CHAPTER 1

ORIENTATION

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Early childhood care and education is an integral part of basic education and represents the first essential step in achieving the goals of education for all (SA, 2001a:14). Education White Paper 5 on Early Childhood Development in terms of the National Education Policy Act, 1996 (SA, 1996) testifies to the growing appreciation of the crucial importance of the child's earliest years (UNICEF, 2007:4). It further asserts that the learning capacity and value orientations of children are largely determined by the time the child reaches the age of primary schooling (5 ½ to 7 years). For this reason, any sustained effort in education for all must set targets and programmes for Early Childhood Development (ECD) and attempt to promote effective management that will ensure quality foundational education (SA, 2001a:14; UNICEF, 2004:14; UNICEF, 2007:17).

The early years of life are a particularly sensitive period for children's survival, growth and psycho-social development and if the management of sites in which young children grow up is not effective, their later participation in society is likely to be compromised (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000:42). Anderson, Shinn and Mindy (2003:32), UNICEF (2004:36) and UNICEF (2007:1) establish that a child's educational experience in early years has both an immediate effect upon their cognitive and social development and long-term effects upon their educational achievements and life prospects, which in turn, influences readiness to learn in the school setting. This therefore, calls for enhancement of quality foundational education.

School management has an important role to play in ensuring that there are strategies in place to achieve foundational quality education. Strengthening the quality of education has become a global agenda at all educational levels and more so at
foundational level (Mirza, 2003:5). The quality of foundational education is not only important for preparing individuals for the subsequent educational levels but to equip them with the requisite basic life skills. Quality education also ensures increased access and equality (Mirza, 2003:6) and it is mainly due to these reasons that effective management of Grade R sites is of utmost important. It is paramount important to discuss background and statement of the problem below.

1.2 BACKGROUND AND STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Before 1994, about 10% of the children in South Africa from birth to six years had access to public or private ECD facilities. For many years the major contributors to ECD have been the non-governmental agencies, religious communities and other civil bodies who, together with unemployed women in the townships, started quite a number of innovative community based ECD programmes (SA, 2001a:4).

From 2002 to 2004 seven hundred and sixty (760) sites were registered with the Gauteng Department of Education (GDE) through the implementation of the National Conditional Grant. Currently 1360 functional Grade R sites have been established through the implementation of the National Conditional Grant processes and the Provincial activities (SA, 2007:2). This process serves as a springboard to phase in Grade R in Gauteng Province. The phasing-in process is meant to continue and it is anticipated that approximately five thousand (5000) Grade R sites would be established by 2010. These Grade R sites have to accommodate all learners aged four and half (4½) turning five (5) by 30 June in the year of admission and would become part of the compulsory 10 years of education (Grade R to Grade 9) (SA, 2005:2; UNICEF, 2007:2; Zill & Ziv, 2007:3).

The term ECD straddles two educational phases namely, the period before formal schooling which was known as pre-primary education and the Foundation Phase, formerly known as the Junior Primary Phase. The Foundation Phase now includes a
traditional pre-school year, Grade R as well as Grades 1 to 3 (Excell & Linington, 2007:15).

The phasing in process has shown to have a negative impact regarding effective management and support of Grade R sites, posing hindrances in ensuring quality foundational education. Such problems include the following:

- School management teams (SMTs), including some Heads of Departments (HODs) for the Foundation phase, are not trained to monitor and support Grade R practitioners (Gauteng Department of Education, 2008a:1; SA, 2008:4). The lack of training makes it difficult for the managers to support and guide ECD practitioners.

- Lack of resources does not only make effective learning and teaching difficult but also impacts negatively on the quality of education rendered. Although education in these sites has to be semi-formal, lack of human resources to implement and sustain quality accredited curriculum (Gauteng Department of Education, 2008a:5; Gauteng Department of Education, 2008b:10) and poor delivery caused by lack of training, hinder progress (Cronje, 2004:6). Ultimately, poor quality of teaching and learning in these ECD sites results.

- Most practitioners are poorly prepared for their task. According to Circular 28 of 2005 (SA, 2005), School Governing Bodies (SGBs) and or Community Sites Management Teams (CSMTs) may appoint practitioners who have at least Grade 9 or ABET level 4 qualifications with at least three years experience in ECD. This poses a serious problem as most of the sites have practitioners with Matric certificates without any ECD qualifications. Furthermore, most of the practitioners have never taught before (SA, 2005:4). In other sites qualified educators have been appointed. These qualified educators leave the Grade R sites immediately when appointed in permanent posts. Lack of stability impacts
negatively on the management of sites because of practitioners who leave the sites for permanent posts elsewhere.

- Sometimes tension arises between the practitioners and HODs in these sites. Some practitioners had been managers in the sites where they have been teaching (Community based sites before they were cooperated into schools). Due to the phasing in process, they lose their status of being managers and become practitioners under the SMT of the school and have to be supervised and monitored by HODs (SA, 2008: 1).

Derived from the above, the following research question arises:

How effective is the management of Grade R sites to ensure quality foundational education in the Sedibeng Districts?

This question is addressed by investigating the following sub-questions:

- What is the fundamental nature of quality education in Grade R?
- Does the management of Grade R sites in the Sedibeng districts ensure quality education?
- What guidelines can be provided for effective management of Grade R sites to ensure quality education in the Sedibeng Districts?

1.3 AIMS OF THE STUDY

The aim of the study is to investigate the effectiveness of management of Grade R sites to ensure quality foundational education in the Sedibeng Districts.

This aim can be operationalised into the following research objectives:

- to investigate the fundamental nature of quality education in Grade R;
- to investigate if the management of Grade R sites in the Sedibeng districts ensures quality education; and
• to provide guidelines for effective management of grade R sites to ensure quality education in the Sedibeng Districts.

To this end, and in order to achieve the aims of this research, a thorough literature review and empirical research will be undertaken.

1.4 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN

According to Welch, Kruger and Mitchell (2005:2), research is a process that involves obtaining scientific knowledge by means of various objective methods and procedures. Leedy and Ormrod (2005:2) affirm that research is a systematic process of collecting, analysing, and interpreting information in order to increase understanding of the phenomenon about which we are interested or concerned. It is the general approach that the researcher takes in carrying out the research project and to some extent; this approach dictates the particular tools the researcher selects. Therefore, research methodology considers and explains the logic behind methods and techniques.

This study is quantitative in approach. Quantitative research endeavours to address questions regarding relationships among measured variables with the purpose of explaining, predicting and controlling phenomena that will generalise to other persons and places.

1.5 RESEARCH METHOD

The method for this study involves both literature and an empirical study. The study was therefore, done in two phases.

1.5.1 Literature study

Phase one of the study entails a literature study. Conducting a literature study enabled a strong orientation framework of what would be studied and how it would be studied (Fouche & Delport, 2002:268). In the literature review relevant books, journals, papers presented at professional meetings, dissertations and theses by graduate students, reports by schools and university researches and Government Gazettes were consulted. An extensive search of applicable websites on the internet was done to
gather additional information. Some of the literature used in this study is illustrated in the figure below.

Fig 1.1 Summary of literature

Theme 1: Early childhood education
- Scott-Little, Kagan & Frelow, 2003; Davin & Van Staden, 2005; Arnold et al., 2006; and others.

Theme 2: Quality education

Theme 3: Management of quality education
- Sources include: Van der Westhuizen et al., 2008; Coetzee, 2002; Mark & Louis, 1999; SA, 2008; Pretorius, 2004; Bennett, Crawford & Canwright, 2004; Meier & Marais, 2007; Ndumase, 2004; Meyer, 2002; Bennett et al., 2004; SA, 1996, 2003, 2005, 2006, 2008; Van der Westhuizen, 2008; Pretorius, 2004; Meier & Marais, 2002; Bush, 2007; Mogonediwa, 2008; DeWitt, 2008; Wellhausen & Crowther, 2004; Gewertz, 2003; Arnold et al., 2005; Meyer, 2002; Marzano, 2003; Everton, Emmer & Worsham, 2000; Oliver & Reschly, 2007; Aubrey, 2008; Bennett et al., 2004; Kruger, 2004; Bush, 2007; Van der Waldt, 2004; Nel, 2007; Everton, Emmer & Worsham, 2000 and others.
The following key words were used in the literature search:

Management, management in ECD, effectiveness in management, quality, quality in education, ECD, quality foundational education

1.5.2 Empirical research

In addition to literature study, data were collected by means of questionnaires. A questionnaire was constructed from the literature study based on the models of quality, quality assurance and effective management. A self developed questionnaire was used to collect data on effective management of ECD sites for quality foundational education. A self-developed questionnaire was used because a standardised questionnaire relevant to the study in question could not be found.

A questionnaire is a self-report data collection tool that each research participant fills out as part of a research study (Johnson & Christensen, 2004:164). Participants completed a questionnaire at their own time and it included multiple questions and statements. Welman et al. (2005:180) maintain that questionnaires must be laid out in such a way that participants are able to follow all the instructions easily and answer all the questions that they are to answer. If a questionnaire is properly administered, it is still the most appropriate instrument to elicit information from a big sample.

1.5.3 Research design

A descriptive design will be employed in this study. According to Leedy and Ormrod (2005: 198), in a descriptive study design the primary goal is to assess a sample at one specific point in time without trying to make inferences or connecting statements. The researcher will describe the existing phenomena as accurately as possible. The research design will be discussed further in chapter three.
1.6 RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY

Reliability is ensured when evidence and conclusions of the study stand up to the closest scrutiny and the results are consistent over time (Welman, et al., 2005:145; Leedy & Ormrod, 2005:29). Validity, on the other hand, would be ensured by determining whether the research accurately measured that which it was intended to measure or how truthful the research results were. Thus, it will be without research errors, faulty research procedures or poor samples and inaccurate or misleading measurement (Welman et al., 2005:142; Leedy & Ormrod, 2005:28), but ensures credibility, which allows participants to validate that the reported findings represent their experiences (Ellis & Levy, 2009:333).

1.7 TARGET POPULATION

The target population is the total group of people from whom information could be obtained and whose opinions were needed to fulfil objectives of the research (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005:102). In this study, the target population consisted of school based and community based practitioners and managers in the Gauteng Province. There are currently fifteen (15) districts in the Gauteng Province. Two districts from the Gauteng Province were involved in this study namely, the Sedibeng East and Sedibeng West Districts. The sample was chosen from the Sedibeng Districts because of its proximity to the researcher. There are 165 primary schools with Grade R sites and 50 community based sites with Grade R in these districts.

1.7.1 Sample

The sample was randomly selected. A sample according to Leedy and Ormrod (2005:95) is a subset of the population. Lists of primary schools with Grade R and CBS were obtained from the Sedibeng district offices. All these schools were targeted but the practitioners and managers were randomly selected. The selection yielded a sample of practitioners from both School Based Sites (SBS) and Community Based Sites (CBS)
The sample is indicated in the table below.

Table 1.1: Sample of the Study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Sites</th>
<th>No of Practitioners</th>
<th>ECD Managers</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SBS</td>
<td>165</td>
<td>186</td>
<td>184</td>
<td>370</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CBS</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>215</td>
<td>236</td>
<td>214</td>
<td>450</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1.8 DATA ANALYSIS

Data collection, processing and analysis followed the survey research. The statistical consultancy services of the North-West University: Vaal Triangle was approached for assistance in the analyses and interpretation of data collected by means of questionnaires. Descriptive data were used to interpret the data collected. Data collected was analysed by means of frequencies and tests for statistical differences. Data is presented in chapter four in tables and graphs.

1.9 RATIONALE FOR THIS STUDY

In spite of concerted efforts and resources devoted to quality education, especially at Grade 11 and 12 levels, the results have been neither satisfactory nor sustainable. Mirza (2003) indicates that if drop-out and failure rates are indicators of quality, the picture in Districts 7 and 8 in Sedibeng is not a promising one. There is an indication of high internal inefficiencies and educational wastage in both these districts which needs to be addressed comprehensively. Failing standards reveal poor service delivery, leading in turn to low levels of interest and improvement in quality is a key element that could ensure equity for learners through substantive entitlements in terms of capabilities for improving human well-being (Mirza, 2003). The researcher is of the opinion that this situation can be reversed if Grade R sites can be effectively managed.
It is important to establish whether managers of ECD centres are aware of the significance of provision of quality education. It is also important to establish how quality is ensured in the sites in the Sedibeng districts.

1.10 EXPECTED OUTPUTS OF THE STUDY

The researcher currently holds the position of Institutional Development and Support Official (IDSO) at Sedibeng East District Office, working directly with the management of Grade R sites. Based on the findings of this research, the researcher will endeavour to provide guidelines in order to ensure that Grade R sites are effectively developed and managed. Support and assistance will also be given to Grade R practitioners, school managers and sites in ensuring quality foundational education in the Sedibeng Districts.

1.11 CHALLENGES OF THE STUDY

The following challenges were encountered in the study:

- **Literature review** - Insufficient information pertaining to Grade R, such as articles and textbooks, since Grade R is newly introduced to schools and in the community; and

- **Administration of questionnaires** – Some of the questions were misinterpreted by practitioners; collection of questionnaires from participants created problems; some practitioners were absent when questionnaires were delivered to their schools or collected; other managers forgot to complete the questionnaires.

1.12 LIMITATIONS OF THIS RESEARCH

The main limitation of this research is that the method of data collection was only quantitative. The use of both quantitative and qualitative approaches would have brought great value to this study, a matter which is partly attended to.
1.13 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The researcher obtained permission from the head office at the Gauteng Department of Education and Sedibeng districts to conduct the research. The research was conducted according to the prescribed departmental protocol that is, ensuring that the research is not conducted during teaching time. Permission was also obtained from the managers of SB and CB sites. Questionnaires were administered and collected after teaching hours.

The questionnaire was accompanied by a covering letter requesting the participants to complete it and assuring them of the confidentiality with which their responses were handled.

1.14 CONCLUSION

In chapter 1, the orientation of the research, in the form of the statement of the problem, the aims of research, methods used to conduct this research and the challenges of the study were discussed.

In chapter 2, literature review on the management of ECD centres for quality in foundational education and overview of ECD in South Africa and elsewhere, were investigated by means of a literature survey. This information is presented in the next chapter.