviewed who is currently employed. The other parents are involved in subsistence farming and provide both food and water for the household. This is an arduous task as water has to be fetched from the river, and firewood gathered in the vicinity of the villages. In a drought-stricken area, such as the Kavango farming is difficult and many hours need to be spent in the hot sun tilling the ground. In times of drought, very little can be harvested.

## **5.6 RELATIONSHIPS AMONG EARLY CHILDHOOD CENTRES, PARENTS AND THE COMMUNITY**

In terms of the National Early Childhood Development Policy of Namibia (GRN 1996), early childhood education provision is a community-based undertaken. Parent communities are the providers of early childhood education and they are also required to fulfil different roles at their respective ECD centres (cf. 3.6.4).

### **5.6.1 Organisation of early childhood centres**

The four ECD centres as community-based institutions are all run by their respective centre-committees. Subsequently, each centre committee is the highest governing body of the centre. Further, members to each centre-committee are elected through an election process which usually takes place at the start of each academic year. In order to elect members to each centre-committee, parent meetings are held at the commencement of each academic year during which



members to each centre-committee are democratically elected. Thus, both parents and teachers are represented at the highest level of each centre's governing structure, and have to meet regularly in order to discuss matters affecting the centres. A head teacher at centre A explains: "As a member to our centre-committee, we are supposed to meet once or two times during the course of each term."

A teacher at centre C explains what transpires at these meetings: "During centre-committee meetings we usually discuss how parents should support this centre and it is so important for our centre-committee to meet regularly."

A teacher at centre D agrees: "If parent meeting is held we usually request the parents to provide support to our centre."

In terms of the unwritten policy of the four ECD centres, each centre-committee, in consultation with teachers and the parent community, is empowered to make policy and decisions regarding each centre. Similarly, each centre-committee is also tasked with coordinating community support to each centre and is entrusted with the provision of guidance and leadership to the teaching staff in particular and to parent community in general. The teacher at centre C explains: "The centre-committee is important as it decides on the affairs of our centre. However, our centre-committee is not doing its work." Thus, the role of each centre-committee centres around policy and decision making, coordination of community support and provision of guidance and leadership.

Parent and centre-committee meetings are therefore the formal platforms created for the two parties to discuss issues pertaining to their perspective ECD centres. During parent and centre-committee meetings, both parents and teachers are granted the opportunity to deliberate matters on the agenda and decisions, policy regarding each centre can be approved. Thus, both parents and teachers of the four community-based ECD centres stress the pivotal role of their respective centre-committees. In spite of this general understanding, parent and centre-committee meetings are not held regularly in any of the four centres. A parent at centre D

agrees: "We don't see such meetings." The head teacher at centre A confirms: "Many parents do not want to attend parent meetings. Even our centre-committee is not functional."

Another teacher at centre B concurs that parent and centre-committee meetings are not held regularly at the centre because many parents are reluctant to attend parent or centre-committee meetings. She argues that this is because parents are unable to implement decisions or policies which are approved during parent meetings. A parent at centre C echoes this view indicating that her centre experiences a lack of leadership because the centre-committee does not always conduct centre-committee or parent meetings.

In community-based institutions such as the four ECD centres, ineffective centre-communities create difficulties in the running of the centres as a whole. Thus the lack of leadership at the centres and the consequent lack of parent support is cause for concern. As a result of this relationship, the teachers very often have to decide on the future of the centres without the support from parent communities. A teacher at centre C confirms the latter: "I am now left alone to do everything. What can I do?"

In the same light a parent at centre A concurs that her centre experiences a lack of leadership and as a result, the parent community does not know what to do regarding their centre. It is thus a desperate situation experienced by both parents and teachers regarding the present and future of their respective centres.

What is equally worrying is that many parents are unwilling to become involved in the running of their ECD centres arguing that it is the government's responsibility to do so or to pay them for their services. Thus, in centres B and C parents interviewed indicate that they are reluctant to render services to their centres unless they are paid to do so. The parents want the government of Namibia to provide in all the needs of their community-based centres just as it is the case with primary education provision in Namibia. A parent at centre B remarks:

*The government treats our centre unfairly. It provides everything to primary schools, including feeding schemes for children. What does the government think about our centre? We need the same treatment from our government.*

A teacher at centre C explains: "At first our parents refused to build the new centre. Now they were demanding some payment for their service to the centre."

Parents' stand on government of Namibia's involvement in the provision of support to their community-based ECD centres, is thus contrary to the role of government and that of parent communities in community-based ECD centres (cf. 3.6.4-3.6.5).

## **DISCUSSION**

In terms of Namibia's National Early Childhood Development Policy (GRN 1996:22-23), early childhood education became a community-based undertaking in 1996. In partnership with the government of Namibia, NGOs, churches and other interested parties, parent communities have a prominent role to play in early childhood education provision. Thus, the establishment and running of either home-based or centre-based community-based ECD centres rests on parent communities concerned. The government of Namibia through its line ministries only plays a supplementary role in early childhood provision. Such role includes: provision of training and guidance and the provision of material support when available (cf. 3.6.5).

Emphasising the role of parents in community-based ECD centres, the literature further shows that parent communities through their respective centre-committees are responsible for managing their centres. Each centre-committee is subsequently tasked with the following functions: to provide leadership and guidance, solicit financial and material support from parents and external donors, ensure that teachers are paid regularly, recruit teachers, organise training courses for teachers, determine the role and function of teachers, make policy and decisions, ensure quality ECD programme for children and hold regular meetings with parents (cf. 3.6.4). It is clear from the above that the centre committees of the four centres which form part of this research are not fulfilling these tasks.

### **5.6.2 Lack of written policy on parent involvement**

It is the practice in the four centres that each centre-committee coordinates parent involvement in the centre and holds regular meetings with the parents of the centre. During these meetings, decisions or policy regarding each centre are made by those attending the meeting. Decisions taken and approved at the meetings are considered binding to all parents and parents are required to adhere to all decision thus taken. The teacher of centre C explains: "Decisions are taken during parent meetings such as how the parents should support this centre." Unfortunately, these decisions are seldom recorded in writing, and are thus often open to individual interpretations. The head teacher of centre A remarks: "We don't have a written policy. We always call parent meetings to discuss matters affecting our centre." In addition, none of the four centres have any written guidelines or statement on parent involvement at the centre. This means that each centre is consequently only guided by decisions taken during parent meetings. Unfortunately, parent meetings in all four centres are not regularly conducted.

As a result of this lack of policy and the infrequency of parent meeting, teachers very often do not know what to do in order to get parents involved in their respective centre's activities. This lack of written policy on parent involvement was confirmed by all parents and teachers of the four centres. A teacher at centre A explains that as a result all issues dealing with parent involvement have to stand over until a parent meeting is convened by the centre committee. As this does not take place on a regular basis she is experiencing problems in the involvement of parents - an aspect she considers of vital importance. A teacher at centre C concurs that her centre does not have any written policy on parent involvement in the centre. As a consequence this teacher admits to not knowing how to make the parent community support her centre.

## **DISCUSSION**

The literature indicates that teachers are not always provided with appropriate training to work with parents during their initial training. Subsequently most schools, including preschools, lack written policy and practice regarding parent involvement in education (Tizard et al 1991:99). Dauber and Epstein (1993:61) agree that school programmes and teachers' practices are the

strongest and most consistent predictors of parent involvement at school and at home. A lack of policy on parent involvement impedes the parent involvement process. The four community-based ECD centres experience a lack of policy on parent involvement which generally hinders parent involvement in each centre. Both parents and teachers are often confused about their role in the centres. Community-based institutions such as the four ECD centres need a clear written policy on parent involvement which defines parental role in each centre. The success of other community-based ECD centres has been attributed to a well defined role of parents in ECD programmes (cf. 2.4).

### **5.6.3 Parents see preschool as a way of preparing children for school success**

In the four community-based ECD centres, parents want their children to succeed at school and eventually in life. A parent at centre A remarks: "Is not like in the past, young children have to learn many things while they are still young." Through early childhood education provision, parents aim at laying a strong foundation to their children's school success. Thus, parents regard sending their children to the centres as an important service to their children's preparation for school success. Moreover, sending children to the centre is seen by parents as a responsibility towards their own children. Through early childhood provision, young children are prepared on time to face the challenges of school and eventually children become successful at school and within their own communities. As parent at centre D remarks: "I want to make things easier for my children when they start school." Similarly, a parent at centre B concurs that she sends her child to the centre in order to learn about things that can assist her child to perform successfully at school at a later stage. A parent at centre A also argues similarly: "Our children are well prepared to start Grade 1, it is not like in the past."

The rest of the parents interviewed all agree that early childhood provision contributes to their children's learning and development. Similarly, the teachers interviewed all agree that parents appreciate early childhood provision for their children. Adding that through early childhood education programme, the young children in the villages are prepared for Grade 1 in primary schools.

Early childhood education provision is considered by parents as beneficial to their children in community-based ECD centres. In this regard, parents point to several benefits to their children. A parent to centre D explains: "Children learn new things that assist them to growth in life."

Similarly, a parent at centre C adds: "Our children learn good manners and they also meet new friends which is a good thing for children."

The rest of the parents interviewed point to several benefits to their children such as improved behaviour, respect for elders, becoming aware of religion, respecting time and acquiring literacy skills. In essence, early childhood programme assists the young children to learn and to develop successfully. As a parent to centre A remarks: "My child is learning a lot of skills that I cannot provide."

Parents recognise thus that an early childhood programme improves their children's learning and development. The latter motivates parents to send their children to the centres. However, it does not seem to motivate parents to contribute much to the centres. Likewise, it does not seem as if they realise the lack of facilities and equipment will have a detrimental effect on the provision and success of ECD provision to their children. Nor are they concerned about the lack of training of the teachers entrusted with the education of their children, and make no effort at assisting the teachers at the centres to improve their knowledge.

## **DISCUSSION**

The literature shows that through preschool education, children are equipped to get the best out of school and indeed out of life (cf. 1.3.3). This implies preschool education serves as a way of preparing young children for school success and as such preschool education is beneficial to young children, their parents and the community (cf. 3.8). Likewise, the findings of this study confirm that preschool education (early childhood programme) aims at preparing young children for school success and such programme is beneficial to the children's learning and development. The benefits to children motivate parents to enroll their children into

community-based ECD centres. However, the fact that they then cease to assist the centre is reason for concern.

#### **5.6.4 The financial needs of the centres cannot be met by the parents**

In terms of Namibia's National Early Childhood Development Policy, each parent community is required to fund its own community-based ECD centre, including teachers' salaries. The government of Namibia, NGOs and churches are only expected to support the efforts of parent communities (cf. 3.6.3-3.6.5) not to take over their responsibilities..

In an attempt to meet the financial needs of the four community-based centres, individual parents are required by each centre to pay a monthly centre-fee. The centre-fee collected by each centre is used mainly for the teacher's salary. The teacher of centre C explains: "The government does not give money to buy materials or to pay me as the teacher of this centre." However, at all four centres, teacher salaries are not regularly paid. This is mainly because many parents are unable to afford centre-fee on a monthly basis due to the high level of poverty of the community and the high unemployment rate among most parents. As a result of the irregular payment of centre-fees, all four centres experience a shortage of funds and a need for external financial support from donors to supplement the efforts of individual parents. The teacher of centre D remarks: "We are not paid, we just work for the love of the children." The head teacher at centre A explains the financial situation at her centre as follows:

*At this centre parents as individuals are required to pay centre-fee each month. However, most parents are poor and they do not have employment. That is why they cannot afford to pay centre-fee each month.*

A teacher of centre B concurs adding that her centre is in financial crisis because most parents are unable to afford to make a financial contribution to the centre on a regular basis. She also explained that the centre-fee is mainly utilised to pay her salary but that this is far from enough to meet her and the centre's financial needs.

In addition to the monthly fee, most centres expect parents to assist the centre by, for example, donating food, cleaning materials, toys et cetera. The head teacher at centre A indicates that her centre specifically requested parents to donate food and soap to the centre but nothing was received from parents. However, a father voluntarily donated building material to centre A. The other centres also request parents to donate anything useful to their centres but received no response to this request.

All parents interviewed were well aware of their obligation to pay a monthly fee. As a parent at centre C put it: "What I know is, we as parents agreed to pay money to our centre." In spite of this, many parents do not do so. In January only three parents of centre B paid their children's fees. This is a very big problem as centre-fees are the main source of funding for all four centres. Moreover, each centre utilised the funds for paying teachers' salaries. When parents of a centre are unable or unwilling to pay their monthly fees, teachers working at the centres do not receive salaries at the end of the month. This was confirmed by the head teacher at centre B who states that she does not receive a salary every month.

A parent at centre C laments the plight of most parents: "We simply don't have something to offer to the centre. We are poor people." Because of the depressed economic conditions in the community, parents who cannot pay the centre-fee in cash are encouraged to pay in-kind by rendering any kind of needed services to their respective centres. This allowance was agreed to by both parents and teachers of all the four centres at parent meetings. However, most parents have not made use of this offer and continue to do nothing. Although the practice in all four centres allows parents to either pay in cash or in kind many parents to all four centres choose not to do anything. However, in exceptional cases a few parents at centre A sometimes pay in kind such as millet which the teachers sell to the public for cash. At the other centres, parents who cannot afford to pay in cash do not make any other attempt in order to meet their financial commitment to their centres. A teacher at centre B narrates the problem of non payment at her centre as follows:

*During the month of January only three parents paid centre-fees and although parents are allowed to pay in kind I don't see any improvement.*



Likewise, the head teacher at centre A explains that all parents are informed that if they are unable to pay in cash they are also allowed to pay in kind, adding that only a few parents have made use of this offer. A parent whose child attends this centre states that although she is aware of this concession, she feels that often parents have got nothing to offer to their centre. This attitude leads to the head teacher at centre A complaining: "We expect our parents to support us voluntarily but I have not yet seen any substantial support from our parents." A parent at centre C concurs that parents are sometimes requested by the teacher to support their centre on a voluntary basis. However, she admits that many parents are reluctant to provide support of any kind.

Highlighting the role of parents in providing voluntary support services to her centre, the head teacher at centre A indicates that some parents do at times provide limited support to their community-based centre. She, however, points out that very often parents are reluctant to do so even if they are requested by the teachers to assist in this regard. The only teacher at centre C agrees that there are few parents who are willing to support her centre on a voluntary basis. She further shows that most parents ignore her requests to offer voluntary services. At centres B and D both parents and teachers interviewed indicate that parents do not provide any kind of voluntary support to their centres even if they are requested to do so. A parent at centre B concurs that parents refuse to offer voluntary services to their community-based centre. The head teacher at centre A has similar problems and laments: "At this centre we want parents to assist us in many ways. At present teachers have to do everything in the centre."

Thus, it seems that parents are reluctant to, or unable to pay the agreed upon monthly fees to the ECD centres. This means that teachers are often not being paid and that centres are not able to buy the equipment needed by ECD centres. The agreed-upon payment in-kind is also not working. Most parents are reluctant to avail themselves of this opportunity and argue that they have nothing to offer. Likewise many parents seem to feel that they should in some way be remunerated if they work at the centres.

## DISCUSSION

The literature refers to parents in Namibia as the basic providers of early childhood education (cf. 3.6.4). Regarding community-based ECD centres, parent communities are required to provide in all the needs of their ECD centres which are established by parents themselves. Parent involvement in community-based ECD centres thus entails a broad spectrum of parent involvement activities which are aimed at sustaining each centre (GRN 1996:27-40; MEC 1993c:22-32). This should include parents' provision of financial assistance in the form of centre-fee payment. However, provision is made for payment in-kind. However, evidence from the research undertaken shows that teachers' salaries are not regularly paid because many parents are unable to pay the centre-fee each month. This is particularly the case in disadvantaged parent communities which are mostly rural parents.

Regarding the four community-based ECD centres, parent involvement is perceived as meeting financial commitments through centre-fee payment each month. Likewise, parents who are unable to afford payment in cash are given the option to pay in kind but the latter does not always happen. Community-based ECD centres such as the four centres need a wide range of parents' support. In the absence of such support, community ECD centres can prove to be difficult to run on a sustainable basis. As community projects, parents are not only responsible for centre-fee payment but also responsible for all other needs of their community-based ECD centres. Regarding the four community-based ECD centres, parent involvement is only defined in terms of financial support. It seems that the latter is attributed to a lack of centre policy on parent involvement as well as to ineffective centre committees as governing body.

### **5.6.5 Poverty impinges on the successful running of the centres**

Namibia as a developing country faces the many socio-economic problems associated with developing nations. Moreover, the literature shows that close to 60 percent of rural people in Namibia are classified as poor (Nghitwika & Nowaseb 1994:8). Similarly, the literature indicates that young children of Namibia find themselves in poverty, particularly the young children from rural families (cf. 3.5). It is thus not realistic to expect poor rural parent communities to run community-based ECD centres successfully. Some form of external

support to rural community-based ECD centres could be useful, particularly in terms of funds, material and training.

Regarding the four community-based ECD centres, few parents are in the position to pay centre-fees each month which is the major financial resource-base to each centre. Subsequently, each centre experiences a shortage of funds. The head teacher of centre A explains: "We lack books, pens, our parents are poor they just cannot afford it." This is mainly because most parents are poor, unemployed and lack resources to support their community-based ECD centres. The impact of the latter on each centre has been detrimental as these centres lack adequate facilities and funds which are necessary to operate as community-based institutions. The four centres therefore operate under difficult circumstances. Commenting on the poor condition in her centre, the only teacher at centre B indicates: "Our centre lacks everything because parents are poor."

Similarly, all other teachers interviewed agree that their centres lack basic resources because parents cannot afford such resources. Subsequently, learning and teaching in the four centres take place under difficult circumstances, as confirmed by a teacher at centre C: "Children don't have pencils, books and I can't do anything to assist them." The successfully running of the four community-based ECD centres is consequently hampered by a lack of basic resources.

This problem is difficult to solve as most parents of the children in the four ECD centres are poor. Subsistence farming serves as the only major economic activities for the majority of parents. A parent at centre D laments: "We don't work for money, we are just poor farmers." With prolonged drought conditions in Namibia and a lack of formal employments in rural Kavango, most parents find it very difficult to earn a living. The situation among parents is subsequently characterised by absolute poverty and hardship. Thus, most parents have to struggle in order to provide in the needs of their families. A parent at centre C agrees: "It is drought, thus we find it difficult to earn a living from farming activities." Even basic items such as food and clothing for members of families are difficult to provide. Subsequently, members of families in the rural villages spend most of their day trying to provide in the basic needs of their families. Lamenting on the plight of parents of children at centre B, a parent explains that:

*We may provide the little food we have to our children when they leave home in the morning, but like this year it is drought and many of us can hardly find food for our families.*

A parent at centre C concurs stating that:

*Our people are poor, where can they get money to donate to this centre? Like this year we are facing drought. Many people are not expecting good harvest. It is thus always difficult for us to survive.*

Similarly, all teachers interviewed agree that their centres are difficult to be run by parent communities themselves because the parents do not have the means to run community-based ECD centres.

## DISCUSSION

Evidence from the literature indicates that the socio-economic condition of rural parents around the globe, is influential regarding parent involvement in education (cf. 2.3). Likewise, the literature shows that parent involvement in the education of their children in rural Africa is generally hampered by the post socio-economic condition of parent communities (cf. 2.3). Rural parents who are economically disadvantaged have little time and resources to become involved in preschool education even if such institutions are community-based institutions such as the four ECD centres under research. Most of the parent communities' energy and time are normally spent on households' needs to survive in a rural environment. Consequently, parents have little time and energy to spend on parent involvement activities. The latter is most detrimental to the four community-based institutions which depend on the support from parent communities for its continuous operations.

Impoverished parent communities would most likely not adequately generate material or financial support to their community-based institutions as they lack resources. However, the literature also shows that parent communities who are economically disadvantaged can

strengthen their role in education of their children if parent involvement activities are well organised and nurtured (cf. 2.3).

#### **5.6.6 Role players have a limited understanding of using volunteers**

The literature indicates that parents might serve as volunteers in centre-based ECD programmes. This means parents can fulfil a variety of functions within centres or outside centres which are beneficial to both parents and the centres (cf. 2.5.2). Through volunteering parents' activities such as fundraising, repairing school property, assisting teachers in making teaching aids, et cetera, parents develop an understanding of the particular centre and subsequently such parents become supportive towards the centre as a whole (cf. 2.5.2). Parents from any social background are thus regarded as an important support-base for community-based ECD programmes.

Regarding the situation in the four ECD centres, little or virtually nothing is done to utilise parents as volunteers in these community-based centres. The head teacher of centre A explains: "Parents are always asked to pay centre-fee." Parents are mainly required to support each centre by way of centre-fee payment each month. Apart from parents' financial obligation towards their respective centres, the parents of the children in the four centres have no other defined role to play in the centres. The teacher at centre B concurs: "Parents are mainly required to pay centre-fee." Subsequently, parents of each centre are not effectively used as volunteers in the centres. Likewise, little is done by teachers to create parent involvement activities that can be carried out within, or outside centres. In all four centres, parents are sometimes requested by centre-committees to support them in cleaning centres' premises on a voluntary basis. Similarly, the teacher of centre D concurs that she usually uses parents to assist her in cleaning the centre but few parents are willing to assist her in this regard.

At centre A parents are encouraged by the teachers to support them (teachers) during fundraising activities by means of donating anything relevant to their centre. This is also the only centre which sometimes conducts fundraising activities. At centre C, the teacher at this

centre once involved parents in assisting her to produce teaching aids for her classroom. However, this was not repeated. No other centre has tried similar activities.

It is clear from the finding above that parents to the four centres are not effectively utilised as volunteers. The latter is attributed to a lack of understanding on the part of teachers on how to use parents as volunteers within centres or outside centres.

## **DISCUSSION**

Although some attempts are made by each centre to involve parents as volunteers, a lack of understanding on ways of using parents as volunteers hampered the latter. It seems therefore, that both parents and teachers lack the necessary knowledge and skills on how to utilise parents as volunteers. As a result of this condition, parents' support to each centre has been limited. A lack of understanding on how to use parents as volunteers could be attributed to a lack of appropriate training for both parents and teachers (cf. 2.7.1).

### **5.6.7 Role-players are very reliant on the government to solve issues at the preschools**

In accordance to the National Early Childhood Development Policy of Namibia, parent communities are tasked with the provision and support of early childhood education for their own young children. Thus, the provision of facilities and staff are the responsibility of parent communities who might take initiatives to establish community-based ECD centres. The government on the other hand, is only responsible for supporting the efforts of parents through the government's line ministries (cf. 3.6.3-3.6.5).

In terms of the four community-based ECD centres, parent communities are also charged with provision and support of ECD programme. A parent at centre D remarks; "We need government support, what is the role of the government?" This is the case because each centre was established by their respective parent communities after realising the need for early childhood education programme for young children of their community. Thus, all parents and teachers interviewed agree that the centres are the initiatives of the parents themselves and it

needs to be supported and nurtured by parent communities themselves. Thus, parents recognise their central role in community-based ECD centres, but hasten to add that they are only able to provide limited support because of poverty and unemployment. A parent at centre B adds: "We are poor and unemployed. So the government must help us." Both parents and teachers of the four centres therefore believe that the government of Namibia needs to provide extensive support to their community-based centres, and that parents' support is insufficient to meet the needs of their centres. As a parent of centre B remarks: "We are poor, the government needs to provide more support to our centre."

Another parent at centre D concurs stating that: "The government of Namibia should assist us in paying the salary of our teachers because parents don't have money to do this."

The needs of the four centres are numerous and similar in all four centres. Such needs include the need for basic facilities for centres to operate as well as the need for financial resources to pay teachers' salaries. The teacher at centre C explains: "We are in need of many things such as books, pens, desks, thus the government must assist us." Thus both parents and teachers of the four centres strongly believe that the government of Namibia should assist them in resolving some of the problems facing their centres. For example, all parents and teachers interviewed point out that the government of Namibia should use its financial resources and expertise to solve many of their difficulties, financial or otherwise. Although all parents and teachers of the four centres agree that the government needs to extend its helping hand to their community-based centres, some parents and teachers would like to see the government of Namibia taking most of the responsibilities away from the parent communities. The latter is particularly the view of parents and teachers at centres B and D, while parents and teachers at centres A and C only would want the government to increase its financial support to their centres.

The head teacher of centre A explains the role of the government in her centre as: "At this centre we believe that the government can help us a lot but we don't receive any significant assistance from the government."

Similarly, the only teacher at centre C concurs that: "Government needs to assist this centre by providing some financial assistance. While parents can continue to assist us in some small ways as they always do."

Contrary to the view above, parents and teachers at centres B and D argue that the government of Namibia needs to take the full responsibility for early childhood education provision in their respective communities. At centre B the teacher and parents interviewed agree that both their community-based centre and the primary schools in their area need to be treated equally by the government. In this regard, the teacher and parents point out that their community-based centre and local primary schools need to enjoy equal benefits and other opportunities from the government. Likewise, parents at centres B and C are sometimes reluctant to provide support to their centres free of charge. Parents at centres B and C want the government to reward them in the form of wages for any service they might provide to their centres. This is, however, contrary to the National Policy on Early Childhood Education Provision of 1996, under which the four community-based ECD centres are operating.

## **DISCUSSION**

Although the policy of the government stipulates that communities themselves must provide and support early childhood education programmes, parents and teachers to the four community ECD centres are convinced that the government of Namibia needs to increase its support to their centres. Moreover, some parents and teachers want the government to take the full responsibility of early childhood provision away from parent communities. This is, however, contrary to the National Early Childhood Development Policy of Namibia, which promotes independent running of community-based ECD centres (cf. 3.6.3-3.6.5).

The National Early Childhood Development Policy (GRN 1996:4-48) and the Document Towards Education for All (MEC 1993d:69-72) clearly indicate that the government, through its line ministries, are to provide different kinds of support to communities in order to successfully run their own community-based ECD programmes. This implies that government should constantly supplement the efforts of parent communities, disadvantaged communities



in particular. It is therefore the right of the parents and teachers of the four ECD centres to request or expect some kind of support from government, as provided for in the National Early Childhood Development Policy (GRN 1996). However, it seems that the four community-centres are receiving little support from government. Unless this changes, community-based institutions such as the four ECD centres will only survive or sustain themselves effectively if parents take up the challenge instead of relying on the government for support.

#### **5.6.8 The substantial role of the church in the community and preschools**

The Namibian churches have historically been involved in early childhood provision. Moreover, churches and NGOs are together tasked with various responsibilities such as training of preschool teachers, assisting with the implementation of ECD policy and provide assistance to local communities to establish and run their own community-based ECD centres (cf. 3.6.3).

Against this backdrop, the local churches provide various kinds of support to the four community-based ECD centres included in this research. Thus, the local churches such as Evangelical Lutheran Church in Namibia and the Roman Catholic Church are the two prominent local churches that provide support to the four centres. The support to each centre varies and depends on what each church is able to afford. In this regard, the head teacher at centre A explains: "Our centre receives some assistance from our church in the forms of money, teaching aids and things like desks for children. "

Similarly, the teacher at centre C says: "This centre is sometimes lucky to get money from our church which is collected from church members on Sundays."

Centres A and C receive substantial support from their local Evangelical Lutheran Church in Namibia (ELCIN). The teacher at centre A explains: "We received some teaching aids and some limited funds from our church." Such support ranges from funds, teaching and learning aids, medical care for children, food-aid, classrooms, desks, utensils, to training courses for teachers. The support indicated above is received either on the request by each centre or the church on its own takes initiatives to provide such support to a particular centre. Likewise, the

teacher at centre C explains that the local church used to donate some funds to her centre. Centres A and D do not receive the above indicated church's support on a continuous basis because the local churches cannot afford it. The teacher at centre C explains: "Our church has only limited resources and it is not easy for the church to raise money."

The head teacher at centre A concurs that her church also struggles to survive because of a shortage of funds. Thus the support of the church to each centre depends on the availability of resources of the local church. In this regard centres B and D receive less support from their local church than centres A and C. The church's support to centres B and D is mainly in the form of guidance and moral support while these centres get little financial or material support from their local churches. However, the local churches (Roman Catholic Church) provide opportunity to parents and teachers of centres B and D to make announcements on Sunday during church service. This is also the case with centres A and C. Parents and teachers of the four centres are granted the necessary opportunity to meet face to face during church service. Such a platform is particularly important to parents and teachers because the four centres do not hold regular parent or centre-committee meetings. The teacher at centre B explains:

*We don't receive any support from our church, except that parents and myself are allowed to make announcements on Sunday. I always use this time to speak to parents.*

The other teachers at centre D agree that their church does not have the resources to share with the centre. However, they add that they appreciate the church's role in giving encouragement to parents and teachers. Thus, the local church remains an important support system to each centre. However, the lack of resources very often limit the church's efforts to increase its support to the centres.

## DISCUSSION

The church's support provided to the four centres plays a vital role in assisting these centres to sustain themselves. In the absence of any significant parent support, the local church

significantly assists the parent communities in running their centres. This is in line with the policy of the government on early childhood provision. Church support to each centre is, however, hampered by a lack of sufficient resources on the side of the local churches. The latter is supported by previous research evidence that shows that many Namibian churches lack funds and facilities to support ECD programmes (cf. 3.7).

### **5.6.9 Community support is narrowly defined and difficult to obtain**

In Namibia, community-based ECD centres are initiated and subsequently established by parent communities themselves. Parent communities include members of the communities and their public institutions. In order for the established community-based ECD centres to run successfully, parents and other members of community are expected to become involved in the provision and support of such community institutions. This is essential to the effective running of these institutions. The basic maintenance of ECD centres is a case in point (cf. 3.6.4).

Regarding the four community-based ECD centres included in this study, community support and parent involvement in the centres are all mainly defined in terms of financial support (cf. 5.6.9). The teacher at centre D explains: "Parents are mainly required to pay N\$5,00 but they don't." Likewise, community support to each centre is also defined in terms of financial support. This means that few attempts are made to utilise the available resources and services in the communities to benefit the community-based ECD centres. The teacher at centre B agrees: "Parents' duty is that of paying centre-fee." The exception being the involvement of the local churches as community institutions which provide support to the centres which is not necessarily financial. The role of the church in supporting each centre is fully discussed in 3.6.3.

At centre A some limited community support is received from individual community members and a local company. This was as result of an appeal for donations from the teachers at the centres. Often these donations have to be used to contribute to the salaries of the teachers. The financial contribution of a local development company was used to purchase building materials for the construction of new community-based centre (cf. 5.6.9).

The head teacher at centre A explains:

*Our church support us by donating money to our centre. We also receive some money from the community members but this is too little to meet our financial needs.*

The situation at centre C resembles that of centre A described above. Thus, some limited community support is received mainly from the local church (cf. 5.6.8) and from a local development company based in Rundu. Such support is mainly in the form of funding which is donated to centre C. Apart from this financial support, no other concrete community support is received by centre C. In this regard, the teacher at centre C explains that her centre is mainly supported by the local church through financial donations and in recent time, some substantial financial support is received from a local development company. At centres B and D, community support is almost absent. The only community support to centres B and D comes only from the local churches which provide moral support and platform for teachers to make formal announcements to parent communities (cf. 5.6.8). Explaining the lack of community support to her centre, the teacher at centre B states: "I don't see any support from the community except that parents support us when they are able to pay centre-fees."

The other teachers at centre D agree that their centre is only supported by the parents in the form of centre-fee payment. Thus, in all four community-based ECD centres, community support is lacking and such support is not defined in terms of the wide range needs of each community-based ECD centres.

## **DISCUSSION**

The literature indicates that community support at all school levels is vitally important in order to provide the necessary resources and services that a school might need (cf. 2.5.3). In terms of community-based ECD centres, community support entails a wide range community involvement activities which aims at strengthening early childhood programme (cf. 3.6.4). However, it seems that community support to the four community-based ECD centres is narrowly defined and is often only associated with financial support. The expectation is that

community support in the four centres is broadly defined so that each centre can broaden its support-base.

#### **5.6.10 Little provision is made to assist parents in their parenting tasks**

The literature clearly shows that provision needs to be made to assist parents of the children in community-based ECD centres in their parenting tasks. Likewise, the literature also indicates that teachers, the government of Namibia, churches and NGOs are the providers of parent educational programmes (cf. 3.6.3-3.6.5).

In the four community-based ECD centres little or virtually nothing is done to assist parents in their parenting tasks. The teacher at centre D concurs: "I don't have any idea about such programmes." The head teacher at centre A explains the lack of parent educational programme at her centre as follows: "Parent educational programmes of any kind is not provided at this centre. Nobody initiates such kind of programme. "

The other parents and teachers interviewed at all four centres agree that parent educational programmes are not provided at their centres as such programmes are not initiated at all. However, in an exceptional case, a one day parent educational course was once presented to the parents of the children in centre C. A parent at centre A explains: "We don't see it, maybe at other centres." This one day course was initiated and presented by the officials in the Ministry of Regional and Local Government and Housing in collaboration with UNICEF. The course dealt with issues such as child development and teaching strategies.

The teacher at centre C explains how the course was conducted: "This course was conducted under a tree near our centre. Many parents attended the course including myself. Everybody enjoyed the course." This was reiterated by the parents interviewed. Moreover, when mention was made of this in other interviews with parents most agreed that they would attend parent educational programmes if such programmes are provided. As a parent at centre A explains: "If an opportunity can come for us as parents to become involved in parent educational course, I will welcome such a programme." This is a clear indication of parents' desire to assist their children in terms of education and development.

In the interviews parents of the children in the four centres explained that they had learnt how to be parents from their own mothers (parents). Advice from their mothers included information on among others: breast-feeding, childcare and protection, mother tongue teaching and good manners for children. These parenting tasks not only enrich the parents knowledge and skills but it also contribute to their children's learning and development. A parent at centre B explains how she learnt parenting tasks from her own mother as follows:

*As a young girl, I observed my mother cleaning my younger brother. My mother also taught us how to take care of young children. During my childhood my mother also entrusted me her younger children to take care of them, while she was away to work on the field.*

Likewise, the other parents interviewed express similar experience which points to traditional parenting education. However, it needs to be pointed out that traditional parenting tasks often does not relate to support of children in formal education and nor does it include all aspects of parenting which parents in the twenty first century may be in need of. The latter points to the need for parents training programme in each centre.

## DISCUSSIONS

The literature indicates that parent educational programmes are fundamental components of any early childhood programme that promotes parent involvement in such programme (cf. 2.5.2). Within this context, the National Early Childhood Development Policy of Namibia makes provision for programmes that aim at improving parents' parenting skills (cf. 3.6). Parenting programmes are subsequently integral elements of community-based ECD centres in Namibia. In the four community-based ECD centres such programmes are lacking. In the absence of such programmes, parents lack parenting skills and consequently their role as parents at home and in centres is substantially reduced.

### 5.6.11 Teachers are not adequately trained for their task

Substantial research evidence indicates that teachers are usually not trained to involve parents in their child's education. Subsequently, most serving teachers lack appropriate skills and

experience on parent involvement in education (Tizard et al 1981:97-98; Moles 1993:32). The teachers at the four centres are no exception.

The teachers employed at the four centres are not trained teachers and many have not even completed their schooling. This makes the task of teaching young children and preparing them for school entry a difficult one. Likewise, their employment at community-based ECD centres necessitates working closely with parents and other community members. This also requires skills which they may be lacking. It is therefore important that they be adequately trained for the task.

In Namibia, the two ministries of government of Namibia inter alia: the Ministry of Regional and Local Government and Housing and the Ministry of Basic Education, Sport and culture provide inductive training courses to teachers employed at community-based ECD centres. This was also provided to the teachers working at the four centres forming part of this research. Moreover, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Namibia (ELCIN) is sometimes involved in providing in-service training courses to the teachers of centres A and C only. Such training takes place when new teachers are recruited by their respective parent communities. Further, the government of Namibia through its line ministries indicated above, provides ongoing in-service training courses to all serving teachers but this does not always happen. The head teacher at centre A recalls: "In the past the government provides regular workshops for teachers but at present this does not happen again."

Similarly, the teacher at centre D remarks:

*I only attended a training course at the time when I was appointed as the teacher of this centre. The government does not arrange workshops for teachers any longer, I don't know what is the problem.*

All other teachers interviewed point out that an in-service training programme is lacking in their centres and they also agree that in-service training of teachers needs to be reintroduced in their centres as such training can assist them to improve their knowledge and teaching skills. The teacher at centre B remarks: "One training workshop is not enough, we need more workshops for teachers to learn more."

When teachers are provided with the inductive course, it takes place over a four week period. Such training is offered during school holidays when teachers are free from their school duty. The teacher at centre C explains:

*We were called upon to attend a workshop in Rundu for four weeks. We learned how to teach young children and many other things. I cannot remember. When we came back from the training I informed parents about what I learned from the training during Sunday church service. I always do this to inform the parents.*

Certainly, a training course for four weeks is not sufficient to provide in all the needs of the teachers, particularly when teachers are not previously trained as professionals, such as the teachers of the four centres (cf. 5.7.3).

The inductive course and in-service training for teachers cover aspects such as: teaching methodology, teaching and learning aids as well as a small unit on parent involvement. As a practice in all four centres, teachers share some of their training experiences with parents during Sunday church services, when most parents are expected to be present. In this regard, the teacher at centre B recalls: "I learned how to teach children and also how to produce teaching aids."

The teacher at centre D adds: "They taught us how to work with parents such as how to conduct parent meetings. I also learned how to teach young children."

The teachers of all four centres also confirm that they always share some of their training experience with parents during Sunday church service.

It is thus evident that teacher training courses does not sufficiently cover all aspects which are needed by newly appointed teachers who have no previous experience of preschool education. Follow-up training courses for these serving teachers can greatly assist in this regard. However, it seems as if the government is currently not providing such services to teachers in this region and teachers from all four centres are being disadvantaged as a result thereof.



Further, the training for teachers discussed above does not seem to include adequate skills on how to involve parents in a wide variety of aspects. This is only dealt with fleetingly in the induction course. The head teacher at centre A remarks:

*We learned something about parent involvement, things such as how to conduct parent meetings. This is what I can recall, but I don't think we have enough information on parent involvement. We try what we are able to do. Sometimes we don't know what to do, as nobody assists us. What I can suggest is we need more training, the government must assist us.*

A teacher at centre D remarks: "We learned something on parent involvement, but I cannot recall everything."

The other teachers express similar experiences indicating that they know little about parent involvement. They (teachers) mostly rely on their common experience and the little knowledge they gain during inductive training is just not sufficient to meet their needs. Thus, it is evident that teachers lack sufficient skills in the field of parent involvement, due to a lack of training. Without training in the area of parent involvement, teachers can hardly implement parent involvement activities in their centres and subsequently parent involvement in the centres is impeded.

## DISCUSSION

As can be seen in the four community-based ECD centres, teacher training provided by the government of Namibia and the local church does not adequately address the aspect of parent involvement in the centres.

Subsequently, all teachers lack skills on how to involve parents in the centres' work and life. As teachers lack skills regarding parent involvement, teachers are unable to design and implement parent involvement activities/programmes in their centres. The findings described above are confirmed by previous research (cf. 2.7.1).

### **5.6.12 Role-players have a limited understanding of how learning can be supported at home**

Early childhood programmes aim at assisting young children to develop to their full potential, which includes being healthy, happy, curious, interested and able to communicate with people in their environment (cf. 1.3.3). Similarly, early childhood programmes provide in the developmental needs of young children and also stimulate the learning process (GRN 1996:7-8). In view of this, literacy teaching in ECD centres is seen as secondary to the aim of early childhood programmes.

In the four community-based ECD centres, early childhood programmes centre around the formal teaching of subjects such as: English, Bible studies, literacy skills, play and counting. The teacher at centre C explains: "I teach them subjects such as English, writing, Bible studies and others." Children are formally taught in their classrooms during the working hours of each centre. In the afternoon, children are left in the care and protection of their own parents at home. The teacher at centre A explains: "We just teach them in the classroom and thereafter we send them home to their parents." The teacher at centre B explains: "I teach children in the classroom and after that I send them back to their homes. We don't have any afternoon activities at this centre." The teachers from all other centres confirm this.

In the absence of any programme for parents and their children to be involved in, a few parents admit to using their own initiatives and teaching their own children at home in the afternoons. As a parent at centre C remarks: "Few parents are actually involved in teaching their own children while at home. It is mostly the mothers."

Thus, some parents at all four centres are sometimes involved in actually teaching their own children the following subjects while at home: literacy skills, English, counting and singing. Such activities are informally conducted, last for few minutes and are repeated over many days. Similarly, most parents are regularly involved in providing traditional education such as: good manners, dressing and home language teaching. Such education is provided informally, through

daily contacts and communication between parents and their own children. A parent at centre A recalls how she teaches her children something that relates to the centre's teaching:

*As a parent, when I have time, I used to ask my child the question: What did you learn today? My child might sing a song for me, or might utter some English expressions such as: 'Good morning, how are you?' I normally assist my child to do this things correctly. I also think other parents provide children in small ways. Because our children are still young we don't expect much from them.*

The rest of the parents interviewed express similar experience as described by the parent at centre A. A parent at centre C recalls: "My child like it, she enjoy it when I teach her something."

As a way of motivating parents to become involved in their own children's education while at home, individual children are sometimes given small learning tasks to take home in order to seek assistance from their own parents. Such tasks are written on a small paper, and relates to what has been taught in the centres. A teacher at centre A explains: "A parent may ask his/her child to read the letters on a paper loudly and after that, this parent might assist the child to pronounce the letters correctly."

The practice indicated above is common to all four centres. However, all the teachers interviewed indicate that they do not know whether parents assist their children or not. Considering the practice discussed above, both parents and teachers interpret learning at home as meaning teaching children academic knowledge and skills. It is also clear that both parents and teachers have a limited understanding of how parents can support learning at home. In this regard, parents are mainly expected to actually teach their children knowledge and skills which are taught during morning sessions in the centres. However, no teachers ever gives parents guidance in this regard.

## DISCUSSION

In the four ECD centres, learning at home and in centres is mainly defined in terms of imparting academic knowledge and skills through active teaching by parents at home and by teachers in the centres. In principle, learning and teaching at home and in classroom need to meet the developmental needs of children such as motor skills, language development, social skills, cognitive skills that are suitable self-concept enhancement and natural creative abilities. Although young children need literacy skills, young children at preschool level need only to be exposed to such skills as the latter are normally dealt with at primary school level (cf. 1.3.3).

The literature also indicates that learning activities in classroom can be extended to the home, in this regard, parents need some guidance from teachers. Both parents at home and teachers in centres are thus partners in enhancing the learning and development of young children under their care (cf. 2.5.1-2.5.3).

### 5.6.13 Ample opportunity is provided for informal communication

All four centres are located near the parents' homes the nearest being approximately two hundred metres from the centres. Likewise, parents and teachers live in small villages where all inhabitants know each other. Subsequently, daily personal contacts take place between parents and teachers. As a parent at centre D explains: "I can meet our teachers at any time, the centre is near our home and our teachers' homes are next to our homes. We don't find it difficult to meet each other."

The teacher of centre C concurs: "I am almost on a daily basis in contact with most parents. Some parents visit our centre to enquire about their children or just to see what I am doing."

At the other centres parents and teachers agree that due to proximity of the centres to parents' homes, information, requests and invitations are easily passed on to each other. Adding that parents and teachers are neighbours who maintain a friendly relationship. A parent at centre A remarks:

"Teachers are our friends, we regard them as parents just like us."

Informal communication between parents and teachers also takes place when parents visit centres. Such visits are used by parents to observe the actual teaching and learning in the classroom and both parents and teachers also use this opportunity to exchange information about individual children and the centres as a whole. The head teacher at centre A recalls: "Some parents visit our centre, we show them all what we do in the classroom. We also talk about how their children are doing."

The teacher at centre D agrees: "Some few parents visit us at the centre."

Similarly, all the parents interviewed indicate that they sometimes visit their respective centres in order to meet their children's teacher in person. The teachers at centre A also visit parents at their homes in order to remind them about financial obligations toward their centre. The head teacher at centre A explains: "Sometimes we go out to visit parents so that we can remind them to pay centre-fee." Teachers at centres B, C and D do not conduct such visits.

Thus, in all four centres, ample opportunities exist for parents and teachers to meet informally. As a parent at centre B sums this up: "Information can easily reach me. I can visit the centre to enquire or I can meet our teachers personally."

Although ample opportunity is provided for informal communication between parents and teachers, less opportunity is provided for formal parent and centre-committee meetings, where formal decisions are taken. Regarding this, the teacher at centre B explains:

*We are supposed to hold parent and centre-committee meetings each year. But like this year, not a single meeting was held. As a result, centre-committee members are not yet elected.*

Likewise, the teacher at centre C concurs: "It is a problem at this centre, we don't have a centre-committee. What can I do? I am the only teacher at this centre."

The situation as discussed above also prevails at the other centres and subsequently the teachers are sometimes in a desperate situation as they are left alone to run the centres.

The lack of centre-committee or parent meetings is discussed in 5.7. As a result of a lack of parent and centre-committee meetings in all four centres, teachers are increasingly resorting to Sunday church services as the platform to address the parents formally. The only teacher at centre C states: "I regularly address parents in the church. This is appropriate because many parents are reluctant to attend parent meetings."

In other centres, the teachers use the same strategy to speak to parents as a group. Clearly, Sunday church sessions cannot substitute parent or centre-committee meetings.

## **DISCUSSION**

The literature shows that there are a variety of communication strategies that might foster parental roles and functions in early childhood education setting. Similarly, evidence indicates that open communication is essential for maintaining sound relationship between parents and teachers (cf. 2.2). The ample opportunity for informal communication which is provided in the four centres, can therefore be used to foster parental roles and functions in each community-based ECD centre. While the lack of formal meetings between parents and teachers can be attributed to a lack of leadership in each centre. Without formal contacts between parents and teachers, community-based centres might prove very difficult to run, as parents are the bedrock of community-based ECD centres (cf. 3.6.4).

## **5.7 BARRIERS TO PARENT INVOLVEMENT**

Although many of the factors mention above act as barriers to parent involvement, participants made specific mention of a number of important aspects which prevent them from becoming involved in the ECD centres their children attend. These are listed in the section below which also serves to summarise a number of important points made during the interviews with parents and teachers.

### **5.7.1 Socio-economic conditions**

Since the 1990s, Namibia has been hard hit by drought. Each year less rainfall is recorded, this implies less water becomes available for agricultural activities. As a parent at centre C recalls:

"It is just drought since ten years ago, we always try our best to farm but the rain disappoints us."

A parent at centre D agrees: "As parents we are experiencing many difficulties such as drought. Food has become difficult to come by."

In terms of parent communities to the four centres, most parents are subsistence farmers who earn their living from subsistence agriculture. A parent at centre D explains: "We are farmers, we don't have any other employments, if there is no rainfall, we always face difficulties."

With the prolonged drought condition in Namibia, most parents at the four centres are increasingly subjected to hunger and poverty. In this regard, food is scarce and most parents are struggling to provide enough for their families to eat. In most cases, family members have either to ask for food from members of the extended family, or, if they have livestock, they need to sell the livestock so that they have money to buy food. A parent at centre A laments: "We are poor people without anything to sell. The drought makes things more hard for us."

Although parents want to assist their centres financially or materially, poverty, which is aggravated by the prolonged drought, prevents most parents from doing so. As a parent at centre B explains: "As an example, this year we are facing drought and famine. This makes it difficult for parents to pay."

Similar sentiments were expressed by all parents and teachers interviewed.

The teacher at centre C explains: "Many parents would like to pay, but they don't have the money."

## **DISCUSSION**

The literature indicates that rural Namibia is most disadvantaged in terms of socio-economic development. Close to 60 percent of rural people in Namibia are identified as poor (GRN 1996:8). With prolong drought that faces Namibia, most rural families' socio-economic conditions are made even worse. It is thus unrealistic to expect substantial parent support from subsistence farmers whose means of living has been lost due to the drought.

### 5.7.2 Lack of time

As mentioned in 5.7.2 above, economic activities of parents centre around subsistence agricultural farming. Thus parents are involved in various farming activities in an effort to feed their families. Most of the agricultural activities take place in the mornings when the children are at school. A parent at centre B explains:

*At present it is summer. Although we don't receive good rain, we still need to work on the field. After working on the field you become tired, less time is available to do other work.*

All other parents and teachers interviewed agree that it is difficult to survive in the villages as everything is hard to come by. Women have to fetch water from the river as well as collecting firewood from the nearby bush. These are daily routine for rural families, and these activities are time-consuming. As a parent at centre D explains: "We simply don't have time to do everything.'

A parent at centre C concurs: "Like this time of the year, we have many things to do at home."

In addition, due to the scarcity of food, much time is devoted to seeking out relatives and friends and asking them for assistance. It is thus not the priority of most parents/families to spend time on education of their children. Parents only spend some of their time on their children's education if they are convinced that everything they are supposed to do in order to survive has been done. This is summed up in the words of a parent whose child attends centre A: "If some time is left, I may use such time to talk about education with my children but I always don't have such time."

## DISCUSSION

Parents need time to become involved in parent involvement activities, either at home or in preschool education settings. In the case of the four community-based ECD centres, most parents lack sufficient time to spend on parent involvement activities. This lends support to



other research findings that indicate that parents must also contend with other demands on their limited time (cf. 2.7.2).

### **5.7.3 Lack of knowledge of parent involvement**

Evidence from the literature indicates that parent involvement programmes in early childhood education settings can only be successfully implemented if parents and teachers are appropriately trained to work in partnership. However, it is also evident from research findings that in most education systems, both parents and teachers are not always appropriately trained to work as partners (cf. 2.7.1).

In the discussions above (cf. 5.7) mention is made that parents and teachers lack knowledge and skills which are essential to implement parent involvement activities in the centres or in parents' homes. The lack of appropriate skills and knowledge is mainly attributed to a lack of relevant training of parents and teachers regarding parent involvement. Thus, many teachers do not know how to improve or implement parent involvement in their ECD centres, while many parents show a lack of interest in the centres their children attend. Thus the teacher at centre B explains: "I think many parents don't want to support this centre because these parents lack the will to do so."

A parent at centre A agrees: "Maybe because of a lack of understanding, I don't know."

At the other centres, parents and teachers interviewed all agree that many parents show little interest in their respective centres and subsequently the centres are not fully supported by parents. In addition, many parents lack sufficient information on what their role constitutes. As one parent at centre A explains: "Sometimes I really don't know what the teachers expect from me. What I know is each parent is supposed to pay centre-fee."

A parent at centre C also explains that she is unable to teach her child at home because she does not possess the relevant information and skills to do so. It is thus evident that parents lack

information regarding parent involvement due to a lack of appropriate training in this field. As a result parents only have a limited understanding of their parental role.

The teachers too have only little understanding of parental role in their respective centres. As teachers are not adequately trained to work with parents as partners, the teachers of the four centres can only narrowly defined the role of parents in their community-based ECD centres. Regarding the latter, the head teacher at centre A explains: "We are not trained sufficiently in the field of parent involvement. We always use our own knowledge in order to appeal to the parents to support us."

The other teachers at centres B, C and D agree that it is difficult for them to involve parents in the centres' work, adding that they don't know what to do in order to improve the role parents play in their centres.

## **DISCUSSION**

The importance of parent involvement in early childhood education settings cannot be over emphasised. Likewise, parents and teachers need to possess knowledge and skills of working in partnership in order to implement parent involvement activities (cf. 2.4). In the case of the four community-based ECD centres, both parents and teachers lack a clear understanding of how to work as partners. This is mainly attributed to a lack of training in the field of parent involvement.

### **5.7.4 Lack of ownership of centres**

In terms of Namibia's National Early Childhood Development Policy, parent communities have the responsibility of early childhood provision. While the government of Namibia, NGOs and churches are also tasked with the provision of some support to parent communities to run their community-based ECD centres independently (cf. 3.6.3-3.6.5).

The four ECD centres were all established within the framework of the National Early Childhood Development Policy, referred to above. Thus, the four centres are called community-based ECD centres (community-kindergartens). This implies that each parent community has initially accepted that it is responsible for early childhood provision and for the centres which have been established. In this regard the head teacher at centre A remarks: "Parents agreed to establish this centre and they also agreed that they will support the centre." The teacher of centre A agrees: "It was parents themselves who decided to start the centre."

At the other centres, parents and teachers interviewed agree that the community-based ECD centres are the initiatives of the parents themselves, adding that over the years, parents have provided various support to these centres.

Although parents accept the concept of community-based ECD centres in principle, parents and community do not fully accept the fact that the government of Namibia does not have sufficient funds to provide in all the needs of their community-based ECD centres. In this regard, parents and communities to the four centres believe that the government of Namibia is in the position to provide all the necessary funds and facilities to their centres. Thus, a parent at centre B comments: "The government can assist this centre by introducing feeding scheme for our children and also by paying the teacher's salary. We cannot do all these things." A parent at centre D concurs: "Something must be done by the government, we cannot afford everything."

Similarly, parents at the other centres agree that the government must accept most of the responsibilities for their centres, as it is the task of government to provide in the needs of the people.

It is also the practice in all four centres for individual parents to withdraw their children from the centres, if teachers constantly remind them that they have not paid the centre-fee. Children who are withdrawn from the centres are enrolled in primary schools even when these children are not six years old. The head teacher at centre A explains. "Many of our children are no more with us. Their parents decided to enroll them in primary school because they cannot settle their debt."

The head teacher also explains that it is not the policy of her centre to expel children on the ground of non-payment of centre-fee. The teacher at centre C agrees: "I just see children leaving our centre." The other teachers at centres B, C and D interviewed agree, adding that because of parents' tendency to withdraw their children from their centres, many parents are tempted to show little support to their respective centres. It is thus evident that parents do not fully accept ownership of their community-based ECD centres and do not abide by the rules of the centres. Likewise, the loyalty of some of the parents to the centres is questionable.

## **DISCUSSION**

In terms of the National Policy on Early Childhood Provision in Namibia, parents and community are the providers of early childhood education. This is realised through the establishment of community-based ECD centres which are fully owned and run by parent communities themselves (cf. 3.6.4). In the case of the four community-based ECD centres, ownership of the centres is lacking because parents and community do not accept the responsibilities that ownership requires. Subsequently, parent involvement is hampered in each centre.

### **5.7.5 Parents' lack of confidence and dependency**

Community-based ECD centres' continues operation depends much on parents' initiatives and willingness to render support to these institutions. Parents need to be highly motivated in order to fulfil their parental role and functions in their respective centres. In the four community-based ECD centres, parents very often lack the necessary confidence in themselves to fulfil their parental role at home and in the centres. As a parent at centre C explains: "I am just a mother of my child. What can I do?" A parent at centre D agrees: "We are ordinary people, we cannot do much."

Likewise, the other parents concur that they are poor people who cannot do much to support their centres. A parent at centre D also agrees: "I am just an ordinary person who has little to offer to my child in terms of education."

Parents thus lack self-confidence which is a prerequisite for individual parent involvement activities. This also contributes to parents' dependency on the teachers and centre-committees. Thus, parents and the community at large often depend on what individual teachers or centre-committee members can organise and subsequently provide to each centre. Regarding this, the head teacher of centre D explains: "Our parents cannot do anything on their own. We as teachers have to do things on their behalf. They always look upon us to provide to this centre."

Similarly, the teacher of centre B explains: "I do everything in this centre. Our centre-committee members are not yet elected. Everything is on my shoulders."

A parent at centre A also agrees that in the absence of their prominent centre-committee member who left her position, parents seem unable to organise themselves and nothing is being done to improve the centre.

In contrast to the above, some parents do not have confidence in the teachers' ability to educate their children successfully. In the view of some parents, the appointed teachers are not well qualified and thus not able to teach their children. In this context, a parent at centre A explains:

*Another issue I can think of is that many educated parents think that their children are not getting good education. So, these parents ignore everything about our centre.*

At the other centres, teachers interviewed indicate that parents treat them differently, not like teachers at the higher school levels. The teacher added that not all parents appreciate their work in the centre.

Parents lack thus self-confidence to initiate ideas which are useful to their centres. Similarly, parents also lack confidence in the teachers' professional work and ability to teach their children. This negatively affects parent involvement in the centres.

## DISCUSSION

The literature shows that parents' confidence in becoming involved in their child's education can improve greatly if parents are equipped with parent involvement skills (cf. 2.4). Moreover, a lack of parent involvement skills on the side of parents is considered a barrier to parent involvement (cf. 2.7). Parents' lack of confidence and dependency on centre-committees can partly be attributed to a lack of skills on parent involvement all the role-players in the centres lack thus parent involvement skills that can be utilised to strengthen their mutual roles in early childhood provision.

### 5.7.6 Lack of leadership

In the discussion above (cf. 5.6.1) reference is made that in each centre, centre-committee serves as the governing body. Thus, each centre-committee is tasked with the coordination of both parents and community support to each community-based ECD centre. Moreover, each centre-committee is entrusted with the provision of leadership to the teacher staff in particular and to parent community in general. However, it appears that little is being done in this regard. For example centre-committee and parent meetings are not regularly held in all four centres, whereas centre B has yet to elect a centre-committee. The teacher at centre D adds: "Our centre-committee is not functioning. It is really difficult to run this centre without the support from our parents." The head teacher of centre A agrees: "At present we as teachers are solely running this centre."

The other teachers at centres A and C agree that their centres lack leadership because their centre-committees are not functioning and the teachers are therefore left with the task of keeping the centres running. Likewise no one accepts the responsibility of coordinating parent involvement activities. As one parent remarked: "We don't have leaders." Another parent adds: "It is really difficult for our teacher to run this centre because we don't hold meetings."

Obviously without effective centre-committees in the four community-based ECD centres, the affairs of these centres cannot be run successfully. Centre-committees provide guidance and

leadership to the teachers and parent communities which is important for the running of each centre. In the absence of such leadership, parents and teachers are unable to coordinate parent involvement in the centres.

The lack of leadership in the four centres is also aggravated by a lack of formal policy on parent involvement in each centre. The latter is discussed in 5.6.2. Each centre lacks a written policy on parent involvement. Subsequently, the role and functions of parents and communities in each centre are not substantially defined and also not well understood by the role-players. It is thus the role of each centre-committee to formulate written policy on parent involvement. Without an effective centre-committee, such policy cannot be made as it is the case in the four centres. The effective running of the four centres is consequently made difficult and teachers are often burdened with this task.

## **DISCUSSION**

The national policy on early childhood education makes provision for centre-committee as parent representative body and subsequently each elected centre-committee is the governing body of community-based ECD centre. The elected centre-committee provides leadership to parents and teachers of each centre (cf. 3.6.4). Likewise, each elected centre-committee constitutes the leadership of community-based ECD centres in Namibia. Regarding the four community-based ECD centres, centre-committees are not functional.

Parents and centre-committee meetings are not regularly held, as centre-committees are not effective in their role and sometimes centre-committees are not elected on time. Subsequently, each centre experiences a lack of leadership which make it difficult to run the affairs of each centre successfully. Moreover, the lack of leadership hampers the parents' role in each centre as parental role is that clearly defined by each centre-committee.

### **5.7.7 Lack of training of role-players**

The lack of training opportunities for parents and teachers in the four community-based ECD centres is referred to in 5.6.2-5.6.12 above. In actual fact, all the teachers of the four centres have not been trained as professional teachers to work in early childhood education setting.

This means, the teachers of the four centres are in need of extensive in-service training programme that can equip them with the necessary knowledge and skills for teachers in early childhood education programme.

Despite the greater need for ongoing in-service training for teachers in the four centres, little is done to improve the situation. In each centre, the teachers receive inductive training for a period of four weeks during school holidays. Follow-up training is almost non-existent. Likewise, little attention is given to the issue of parent involvement during inductive training course (cf. 5.7.3).

With regards to parents, only the parents to centre C received a one day training course in parenting skills. However, the course did not include the issue of parent involvement. At the other centres, no parent training course has ever been given (cf. 5.6.11). The consequence is that both parents and teachers lack knowledge and skills that are needed to work as partners. In community-based ECD centres such as the four centres, parents and teachers are fundamentally required to work as partners. Such partnership ensures that community-based centres are run effectively and sustainable. A parent at centre A emphasises the need for training as follows: "It is a good thing for parents to be trained in order to assist our two teachers." The teacher at centre C agrees: "We need more training as they have promised us."

Similarly, a parent at centre B remarks: "Parents are ready to be trained."

The need for training of parents and teachers is recognised by the two parties as they believe that parent involvement in each centre can be improved if the two parties are trained, particularly in the field of parent involvement. The head teacher of centre A remarks: "Things can improve if all of us are trained."

As a result of a lack of training, the teachers in all four centres are unable to use parents as volunteers in their classrooms (cf. 5.6.6). Similarly, parents are also unable to support learning at home (cf. 5.6.12). Clearly, training of the role-players in each centre is of significant importance to improve parent involvement in the four centres.



## **DISCUSSION**

The literature clearly identifies the lack of training for parents and teachers in early childhood education settings as a barrier to parent involvement. Without training in the field of parent involvement, both parents and teachers might find it hard to work as partners. Likewise, research evidence also shows that most teachers' training programmes around the world do not adequately address the aspect of parent involvement (cf. 2.7.1).

In the four community-based ECD centres, parent involvement is hampered by a lack of appropriate involvement. Parents and teachers both lack sufficient knowledge and skills which are needed to work as partners.

### **5.8 SUMMARY**

Chapter 5 has presented significant themes that emerged from qualitative research and the discussions of the key themes thereof. In chapter six, a general overview of the investigation and guidelines on improving parent involvement in rural community will be presented.

## **CHAPTER 6**

### **OVERVIEW OF THE INVESTIGATION AND GUIDELINES ON IMPROVING PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN RURAL COMMUNITIES**

#### **6.1 INTRODUCTION**

In order to show that the aims of the investigation originally expressed in 1.6 have been achieved, a general overview of the investigation is provided in this chapter. Moreover, theories and previous research findings relating to parent involvement in preschool education in a rural environment in particular, as well as an overview of early childhood education provision in Namibia are integrated with the key themes that emerged from the qualitative research. Further, a synthesis of the main findings are also provided in this chapter. Recommendations for improving parent involvement in rural communities derived from the research are briefly stated. The present chapter is concluded with the identification of possible areas for further research.

#### **6.2 OVERVIEW OF THE INVESTIGATION**

Parent involvement is a complex educational phenomenon and usually refers to a broad spectrum of activities in which parents might be involved. Subsequently, consensus has not yet been reached on the definition of the phrase parent involvement. However, a common theme is that all activities relating to parent involvement bring together the separate domains of home and school and suggest that the relationship between home and school should be changed in such a way that parents take a more active role in the education of their children (cf. 1.2). Central to the success of parent involvement programmes in a rural environment is that parent involvement activities are organised in such a way as to include parents in their children's education (cf. 2.3).

##### **6.2.1 Parent involvement in early childhood education**

In an effort to determine the place and role of parents in preschool education in general and in rural preschool settings in particular, a literature study was undertaken. The emphasis

throughout was on parent involvement in preschool education within disadvantaged rural communities.

This research illustrates that the importance of parent involvement at all school levels cannot be over emphasised. For nearly a quarter of a century evidence has shown that parent involvement in education is beneficial to parents, children and schools (cf. 2.1). Young children from disadvantaged families such as rural children improve their academic achievement if parents are involved in their education (cf. 2.4). Moreover, the benefits to parents are substantial and include: increased self-confidence, understanding schools better, becoming empowered parents, acquiring new skills, et cetera (cf. 2.6.2). School teachers and schools as institutions are also beneficiaries of parent involvement (cf. 2.6.3). In view of the importance of parent involvement, various parent involvement programmes have been developed worldwide, particularly in the United States of America (cf. 2.5). There is thus a globally recognition of parents as important role-players in education, particularly at preschool level. A variety of parent involvement strategies are employed globally in order to foster parent involvement in education.

In a rural environment, parent involvement is often limited by the poor socio-economic circumstances of most rural parents. However, rural parents might play a significant role in their children's education if parent involvement activities were organised in such a way that parents are drawn into the centre of their children's education (cf. 2.4).

Most parent involvement programmes in preschool settings fall into three categories inter alia: home-based programmes, centre-based programmes and comprehensive parent involvement programmes. Home-based programmes aim to assist parents to be better parents and to become effective teachers of their own children. School-based programmes aim at assisting parents' understanding and support for their children's preschool. In contrast comprehensive parent involvement programmes aim at encouraging parents to participate in a variety of both home-based and centre-based parent involvement activities (cf. 2.5.3). Central to these parent involvement programmes is the recognition of parents and community's pivotal role and functions in early childhood education. Parents and communities are seen as partners of teachers in delivering early childhood education to young children. Subsequently, different

functions and roles are accorded to parents in the spirit of partnership relationships with teachers. In strengthening parents' capacity to become effective role-players in early childhood provision, parent education is made part of parent involvement programmes (cf. 2.5.1 and 2.5.2). Regarding comprehensive parent involvement programmes, parents and teachers are regarded as having shared responsibilities in educating children. The two parties are expected to develop a partnership relationship which is characterised by an emphasis on coordination, cooperation, complementarity of schools and families, two-way communication and collaboration between families and schools. Similarly, comprehensive parent involvement programmes also aim at involving communities in most aspects of schools within the framework of a partnership relationship (cf. 2.5.3). The findings of this investigation (cf. 5.6.1) point to a centre-based parent involvement approach which aims at assisting parents' understanding and support of community-based ECD centres.

In centre-based parent involvement programmes, parents work as teacher aides and volunteers in schools. Parents, through parent involvement activities in school develop a better understanding of the functioning of schools resulting in increased support to the schools (cf. 2.5.2).

The barriers to parent involvement in early childhood education are discussed in chapter 2 section 2.7. The findings emphasise that the main barriers are the lack of parent involvement skills, a lack of school policy and practice of parent involvement and poor socio-economic circumstances of parents (cf. 2.7). The findings in chapter 2 section 2.7 lend support to the findings of the qualitative research undertaken by the researcher (cf. 5.7).

The benefits of parent involvement to parents, teachers and children are extensive and are discussed in chapter 2 section 2.6. In light of the benefits of parent involvement (cf. 2.6), education systems are being reformed in order to include parents as role-players in educational provision (cf. 2.1).

## **6.2.2 Early childhood provision in Namibia since 1990**

Early childhood provision in Namibia was examined by means of a literature review (cf. 3.3). Since 1990, basic education provision in Namibia has been guided by the principle of equal access to education for all. Prior to 1990 basic education which included preschool education

was provided by eleven ethnically defined authorities. However, only a few ethnic authorities managed to provide preschool education adequately. Following Namibia's independence in 1990, numerous educational reforms and changes were undertaken by the new government of Namibia in order to bring about equality in the education system. As preschool education was provided to a small number of young children, the new government suspended its provision of preschool education in 1994 and subsequently developed a national early childhood development policy which was released in 1996. The government's suspension of preschool education was based on a lack of sufficient resources to provide preschool education to all young Namibians in line with government's policy of equal access to education (cf. 3.3).

In order to address the issues of a lack of resources and inequality in early childhood provision, the government introduced a National Early Childhood Development Policy in 1996. The policy stipulates that early childhood education in Namibia is a community-based undertaking. The latter implies that parent communities are responsible for early childhood provision. Further to this the government and the historical providers of early childhood education such as churches and NGOs are to support the efforts of parents communities in running community-based ECD centres (cf. 3.6.3). Thus, parent communities, the Namibian government, churches and NGOs are the main role-players in early childhood provision. However, parent communities are the main providers of early childhood education through community-based ECD centres (cf. 3.6.4) while the government, churches and NGOs play only a supplementary role. The role of parent communities, government, churches and NGOs are discussed in chapter 3 section 3.6.3-3.6.5.

In terms of the national policy on early childhood provision, early childhood education in Namibia can either take place in centres (centre-based) or in homes (home-based). Centre-based ECD programmes aim at meeting the development and learning needs of children between the ages of three to six years, while home-based ECD programmes are aimed at the development and learning of both parents and their children (cf. 3.6.2). In the wake of the introduction of the policy on National Early Childhood Provision in 1996, many community-based ECD centres have been established throughout Namibia. Most of these are called community kindergartens and are run by the parent communities themselves. A lack of relevant

expertise in the running of such centres is one of the major problems experienced by most ECD centres particularly in rural communities. In addition, Namibian society is characterised by a deep rooted disparity among people. Subsequently, community-based early childhood provision remains unequal. Wealthy parent communities are able to support and run their community-based ECD centres successfully, while disadvantaged parent communities (particularly rural parents) experience difficulties in the running of their community-based ECD centres. The latter is attributed to a lack of resources and relevant expertise (cf. 3.7).

### **6.2.3 The research design**

Chapters 2 and 3 provided the necessary background to parent involvement in preschool education as well as early childhood provision in Namibia since 1990. However, this does not provide a detailed account of role-players' experiences of parent involvement in preschool education at grassroot level. As few studies have investigated the latter, a qualitative approach (cf. 4.2.1) was considered appropriate for an exploratory study of parent involvement in rural preschool in the Kavango. Four rural preschools (community kindergartens) to the west of Rundu settlement in the Kavango region were selected (cf. 4.5.2) and a number of days spent in each preschool as participant observer (cf. 4.7.1). Semi-structured interviews were utilised to elicit relevant data from both parents and teachers (cf. 4.7.2.1- 4.7.2.2). The data collected were analysed by procedures typical of qualitative research and organised according to emerging key themes (cf. 4.8). These themes reflect mainly on parent involvement (cf. 5.6) and barriers to parent involvement (cf. 5.7). A further synthesis of the key themes was conducted and main findings integrated with the key findings in chapter 2 and 3 (cf. 6.3).

## **6.3 SYNTHESIS OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

In this section, key themes that emerged from qualitative research are synthesised and integrated with main findings in chapters 2 and 3.

### 6.3.1 Organisation of early childhood centres

Early childhood provision in Namibia is a community-based undertaking (cf. 3.6). The establishment and running of either home-based or centre-based ECD programmes are the responsibility of parent communities while government, churches and NGOs provide support to such parent communities' initiatives. Moreover, parent communities through their elected centre-committees are responsible for running their respective community-based ECD centres. An elected centre-committee serves as parent representative body as well as governing body of each centre (cf. 3.6.4). Early childhood programmes can take place in centres for children (centre-based) or in parental homes (home-based). Parents themselves decide on the kind of programmes to be offered (cf. 3.6.1-3.6.2). Findings suggested that parent communities in the Kavango rural areas established community-based ECD centres for children living in the area (cf. 5.6.1). Similarly, findings indicate that elected centre-committees serve both as parent representative bodies and as governing bodies of these centres.

However, findings also indicate that centre-committees at all the ECD centres included in the research are mostly ineffective and are often not elected on time. Likewise, teachers in the centres are often overwhelmed by the responsibilities they have to mostly bear alone (cf. 5.7).

Related to the organisational needs of the centre, is the fact that few opportunities are provided for formal parent and centre-committee meetings where formal decisions need to be taken (cf. 5.7.6). Likewise participants reported that parent and centre-committee meetings are not held regularly (cf. 5.6.1, 5.6.2 and 5.7.6). Thus, although informal communication between parents and teachers takes place on a daily basis due to the proximity of ECD centres to the parent community and friendships between parents and teachers (cf. 5.6.13), the need to take formal decisions regarding the centres is not being met.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Effective communication is essential for maintaining a sound working relationship between parents and teachers (cf. 2.2). Moreover, a variety of communication strategies exists which

can be used to facilitate partnerships between ECD centres and the families they serve. The ample opportunity which is provided for informal communication between parents and teachers should be used by both parties to inform themselves regarding children's learning and development, parental role in centres and at home, problems facing centres and many other issues that are deemed necessary to both parties. The lack of formal communication between parents and teachers is mainly attributed to ineffective centre-committees (cf. 5.6.13). It is recommended that action should be taken to elect centre-committee members on time and to define the role of centre-committee more clearly (cf. 3.6.4). Government (cf. 3.6.5) and local churches (cf. 3.6.3) should provide guidance and supervision to elect centre-committees. Likewise, parent meetings should be made more effective and used to discuss a variety of issues, not only the non-payment of centre-fees.

Also recommended is that all parents and teachers serving on community-based ECD centre governing bodies, be adequately equipped for their task. This is of even greater importance for parents in a rural environment, as most have not had any managerial experiences. Given the fact that this research (cf. 5.6.1) and literature review (cf. 3.6.4) indicate that centre-committees are responsible for running community-based ECD centres in Namibia, it is recommended that the role of each group of stakeholders serving on the centre-committee, be clearly defined. Moreover, it is recommended that each community-based ECD centre should clearly spell out the role of its centre-committee and governing body. Similarly, it is recommended that centre-committee members be provided with relevant training regarding their role in community-based ECD centres (cf. 3.6.3 and 3.6.5).

### **6.3.2 Lack of written policy on parent involvement**

The findings clearly show that all the centres visited, lack a written policy on parent involvement. In general, the amount and type of parent involvement are determined in an ad hoc manner at parent meetings (cf. 5.6.2). Given the fact that such meetings are not regularly held, this arrangement is unsatisfactory (cf. 5.6.1).



## RECOMMENDATIONS

As indicated in paragraph 2.7.1, a lack of centre policy is a major barrier to parent involvement. In this context, Dauber and Epstein (1993:61) indicate that school programmes and teachers' practices are the strongest and most consistent predictors of parent involvement at home and in schools. It is thus recommended that community-based ECD centre in rural areas formulate a policy which will address all aspects of parent involvement. Moreover, all role-players should take part in the formulation and adoption of such a policy. School-based parent involvement programmes (cf. 2.5.2) and comprehensive parent involvement in programmes (cf. 2.5.3) can be used to guide policy making. It is also recommended that government's policy on parent involvement should be broadened to include all parents not only those serving on the centre's governing body.

### 6.3.3 Parents have high expectation of preschools

Early childhood programmes prepare young children to get the best out of school and indeed out of life (cf. 1.3.3). Moreover, early childhood programmes which emphasise parent involvement are beneficial to parents, children and teachers, particularly in a rural environment or in disadvantaged communities (cf. 2.6.1-2.6.3). Findings consistently show that community-based ECD programmes aim at preparing young children for school success and are beneficial to children's learning and development. These proven benefits to children motivate parents to enroll their children in community-based ECD programmes (cf. 5.6.3).

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Early childhood provision in Namibia is a community-based undertaking (cf. 3.3). Parent communities are responsible for early childhood provision (cf. 3.6.4), while government, churches and NGOs supplement the efforts of parent communities (cf. 3.6.3, 3.6.5). In this regard, it is recommended that parent communities be given more assistance by government, churches, NGOs and other interested parties in developing early childhood programmes with

a focus on parent involvement. Early childhood programmes which are discussed in 2.5 can serve as a guide in this regard.

#### **6.3.4 Parent involvement is narrowly defined**

In community-based ECD centres, parents are required to become involved in a broader spectrum of parent involvement activities aimed at sustaining community-based ECD centres (cf. 3.6.4). Moreover, parent involvement includes a wide range of parent involvements activities which are either home-based or school-based activities (cf. 2.1). Findings indicate that parent involvement in community-based ECD centre is understood by both parents and teachers as referring to parents provision of support in the form of centre-fee payment. In this regard, parents and teachers often equate parent involvement with parents' monthly payment of centre-fee (cf. 5.6.9). Clearly, parent involvement is not broadly defined but only defined in monetary terms (cf. 5.6.9). Moreover, qualitative research findings suggested that both parents and teachers in rural community-based ECD centres have a limited understanding of ways of using parents as volunteers. Tasks parents are sometimes asked to assist in, are cleaning the centres, fundraising and production of teaching materials (cf. 5.6.6).

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

In order to meet the wide range needs of community-based ECD centres, parents are required to become involved in a broader spectrum of parent involvement activities (cf. 3.6.4). In view of this, it is recommended that community-based ECD centres formulate policy which defines parent involvement in broader terms and should include various kinds of parent involvement activities, which can be performed within or outside ECD centres. Thus, volunteering activities such as parents accompanying children on excursions, fundraising, repairing school property, acting as teacher aides in classrooms are some of the tasks parents can be involved in as volunteers (cf. 2.5.2). However, both parents and teachers need relevant knowledge and skills on ways of using parents as volunteers (cf. 2.5.2). In view of this, it is recommended that training be provided to both parents and teachers on ways of using parents as volunteers within and outside community-based ECD centres. School-based parent involvement programmes (cf.

2.5.2) can serve as a guide in this regard. Likewise, the role of parents in parent-cooperative nursery schools which are discussed in 2.5 can also be used as a guide.

### **6.3.5 Poverty impinges on the successful running of community-based ECD centres**

Close to 60 percent of rural people in Namibia are classified as being poor (cf. 3.5). Moreover, parent involvement in rural Africa is generally hampered by the poor socio-economic status of parents (cf. 2.3). Qualitative research findings indicate that parent communities are unable to provide adequate support to their community-based ECD centres, because of ever increasing poverty (cf. 5.6.4). In this regard, community-based ECD centres are unable to run successfully because parents lack sufficient resources and facilities for the needs of the centres (cf. 5.6.4).

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

In paragraph 5.6.9, mention is made that both parents and teachers equate parent involvement with centre-fee payment by parents. Subsequently, parent involvement in community-based ECD centres is only defined in terms of financial support to the centres. In view of the latter as well as the poor socio-economic condition of parent communities, it is recommended that community-based centres should strive to broaden their support-base. In this regard, parent involvement should be defined in broader terms (cf. 2.1, 3.6). Likewise, it is recommended that parents should be provided with training in the field of parent involvement activities (cf. 2.4).

### **6.3.6 Role-players in community-based ECD centres are reliant on government support**

The role of government in early childhood provision is that of supplementing parent communities' efforts to run and support their community-based ECD centres on a sustainable basis (cf. 3.6.5). This implies that government needs to constantly support the efforts of parent communities particularly disadvantaged parent communities (cf. 3.6.5). On the other hand, parent communities themselves are responsible for early childhood provision (cf. 3.6.4). The research findings indicate that community-based ECD faces a shortage of resources and facilities and both parents and teachers believe that government has sufficient resources to

provide in the needs of their community-based ECD centres (cf. 5.6.7). In this regard, parents and teachers want government either to take the full responsibility of early childhood provision or to increase its support to community-based ECD centres (cf. 5.6.7).

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Community-based ECD centres can only be run successfully if the role-players accept the full responsibility that goes with early childhood provision (cf. 3.3). Moreover, parent involvement and support is crucial to community-based ECD centres' success (cf. 2.5). Government supplements the efforts of parent communities in running community-based ECD centres (cf. 3.6.5). Thus, both parent communities and government have a role to play in early childhood provision. It is recommended that government revisits its role in early childhood provision and action be taken by government to increase its role in community-based ECD centres, particularly in rural ECD centres. Such government intervention should be aimed at strengthening parent communities' capacity to provide early childhood education successfully.

### **6.3.7 The church as well as the community need to support community-based ECD centres**

The research shows that local churches provide substantial support to community-based ECD centres (cf. 5.6.8). Such support includes funding, provision of teaching/learning aids, medical care for children, food aids, classrooms, desks and other furnishing as well as training for teachers. Such support depends on what each local church is able to afford (cf. 5.6.8). In rural areas local churches have only limited resources and facilities to provide to the respective community-based ECD centres. This could explain why research findings indicate that community support to the community-based ECD centres is often defined in terms of financial support (cf. 5.6.9). This means that little is done to utilise the available resources and services in the communities (cf. 5.6.9). By this omission, expertise which could benefit the ECD centres is not utilised.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Historically, Namibian churches have been involved in early childhood provision (cf. 3.3). In terms of the policy on early childhood provision, churches are also tasked with providing support to parent communities in the running of community-based ECD centres (cf. 3.6.3), however, many churches lack resources and facilities to support community-based ECD programmes (cf. 5.6.8). In view of this, it is recommended that local churches' support to community-based ECD centres should emphasise training of both parents and teachers, particularly in the field of parent involvement. Similarly it is recommended that churches, NGOs and government should work as partners in soliciting support for community-based ECD centres.

Community support at all school levels is of significant importance as it provides the necessary resources, facilities and skills that schools are in need of (cf. 2.3). Community-based ECD centres can thus benefit substantially from community-support (cf. 3.8). In this light, it is recommended that role-players in community-based ECD centres be trained on how to identify and utilise the available resources and services available in the community, in order to strengthen their community-based ECD programmes.

### **6.3.8 Parents need assistance in fulfilling their role as parents**

Research findings indicate that little is done to assist parents in their parenting tasks in the rural communities of Kavango region (cf. 5.6.10). Most parents state that they acquired their parenting skills from their own parents (cf. 5.6.10). This is commendable. However, it can be argued that a new dispensation requires new skills and that parents need assistance in raising children in the new millennium. Thus, ECD centres, together with the home, should aim at meeting the learning and developmental needs of children such as improving mother tongue skills, language development, social skills, cognitive skills, positive self-concept development and natural creative abilities (cf. 1.3.3, 5.6.12). However, the research findings indicate that parents and teachers have a limited understanding of how learning can be supported at home. Moreover, learning and teaching at home are mainly defined in terms of academic knowledge

and skills such as literacy skills and English language development (cf. 5.6.12). Parents at home use their own initiatives when teaching their children at home and no support is provided to parents in this regard (cf. 5.6.12).

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The importance of parenting skills cannot be over emphasised (cf. 2.4). Thus, parents and caregivers, particularly in disadvantaged communities need to be supported in their parenting tasks. For this reason the policy on early childhood provision in Namibia indicates that parents should be supported in their parenting tasks through the provision of relevant training (cf. 3.6.5). In view of the importance of parenting, it is recommended that community-based ECD centres develop parenting programmes to assist parents in their parenting tasks. Home-based parent involvement programmes which are discussed in 2.5.1 might be used as a guide in developing parenting programme. Similarly, it is recommended that churches, NGOs and government agencies should assist teachers in providing parenting skills to parents (cf. 3.6.3). The latter is in line with the provision of early childhood education programmes in Namibia (cf. 3.6.2-3.6.5).

Learning should also take place at home. Moreover, parents need skills on how to support their children's learning at home (cf. 2.5.1). In the light of parents and teachers' limited understanding of how learning can be supported at home (cf. 5.6.12), the researcher recommends that both parents and teachers be provided with appropriate training on ways in which parents can support learning at home. In this context, emphasis should be placed on the role of parents in helping their own children to achieve their learning and developmental needs at home (cf. 1.3.3, 2.5.1). Home-based parent involvement programmes which are discussed in 2.5.1 can be used as a guide to develop a training manual on ways of supporting learning at home. Similarly, community-based ECD centres should strive to comply with the aims of early childhood programmes as set by government (cf. 1.3.3, 5.6.12). In this regard, government should provide supervision, training and guidance (cf. 3.6.5).

### **6.3.9 Teachers lack skills on how to involve parents**

The research showed that teachers lack skills on how to involve parents in community-based ECD centres (cf. 5.7.3). In this regard findings indicate that teacher training does not include adequate skills on how to involve parents (cf. 5.7.3). Moreover, findings also show that the duration of teacher training is too short to include aspects of parent involvement in the training (cf. 5.6.11). The findings indicated above, have been confirmed by other research (cf. 2.7.1).

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Teacher pre-service or in-service training does not always include skills on how to involve parents in the education of their children (cf. 2.7.1). Subsequently, teachers lack skills on how to involve parents. The latter is confirmed by the research findings (cf. 5.6.2, 5.6.6, 5.6.9, 5.6.11, 5.6.12, 5.7.3). Training of teachers in the field of parent involvement is, however, of paramount importance for the success of community-based ECD programmes (cf. 2.5). For this reason, it is recommended that parent communities in collaboration with government, NGOs and churches should consider the introduction of community-based ECD programmes that include the educational and development needs of parents, children and teachers. In this regard, school-based parent involvement programmes which are discussed in 2.5.2 can be utilised as a guide. Similarly, it is recommended that the curriculum for in-service training of teachers should include skills on how to involve parents and such provision should be an ongoing process. In this regard, government, churches and NGOs should play a leading role (cf. 3.6.3 and 3.6.5). Parents should also be provided with training in the field of parent involvement activities. Teachers who have been in parent involvement should assist in this regard.

## **6.4 BARRIERS TO PARENT INVOLVEMENT**

Barriers to parent involvement are numerous and prevalent in both rural and urban environments (cf. 2.7). Participants listed the following barriers to parent involvement in community-based ECD centres: poor socio-economic condition of parents (cf. 5.7.1), lack of time (cf. 5.7.2), lack of knowledge of parent involvement (cf. 5.7.3), lack of ownership of

centres (cf. 5.7.4), parents' lack of confidence and dependency (cf. 5.7.5), lack of leadership (cf. 5.7.6) and lack of training (cf. 5.7.7). Most of the barriers to parent involvement in 5.7 have been confirmed by previous research (cf. 2.7).

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Consistent findings from literature indicate that poor socio-economic conditions of parents and a lack of knowledge and skills of parent involvement serve as the major barriers to parent involvement, particularly in disadvantaged rural communities (cf. 2.2, 2.3). This suggests that many disadvantaged parents have little resources, time and energy to spend on parent involvement activities (cf. 5.7.2). Moreover, such parents are often also disadvantaged in terms of educational development and parent involvement skills (cf. 2.7.8). Likewise, teachers also lack knowledge of parent involvement (cf. 2.7.1). Consequently the two parties find it difficult to implement parent involvement activities (cf. 5.7.3). Within this context it is recommended that both parents and teachers should be provided with training in the field of parent involvement (cf. 5.6.2-5.6.13). Likewise, barriers to parent involvement which are identified in 5.7, should be studied by role-players during a workshop or seminar and appropriate solutions be sought.

### **6.5 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH**

In view of the findings on parent involvement in rural community-based ECD centres it is recommended that the potential use of qualitative research approach in the investigation of rural education in Namibia be further explored. Similarly, in light of a lack of research on parent involvement in rural community-based ECD centres, the researcher recommends further research in this field. Many aspects relating to parent involvement in rural community-based ECD centres require more detailed research. Thus, the following areas are suggested for further research:

- The influence of the academic background of rural parents on learner achievement.
- The extent and type of training of early childhood practitioners in rural areas of Namibia.



- Strategies to improve the parenting skills of rural parents.
- Effective use of parent volunteers in rural community-based ECD centres.
- The academic achievement of learners who attended early childhood centres.

## 6.6 CONCLUSION

Government's introduction of the policy of community-based early childhood provision is aimed at addressing a lack of resources and inequality in early childhood provision (cf. 1.1). However, the translation of policy into practice has been beset by many problems. In rural Namibia, close to 60 percent of rural households are classified as poor (cf. 3.5). The implication is that government's policy of community-based ECD provision will not automatically produce the benefits discussed in section 3.8, nor will it automatically achieve its intended aims which are shown in 1.1. Priority should therefore be given to training of both parents and teachers, particularly in the field of parent involvement, which is a new concept to both parties.

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OBSERVATION: CHECKLIST

NAME OF PRESCHOOL: .....  
OBSERVATION DATE: .....  
OBSERVATION TIME: .....

1. LOCATION OF PRESCHOOL

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

2. PRESENCE OF THE PARENTS AND OTHER CARE-GIVERS ON PRESCHOOL  
GROUND AND ACTIVITIES INVOLVED IN:

A PARENTS OR OTHER CARE-GIVERS	ACTIVITIES INVOLVED IN

A PERSON (OTHER THAN STAFF) ON SCHOOL PREMISES	ACTIVITIES INVOLVED IN

### 3. CONDITION OF PRESCHOOL

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#### 3.1 PHYSICAL CONDITION OF PRESCHOOL

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#### 3.2 CLEANLINESS OF PRESCHOOL

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### 4. CONDITION OF CLASSROOM

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### 5. TEACHING AND LEARNING AIDS

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### 6. PLAYING EQUIPMENT

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### 7. WATER AVAILABILITY

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### 8. TOILET FACILITIES

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**9. CHILDREN AND STAFF**

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**10. CURRICULUM**

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**11. ACTIVITIES IN WHICH TEACHERS ARE INVOLVED**

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**12. ACTIVITIES IN WHICH CHILDREN ARE INVOLVED**

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**13. ANY OTHER COMMENTS/OBSERVATIONS**

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## **INTERVIEW GUIDE: PARENTS**

The interview questions are clustered under headings. This has been done to direct the interview and also to assist the interviewer. The headings indicated above, will not be given to the participants. Further, the participants will be allowed to raise issues and discuss aspects not on the interview schedule. The schedule is only a guide to assist the interviewer to cover the main points during the interview.

### **1. PARENTS AS TEACHER AIDES AND VOLUNTEERS IN THE CLASSROOM**

- 1.1 In what way are you (or any other parent) involved in classroom activities at your centre?
- 1.2 What opportunities for involvement do the teachers of the centre offer you?
- 1.3 In what way do you assist the teachers in the classroom at this centre?
- 1.4 How would you like to be involved in the classroom activities at your centre?

### **2. PARENTS AS SUPPORTERS**

- 2.1 In what way do you assist/support the centre?
- 2.2 What is the role of the parents at this centre?
- 2.3 What type of service do you provide to your centre?
- 2.4 In what way would you like to support your centre?
- 2.5 In what way is your centre supported by people or organisations other than yourself?

### **3. PARENTS AS POLICY MAKERS AND PARTNERS**

- 3.1 In what way are you involved in the decision making process regarding your centre?
- 3.2 How often are you given the opportunity to assist in decision making at this centre?
- 3.3 Do you consider the parents of this centre to be part of management/decision making.

#### **4. COMMUNICATIONS BETWEEN THE PRESCHOOL AND PARENTS AND VICE VERSA**

- 4.1 How do you find out what is happening at your centre?
- 4.2 How do you find out how your child is doing at the centre?
- 4.3 Are there opportunities for you to discuss your child with teachers at the centre?
- 4.4 How are you treated when you visit the centre or attend social functions?

#### **5. PARENTS AS TEACHERS OF THEIR CHILDREN AT HOME**

- 5.1 In what way are you involved in the education of your own children at home?
- 5.2 Have you ever been shown how to assist learning at home? Please explain.
- 5.3 In what way do you think parents should become involved in the actual learning of their children in the afternoons?
- 5.4 What factors may prevent parents from assisting learning at home?

#### **6. PARENTS AS LEARNERS**

- 6.1 How were you taught traditionally to be parents?
- 6.2 In what way are you involved in parent education courses at your centre?

#### **7. BARRIERS TO PARENT INVOLVEMENT**

- 7.1 What barriers are there to parent involvement in this centre?
- 7.2 How do you propose that these be eliminated?

### **INTERVIEW GUIDE: TEACHERS AND HEAD TEACHER**

The interview questions are clustered under headings. This has been done to direct the interview and also to assist the interviewer. The headings indicated above, will not be given to the participants. Further, the participants will be allowed to raise issues and discuss aspects not on the interview schedule. The schedule is only a guide to assist the interviewer to cover the main points during the interview.

#### **1. PARENTS AS TEACHER AIDES AND VOLUNTEERS IN THE CLASSROOM**

- 1.1 What is the policy of this centre regarding parent involvement in the classroom activities?
- 1.2 In what way are the parents involved in your class activities?
- 1.3 In what way do the parents assist you in the classroom?
- 1.4 What prevents the parents from being more involved in what takes place in your classroom?

#### **2. PARENTS AS SUPPORTERS**

- 2.1 What is the role of the parents at this centre?
- 2.2 In what way do the parents support this centre?
- 2.3 What type of services do the parents provide at this centre?
- 2.4 In what way do you want the parents to support this centre?
- 2.5 In what way is your centre supported by other people or organisations?

#### **3. PARENTS AS POLICY MAKERS AND PARTNERS**

- 3.1 What is the policy of this centre on parent involvement?
- 3.2 Is it a written policy or unwritten policy?
- 3.3 Which governing structure is in place at this centre?
- 3.4 What is the role of the governing structure at this centre.
- 3.5 In what ways are the parents involved in the decision making process in this centre?

#### **4. COMMUNICATION BETWEEN THE PRESCHOOL AND PARENTS AND VICE VERSA**

- 4.1 How do you pass information on to parents or to guardians?
- 4.2 What opportunities are offered at this centre to parents to meet you personally?
- 4.3 What other opportunities are there for parents to meet you?
- 4.4 How often do you contact parents? How do you contact them?

#### **5. PARENTS AS TEACHERS OF THEIR CHILDREN AT HOME**

- 5.1 What is the policy of this centre with regard to parent involvement in the education of their children at home?
- 5.2 To what extent are parents involved in their children's education?
- 5.3 In what way do the parents assist their children with academic matters?
- 5.4 Is any training provided to parents to teach them how to support learning at home? Please explain.

#### **6. PARENTS AS LEARNERS**

- 6.1 Do you offer educational programmes for parents at this centre?
- 6.2 What are the objectives of such programmes?
- 6.3 In what way did your basic training equip you to work with parents

#### **7. BARRIERS TO PARENT INVOLVEMENT**

- 7.1 What barriers are there to parent involvement in this centre?
- 7.2 How do you suggest these be eliminated?

GENERAL INFORMATION: TEACHERS

PERSONAL INFORMATION

FULL NAMES: .....  
DATE OF BIRTH: .....  
FIRST LANGUAGE: .....  
MARITAL STATUS: .....

PROFESSIONAL INFORMATION

HIGHEST QUALIFICATION: .....

YEARS OF TEACHING EXPERIENCE: .....

HAVE YOU ATTENDED ANY WORKSHOPS/COURSES ON PARENT INVOLVEMENT?

.....  
.....

**GENERAL INFORMATION: HEAD TEACHERS****PERSONAL INFORMATION****FULL NAMES:** .....**DATE OF BIRTH:** .....**HOME LANGUAGE:** .....**MARITAL STATUS:** .....**PROFESSIONAL INFORMATION****HIGHEST QUALIFICATION:** .....**YEARS OF EXPERIENCE AS TEACHER:** .....**YEARS OF EXPERIENCE AS HEAD:** .....**INFORMATION OF CENTRE****NAME OF CENTRE:** .....**NUMBER OF CHILDREN:** .....**NUMBER OF TEACHERS:** .....**NUMBER OF CLASSROOMS:** .....**FEEDING SCHEME:**      **YES/NO:** .....**HAS ANYONE ATTENDED A COURSE ON PARENT INVOLVEMENT?**.....  
.....**HOW OFTEN ARE STAFF ABLE TO ATTEND SUCH WORKSHOPS/COURSES TO  
IMPROVE THEIR SKILLS?**.....  
.....**WHAT IS THE POLICY OF YOUR CENTRE ON PARENT INVOLVEMENT?**.....  
.....

GENERAL INFORMATION: PARENTS

FULL NAMES: .....  
AGE: .....  
MARITAL STATUS: .....  
NUMBER OF CHILDREN: .....  
DO YOU HAVE ANY FOSTER CHILDREN/CHILDREN OF RELATIVES LIVING  
WITH YOU? .....

OCCUPATIONS OF FAMILY MEMBERS

THE HIGHEST SCHOOL GRADE PASSED BY WIFE: .....  
OTHER QUALIFICATIONS: .....  
THE HIGHEST GRADE PASSED BY HUSBAND: .....  
OTHER QUALIFICATIONS: .....  
OCCUPATION OF MOTHER: .....  
PRESENT WORK: .....  
OCCUPATION OF FATHER: .....  
PRESENT WORK: .....



**EXAMPLE OF AN INTERVIEW**  
**INTERVIEW BETWEEN J SIKONGO (JS) AND**  
**HEAD TEACHER FROM CENTRE B**

JS: How are parents used as volunteers in the classroom at this centre?

Helena: It is me the teacher of this centre who do everything. I attended a training course on how to teach young children and it is therefore my duty to teach the children in the classroom. It is not the responsibility of the parents. The parents are not trained and I do not allow parents to teach children in the classroom. However, some parents used to visit my classroom in order to observe how I teach their children. When parents visit the centre, parents do not provide any kind of assistance. I do everything on my own. As an example, I collected old papers as teaching aids for my classroom. Our parents are only expected to pay centre fee each month, but not to become involved in classroom activities such as teaching children. Even centre-fee, only few parents use to pay regularly. Like during the last month, only three parents paid centre-fee. It is just not enough to provide in the need of this centre. I always struggle to get books and other teaching aids for my classroom, parents don't assist me in this regard. It is actually very difficult to work in this centre as everything is done by me.

JS: You mentioned that it is your duty or responsibility to teach children in the classroom and not the duty of parents. How do parents assist your centre outside the classroom?

Helena: The parents are mainly required to pay N\$30,00 each month. This is the duty of all parents. Because of poverty and unemployment our parents are unable to pay centre-fee. I do everything in the centre while expecting the parents to support me financially or materially.

JS: In what other ways do parents support this centre as a whole?

Helena: As a decision taken by the parents themselves, individual parents are required to pay N\$30,00 each month. However, only few parents pay regularly. As an example, during the month of January only three parents paid. What can we do

with the little money? It is really a problem facing us. I can say most parents are poor and they do not have paid jobs . Last year, our parents decided to build a new centre. A place where the new centre has to be built is already found and parents are informed to start with the work. Yet, nothing has happened. I don't know where we are heading to. I understand our parents want to be paid for any service they might render to this centre. The government is not assisting us in this regard and thus up to the present moment the proposed new centre is not built. Our parents are poor and it is really difficult to do something on their own. In my view, the government needs to do something in order to assist us.

JS: Apart from the parents you mentioned earlier on, in which ways is the community at large involved in the provision of support to your centre?

Helena: Our centre does not receive any other support. There is nothing I can mention, because nobody helps me at this centre. As the only teacher at this centre, I try everything on my own. Like teaching aids, I collected old books and pictures which were thrown away by the teachers of the primary school. It is hard to work without support from the community. Our parents are poor and they don't pay centre-fee each month. Even the government does not help us. Like this year, nobody from the government visited our centre.

JS: As the only teacher of this centre, what do you do in order to assist parents to improve their parenting skills?

Helena: I only teach the children in the classroom because I received training on how to do it. The parents are not taught by me and nobody assists our parents in this regard. I usually attend training workshops during school holiday. Parents don't attend such workshop. Actually I don't do anything to assist our parents. The government also does not assist us on this matter. I am the only teacher at this centre. What can I do. It will be good if the government can provide such programmes but I did not yet experience it.

JS: What other parent educational programmes are available to parents of the children in this centre?

Helena: There are few educational opportunities in our community. Adult literacy programme is the one I know of. I don't think that many parents attend such programmes. I suggest the government needs to provide more educational opportunities for parents. Maybe this will benefit our centre. Educational programmes for parents is really lacking. Something must be done in this regard.

JS: Do you think that there is a lack of parent educational opportunities?

Helena: Yes, I agree as such opportunities don't exist in our village. It is only teachers who are provided with in-service training, the parents are not part of it. Even in-service training for teachers is rarely provided.

JS: Being the only teacher of this centre, do you offer advice to parents on how to stimulate and support learning of their own children at home?

Helena: Yes, I sometimes talk to the parents about this matter.

JS: Can you elaborate more on how you advise parents?

Helena: Yes, when we hold parent meetings like in the past, I always encourage our parents to teach their children at home. But I don't think that parents teach their children at home. I sometimes write something on pieces of paper and give it to all the children in my classroom to take home to their parents. This could be letters or pictures, I expect from the parents to teach their children these things when they have time. I don't know what happens at home as everything depends on the parents' willingness to teach their own children.

JS: Is there a governing structure in place in this centre?

Helena: Yes, the centre-committee is responsible for governing our centre. However, the situation today is that I do everything because our centre-committee is not functioning well.

JS: What are the tasks of the centre-committee?

Helena: The centre-committee is supposed to run this centre. It needs to hold parent meetings and also encourage parents to pay centre-fee regularly. At present, the centre-committee is not yet elected. Thus, I am responsible for most of the things that take place in the centre. The centre-committee is not active in its work, many centre-committee members show little interest in the affairs of this centre. As a result of this situation, I struggle to find resources that can support this centre. What I need is more government support, because our parents are always reluctant to assist this centre.

JS: In what ways are parents involved in decision making process regarding this centre?

Helena: Through parent meetings, all the parents are given the opportunity to take part in decisions. As I said, we have a problem of a lack of parent meetings. In fact, little is done, because the centre-committee is not strong but rather weak. It is also the case that parents show little interest in parent meetings. When parent meetings are called, only few parents attend such meetings. Most parents say that there is no use to attend parent meetings because the decisions which are taken during parent meetings are not implemented. At present, nothing is happening, except that I try my best to teach the children.

JS: You indicated that parents show little interest in parent meetings, why is it so?

Helena: I also don't know, but I think that they feel neglected by the government. Parents want their centre to be treated equally with primary schools, which receive substantial support from the government.

JS: Do you think that the parents play an active role in decision making process in your centre?

Helena: I don't think so, I don't see it. It is mostly me who do everything.

JS: How do you pass information on to parents or to guardians?

Helena: There are many ways of passing information to parents. The centre is not far from parents' homes. I am always in contact with parents. Some of them use

to visit the centre, just to see how things are going on. Sometimes I use to write information on small papers and give it to children to take to their own parents. Most parents are my neighbours, I always share information with them when we meet at my home or in their homes. In the past, we always hold parent meetings but this does not happen again.

JS: Are there any opportunities for parents to come to the centre and talk to you?

Helena: Yes, all the parents are always free to visit me at the centre. Some parents visit me at the centre, I appreciate their visits as it give me encouragement. However, most parents choose to talk to me when we meet at home. I don't experience any problem regarding communicating with parents, as we all know each other for many years.

JS: What is the policy of this centre regarding parent involvement?

Helena: We want parents to pay centre-fee each month. We also want the parents to attend parent meetings regularly so that we can discuss the affairs of this centre. This does not happen. Many parents do not contribute anything to the centre. It is therefore difficult to run this centre. I suggest the government should assist us by providing facilities and funds. Parents are poor and cannot be expected to provide all these.

JS: Is it a written policy or unwritten policy?

Helena: We don't have a written policy on parent involvement. However, parents were informed that they ought to pay centre-fee each month. All the parents agreed to this decision during parent meetings. I constantly encourage parents to pay centre-fee, but I don't see any improvement in this regard.

JS: In what other ways do you feel parents should be involved?

Helena: Parents are mainly expected to provide financial assistance to this centre. As you might know that the government does not provide any funding to this centre. We also want the parents to help us with the construction of the new

centre. Last year parents agreed to build a new centre, but to this day nothing has been done. Many parents want the government to pay them money for their service to this centre. I also feel that the government must help us in this regard even by providing drought relief aid to parents in return for their service to the centre. I always encourage parents to help me in various ways but parents are reluctant as they consider this as the duty of the government.

JS: How often are you able to attend courses to improve your skills?

Helena: Not always. It is usually only one time in a year. In the past, we regularly attended workshops during school holidays but I don't see it again. I need more training as I am the only teacher at this centre.

JS: Do you receive in-service training on parent involvement?

Helena: The workshop is usually about teaching methods as well as on using local material for the production of teaching and learning aids. We also learn a bit about parent involvement such as how to conduct parent meetings. It is just not sufficient. I know a bit about parent involvement what I need is more training in the field of parent involvement. This might help me a lot in working with difficult parents.

JS: Do parents also receive training on parent involvement?

Helena: No, the workshop is only intended for teachers. Parents do not get any kind of training. I always share some of the information with parents during Sunday church service when most parents are present.

JS: Do you feel that parents need to be trained in the area of parent involvement?

Helena: Yes, parents need training regarding parent involvement. At present parents know little about parent involvement as parents are not provided with such courses.

JS: What do you consider to be the benefits of parent involvement?

Helena: I think through parent involvement our parents can be encouraged to pay centre-fee on a regularly basis. This can also help our centre to develop.

JS: In your opinion why do parents send their children to attend ECD programmes?

Helena: The situation is not like in the past, parents want their children to perform well when they start with primary school education. Many parents praise their children that they are learning a lot from the centre. That is how I think.

JS: What do you think are the benefits of your centre education to children?

Helena: Children learn many things in the centre. They learn how to read, write and they also know some English expressions. This is good for children when they start grade one. Children also learn good behaviour and it is not like those children who do not attend ECD programmes.

JS: What are the barriers to parent involvement in this centre and how can parent involvement be improved:

Helena: What I have seen is that many parents are not eager to attend parent meetings. Many parents ignore calls to attend parent meetings. So, we cannot do anything regarding this centre. It is also the case that most parents are poor and cannot pay centre-fee. There is little we can do to improve the situation. I think the government should help us more and not just expect the poor parents to run this centre.

JS: Thank you for the interview.

**EXAMPLE OF AN INTERVIEW**  
**INTERVIEW BETWEEN J SIKONGO (JS) AND**  
**PARENTS FROM CENTRE B**

JS: In which ways do you become involved in classroom activities at this centre?

Ernestine: I always take my child up to the entrance. I may greet our teacher if I see her. After that I return home. I don't become involved in what takes place in the classroom. What we do as parents is to pay centre-fee. As you know we are poor parents we don't always have the money to pay. That is our duty. What happens in the classroom is the responsibility of our teacher. I cannot teach children in the classroom, that is the duty of the teacher.

Pelgrina: I also want to agree that parents' responsibility is that of paying centre-fee. Thus, we don't get involved in classroom activities as this is the duty of the appointed teacher. I sometimes visit the centre just to observe the situation, but not to do anything that relates to the classroom activities.

JS: What other voluntary tasks do you perform in this centre?

Pelgrina: There is little I can say. What I know is that parents don't get involved in any kind of voluntary work in the centre. I did not see it. Maybe my friend has witnessed it.

Ernestine: Actually nothing happens in the centre. What happens in the centre is done by our teacher. The parents only pay centre-fee when they have got money. I also can recall that last year all the parents agreed that we should build a new centre but nothing has yet happened. I don't see any parent working in the centre as a volunteer. That does not happen. Even myself I don't do it (laughing).

JS: Are you asked to work as volunteers in the centre?



Ernestine: What I know is that our teacher constantly reminds us to support the centre financially or materially. However, we as parents don't have the means to support our centre. As I am sitting here, where from can I get money? It is difficult for parents to support this centre.

Pelgrina: Parents do not work as volunteers in the centre. That does not happen. Our role is mainly to pay centre-fee but we always fail to pay, because we are poor.

JS: In what other ways do you support this centre as a whole?

Ernestine: As we have said already, parents are required to pay centre-fee. Apart from paying centre-fee I don't think we have done something else to support this centre. Many parents are unable to pay. We very much find it difficult to survive. Many families lack food. This is always difficult.

Peelgrina: I fully agree with my friend. What I want to add is that the government needs to support this centre. We as parents cannot be expected to provide in all the needs of the centre. We simply lack the means to meet the needs of our centre. We have many other responsibilities which need our urgent attention. We experienced drought for the last three years and yet we are expected to find money to pay to the centre, children get sick and we have to pay hospital fees. It is really difficult to meet all these needs.

JS: As parents of the children in this centre, do you receive advice or training that aimed at improving your parenting skills?

Pelgrina: We don't receive such advice or training. What I know about parenting is either self taught or my parents taught me such parenting skills. At our centre our teacher used to attend workshops, but such training workshops are not for parents. That is what I know.

Ernestine: It is true what my friend has said. I always observe that our teacher is sometimes called over the radio to attend workshop in Rundu. We as parents are not part of it.

JS: Do you think that parents need to be advised or even trained in parenting skills?

Ernestine: We actually need such training but we don't get it.

Pelgrina: As parents we need some kind of training in order to develop ourselves. That is my comments.

JS: Does the teacher advise you on how to stimulate or support learning of your children at home?

Pelgrina: Our teacher is responsible for teaching our children in the centre. We don't get any kind of advice from the teacher. What we do at home, we do it on our own. Sometimes I might teach my child things like counting and singing but I do it on my own without any advice from the teacher.

Ernestine: I don't have much to say on that question, as my friend who spoke before has said everything. I sometimes assist my child to learn but I don't get any advice from the teacher.

JS: In what ways are you involved in decision making processes at this centre?

Ernestine: I think, we as parents, also play a role in what takes place in our centre but we do not do this every time. Take the example of the meeting we held last year regarding the new centre. It was a collective decision we took as parents to build a new centre for our children. However, nothing has yet been done. Maybe, because we are not being paid, that is why we cannot fulfil our decision. As parents, we are also allowed to participate in parent meetings but I do not see parent meetings being held regularly. We are poor people, we cannot do much about our centre, the government needs to help us, we may decide to do something but we cannot implement our decisions.

Pelgrina: I am in full agreement with what my friend has said. I don't want to add anything on what she has said. I can just say that something must be done to assist the poor parents. At the present moment virtually nothing is happening. Parent meetings are not being held. We just send our children to the centre. I

don't see decisions being taken by parents, except that we are required by the centre to pay. Many of us are unable to pay centre-fee.

JS: As parents do you think that you also play an active role in decision making processes in this centre?

Ernestine: During meetings, parents are allowed to ask questions and we are also allowed to visit the centre in order to enquire about our children.

Pelgrina: I don't think that we play an active role. I don't see it.

JS: How do you find out what is happening at the centre?

Pelgrina: I sometimes visit the centre just to see for myself what is happening there. While visiting the centre I always talk to the teacher. If our teacher has something to tell me, she might tell me everything during my visit to the centre. I also get information via my child. I always ask my child to tell me something about the centre. Our teacher also pass information to me through my child. Like in the previous years we had parent meetings, important information and messages were shared during parent meetings. Such meetings are no more regularly being held, but I don't have any problem with getting information about the centre. We are always in daily contact with our teacher. Our teacher can easily contact me if she has a message for me. She is a neighbour.

Ernestine: I also want to add that I used to receive a lot of information through my children. Sometimes I personally visit our teacher at the centre, just to ask something I don't understand. When I accompany my child to the centre, I always meet our teacher and we use such time to share some information regarding the centre. During parent meetings important messages are passed on to parents, but I don't see this happening again. Is not like when we started.

JS: How are you treated when you visit the centre?

Ernestine: Parents are always free to visit the centre and our teacher is somebody we know well. Parents can ask questions to the teacher. It is just fine when visiting the centre.

Pelgrina: Our teacher treats us well. We talk and laugh with the teacher. I don't experience any problem.

JS: You mentioned that parent meeting is not regularly held at your centre, why is it so?

Ernestine: What I know is that many parents refuse to attend parent meetings. Many parents will say that they don't see the use of parent meetings. They will argue that they are poor people who cannot support the centre on their own. The parents want government officials to address them but this is not happening.

Pelgrina: Things were better in the past. Meetings were regularly held. Nowadays everybody is not interested, it is only the teacher who try her best to run the centre.

JS: Why do you send your children to this centre?

Pelgrina: We want our children to learn many things while they are still young. It is not like in the past when children were only at home. Children are learning many things, this is good for children when they start grade one.

Ernestine: If you compare the situation in the past with the present situation, you will see that the situation today is much better for our children than in the past. Our children start school while they are still young and we have the expectation that they will succeed in school. The government should therefore assist us as we don't have the resources to run this centre.

JS: What do you consider to be the benefits of ECD programme to your children in this centre?

Ernestine: We have seen many good things. Our children can now read and write and they also show good social behaviour. This is good for our children's future.

Pelgrina: The benefits to our children are many. As an example, our children learn many things that helps them to be good children such as good behaviour, counting and reading. That is what I can say.

JS: In your view, what are the barriers to parent involvement in this centre and how can parent involvement be improved?

Pelgrina: Parents are poor to pay centre-fee. It is a real problem facing us. We want to assist this centre, but we don't have the resources to do that. The government should therefore support this centre. In other schools, children are receiving food, but not at this centre. Why is it so? We want our centre to receive the same benefits from the government.

Ernestine: I agree with what is said by my friend. We want government support in different ways such as paying our teacher's salary. Many of us are not working. Where from can we get money to pay? We always try to help this centre but this is difficult to achieve. I suggest that the government should provide some assistance to our centre.

JS: Thank you!



**REPUBLIC OF NAMIBIA**

**MINISTRY OF BASIC EDUCATION, SPORT AND CULTURE**

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<b>Reference</b>	<b>:</b>	<b>RUNDU</b>
<b>Enquiries</b>	<b>: Mr. J. Sikongo</b>	<b>20 January 2001</b>

The Centre-Heads  
Community Kindergartens  
Rupara, Nkurenkuru, Sitopogo and Karangana  
Kavango

Dear Sir/ Madam

**RESEARCH: BY JOSEPH SIKONGO**

Mr. Sikongo is an employee of the Ministry of Basic Education and Culture at Rundu Regional Office. Furthermore, he is currently enrolled at UNISA for M.ED Degree Course.

In order to fulfill the Basic requirement of the M.ED Degree Course, a research needs to be conducted. Thus, your centre has been selected to participate in the envisaged Research Project.

The aim of the study (Research) is to investigate the present Relationship between the home (parents) and Kindergarten in a Rural Community in the Kavango. Within this context, the Research to be carried out, is basically an academic exercise, which is aimed at fulfilling the M. ED course requirement.

Any information that is obtained from the parents and teachers (ECD workers) at your centre will be treated confidential.

Sincerely

.....  
**MR. A. DIKUUA**  
**REGIONAL EDUCATION OFFICER**