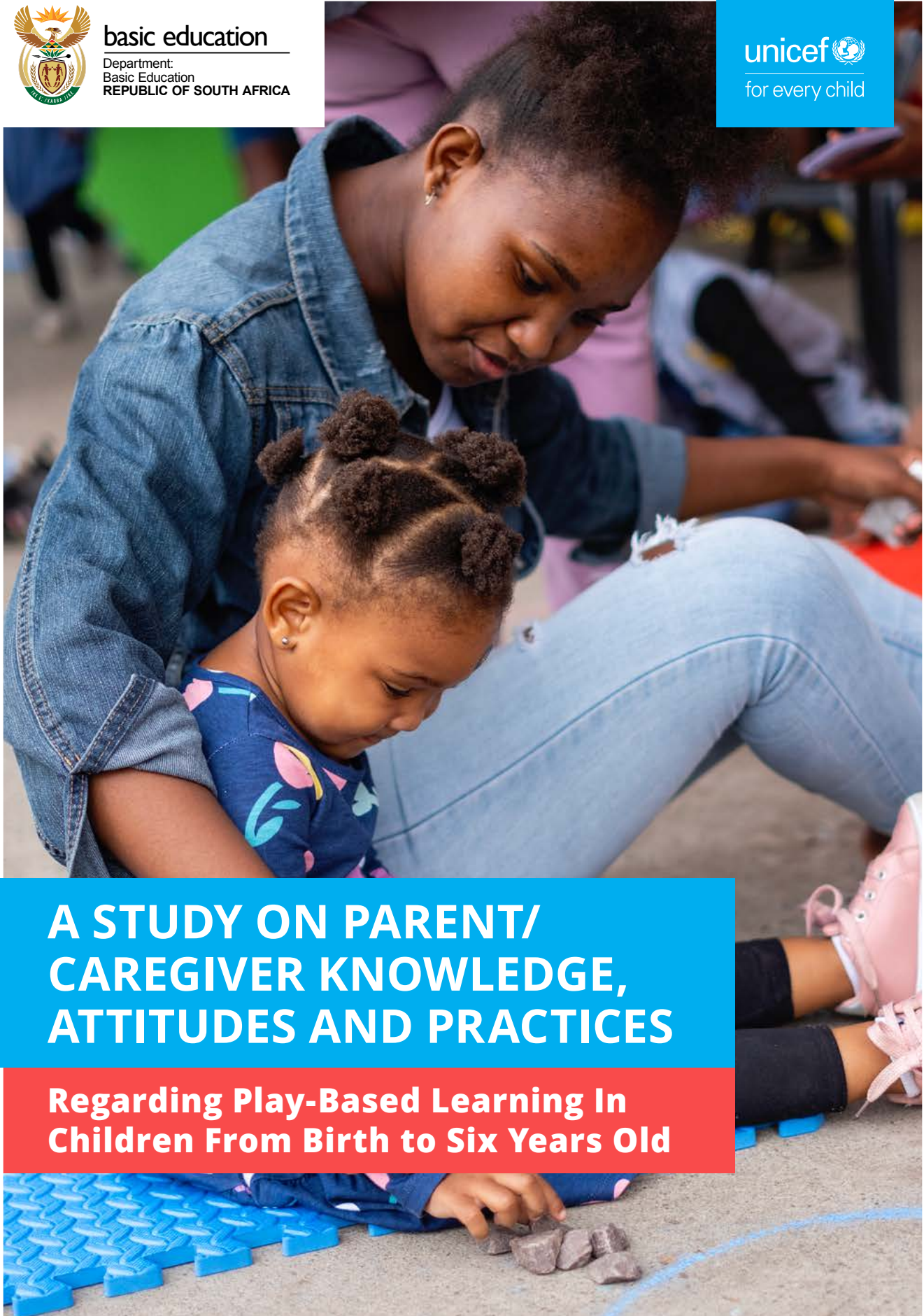




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# A STUDY ON PARENT/ CAREGIVER KNOWLEDGE, ATTITUDES AND PRACTICES

**Regarding Play-Based Learning In  
Children From Birth to Six Years Old**

**Report from:**

Impact Consulting

**Report to:**

The United Nations  
Children's Fund (UNICEF)

**Written by:**

Jerushah Rangasami, Gill  
Naeser, Linda Biersteker,  
Nelius Boshoff

**Fieldwork team:**

Linda Arnott, Lindy Dlamini,  
Lindiwe Farlane, Gabrielle  
Jonker, Gill Naeser, Matipa  
Ngoro, Paddy Nhlapo  
and Patsy Pillay

**Support from:**

Deborah Pavlou, Bridget  
Savage, Simon Sender

**Cover photo**

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# Acronyms and Abbreviations



|               |                                                            |
|---------------|------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>CAPS</b>   | National Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statements       |
| <b>DBE</b>    | Department of Basic Education                              |
| <b>DOH</b>    | Department of Health                                       |
| <b>DSD</b>    | Department of Social Development                           |
| <b>ECCE</b>   | Early childhood care and education                         |
| <b>ECD</b>    | Early Childhood Development                                |
| <b>ECDNCF</b> | ECD National Curriculum Framework                          |
| <b>EFA</b>    | Education For All                                          |
| <b>ELPO</b>   | Early learning programme outcomes                          |
| <b>ELDA</b>   | Early learning development areas                           |
| <b>FGD(s)</b> | Focus group discussion(s)                                  |
| <b>GBV</b>    | Gender-based violence                                      |
| <b>HIV</b>    | Human immunodeficiency virus                               |
| <b>ICT</b>    | Information and Communication Technology                   |
| <b>KAPs</b>   | Knowledge, attitudes and practice(s)                       |
| <b>LMIC</b>   | Low- and middle-income countries                           |
| <b>NCF</b>    | National Curriculum Framework                              |
| <b>NELDS</b>  | National Early Learning and Development Standards          |
| <b>NIECDP</b> | The National Integrated Early Childhood Development Policy |
| <b>RCT(s)</b> | Randomised controlled trial(s)                             |
| <b>RSA</b>    | Republic of South Africa                                   |
| <b>SES</b>    | Socio-economic status                                      |
| <b>SMS</b>    | Short message system                                       |
| <b>SASSA</b>  | South African Social Security Agency                       |
| <b>TV</b>     | Television                                                 |
| <b>UNICEF</b> | United Nations Children's Fund                             |
| <b>USSD</b>   | Unstructured supplementary service data                    |
| <b>WHO</b>    | World Health Organisation                                  |

## Provincial Abbreviations

|            |               |
|------------|---------------|
| <b>EC</b>  | Eastern Cape  |
| <b>FS</b>  | Free State    |
| <b>GP</b>  | Gauteng       |
| <b>KZN</b> | KwaZulu-Natal |
| <b>LP</b>  | Limpopo       |
| <b>MP</b>  | Mpumalanga    |
| <b>NC</b>  | Northern Cape |
| <b>NW</b>  | North West    |
| <b>WC</b>  | Western Cape  |

## A note on terminology used in this report:

**Parent** in this report refers to any regular primary parent of the child who is responsible for physically attending to the child's needs (e.g., dressing, bathing, feeding, getting them to school), not necessarily the breadwinner.

**Play-based learning** includes both opportunities for free play initiated by the child and guided play, in which adults and/or older children interact with the young children in a way that guides the child's development and learning.

**Skip-generation households** are families in which grandparents raise children and the parents are absent.

## A Study on Parent Knowledge, Attitudes And Practices (KAPs)

### Executive Summary

South African ECD policies and curricula highlight play to promote early learning. These also emphasise the role of parents in supporting the development of their young children, which is essential, as the home learning environment accounts for a large proportion of child educational performance, whether or not they attend an ECD programme. In 2020, more than 50 per cent of children from birth to four years old stayed at home with parents or guardians. Approximately 30 per cent of birth to three year olds, 70 per cent of four year olds, and more than 90 per cent of five to six year olds participated in an early learning programme (including Grade R).

Neuroscience explains that playful experiences enhance learning, including executive functioning skills. Play also promotes social interaction with caregivers and peers, which develops language, cooperation, and social learning in young children, and helps them to practise self-regulation. Parental wellbeing and mental health, and hence responsive caregiving, are enhanced through playful interactions with young children.

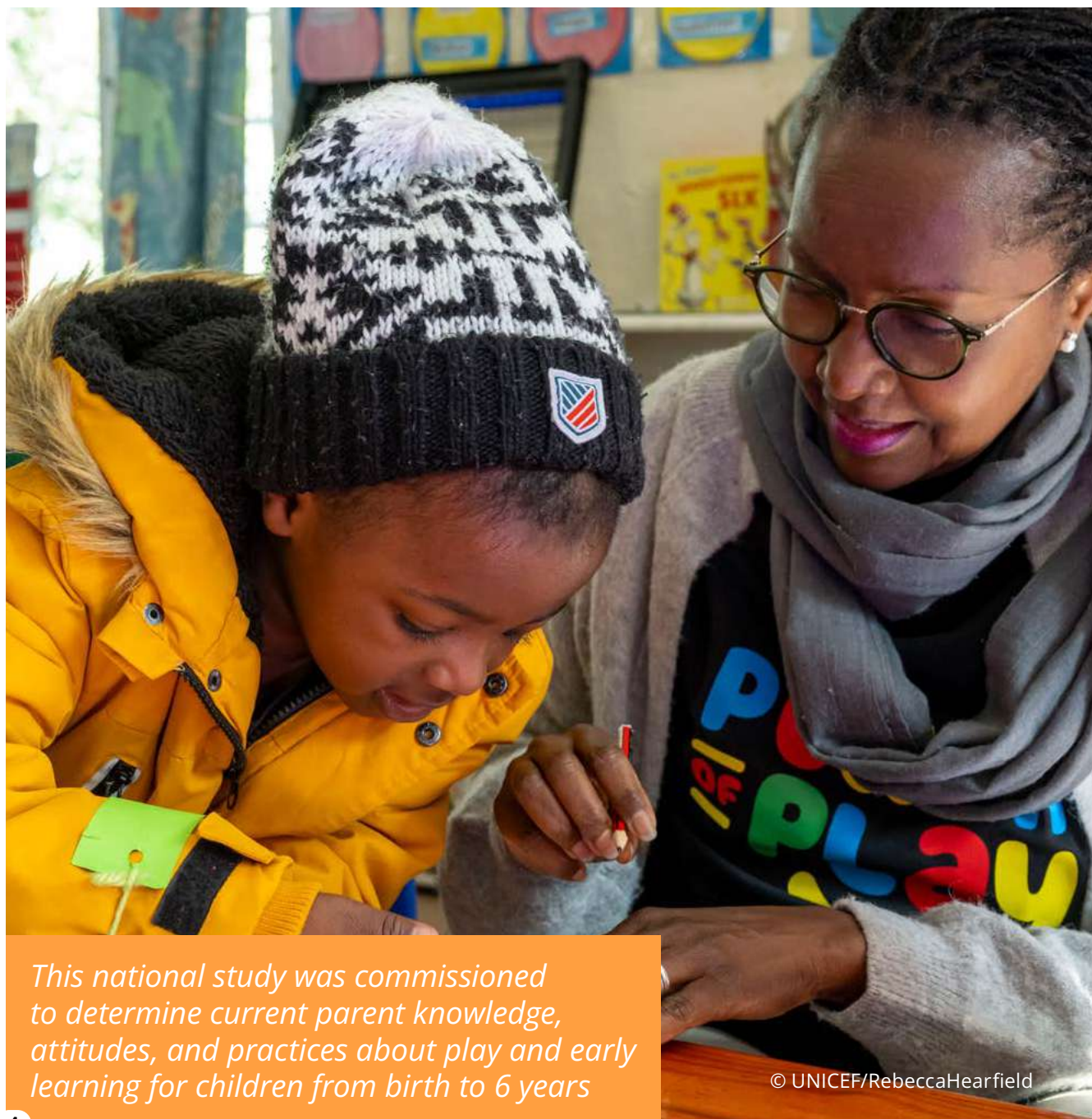
### Impact of home environments on play and learning

The influence of children's home environments and parenting practices is well established. Parent and child interactions in the first few years are especially important for early language,

cognitive, and socio-emotional development, and early grade school performance. Parents' time spent playing with young children is limited: local studies indicate significant proportions of parents never engage in reading or telling stories, singing to their children, drawing and colouring, counting, or playing with blocks or puzzles. This indicates a clear need to change prevailing parenting practices so as to support early learning.

### Overview of the study

This national study was commissioned to determine current parent knowledge, attitudes, and practices about play and early learning for children from birth to 6 years, to inform an evidence-based approach to supporting the implementation of early learning programmes in South Africa.



*This national study was commissioned to determine current parent knowledge, attitudes, and practices about play and early learning for children from birth to 6 years*

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**A mixed methods design was utilised, including the following:**

- A rapid literature review
- Mapping of current parenting programmes offered
- Reflective participatory workshops
- Quantitative and qualitative data collection during site visits in nine provinces through:
  - » Focus group discussions and interviews
  - » A parent survey administered by trained local fieldworkers
- Participatory design and analysis sessions with a steering committee for the study

**A total of 1429 participants were involved in the study:**



**1088**

**Parent surveys**  
(a nationally representative sample)



**310**

**Focus group participants**  
(parents, local leaders)



**31**

**Key informant interviews**  
(national and provincial ECD and parenting programme providers)

## Parent KAP about play in early learning

Study findings substantiate that the importance of play is not widely understood. Parents viewed their responsibilities largely in relation to the child's needs for health, nutrition, protection, self-care and socialisation. They understood that play helped the child bond with the parent, and that a range of adults and other children should play with young children. Parents gave examples of playful interactions during care routines. Singing, drawing and playing games were seen as avenues for learning. Respondents noted the role of culture and traditional games in teaching "identity and respect".

'Learning through play' was understood mostly in relation to learning socialisation skills. Attending 'creche' was seen as the avenue for educational learning. Many parents believed that children learn through technology, especially watching television (cartoons) and playing on cellphones.

The link between learning and play in other developmental domains was not well understood, especially not how play influences learning of emergent mathematics and early literacy. Understandings that children play for leisure on their own or with other children were prevalent; however, only two thirds of parents knew that young children could be learning when playing on their own.

## Attitudes

Parents' values and goals for child development influence child behaviours and have implications for programmes aiming to promote particular parenting practices. In this study, responses to the attitude scale were overwhelmingly positive. Ninety-two per cent agreed that it was important to play with your child, that it promoted bonding (97%), that they looked forward to it (89%), that it was fun (96%), that adults should play with children (89%) and that it was not only a woman's role to play with the child (90%). Only 20 per cent believed that boys and girls should play different games. More than three quarters (78%) of parents believed in letting children have some choice in what was played. Some parents indicated that children should be doing chores rather than playing; 84 per cent agreed that including children in household tasks could be seen as play. These attitudes provide a useful basis for promoting play though efforts are needed to build a better understanding of the importance of play for learning.

Fifty-two per cent of parents believed in learning through instruction and it was commonly believed that learning takes place at school/creche, not at home. A concern was that children from birth to two years old were considered too young for books and play. Attitudes to technology varied, though there was some general awareness of potential damage from unregulated exposure to media. Respondents felt that screen time should be limited for children from birth to two years old as it prevented socialisation.

## Practices

In common with many African contexts, play was largely polyadic (children playing with other children) especially in rural areas, and physical care and socialisation were parental priorities in the early years. This indicates that not enough adult/child play was taking place. Not having time to play with the child was a reported constraint for nearly a third of parents, more so for three to six year olds. However, only 7 per cent of parents said that neither they nor any household member played with the child at all, 35 per cent indicated someone had played only once or twice, and 59 per cent reported that a young child had been played with "many times". Siblings and mothers most often engaged in play.

Children play with other children in mixed age groups. Different kinds of play included exploratory play by younger children, some 'educational' play materials, active physical play, fantasy play with dolls and wire cars and numerous games with rules.

Bought toys were available in 68 per cent of households. Singing and physical play between adults and children was most common (close to two thirds). There was significantly less engagement on early literacy and numeracy development. Less than a third told stories or read books. Forty-three per cent of households have no books. Less than 20 per cent reported puzzles or construction toys.

While 25 per cent of children had access to electronic devices and only 20 per cent listened to children's radio, 71 per cent watched TV or videos on a phone regularly. This presents an opportunity for educational programming, but a concern for exposure to inappropriate content, and limited active and mediated play and reading of stories.

Playing indoors for safety reasons was emphasised. Outdoor play needed to be supervised. Indoor play lent itself to technology or TV watching, which was prevalent in all areas. This was found to have eroded active, exploratory play.

### **Contextual enablers and barriers for parent mediated play in early learning**

Focus group discussions with parents and service providers highlighted pointers for interventions to promote learning through play, as well as broader support that parents need to engage confidently and responsively with their children, and the resources needed to enable this.

Several factors surfaced provide a good foundation for developing a culture of playful learning for the future, including positive parent attitudes towards playing with children, and availability of certain play materials. In intergenerational and larger households, multiple carers, including siblings, played with children. Access to media and television was extensive and, judiciously used, offers an opportunity for advancing learning through play.

However, findings indicate serious challenges to learning through play from the broader environment. A lack of social cohesion and safe spaces for young children to play severely restricts play opportunities. Most children (76 per cent ) play inside, only half played outside, and 38 per cent at neighbours. Only 16 per cent accessed an ECD programme. Indoor play involves more sedentary, screen-based activities. A lack of puzzles, conceptual games, drawing materials and books is a challenge. Time-poor parents are often isolated and lack confidence in their parenting. A significantly higher percentage (one third) of parents over 40 years old reported being too busy to play, though they were still more likely to spend time playing with their children than younger parents (under 25 years old).

# Contents

|                                                                                                                             |           |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|
| <b>1. Introduction</b>                                                                                                      | <b>12</b> |
| <b>2. Context and Background</b>                                                                                            | <b>12</b> |
| 2.1. Overview of Young Children and Early Learning in South Africa                                                          | 13        |
| 2.1.1. Demographics of young children in South Africa                                                                       | 13        |
| 2.1.2. Family structures in South Africa                                                                                    | 14        |
| 2.2. The Nurturing Care Framework                                                                                           | 14        |
| 2.3. Early Learning                                                                                                         | 16        |
| 2.3.1. Protective factors and risks for early learning and development                                                      | 16        |
| 2.3.2. Attendance of children at educational facilities                                                                     | 18        |
| 2.3.3. The significance of the home environment for child learning outcomes                                                 | 20        |
| 2.3.4. What we know about early learning in the home environment in South Africa                                            | 21        |
| 2.4. South African Policy Provisions On Play And Early Learning, And The Role Of Parents/ Primary Parents In Early Learning | 23        |
| 2.5. SUPPORT FOR RESPONSIVE CAREGIVING                                                                                      | 29        |
| 2.6. Children's Play And Learning                                                                                           | 30        |
| 2.6.1. What is play?                                                                                                        | 30        |
| 2.6.2. The benefits of play                                                                                                 | 31        |
| 2.6.3. Play in different cultural settings                                                                                  | 32        |
| 2.6.4. The impact of primary parent on learning                                                                             | 33        |
| 2.6.5. Promoting play with parents                                                                                          | 34        |
| 2.7. Delivering Effective Parenting Programmes                                                                              | 35        |
| 2.7.1. What works for enabling effectiveness of parent programmes                                                           | 36        |
| 2.7.2. Contextualisation of parenting/parent programmes                                                                     | 39        |
| 2.7.3. The role of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in parent education programmes                            | 40        |
| <b>3. Methodology</b>                                                                                                       | <b>43</b> |
| 3.1. Purpose and Objectives of the Study                                                                                    | 43        |
| 3.2. Study Methods and Participants                                                                                         | 44        |
| 3.2.1. Literature review                                                                                                    | 44        |
| 3.2.2. Mapping of Parenting Programmes                                                                                      | 45        |
| 3.2.3. Qualitative and quantitative data collection during site visits                                                      | 45        |
| 3.2.4. Parent short survey                                                                                                  | 46        |
| 3.2.5. Parent/parent and local leader focus groups at each of the sampled sites                                             | 47        |
| 3.2.6. Focus groups with ECD and parenting programme providers, and ECD centre staff                                        | 47        |
| 3.2.7. Key informant interviews                                                                                             | 47        |
| 3.2.8. Research participants                                                                                                | 47        |
| 3.3. Ethics Approval                                                                                                        | 51        |
| 3.4. Methodology Challenges                                                                                                 | 51        |
| 3.5. Data Analysis                                                                                                          | 52        |
| 3.5.1. Quantitative data analysis                                                                                           | 52        |

|                                                                                                             |            |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|
| 3.5.2. Qualitative data analysis .....                                                                      | 53         |
| 3.5.3. Participatory data analysis .....                                                                    | 54         |
| 3.5.4. Analysis to report writing process.....                                                              | 55         |
| <b>4. Findings.....</b>                                                                                     | <b>55</b>  |
| 4.1. Parents' Knowledge, Attitudes, and Practices Towards Play-Based Learning .....                         | 55         |
| 4.1.1. Knowledge.....                                                                                       | 56         |
| 4.1.2. Attitudes .....                                                                                      | 60         |
| 4.1.3. Practices.....                                                                                       | 66         |
| 4.1.4. Provincial differences in parent KAPs regarding play-based learning.....                             | 81         |
| 4.2. SUMMARY ANALYSIS OF KAPs .....                                                                         | 86         |
| 4.2.1. Parents' knowledge of play-based learning.....                                                       | 86         |
| 4.2.2. Parent's attitudes to play-based learning.....                                                       | 87         |
| 4.2.3. Parent practices of play-based learning.....                                                         | 88         |
| 4.3. Biopsychosocial Contextual Factors .....                                                               | 91         |
| 4.3.1. Community and living environment factors that affect parent KAPs regarding play-based learning ..... | 92         |
| 4.3.2. Family set-up and factors that affect parent KAPs regarding play-based learning.....                 | 95         |
| 4.3.3. Factors related to the parent and the child.....                                                     | 97         |
| 4.3.4. Factors in terms of materials and play tools/methods.....                                            | 101        |
| 4.4. Summary Analysis of Contextual Enablers and Barriers for Parent Mediated Play-Based Learning .....     | 102        |
| 4.5. Programmes for Parents Regarding KAPs for Play-Based Learning.....                                     | 104        |
| 4.5.1. Description of existing programmes .....                                                             | 104        |
| 4.5.2. Programme effectiveness and gaps in programming.....                                                 | 106        |
| 4.5.3. Summary analysis: Programmes for parents .....                                                       | 110        |
| 4.5.4. Actions to be considered.....                                                                        | 111        |
| 4.5.5. Changing knowledge, attitudes and practices.....                                                     | 111        |
| 4.5.6. Provision of early learning resources.....                                                           | 112        |
| 4.5.7. Creating a safe supportive environment for children's play .....                                     | 112        |
| <b>5. Conclusion .....</b>                                                                                  | <b>113</b> |
| <b>6. References.....</b>                                                                                   | <b>113</b> |
| <b>7. Appendices.....</b>                                                                                   | <b>119</b> |

## Programmes for parents: What works?

Well designed parenting programmes have been shown to positively change parenting behaviours. A database of 100 parenting programmes was developed through this study, and in-depth information collected on 37 programmes that offer content on play in early learning. Offerings included book sharing, home visiting, toy libraries, workshops and mobile ECD services. Some have an age focus or target groups such as fathers, young parents or parents of children with special needs. Most were offered face to face, though there are some Parenting Apps. Providers reported that supporting parents and sharing practical activities to do with children enhances parents' confidence to engage in play with their children. Implementation is sustained when adults and children attend programmes together. Peer group support for parents was shown to be valuable, and parent stress levels reduced when parents played with their children.

## What is needed to enable parents to provide learning through play experiences for their children?

### Parenting behaviour change would be supported by:

- Promotion of learning through play through local champions and communication campaigns at all points where parents of young children gather, and in the media
- Provision of accessible book and toy libraries
- Creation of safe play spaces in communities
- Encouraging safe and appropriate play in the home
- Psychosocial support for parents.

While some structural and systemic changes are needed through multi-stakeholder solutions, there are good foundations in place for improving parents' KAP regarding play-based learning. This is very encouraging for the young children of South Africa.



*supporting parents and sharing practical activities to do with children enhances parents' confidence to engage in play with their children*

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# 1. Introduction

This report has been prepared for UNICEF South Africa and the Department of Basic Education (DBE), based on the study of the knowledge, attitudes and practices (KAP) of parents or primary caregivers of children from birth to six years old with regard to play-based learning.

## 2. Context and Background

To guide the KAP study, we reviewed demographic and research literature to develop an understanding of the current situation of parental and contextual support (or lack thereof) for early learning in South Africa, as well as parental knowledge, attitudes and practices in low- and middle-income contexts which support play-based learning and development, and preferred and appropriate methods and programmes for parent engagement and education. This literature review was used to guide the design and development of the study's data collection instruments; guide and supplement/complement the analysis of the primary data; and help shape recommendations for future interventions or policy.

**The literature review focuses on:**

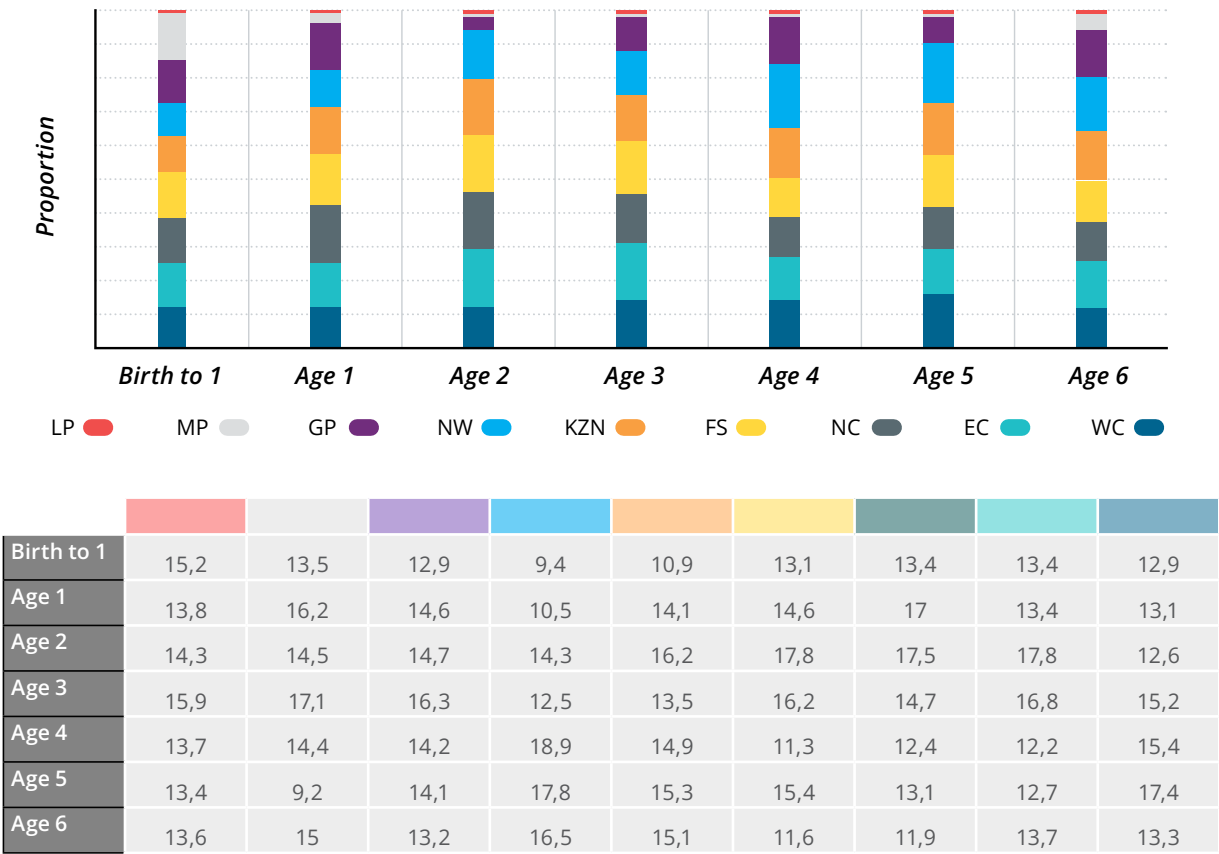
1. **Population overview:** the most recent statistics about young children in South Africa; their distribution; the types of households they live in; and the implications of these factors for their early learning experiences.
2. **Policy and framework references:** references to play and play pedagogy, and the role of parents in South African legal, policy and curriculum frameworks—especially the National Early Learning and Development Standards (NELDS), National Curriculum Framework (NCF), National Integrated ECD Policy, and Children's Act norms and standards.
3. **The Nurturing Care Framework:** a global framework that provides strategic direction for children to reach their full potential, including the five components of nurturing care: good health, adequate nutrition, safety and security, responsive caregiving, and opportunities for learning (with a particular focus on how health, nutrition and safety impact responsive caregiving and learning opportunities).
4. **Existing evidence:** local studies that refer to how parents engage in activities with their young children, as well as evidence from the literature on play pedagogy, especially with regard to its application in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs).
5. **Existing programmes:** a review of parent programmes focused on involving parents in early play and stimulation with children from birth to six years old.

# 2.1. Overview of Young Children and Early Learning in South Africa

## 2.1.1. Demographics of young children in South Africa

There are approximately 8.2 million children aged from birth to six years old in South Africa. Nationally, an estimated 57 per cent of children aged from birth to six years old live in urban areas, compared with 43 per cent in rural areas (*Statistics South Africa, 2020*). The distribution of children aged from birth to six years old per age and province in 2020 is roughly even, as seen in the figure below.

Figure 1. Distribution of children per age and province



The provinces with large rural populations – namely, KwaZulu-Natal, the Eastern Cape and Limpopo – accommodate almost half of all young children in South Africa. Approximately 30 per cent of children live with both biological parents, more than 40 per cent live with their mothers only, and 20 per cent live with neither biological mother nor father (Hall, 2022). Female-headed households and children not living with both biological parents are the most

common type of household arrangement in provinces with large rural areas such as the Eastern Cape, Limpopo and KwaZulu-Natal (Statistics South Africa, 2020).

### 2.1.2. Family structures in South Africa

Family structures in South Africa are diverse. This is not least because the idea of who is constituted within the family unit differs broadly amongst population groups and often goes beyond ties of blood, marriage, kinship, and legality. One of the least common family structures is the nuclear family—South Africa is home to many single-parent-headed families (headed by both men and women), as well as polygamous marriage arrangements. South African families also include multiple generations, extended kinship networks, skip-generation households and child-headed households (Department of Social Development, 2021).

The revised White Paper on Families in South Africa, based on the 2018 General Household Survey (Statistics South Africa, 2019), reports that approximately one-quarter (23.4 per cent ) of households consist of a single person, while the majority of South African households are classified as being composed of families. Of this majority, 2.4 per cent are classified as complex (composed entirely of non-family members); 40 per cent are classified as double generational; and 14.7 per cent are triple generational.

For further breakdown of national household composition, see Appendix A.

Family structures and functions, and intra-family roles and relationships are in a constant state of flux due to changing living conditions, urbanisation and economic migration. Not only do breadwinners move between households, but there is extensive movement of children between households and parents (Hall and Richter, 2018). Additionally, young people who move from rural to urban areas for employment reasons can become stuck in urban peripheries without familial support, and often with children and new families of their own that may then be vulnerable to various risk factors (Hall et al, 2015).

## 2.2. The Nurturing Care Framework

The Nurturing Care Framework, developed by the World Health Organization (WHO) in 2018, provides a roadmap for understanding the main biopsychosocial factors that impact young children. This global framework provides strategic direction, aiming to help children survive and thrive so that they can reach their full potential. The framework's five strategic actions are as follows:

**Strategic Action 1:** Lead and Invest (governance, planning and financing).

**Strategic Action 2:** Focus on Families and their Communities (listening to families, encouraging communities, and using the media).

**Strategic Action 3:** Strengthen Services (building systems, improving the workforce, and providing three-level support).

**Strategic Action 4:** Monitor Progress (monitoring populations, implementation, and individual children's development).

**Strategic Action 5:** Use Data and Innovate (expanding programmes, engaging with the private sector, and using digital solutions).

The framework provides an approach that enables every child to receive the type of nurturing care necessary for them to reach their full developmental potential. The guiding principles underpinning this approach are as follows:

- **The child's right to survive and thrive**
- **To leave no child behind**
- **To focus on family-centred care**
- **To involve whole-of-government action**
- **To incorporate a whole-of-society approach**

The framework outlines the importance of early childhood development (ECD), including the science of child development, the economics of child development, threats to early childhood development, children at risk, and the importance of nurturing care. According to the framework, the five components of nurturing care are as follows:

1. **Good health** (both physical and emotional)
2. **Adequate nutrition** at various stages of development, including pre-natal, breastfeeding, weaning and childhood
3. **Security and safety** (including the risks of extreme poverty and low income; air pollution; exposure to unsafe chemicals; unsafe play environments; harsh punishment and violence; and the importance of child protection services to mitigate these risks and create safe communities)
4. **Opportunities for early learning**, which begins at conception and continues through birth and early childhood. Early learning also includes acquiring skills through socialisation, talking and singing, modelling and imitation, simple games, playing and reading books, and anything else that facilitates the building of curiosity, imagination and knowledge
5. **Responsive caregiving**, whereby parents observe and respond to children's needs, thus protecting them, enriching their learning, and helping them to build trust and social relationships. Good parental mental health enables parents to know what a child's needs are and how to respond appropriately.

To reach their full potential, children need these five components of nurturing care within an enabling environment. Establishing an enabling environment requires enabling policies, supportive services, and empowered communities and parental capacity. The framework proposes a three-level approach to achieve this: a) universal (i.e. all parents and children); b) targeted (i.e. families and children at risk); and c) indicated support (i.e. families of children with additional needs).

## 2.3. Early Learning

### 2.3.1. Protective factors and risks for early learning and development

Wachs and Rahman (2013) reviewed known contextual protective factors for and risks to early childhood development in LMICs. The identified protective factors included:

- Increased educational stimulation in the home
- Programmes promoting the stimulation of children
- Responsive parenting
- Increased social support to parents and/or children
- Maternal ability to cope with stress
- Increased maternal education levels.

Conversely, the developmental risks included growing up in an overcrowded home—something that was also noted in the South African Birth to 30 study (*Bt30, Richter, 2022*). Additional factors that might threaten ECD were identified by the *Nurturing Care Framework (WHO, 2018)*. These included:

- Inadequate maternal nutrition
- Exposure to environmental pollutants and toxic chemicals
- HIV infection
- Poor mental health in parents
- Suboptimal breastfeeding
- Malnutrition
- Illnesses
- Injuries
- Limited stimulation
- Neglect
- Maltreatment

- Disabilities
- Violence at home
- Violence in the community
- Socialisation into gender roles and discrimination between boys and girls
- Extreme poverty and struggling for survival.

Such risks to early child development tend to cluster together, so exposure to one usually means exposure to multiple others.

Normal brain development depends on adequate nutrition, especially during pregnancy and infancy. Both are crucial periods for brain formation and lay the foundation for the development of cognitive, motor, and socio-emotional skills throughout childhood and adulthood (WHO, 2018). Trommsdorff (2009, 2018) emphasises that biological dispositions, socio-economic, and cultural and family factors are associated with individual differences in self-regulation and wellbeing. According to the 2017 RSA Demographic and Health Survey, 27 per cent of children were stunted and 12 per cent of children under six lived in households that reported children going hungry in 2016 (Statistics SA, 2017). The Thrive by Five study (Giese et al, 2022) found that for four- and five-year-old children, being moderately stunted is roughly equivalent to being five to six months behind children with normal height-for-age, all other things being equal. This study found that even mildly stunted children show signs of learning deficits.

Abuse and neglect in early childhood also affects brain development, impacts on cognitive and psycho-social adjustment, and leads to a higher risk of violent and anti-social behaviour. In South Africa, there is no reliable data on how many are exposed, but many young children are often subjected to physical abuse and corporal punishment. From the limited data available, we know that South Africa has a child homicide rate of 5.5 per 100,000 children, which is double the estimated global rate. It is also known that nearly half of South Africa's child homicides are attributed to parental maltreatment, with children under the age of five far more likely to die from maltreatment than older children (Mathews et al, 2013). Children in the birth to five age group are particularly at risk of physical punishment and abuse in the home and are most vulnerable to its consequences (Bower and Dawes, 2014). Mothers living in stressful circumstances who perceive infants as difficult and who support corporal punishment are far more likely to spank the children in their care. In addition, intimate partner violence negatively affects the emotional availability of mothers and increases their baseline stress levels, especially when coincident with poverty. Nearly a quarter of young children live with their mothers only and most are affected by poverty and other burdens. This means that a vast number of young children face one or more of the risks outlined above (Bower and Dawes, 2014).

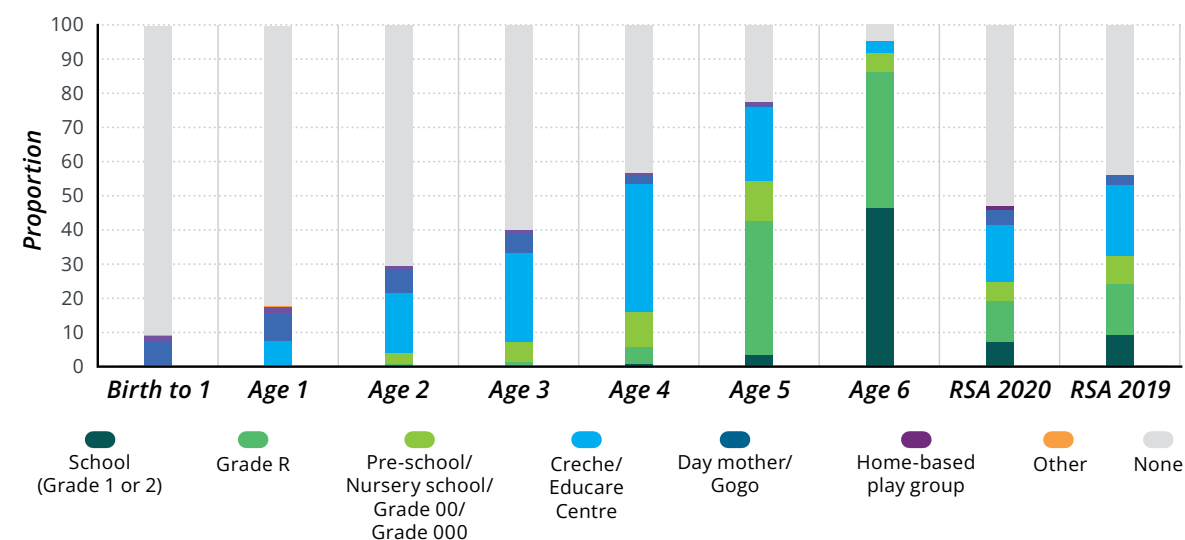
Furthermore, overcrowding reduces the quality of care available for young children and unsafe environments limit children's opportunities for play and exploration, as parents

keep children inside to protect them (Biersteker *et al*, 2023). All these factors affect parents' capacity, knowledge and availability to engage with and support their children's early learning and development.

### 2.3.2. Attendance of children at educational facilities

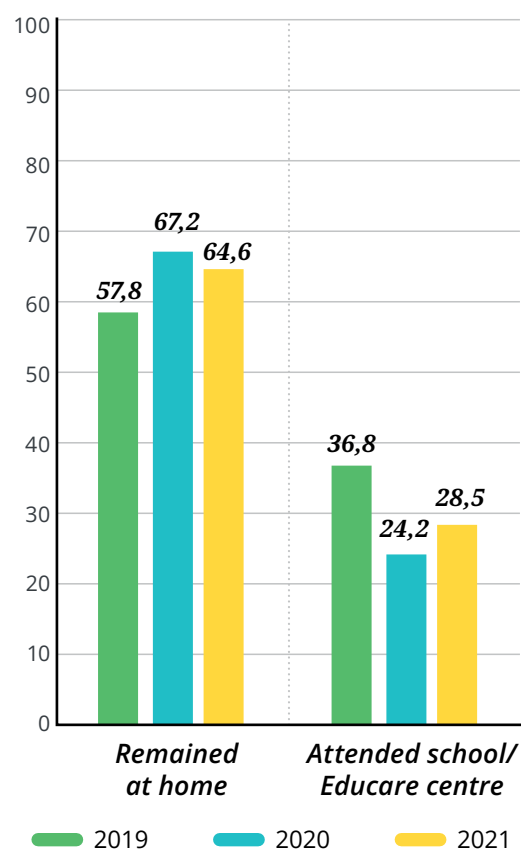
Nationally, in 2020 (Statistics South Africa, 2021), over 50 per cent of children from birth to four years old stayed at home with parents or guardians. Of young children aged zero to three years old, approximately 30 per cent participated in an Early Learning Programme, while over 90 per cent of five- to six-year-olds participated in an Early Learning Programme (including Grade R). Figure 2 below indicates the distribution of children from birth to six years old with regard to attendance at educational institutions, and shows the increase in children staying at home from 2019 to 2020 (Statistics South Africa, 2020).

**Figure 2.** *Distribution of children 0–6 years old in educational institutions*



|            | School (Grade 1 or 2) | Grade R | Pre-school/Nursery school/Grade 00/Grade 000 | Creche/Educare Centre | Day mother/Gogo | Home-based play group | Other | None |
|------------|-----------------------|---------|----------------------------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------|-----------------------|-------|------|
| Birth to 1 | 0,1                   | 0       | 0                                            | 0,6                   | 6,8             | 1,5                   | 0,4   | 90,5 |
| Age 1      | 0                     | 0       | 0,4                                          | 7,3                   | 8               | 1,9                   | 0,3   | 82,2 |
| Age 2      | 0,1                   | 0,4     | 3,5                                          | 17,5                  | 6,7             | 1,2                   | 0,1   | 70,5 |
| Age 3      | 0,1                   | 1,1     | 6                                            | 25,9                  | 5,7             | 1,3                   | 0     | 59,8 |
| Age 4      | 0,6                   | 5       | 10,4                                         | 37,4                  | 2,7             | 0,6                   | 0     | 43,4 |
| Age 5      | 3,4                   | 39,2    | 11,8                                         | 21,8                  | 0,3             | 1,1                   | 0     | 22,5 |
| Age 6      | 46,4                  | 39,8    | 5,7                                          | 3,3                   | 0               | 0                     | 0     | 4,7  |
| RSA 2020   | 7,1                   | 12,1    | 5,5                                          | 16,7                  | 4,3             | 1,1                   | 0,1   | 53   |
| RSA 2019   | 9,3                   | 15      | 8                                            | 20,9                  | 2,9             | 0,1                   | 0,1   | 43,8 |

**Figure 3.** *Childcare arrangements of children from birth to 4 years old by percentage from 2019–2020*



The 2021 ECD census found that there were 1,660,317 children enrolled in the 42,420 ECD programmes available in South Africa (Department of Basic Education, 2022). It is apparent, therefore, that the majority of young South African children do not access an ECD service. COVID-19 also had a significant impact on the nature of recent childcare arrangements. The percentage of children from birth to four years old that remained at home with a parent, guardian, other adult/s, or children increased from 57.8 per cent in 2019 to 67.2 per cent in 2020, before dipping to 64.6 per cent in 2021. Over this period, parents and primary carers were the children’s first educators (*Department of Statistics, 2020*). At the same time, the percentage of children that attended Grade R, pre-school, nursery school, crèche, and ECD centres decreased from 36.8 per cent in 2019 to 28.5 per cent in 2021. Directly connected to childhood education is maternal education, which has been shown to be a significant mediator of child learning outcomes. While maternal education has been steadily increasing, in 2021, 10.7 per cent of South African adults were still not functionally literate (Statistics South Africa, 2022).

### 2.3.3. The significance of the home environment for child learning outcomes

The home learning environment accounts for a large proportion of child educational performance— whether or not they attend an ECD learning programme. Data from a birth to 30 study assessed childcare quality in the first two years, using measures of maternal responsiveness and cognitive stimulation (*Slemming et al, 2021*). The data showed that high levels of cognitive stimulation in the home were associated with increased cognitive scores for children aged 5 years old in low socioeconomic status homes. Britto (2012) identified “ready families” as one of three key pillars for successful school readiness. A “ready family”, in this context, refers to the presence at home of positive parental attitudes and parental involvement in children’s early learning, development and transition to school attendance.

As noted above, the majority of younger children and a substantial number of disadvantaged children aged three to five years old in South Africa do not attend an ECD programme and are instead cared for in their homes. Attending an ECD learning programme is not, in itself, an indication of attaining developmental norms. The Thrive by Five Index study found that 65 per cent of children enrolled in early learning programmes in South Africa fail to thrive by five and are not “On Track” for cognitive and/or physical development (*Giese et al, 2022*). This indicates that the home learning environment also plays a major role in children’s development.

The influence of a child’s home environment and parental parenting practices on ECD is well established. Interactions between parent and child in the first few years of life are especially important for early language, cognitive, and socio-emotional development.

Newland (2014) conceptualises child wellbeing as comprising multidimensional positive child outcomes. “Family wellbeing” is theorised as the foundation of “developmental parenting” and “child wellbeing”. Moreover, how parents treat their children and their involvement in shared activities influences their children’s development (*Newland, 2015*). Many studies have found that home stimulation is a mediating factor between socioeconomic status (SES) and children’s cognitive development (*Engle et al, 2013*). Proxy measures for household stimulation include activities done with the child in the last three days, and the availability of children’s books and toys in the home. Reading and household stimulation are positively associated with child cognitive scores and early grade school performance.

### 2.3.4. What we know about early learning in the home environment in South Africa

Recent local data indicates significant gaps in low-income parents’ engagement with their young children’s learning. Conversely, a mixed-methods study, the Data Drive 2030 Positive Deviance Initiative, investigated the impact of the home learning environment on learning outcomes from low-income children aged four to five years old. Mother engagement and parents contacting their ECD centre practitioners is positively associated with positive deviant children (*Henry and Giese, 2023*).

The Early Learning Outcomes Study (*Dawes et al, 2020*) examined the effect of the home learning environment on the learning outcomes of four- and five-year-old children from low-income communities (quintiles one to three) as measured on the Early Learning Outcome Measure. The availability of educational resources in the home, in the form of play materials and books, predicted cognition and executive functioning and fine motor coordination scores. In addition, findings from parent reports revealed that, on average, parents and other primary caregivers had less than two hours for activities with their children during the entire week. Across programmes, a significant proportion of parents or other family members never engaged in key activities such as reading, telling stories or singing to their children.

This finding indicates that, without significant changes to prevailing parenting practices and life circumstances, programmes relying largely on parent input to achieve child education outcomes are unlikely to be successful.

General household data reveals a similar pattern: In 2017 and 2018, nearly a third of children under school-going age did not have anyone in the household who talked to them about things they had done in the day (*Statistics South Africa, 2020*). Slightly more than one-third of children had someone in the household that often drew or coloured with them, while close to 39 per cent in 2017 and 37 per cent in 2018 never had the opportunity to draw or colour with someone, and more than half of the children either never had or only had limited opportunities to count with someone in the household. Similarly, almost a quarter of the children (24.1%) never had someone in the household who could frequently name different things with them or who could play with them with toys, blocks or puzzles. Significantly, there were differences in the level of household stimulation between racial groups, with white children generally being more advantaged.

On the basis of an extensive and rigorous review of programmes, Rao and colleagues (2014) concluded that to improve child cognitive development in LMICs, we should:



*"...invest in well-designed and properly implemented parent-focused or child-focused interventions, as they have positive effects on children's cognitive development. Parent-focused interventions, in particular, may lead to beneficial changes in parents, which are consequently reflected in their relationships with their children and in the general atmosphere of the home. This contextual change may help to promote continuous cognitive development and support children's learning beyond the intervention period." (Rao et al, 2014)*

As parents, families are integral to supporting children's development, so it is important to blend traditional child-rearing practices and cultural beliefs with evidence-based early development approaches to ensure buy-in and follow through at home. Encouraging active parenting strategies can help to promote young children's all-round development and educational achievement, both early on and in the long term. While involving parents in early learning may be challenging in many contexts, it is a key component of any ECD programming strategy and is prioritised in South African ECD policy guidelines.

## 2.4. South African Policy Provisions On Play And Early Learning, And The Role Of Parents/ Primary Parents In Early Learning

The Department of Basic Education (DBE) has recognised the importance of a play-based pedagogy for early childhood care and education and put in place initiatives such as Play-SA to support it. Education Minister Mtoshekga explained that "the foundations that we lay in early learning and the foundation phase through play, will have an impact on the schooling careers of children up to matric and beyond. Play is learning in the early years..." (*Newsroom/Media Releases: Learning through playing: launch of online training for Early Childhood Development and the Foundation Phase, 9 March 2017*).

ECD-related policy and legislation is explicit about play as the route to early learning. The National Integrated ECD Policy (*Republic of South Africa, 2015*), which outlines government's commitments to ECD, states that the provision of early learning and stimulation requires: "Providing community and centre-based organised play-based early learning that complements the parent's role..." (p 27). With respect to play, the policy indicates that while play is a right in and of itself, it is also important in promoting children's early learning and skills development.

**The policy also identifies some of the challenges to promoting play, for instance:**

- A lack of knowledge of the importance of play in early childhood;
- A lack of implementation of play-based learning in early learning and development programmes; and
- A lack of opportunities to play and interact in a child-centred, secure, supportive and stress free environment.

A lack of knowledge, as well as a lack of supported play opportunities, is as much a challenge in the home environment as it is in early learning and development programmes. Other key policies that refer to play are as follows:

The National Early Learning Development Standards. These standards indicate that when planning a stimulation programme, it should be play-based because children grow and develop through different types and forms of play (*Department of Education, 2009, Section 4*). The NCF – which is aimed at parents as well as other ECD stakeholders – highlights the importance of play as an underpinning principle (*DBE, 2015*). The Partial Care and ECD Programme Registration Framework (*Department of Social Development, DSD*), which is derived from the Children’s Act and associated norms and standard, states that programmes must promote children’s rights to rest, leisure and play through the provision of a stimulating environment (942 2b). Indicators in the framework assess the practitioner’s role in facilitating and promoting play (examples include open-ended play, exploratory play and practitioners engaging with children during play and other activities to promote thinking) and allowing children to play with each other.

The Grade R Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statements (CAPS), (*Department of Basic Education, 2011*). These statements refer extensively to play-based learning and provide a daily programme that lists a range of play areas, both indoor and outdoor. However, the only references to parents relate to reporting on their children’s progress.

Leaving aside the role of play momentarily, the involvement of parents in ECD is emphasised by South African ECD policy instruments. For example, norms and standards for ECD programmes of the Children’s Act 38\* of 2005 (*\*as amended*) (*Republic of South Africa, 2005*) requires that ‘programmes must ensure that parents and caregivers are involved in the development of children’ (6 b) and that ‘Programmes must provide education and support to parents and families to fulfil their responsibilities towards child-rearing and the holistic development of their children’ (6 c). Similarly, prevention and early intervention programmes must focus among other goals on ‘developing appropriate parenting skills and the capacity of parents and caregivers to safeguard the wellbeing and best interests of their children including the promotion of positive, non-violent forms of discipline’ (144:1b). These clearly indicate the role of the ECD provisioning system in supporting parents to fulfil their responsibilities for responsive care and the child’s right to development and protection.

Similarly, the National Integrated Early Childhood Development Policy (*Republic of South Africa, 2015*) provides that: “Government in the first instance recognises that the child’s parents are responsible and important for his or her care, development and well-being through the provision of a nurturing and caring environment in these important early years of life. However, the Government recognises that parents and other primary carers must have access to and receive the information, support and services necessary to enable them to fulfil their responsibilities.” This would enable parents to understand their role in early learning (p 76), as well as facilitating their referral to services necessary for their child’s overall development and wellbeing.

This policy recognises the importance of attachment for children from birth until the year before they enter formal school and advocates for:

- The promotion of a secure attachment relationship between the parent(s) and the child
- The prevention of child abuse and neglect through the provision of parent support
- The identification (through screening) and provision of care and support for children exposed to child abuse and neglect
- The referral of parents and children to appropriate services.

One of the goals of the National Integrated Early Childhood Development Policy is:

*“By 2024 to provide the preceding programmes of parenting support services necessary to improve parental knowledge, capacity and practices related to young children’s holistic development, including information, capacity building, referrals, and specialist parental support of especially vulnerable parents so as to address any mental health problems, substance abuse, disability, abuse or neglect problems that they may face and which impact a child’s development, or any problems that their young children may face.” (Republic of South Africa, 2015, p.56)*

**The policy provides explicit guidance on the content of the information to be provided. It outlines that communication aimed at parents should enable them to:**

- Understand what they can do to improve their children’s nutrition, health and early learning
- Protect their children, engage in positive discipline, and refrain from implementing corporal punishment
- Understand and demand quality early learning and development
- Understand the importance of play in the early learning and development of their children
- Foster parent-child interaction
- Access support and early intervention services for children with disabilities
- Build understanding of the roles of mothers and fathers in ECD.

The South African National Curriculum Framework for Children from Birth to Four (NCF) The South African National Curriculum Framework (NCF) was developed to promote a holistic vision for young children, namely: “Working with and for all children in the early years in a respectful way to provide them with quality experiences and equality of opportunities to achieve their full potential.”

**The NCF focuses on the child from before birth through to the time that s/he enters Grade R. The NCF outlines developmental guidelines for four developmental stages:**

- Beginning (birth -18 months)
- Moving on (18-36 months)
- Advancing Further (3-4 years)
- Towards Grade R (5 years).

**The NCF provides a framework to adults who are facilitating children's learning to:**

- Understand the competence (knowledge, skills) that babies, toddlers and young children hope to and need to develop
- Understand how to support children's holistic development and how to assess children's progress and potential
- Understand how to plan high-quality learning experiences and to reflect on and evaluate performance.

**It promotes that children's learning must include experiences that are:**

- Planned for young children wherever they are being cared for and educated (adult-initiated)
- Consciously planned by adults (i.e. incidental learning/teachable moments)
- Created by the children themselves in order to make sense of their world (child-initiated).

**The National Qualifications Framework of South Africa sets out the Critical Outcomes which are designed for all educational programmes in South Africa. The NCF reflects these. They are that young children should learn to:**

- Identify and solve problems and make decisions using critical and creative thinking
- Work effectively as individuals and with others as members of a team
- Organise and manage themselves and their activities responsibly and effectively
- Collect, analyse, organise and critically evaluate information
- Communicate effectively using visual, symbolic and/or language skills in various modes
- Use science and technology effectively and critically
- Show responsibility towards the environment and the health of others
- Demonstrate an understanding of the world as a set of related systems by recognising that problem-solving contexts do not exist in isolation.

The NCF must be appropriate in a contextual and developmentally appropriate way. There are three themes which emerge from the attention to appropriateness. The three themes described are informed by twelve principles for working with all children and working with all adults, including all families, all practitioners, all programme managers and all support and monitoring personnel. The principles focus upon children's needs and interests and on working with children. They are captured in a child's voice. The three themes and twelve principles are seen in the table below:

**Table 1. NCF Themes and principles**

| Themes                                                   |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
|----------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Theme 1.</b> I am a competent person                  | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. I am a competent person who actively creates my own identity and my own understanding of the world.</li> <li>2. I am unique and have a unique life story.</li> <li>3. I flourish when attention is paid to equality of opportunity, where I can participate to develop my own potential.</li> <li>4. I am sensitive to individual and group differences and must be educated in ways that help me to celebrate difference.</li> </ol>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| <b>Theme 2.</b> My learning and development is important | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. I am curious, energetic and active, and I learn by taking up opportunities to make meaning of the world around me.</li> <li>2. Appropriate local and indigenous knowledge and skills are resources that can be used to promote socially, culturally and linguistically sensitive learning environments for me.</li> <li>3. Play and hands-on experiences enhance my learning and development.</li> <li>4. A comprehensive ECD learning programme for quality and equality of opportunity pays attention to:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• My developmental domains (social, emotional, cognitive, physical – with a focus on health and nutrition)</li> <li>• The content areas (languages and mathematics)</li> <li>• My strong links with my family and later</li> <li>• My links to schooling</li> </ul> </li> </ol> |
| <b>Theme 3.</b> I need strong connections with adults.   | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Parents and families, in their different forms, play a central role in my overall development.</li> <li>2. I benefit from a close and loving relationship with an adult.</li> <li>3. Adults have the responsibility for the protection and promotion of my rights regardless of my age, background, ethnicity, ability or gender.</li> <li>4. We would like adults to promote children's well-being, positive identities, inclusivity, child-focused activities and competence in living and coping with life.</li> </ol>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |

The three themes described are informed by 12 principles for working with all children and adults, including families, practitioners, programme managers, and support and monitoring personnel. The principles focus on children's needs and interests and on working with them. They are captured in a child's voice.

There are six Early Learning and Development Areas (ELDAs) which integrate the three themes and twelve principles. The ELDAs organise children's development and learning opportunities to help adults organise activities with babies, toddlers and young children. The ELDAs and their aims are shown in the table below:

**Table 2.** *The ELDAs and their aims*

| ELDA                                               | Aims                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
|----------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>1. Wellbeing</b>                                | <p>The child needs an environment where they can enjoy health, nutrition, safety and security, and where they can develop confidence and resilience. The child should be physically active, allowing their bodies to develop and grow rapidly.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Aim 1:</b> Being well-nourished</li> <li>• <b>Aim 2:</b> Having good health</li> <li>• <b>Aim 3:</b> Being safe and secure</li> <li>• <b>Aim 4:</b> Developing physical abilities and an interest in physical activities</li> <li>• <b>Aim 5:</b> Building resilience</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| <b>2. Identity Belonging</b>                       | <p>The child needs to experience an environment where they can develop a strong sense of self, experience positive relationships and celebrate differences.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Aim 1:</b> Children are aware of themselves as capable and confident learners.</li> <li>• <b>Aim 2:</b> Children have a strong sense of self-care.</li> <li>• <b>Aim 3:</b> Children build strong relationships.</li> <li>• <b>Aim 4:</b> Children have a sense of group identity and celebrate differences.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| <b>3. Communication</b>                            | <p>The child needs to experience an environment where they can learn to listen attentively, speak openly, develop a love of books, stories and reading, record and write, and prepare for formal reading and writing as they grow and develop.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Aim 1:</b> Children listen to sounds and speech.</li> <li>• <b>Aim 2:</b> Children speak using different styles of communication.</li> <li>• <b>Aim 3:</b> Children make meaning by “reading” what they see, hear, feel, taste and touch.</li> <li>• <b>Aim 4:</b> Children record their experiences and ideas through language, sounds, art, drama and, later on, through “writing”.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                   |
| <b>4. Mathematics</b>                              | <p>The child needs to experience an environment where they can find patterns, make connections, recognise relationships, work with numbers, sort out objects, and match and classify things. This helps them to think, solve problems and ask questions.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Aim 1:</b> Children show awareness of, and are responsive to, number and counting.</li> <li>• <b>Aim 2:</b> Children sort, classify, make comparisons and solve problems.</li> <li>• <b>Aim 3:</b> Children explore shape, space and measurement.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| <b>5. Creativity</b>                               | <p>The child needs to experience an environment where they can identify challenges and problems, try out solutions in safety and freedom, and experiment with play, make-believe play, drawing, painting, cutting and pasting, modelling, music, rhythm, dance and drama.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Aim 1:</b> Identifying, searching for and creating solutions to challenges through problem-solving.</li> <li>• <b>Aim 2:</b> Identifying, searching for and creating solutions to challenges through play and make-believe.</li> <li>• <b>Aim 3:</b> Identifying, searching for and creating solutions to challenges through visual art activities.</li> <li>• <b>Aim 4:</b> Identifying, searching for and creating solutions to challenges through music, dance and drama.</li> </ul> |
| <b>6. Knowledge and Understanding of the World</b> | <p>The child wants to make sense of their world through active participation in their real world and through practical experiments. The child's learning is supported by providing them with opportunities to learn about people, objects, places, plants and creatures from their natural environment.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Aim 1:</b> Children explore and investigate their life world.</li> <li>• <b>Aim 2:</b> Children explore design, make items and use technology.</li> <li>• <b>Aim 3:</b> Children explore and investigate time and place.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |

Each aim has development guidelines, examples of activities, and broad assessment guidelines for each developmental age.

## 2.5. Support For Responsive Caregiving

The revised White Paper on Families (*Department of Social Development, 2021*) also provides intervention guidance for parents and recommends the following strategies for supporting child caregiving:

- **Offer and widen access to parenting support** and advice programmes and services that support parents in adapting to the changing needs of children throughout their lives.
- **Discourage the use of corporal punishment** and empower parents to use alternative disciplining methods that reaffirm children's inherent positive values.
- **Ensure access to antenatal, maternal, and parental care and support** (including mental health support) to promote positive adaptation to caregiving for all new parents, paying particular attention to vulnerable groups such as teenage parents, parents with mental health conditions, and those from particularly economically distressed households.
- **Acknowledge and encourage the role that both women and men play** in the care and wellbeing of children and other family members, and promote men's roles alongside the roles that women traditionally play in child caregiving.
- **Enhance families' and parents' ability and capability to protect children** from exposure to, and participation in, activities that may be detrimental to their physical, emotional, psychological, intellectual, and sexual wellbeing by providing information and services that can support them in this role.

## 2.6. Children's Play And Learning

### 2.6.1. What is play?

A vast body of research agrees that all children in the world engage in play. Play is part of every child's life and serves as a means for the growth of their physical, social, cognitive, and emotional development, helping to create a well-balanced individual. However, while play is universally recognised as a feature of young children's lives, it has not been easy to define and is usually referred to in terms of generally agreed upon characteristics. These characteristics include that it is enjoyable, intrinsically motivated, actively engaging, and valued as a process rather than an outcome (*Brooker and Woodhead, 2009*). Learning through play is said to be

characteristically joyful, meaningful, actively engaging, iterative, and socially interactive (Zosh et al, 2017).

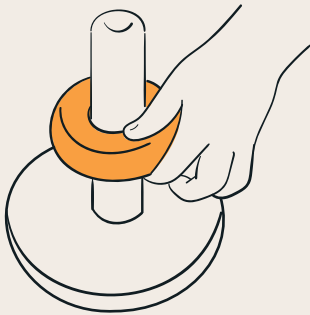
To help define play, Neumann (Read and Patterson, 1976) outlined three criteria to determine whether an activity ought to be considered playful:

1. **Control**, whereby the player determines the activity
2. **Reality**, whereby the activity has an element of pretence rather than a purely realistic quality
3. **Motivation**, whereby the participant is willing to engage with the activity.

One way to classify play is to view it as a learning modality and break it down into what the child is doing and what they may be learning. Viewing play as something that falls into distinct categories helps us to understand what it is and how to properly categorise it.

Thus, play can be viewed as falling into four broad categories:

1.



#### Exploratory play

Children explore properties of the world through senses, discovering outer relationships, use objects in unique ways, and play with sound and language.

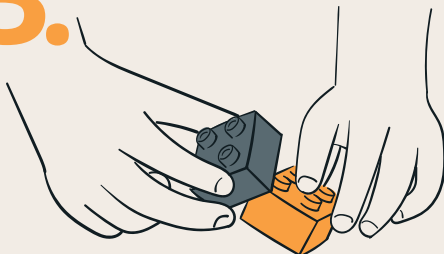
2.



#### Skills Mastery play

Children become adept in skills, including fine and gross motor physical skills.

3.



#### Physical Construction play

Children put objects and materials together to represent their ideas, organising and reorganising their concepts of the world

4.



#### Imitative, symbolic and dramatic play

Children can be actors and observers at the same time, taking on adult roles to define them while using real objects, imagination, and language.

## 2.6.2. The benefits of play

The benefits of play have long been recognised as very important for young children's (zero to nine years old) development and learning—a view which is supported by theorists and researchers of ECD.

Neuroscience helps us understand how playful experiences enhance learning. Liu and colleagues (2017) examined the relationship between these key characteristics of playful learning experiences and the interconnected brain processes that support children's capacity to learn. Their summary of studies showed that a positive emotional state (joy) enables many higher cognitive functions – such as enhanced attention, working memory, mental shifting and improved stress regulation – that are useful for learning. They cite evidence that active engagement is related to executive functioning skills such as inhibitory control. Sustained engagement in an activity requires staying selectively focused on the situation. Repetition requires perseverance, and some research suggests that this is correlated with improvements in working memory. Similarly, the role of social interaction in learning is well established either through positive parent interactions from early infancy or through peers in later childhood, which help children develop language, cooperation and social learning, and practise self-regulation.

Whitebread and colleagues (2017) recently reviewed the evidence for the role of play in children's development, noting that several studies showed that children perform at significantly higher levels in playful rather than non-playful situations. In terms of how various types of play link to child development: their review found evidence of health and exercise benefits associated with physical play and some evidence for the association of physical play with academic progress, cognitive self-regulation and social competence. When children play with any kind of object (object play), this enables gains in language, maths and spatial skills. There is good evidence that language play enhances development of language in many ways and that this links to other skills such as social skills, self-regulation and academic achievement. While there are limited study findings on pretend play, despite its prominence in socio-cultural theories of the significance of play, there is evidence that it may impact on social development, is significant for developing reasoning skills and links to executive functioning and self-regulation. Games with rules, especially number and linear number sequence, lead to improvements in mathematics/numeracy ability. Physical games with rules have been shown to help children adapt to formal schooling.

Recent research also shows that parental wellbeing and positive mental health is enhanced by playful interactions with young children. It is known that an essential driver of optimal child development is parental mental health. Parents who struggle with their own mental health tend to be less responsive to their children's cues and might find it difficult to provide nurturing and responsive care. Playing with a child supports both the child's development and the adult's mental health, whereas an adult with mental health problems may be less responsive to children's cues and may also find it difficult to provide nurturing and responsive care (UNICEF, 2021).

### 2.6.3. Play in different cultural settings

There is a growing awareness of the role of cultural influences on child rearing and development. Children's socio-emotional, physical, cognitive, spiritual and moral development is affected by the cultural influences to which they are exposed.

Different cultural influences may lead to variation in the timing of developmental milestones and developmental pathways, and to the roles that parents and other household members play in supporting child development. Cultural influence also leads to different expressions of play. For example, "Masekitlana" is a variety of make-believe play common among South African Pedi youth that is exhibited by children as young as three years old, in which a narrator uses stones as characters to enact a story (Joseph et al, 2014).

Most play and pedagogy studies are based on Western early childhood discourse (Dockett, 2011). While the assumption that all children engage with play is common, it cannot be assumed that all children engage with play in similar ways, and the social and cultural relevance of play needs to be acknowledged as this: "...may mask the fact that the close association between play and pedagogy taken for granted in English speaking and European heritage society is an alien idea for many other societies. (In particular the) ... notion that freely chosen play will promote academic achievement can seem nonsensical" (Marfo and Biersteker, 2011).

*"Culture is expressed through the goals, expectations, and aspirations of adults in the community for their children as well as behavioural norms and scripts that define everyday practices such as play, discipline, toilet training, socialisation, feeding and sleep routines and educational outcomes"*  
(Oppong and Strader, 2022:17)

While play is often referred to as "children's work" in English speaking and European heritage cultures, in cultures where helping with family work has greater significance, play takes a number of different forms. Play tends to take place either in imitation of work – Lancy (2012) refers to this as the play stage of the 'chore curriculum' – or with children bringing a playful element into their chores. Who children play with is also culturally determined. In traditional African societies, for example, children are expected to play with other children and to receive any guidance they need from older and/or more expert playmates (Ng'asike & Swadener, 2019; Dawes & Biersteker, 2011; Swart et al, 1996). In these African contexts, children are involved in polyadic play with a diverse range of adults including older siblings. This situation occurs despite the indications of global early childhood care and education (ECCE) programming, which is based on attachment theory and the notion of dyadic play with primary parents (Keller et al, 2018).

Thus, the implementation of play-based teaching and learning can be affected by how particular cultures think about play. For example, adults may find playing with a child for learning purposes to be a highly unusual idea in societies where children are expected to play with other children.

#### 2.6.4. The impact of primary parent on learning

A factor in children's holistic development is attachment to their primary parent. John Bowlby's Attachment Theory (1969) maintains that an individual's ability to form an emotional and physical "attachment" to another person creates a sense of stability and security that allows risk-taking, and personality growth and development. Bowlby (1969) established that a child's ability to form a strong relationship with "at least one primary parent" (usually one of the parents) fosters childhood development, as this provides a sense of security and foundation without which new experiences that are vital to learning and development may not occur. Children with strong parental attachment feel secure, are more adventurous and keener for new experiences—all of which helps them to develop faster (*Ainsworth, 1967*). As noted above, in many African contexts children form attachments with multiple parents, including siblings, and this has implications for parenting programmes.

A review of parents' perceptions about their role in early learning found that their facilitation of ECD is influenced by daily practices of childcare and rearing. The general perception is that their role is to nurture and discipline their children. The educational aspect of child development is thought to be the role of the school or ECD facility (*Oppong and Strader, 2022*). Many parents from under-resourced contexts may simply not have the adequate knowledge, skills, understanding, resources or time to facilitate ECD.

There are few studies on the prevalence of perinatal depression and anxiety disorders—common mental health disorders affecting mothers that are three times more prevalent in South African women relative to women in high-income countries (*Brown & Sprague, 2021*). Children of mentally ill mothers are a vulnerable health group for whom targeted intervention may benefit individuals and families alike (*Hope et al, 2021*).

#### 2.6.5. Promoting play with parents

Parents understand play and its role in child learning and development very differently. The beliefs about play and play-based learning thus fall within a continuum of parental beliefs about the intellectual, social, emotional and physical benefits of play (*Saracho and Spodek, 2003*). These beliefs are shaped by a number of factors including cultural belief systems, socio-economic status and educational backgrounds. There is a wealth of literature (*Jayaraj et al, 2022; see also Morris, 2013; Haight et al, 1997; Uygun, 2019*), much of it recent,

which demonstrates the influence of parent attitudes to play on their play behaviours with their children.

Attitudes are a product of knowledge and values regarding children's development that are shaped by cultural and social norms, and parents' own experiences and values. Differences in parental goals for child development influence attitudes and have implications for the potential success of programmes that seek to promote particular parenting practices. For example, parents who thought pretend play was important for social relationships and reading books was important for academic success participated more in their toddler's play and communicated these attitudes to their children (*Haight, 1997*). Similarly, large-scale studies of pre-schoolers have shown significant differences in their play behaviours depending on how democratic or authoritarian their parents' attitudes were (*Uygun, 2019*).

In general, mothers who report valuing and enjoying play tend to report more prosocial behaviour for their children during play (*Morris, 2013*). Parents' perceived need for play is grounded in their sense of play as: 1) important for developing parent-child relationships, and 2) toy- and media-based play as central for promoting developmental and educational benefits (*Jayaraj, 2022*). Saracho and Spodek (2003) note that educated parents tend to view play as divergent and process-oriented, whereas non-educated parents view play as convergent and prefer content-based activities for their children.

Programmes that promote parental-child play have focused on the use of simple, home-based, concrete and practical activities to promote children's learning and development. With simple



amendments, children's chores can be turned into teaching moments. For example, when helping with cooking, maths can be applied by counting vegetables or measuring ingredients; language and vocabulary can be advanced by discussing the vegetables – their colours, shapes, where they come from, and how and where they grow (*Dowd et al, 2018*). Evidence from Tanzania (*Antelan et al, 2023*) indicates that through raising awareness among parents, the quantity of parental talk can be shifted to the benefit of children's development. The spreading and modelling of such messages, as well as arranging groups through which experiences of neighbours and community members can be shared as the messages are tested with the children, enables greater learning for parents and children alike.

An evaluation of Sesame Workshop's Play Every Day in Mexico, South Africa and India (*Sesame Workshop, 2019*) showed that an increased time spent playing with their child increased parent confidence, as well as helping to enhance their understanding of the role and value of play in children's development. There was variance across countries in the reported rates of physical play, social play, play with rules, and play with song and dance. However, the main focus of the Play Every Day programme was imaginative play, and the results showed an increase in the rates of pretend and fantasy play in all three countries. The changes were supported by take-home materials, such as textless storybooks, which increased parent time spent reading and telling stories with their children. In India and South Africa the targeted communities had low literacy levels. One of the main messages was that play can happen anywhere, anytime. Creative thinking increased—especially creative thinking in which common household items were transformed into play objects. In India and South Africa, statistically significant changes in knowledge and attitudes to play were noted.

Local programmes that have effectively promoted attachment and reduced maternal stress include the Parent Centre Infant Home Visiting Programme (*Cooper et al, 2009*), and there is initial evidence to support Ububele's Abazali Abazamayo Programme (*Bain et al, 2017*) in improving functioning in mothers of infants. A pilot feasibility study of Dlananathi's Ibhayi Lengane, a home visiting programme for pregnant mothers and mothers with children from birth to two years old, suggests that this is also a promising approach (*Rochat et al, 2018*).

## 2.7. Delivering Effective Parenting Programmes

Encouraging parents to play with children through simple activities is a core component of early childhood stimulation programmes. Numerous studies have demonstrated the effectiveness of these interventions. For example, over 90 per cent of parents in large-scale ChildFund community interventions in Zambia and Kenya, which used home visiting sessions and/or group parenting sessions, reported that the sessions positively influenced how they cared for their child. Ninety-three per cent of parents reported providing more toys and

objects for their children to play with, and 59 per cent reported that they played with their children more. Positive changes in child behaviour were also observed, with 93 per cent of children smiling, laughing, and/or playing with the parent (*ChildFund, 2020*). A review of 17 randomised evaluations from 11 LMICs, including South Africa, found that programmes that support and encourage parental implementation of early childhood stimulation with children from birth to three years old can improve the quality and quantity of play in children's home environments, as well as improve children's cognitive development (*Abdul Jamal Latief, Poverty Action Lab, 2020*). There is very limited data on the long-term effects beyond the intervention period. The greatest impact of these early stimulation programmes may be for the most disadvantaged children, including children who are stunted or underweight, or who have lower cognitive outcomes before an intervention.

### 2.7.1. What works for enabling effectiveness of parent programmes

Parenting programmes are offered through a variety of modalities, including but not limited to home visits and parent/parent group sessions, and increasingly through ICT methods. In this section, we look at the evidence for successful behaviour change.

While the content and goals of parenting programmes vary considerably, common elements of effective parenting programmes to facilitate the development of young children (*e.g., Azzi-Lessing, 2011; Baker-Henningham and Boo, 2010; Evans, 2006; Love et al., 2005; Rao et al., 2014; Richter and Naicker, 2012; Skar et al., 2015; Zafar et al., 2014*) tend to include the following:

- Programmes must be appropriately timed to reach parents when they are most receptive to change.
- Parental participation needs to be active, engaged and regular, normally over extended periods. Contact (home visits and group meetings) for at least a year is desirable. The actual amount depends on the degree of risk and complexity of messaging.
- Parenting programmes are more likely to be effective if they change parents' attitudes, skills and aspirations, rather than only improving their knowledge. Including an active, skills-based component where parents can practise their newly acquired skills supports this.
- Joint interventions to improve child development (*e.g., language and cognition*) that involve direct activities with the child and training with the parent, plus joint activity with both, work best to improve cognitive and language development.
- A focus on building social support among participants and assisting participants in identifying external sources of social support (referrals) is effective.

- Parent programmes which help parents cope with stress and build their self-efficacy are more likely to be successful.
- Group-based programmes are efficient for reaching parents and also create a supportive group environment. However, to be effective, barriers to participation must be addressed, such as time constraints, distance/transport costs, lack of available childcare and lack of salience.
- A combination of group sessions and home visits can be very effective.
- Facilitators must be culturally competent, warm and empathic, responsive to families and have respect for individual differences; a strengths-based approach is helpful.
- Facilitators must be professional or paraprofessional and, therefore, need adequate training, support and effective supervision for fidelity of implementation.

A comprehensive scoping review of programmes in LMICs that improve childhood outcomes through different modalities (including a focus on parents) found that informational/training programmes significantly increased parental knowledge across a number of countries (*Biersteker et al, 2021*).

Factors mediating the success of parenting programmes on changing the home learning environment (especially stimulation), as well as parent knowledge, include maternal education and household assets. Unschoolled mothers and those with few household goods may have been unable to make the leap from information to materials and practices. Children did not show benefits in nutritional status or language development, perhaps due to limitations in the curriculum, which focused more on increasing maternal knowledge than on improving maternal practices, suggesting that strategies for behavioural change need to be included in parenting inputs (*Aboud, 2007*).

The *Nadie es Perfecto* (NEP) parenting intervention, operating at scale within Chile Crece Contigo, targets parents with children aged birth to five years old who are enrolled in the public health system (*Carneiro et al, 2019*). It promotes knowledge about how to stimulate child cognition and positive discipline, parental self-care and self-esteem, helping parents to foster a nurturing home environment. While the standard programme includes six to eight weekly group sessions, facilitated by a trained moderator, an intensive version includes two practical sessions where parents interact with their child in a monitored environment and receive personalised feedback on their practices. Both interventions improve language and socio-emotional development relative to the controls, but only the intensive version was statistically significant. This reinforces the value of hands-on parent-child interaction as a component of parenting programmes. There were sustained effects on parenting beliefs, practices and child outcomes three years after the intervention ended. The quality of the home environment,



parental nurturing and disciplinary practices, the parent's perceived self-efficacy, parent's perceived social support and the parent's perceived role in influencing child development were found to have a significant mediating role of the NEP in child language and socioemotional development. This study provided indications that group parent sessions can not only shift parental knowledge and promote positive parenting but also improve child outcomes, especially if complemented with practical demonstrations or personalised feedback.

A parenting component included with the Mexican Prospera Conditional Cash Transfer Programme found that encouragement for parents to participate in a parenting programme resulted in significantly greater odds (by nearly two times) of them reading with their children and was associated with a 13 per cent increase in the number of play activities that parents engaged in with their children. Mediation analyses showed that this improved engagement explained nearly a third of the effects of the parenting programme on child development outcomes (Knauer et al, 2016).

Randomised controlled trials (RCTs) evaluating book-sharing, which involves dialogic reading training with primary parents, demonstrated increased reading to children, with significantly larger effects for illiterate parents in Kenya, and where one group-based training was sufficient to increase engagement (Bando et al, 2018). In South Africa, parents of 14–16 month old children who received the dialogic book-sharing training showed significant and substantial improvement in expressive and receptive language, as well as in focal attention in caregiving sensitivity. Book-sharing significantly mediated the impact of the intervention on receptive language, while improvements in parent-child reciprocity during book-sharing mediated the impact of the intervention on both child expressive and receptive language, as well as child focal attention (Vally et al, 2015; Murray et al, 2016).

*In South Africa, parents of 14–16 month old children who received the dialogic book-sharing training showed significant and substantial improvement in expressive and receptive language, as well as in focal attention in caregiving sensitivity. Book-sharing significantly mediated the impact of the intervention on receptive language, while improvements in parent-child reciprocity during book-sharing mediated the impact of the intervention on both child expressive and receptive language, as well as child focal attention (Vally et al, 2015; Murray et al, 2016).*

As noted, the most successful programmes for improving parental engagement and child outcomes include hands-on demonstrations with children through play activities that are tailored according to the child's developmental level and content that can be integrated into

existing, regular daily routines such as walking to the market (*Borisova et al, 2017*). A study in Chile demonstrated the effects of parental support on gains in pre-schoolers' maths skills in kindergarten, as well as the negative effects of parental directiveness on child outcomes (*Leyva, 2019*). Many home-based programmes encourage parents to use routines as learning opportunities, and this study suggests that there needs to be more explicit guidance on how learning is best scaffolded, particularly when cultural norms favour direct instruction.

Other studies confirm that programmes with responsive caregiving components have significantly greater impacts on child cognitive development, parenting practices, and parent-child interactions, compared to interventions that did not include responsive caregiving content (*Aboud and Hossain, 2011*). These results underscore the importance of not only increasing early play and learning materials (for example, the provision of books and toy-making), which are often a focus of parenting interventions for young children, especially in low-resource contexts, but also of incorporating programme components that directly support parental sensitivity and responsiveness. This may also encourage parents to invest more in their child's education. The recent evaluation of Eat Love Play Talk (*Biersteker, 2023*), a light touch parenting intervention including health, nutrition, responsive care and play-based learning content, highlighted the value of making parenting interventions fun, inclusive and strengths-based.

### 2.7.2. Contextualisation of parenting/parent programmes

Several studies show that parenting interventions in the form of home visits improve home stimulation. However, some interventions have no effect on parental beliefs about the importance of play for child development or on parental beliefs about their communication skills with their children (*Sylvia et al, 2021*). A particularly salient indicator of effectiveness for programmes targeting behavioural change around parent responsiveness and learning through play is cultural or contextual appropriateness. This implies a strengths-based approach which builds on indigenous and local knowledge and is a principle underpinning the National Integrated Early Childhood Development Policy (NIECDP) and the NCF.

Unless messaging is aligned with the needs, values and circumstances of the communities we work with, it is unlikely to gain traction. Parental aspirations occur within a socio-cultural and economic context that influences what parents can even imagine for their children's academic success. In certain low-income, low-resource contexts where children do not complete their formal education, parents are not actively involved in the skills development that facilitates the integration of their children into social institutions such as school, but are rather focused on meeting their children's physical needs (*Weber et al, 2021*).

Marfo et al (2008) summarises the evidence as follows: ECD initiatives that focus exclusively on socialisation goals for psychological development, culturally appropriate competencies,

and school readiness are likely to attain minimal results if they pay little or no attention to children’s physical survival and health needs. Furthermore, in order to improve the adoption of scientific best practice by communities, we need to adapt programmes to the local culture by recognising and integrating existing beliefs, practices, people, contexts and skills. Communities may resist or reject recommended parenting practices if they fail to see their own cultural values and traditions integrated into them.

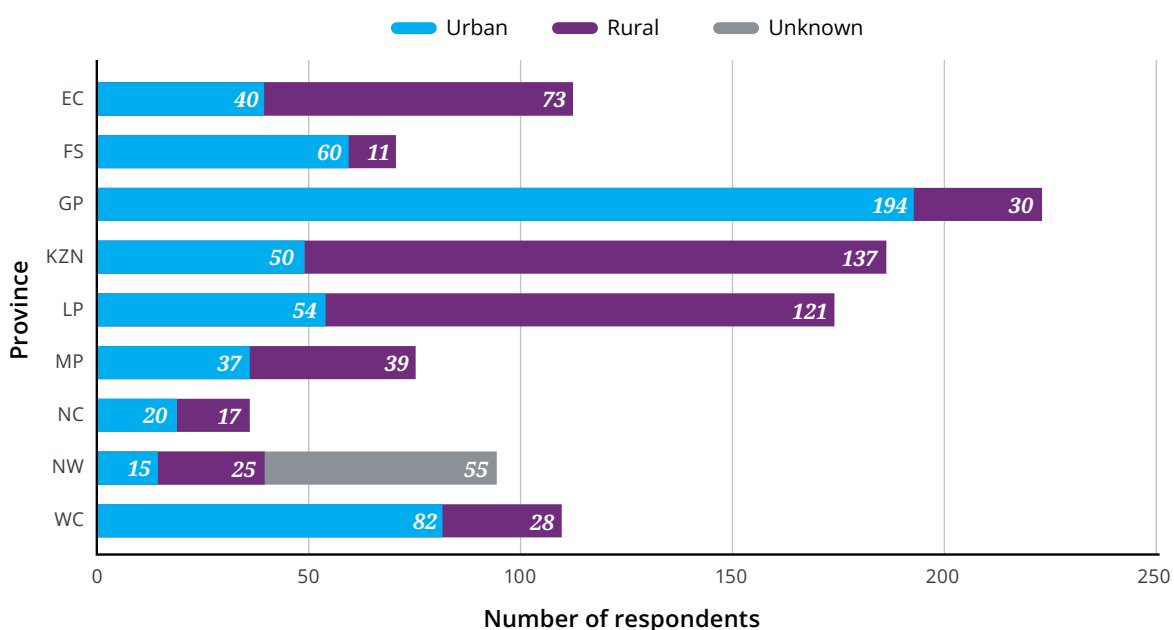
An example can be found in a programme in Uganda, where a key factor for success was buy-in from the community. Delivered by trained non-professional community members, content was based on prior research which identified parent goals and practices (Singla et al, 2015).

### 2.7.3. The role of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in parent education programmes

ICT has the potential to support efforts to scale parenting programme materials. Radio and, to a lesser extent, television programming have been employed effectively for a number of years. More recently, the internet has added its own abundance of resources (e.g., <https://domore.org.za/parenting-resources>). Digital platforms, such as the DBE’s ECD Mobi and CareUp, among others, are also being used in South Africa.

The following diagram provides an explanatory model and framework for the acceptance, adoption, and use of ICT.

**Figure 4.** *The Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology Model Source (Venkatesh et al, 2003)*



This model assumes that use behaviour is determined by facilitating conditions, which include the organisational and technical support available. Moreover, the model assumes that intention to use technology is influenced by performance expectancy (perceived usefulness for performance improvement), effort expectancy (perceived ease of use), and social influence (the degree to which others expect one to use the technology). While a drop-off in continued engagement, particularly with apps, is commonly seen, research indicates that perceived ease of use is a key factor for the intention of continued use (Bhattacharjee, 2001).

### **2.7.3.1. What does research say about the effectiveness of ICT with parents?**

Technology can support less skilled facilitators to deliver parenting content, making interventions less expensive and more scalable. For example, a radio-based Save the Children Rwanda First Steps “Intera za Mbere” early childhood parenting education programme included a step-by-step session guide, flip charts with key messages, and a 15–20 minute radio segment that included a popular soap opera drama format. Participating mothers and fathers engaged in significantly more learning/play and nurturing/care behaviours than parents in the control group ( $p < .001$ ) and more positive discipline ( $p < .001$ ). This delivery format using radio shows promise for low-literacy contexts (Abimpaye et al, 2020; Save the Children, 2015).

There have also been several interventions exploring the use of text messages. In a bundled intervention in Kenya, in addition to receiving storybooks and dialogic training, parents also received two interactive text message (SMS) reminders encouraging them to read with their children. The first message asked a question about the main character in one of the storybooks, and the second asked when parents read to their children. Parents who responded to each text received a small amount of electronically delivered mobile airtime. The bundle was found to be effective in improving engagement, but its effect was not examined in isolation (Knauer et al, 2020).

In India, Read to Kids is an application aimed at improving parental engagement by encouraging parents to read aloud to their children. Over 15,000 users registered on the application. Of these, around 3,606 users became frequent readers to children (at least once per week). The programme resulted in improved parental confidence (especially for those who met in group settings) and more engaged parents in their child’s learning (Crane and Smith, 2018).

CareUp, a South African mobile application, aims to stimulate literacy through mobile messaging and resource access to parents with children aged four to five years old. The programme content enhances continuity of learning by coordinating activities across the home and preschool. In one study, eight text messages were sent per week over 15 weeks. Pilot results showed promising use and uptake of engaging activities for both parents and ECD centre practitioners, as well as improved self-reported parental knowledge and

practices for parents. However, only 34 per cent of invited parents signed up (Roberts and Spencer-Smith, 2017).

Another South African programme is ChildConnect. This is a pilot programme that aims to support and educate parents through an SMS curriculum and focuses on parent engagement, knowledge and behaviour. Of those invited to participate, 24 per cent chose to join, resulting in a pilot sample of 899 parents. The treatment group received three messages per week (one “inspiring”, another “informing” and the last “enabling” parental action). The control group received one “inform” message every fortnight. The vast majority of parents valued the messages (self-report). Additionally, once-a-week messages required a response, and users in the control group were more likely to respond. Lastly, both treatment and control groups showed a significant improvement from pre-test to post-test scores on knowledge. Researchers reported that the key hindering factor in this study may have been the lack of access to a stable mobile device among parents (Mostert and Roberts, 2018).

**Any strategy for using digital resources, therefore, needs to take account of the following:**

- **Distributing an app to potential users can be difficult.**
- **Attrition of users for apps and other online products or offerings can be a challenge.** Local experience suggests that small incentives can be useful (e.g., airtime rewards, acknowledgement at the end of a section of training).
- **Building feedback opportunities into digital offerings can incentivise engagement.** For example, during lockdown, Blocks for Growth provided parents with booklets of stimulation ideas and sent daily WhatsApp activities. Parents were invited to upload photos of their children’s work or activities and received a response when they did this or asked a question.
- **Hardware issues can be a barrier:** while smartphone ownership is growing, space is often limited on entry-level smartphones.
- **For those who do not have smartphones, mobile websites may be an alternative.**
- However, **unequal network coverage can limit access.**
- **SMS (short message service) and USSD (unstructured supplementary service data) are more ubiquitously available for mobile phone users** and may be useful technologies to consider. However, they are typically limited in how much information they can provide, and SMS is often best used to provide prompts.
- **Hybrid products** including hard copy materials and digital support for practitioners, such as in Finding Thabo (which uses posters and a Facebook interface for extension), are also a possibility. Similarly, the CoMach network has used radio programming with a Facebook extension (DSD, 2021).

This literature review informed the development of the KAP survey themes, from which survey and focus group questions were formulated.

# 3. Methodology

## 3.1. Purpose and Objectives of the Study

The primary purpose of this KAP study was to support the implementation of early learning and development programmes for parents of children aged from birth to six years old in South Africa. The aim was to establish a parental KAP baseline to guide programmatic interventions. The specific objectives and accompanying research questions are outlined in the following table:

**Table 3.** *KAPs study objectives and questions*

| Objective                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            | Main questions                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1. To ascertain parents/primary parents' levels of knowledge, prevalent attitudes and existing practices related to the importance of play and play-based learning in the development and early learning of their young children.                                                                                    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are the current levels of parent/primary parents' knowledge about play for early learning?</li> <li>• How do parents/parents feel and think about early learning and play?</li> <li>• How are children currently treated in terms of learning; what are the practices and methods used to nurture children's learning through play, or to teach young children in general?</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                         |
| 2. To understand the biopsychosocial, socio-cultural and socio-economic determinants that advance or hamper parents/primary parents' KAP in understanding and adopting practices that promote nurturing care and support play and play-based learning in the development and early learning of their young children. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In which contexts do children operate (e.g., living environments, geographical typologies, access to resources etc.)?</li> <li>• What is the family set-up and input/support from family/community members into parents' KAPs?</li> <li>• How do these affect the take up of play-based learning?</li> <li>• What are the profiles of parents/parents that aid or hamper play-based learning (e.g., health status, education and literacy, working status etc)?</li> <li>• What are the cultural beliefs and norms that influence parent/parents' KAPs?</li> </ul> |
| 3. To identify preferred and appropriate methods and programmes, including communication for development (C4D), and sources that will advance parents' KAP on play and play-based learning.                                                                                                                          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Which organisations implement positive parenting and related projects/intervention in South Africa, and what do they offer? What other support programmes exist for parents/parents (e.g., state-run)?</li> <li>• What resources can parents access and how?</li> <li>• What modalities for sharing ECD content are acceptable and convenient for parents/parents?</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| 4. To establish the baseline on the KAP in order to develop a monitoring and study framework of the implementation of programmes related to the advancement of parents' KAP on play and play-based learning.                                                                                                         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What KAPs currently exist among parents/parents in different parts of South Africa on play-based learning, using a standardised set of questions based on current frameworks, standards and good practice?</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |

## 3.2. Study Methods and Participants

To meet the KAP study objectives, a mixed-methods design was used, which included:

- **A rapid literature review**
- **A mapping of current programmes** through a survey and focus groups
- **Reflective participatory workshop** processes
- **Quantitative and qualitative data collection** and analysis during site visits (FGDs and semi-structured interviews were conducted, along with a parent/caregiver survey)
- **Participatory design/planning** and analysis sessions with the study's steering committee and sessions with the Impact Consulting team.

### 3.2.1. Literature review

The development of the KAP survey themes and questions was based on a literature review. In addition, the following measures were used as sources, especially for attitude and practice items:

- **The Parent Play Questionnaire** (Ahmadzadeh et al, 2020),
- **The Parent Play Beliefs Scale** (Fogle and Mendez, 2006, in collaboration with Head Start)
- **The Home Learning Environment Interview** (Dawes et al, 2021), which draws on Melhuish (2010) and the UNICEF Multi-indicator Cluster Survey ECD module)

From these sources, key themes were extracted from these sources and questions formulated. In addition, findings from the literature review have also been used to inform our analysis.

### 3.2.2. Mapping of Parenting Programmes

A list of 175 organisations offering parenting programmes was identified. This began with an initial list from the Impact Consulting ECD experts, which was then collated with a list from another consulting agency commissioned by UNICEF to conduct a mapping study of parenting programmes around the country (though this mapping was not focused on play-based learning). All organisations in the database were contacted multiple times to complete online surveys about their programmes, or to give this information to a researcher virtually or by telephone. One survey asked about parenting programmes in general, and the other gathered more in-depth information from organisations that offered play-based learning content for parents. The play-based parenting survey questions can be found in Appendix E.

Data from both studies were collated to produce a final database with information about 100 organisations (see attached). Detailed information about play-based programmes specifically was received from 37 of the 100 organisations. This detailed information can be found in the separate mapping report, and findings have been included alongside qualitative data in the section on programmes in this report. A summary of the survey findings is also available in Appendix E of this report.

### 3.2.3. Qualitative and quantitative data collection during site visits

The fieldwork in all nine provinces took place between 10 October and 3 November 2022. The entire fieldwork team (eight members plus the team lead and project support officer) attended a pilot at one site in the Western Cape. Two further pilots were then held at another site in the Western Cape and in KwaZulu Natal. After slight tool amendments and adjustments based on the pilot, fieldwork rolled out in the other provinces. Four data collection teams of two or three visited an urban and a rural community/site in each province, where they were hosted by an organisation working in the area and offering ECD or parenting support services.

At each site, the fieldwork teams performed the following:

- **Trained the selected fieldwork researchers to use the mobile app** and to understand the survey questions and sampling criteria.
- **Trained a senior host staff member on how to manage and supervise** the survey administration processes.
- **Hosted two focus groups** (interactive sessions held in the vernacular language as much as possible) **with parents and local leaders** in urban and rural areas at each site: one with up to 17 parents, and one with local community leaders; participants were asked to reflect on parent KAP levels and to identify barriers and enablers/determinants regarding play-based learning for young children.
- **Hosted interviews or focus groups with any available providers** of parenting programmes who also worked in the area (including the host organisation staff).

The detailed sampling strategy for the sites and participants can be found in Appendix A.

### 3.2.4. Parent short survey

A short, mostly quantitative survey was administered to parents (at their homes where possible) by ECD and community researchers/peer educators (from each local area/sample site) using mobile capture technology (i.e. data was immediately captured into a smartphone as the participant responded). Mobile capture allows timely and accurate capture and presentation of the data into a workable Excel datasheet, and ensures that data safety is not

physically dependent, as it uploads to a central database immediately. Importantly, the survey could be administered offline in the field and automatically uploaded once connectivity was restored, making it a feasible approach for outreach in rural and off-grid areas.

Community-based ECD providers and community workers were recruited: at least two per site depending on the site sample size, who were literate, technologically competent, trusted in the community, and able to deliver within the deadline. Impact Consulting fieldworkers conducted sample planning and training for the fieldwork researchers to use the mobile app and to understand the questions and sampling. The management and supervision of the survey administration process was handled by our local partners, with support and monitoring from the Impact Consulting evaluation teams.

After the Impact Consulting teams left each site, the local fieldworkers then administered the survey as per the sampling criteria for between one to four weeks. The survey responses were captured immediately onto mobile devices which were provided by Impact Consulting, and responses were submitted in real-time onto a central cloud database. Where there was no cellphone reception in the field, the survey was administered offline and uploaded automatically once connectivity was restored. By January 2023, responses from all provinces had been submitted.

### **3.2.5. Parent/parent and local leader focus groups at each of the sampled sites**

Parent and local leader participants were invited to FGDs (separate focus groups were held for parents and leaders). At these discussions, they were asked to reflect on parent KAP levels and to identify barriers and enablers/determinants regarding play-based learning for young children. Focus groups were held in the vernacular language and facilitated by senior fieldwork facilitators with extensive research experience and specific experience working in ECD. The sessions were interactive and participatory.

### **3.2.6. Focus groups with ECD and parenting programme providers, and ECD centre staff**

Focus groups were held with staff who run programmes for parents. These sessions aimed to explore parental knowledge, attitudes, and practices (KAPs); identify barriers and enablers; and discuss current methods and programmes available regarding play-based learning for young children. A few sessions were held on-site, but most were conducted online.

### 3.2.7. Key informant interviews

Key informant interviews were held with relevant participants at national and local level, as identified during the planning phase. The key informants were consulted about current programmes and parents' knowledge, attitudes, and practices (KAP), and asked to provide feedback regarding current trends and the future of programmatic interventions relating to play-based learning.

### 3.2.8. Research participants

A total of 1430 participants were involved in the study (some participants may have taken part in more than one research activity), broken down as follows:

- **Total surveys:** 1088
- **Total focus group participants:** 311
- **Total key informant interviews:** 31



### 3.2.8.1. Participants engaged in qualitative data collection onsite

The following participants were engaged in qualitative enquiry at each site:

**Table 4.** *Qualitative and quantitative sample sizes*

| Province      | Area  | Parent FG numbers | Community leaders FGs numbers |
|---------------|-------|-------------------|-------------------------------|
| Eastern Cape  | Urban | 5                 | 10                            |
|               | Rural | 12                | 6                             |
| Free State    | Rural | 9                 | 11                            |
| Gauteng       | Urban | 13                | 5                             |
|               | Rural | 10                | 7                             |
| KZN           | Urban | 9                 | 0                             |
|               | Rural | 7                 | 6                             |
|               | Rural | 8                 | 0                             |
| Limpopo       | Urban | 14                | 16                            |
|               | Rural | 17                | 17                            |
| Mpumalanga    | Urban | 5                 | 8                             |
|               | Rural | 6                 | 0                             |
| Northern Cape | Urban | 0                 | 11                            |
|               | Rural | 15                | 9                             |
| North West    | Urban | 12                | 6                             |
|               | Rural | 9                 | 0                             |
| Western Cape  | Rural | 4                 | 6                             |
|               | Urban | 8                 | 8                             |
|               | Urban | 12                | 9                             |
| <b>TOTAL</b>  |       | <b>175</b>        | <b>135</b>                    |

### 3.2.8.2. Participants engaged in other qualitative data collection

**In addition, the following activities took place:**

- One site focus group was held in the North West, and a virtual focus group was held with participants from Limpopo and Mpumalanga during the fieldwork visits.
- In February and March 2023, four online focus groups were held with parenting programme service providers.
- Senior members of the Impact Consulting team conducted two key informant interviews.

**Table 5.** *Key informant interviews*

| Participant/s                                                                             | Type of engagement                                           | Number of participants |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------|
| Funder who supports parenting programmes and research regarding play-based learning       | • Key informant interview                                    | 1                      |
| National NGO implementing a nation-wide play-based learning programme for parents/parents | • Key informant interview                                    | 1                      |
| ECD and parenting programme service providers                                             | • Five online focus groups<br>• One face to face focus group | 29                     |

### 3.2.8.3. Participants engaged in quantitative research activities

Table 6 outlines the number of surveys used against the expected samples. 1208 surveys were completed and submitted; however, 120 of these were excluded from the analysis after data cleaning.

**Table 6.** *Survey sample versus actual responses*

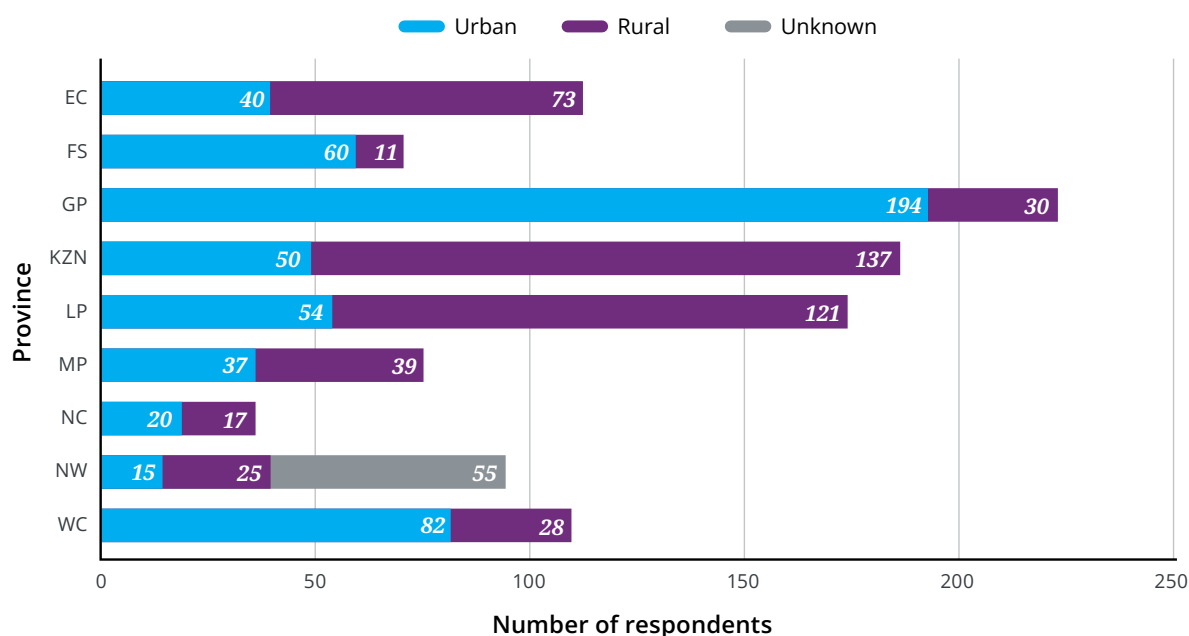
| Province      | Rural sample | Rural actual | Urban sample | Urban actual | Grand total |
|---------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|-------------|
| Eastern Cape  | 70           | 73           | 40           | 40           | 113         |
| Free State    | 30           | 11           | 40           | 60           | 71          |
| Gauteng       | 30           | 30           | 250          | 194          | 224         |
| KwaZulu Natal | 110          | 137          | 70           | 50           | 187         |
| Limpopo       | 100          | 121          | 30           | 54           | 175         |

| Province      | Rural sample | Rural actual | Urban sample | Urban actual | Grand total |
|---------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|-------------|
| Mpumalanga    | 60           | 39           | 30           | 37           | 76          |
| Northern Cape | 30           | 17           | 30           | 20           | 37          |
| North West    | 40           | 25           | 30           | 70           | 95          |
| Western Cape  | 30           | 28           | 90           | 82           | 110         |
| <b>Total</b>  | <b>500</b>   | <b>481</b>   | <b>610</b>   | <b>607</b>   | <b>1088</b> |

The rural versus urban distinction is an important variable, and the total numbers of rural and urban respondents actually surveyed (481 and 607) did not differ significantly from the numbers planned (500 and 610). Therefore, the study maintains a representative sample.

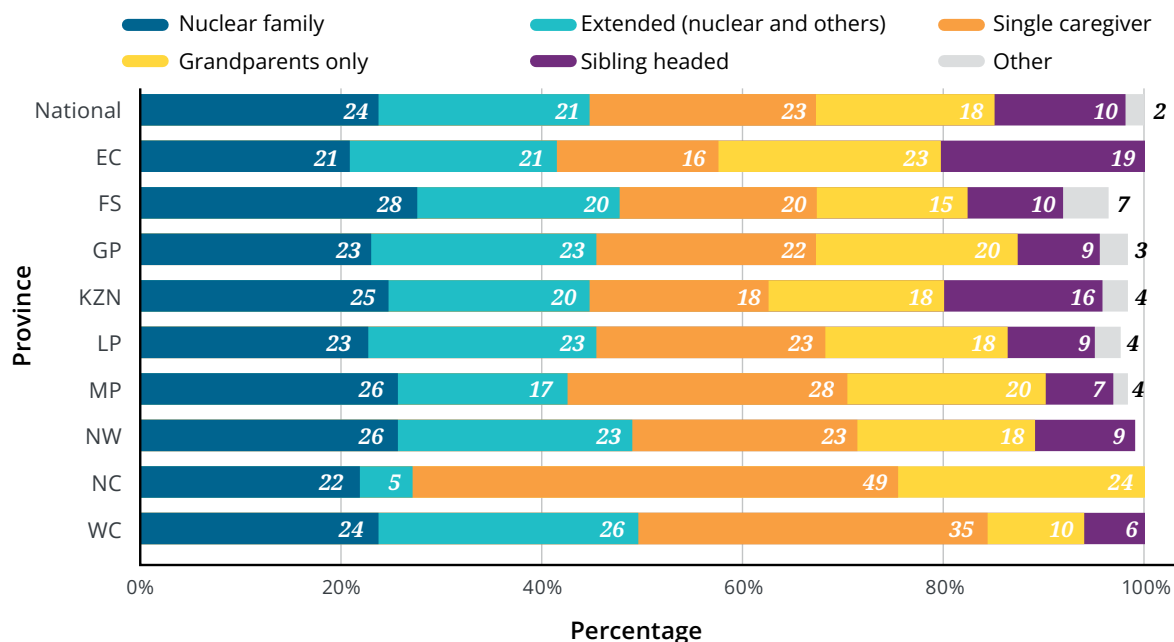
Planned sample totals (quotas) were calculated based on assumptions, since there are no known population values per province in terms of the desired disaggregation. The sampling quotas specified were therefore assumption-driven. In the absence of known population values to the required level of detail, any correction applied to the actual numbers obtained (to reflect the specified quotas) would not be appropriate. Further details about the breakdown can be seen in the graphs below:

**Figure 5. Rural and urban survey responses per province**



In terms of meeting the sample criteria (i.e. distributing the sample across family types), the graph below illustrates that this was achieved consistently.

**Figure 6. Family type of survey respondents**



### 3.3. Ethics Approval

Ethics approval was obtained from Pharma Ethics for this study, in line with UNICEF's Procedure for Ethical Standards in Research, Evaluation, Data Collection and Analysis (available at: <https://www.unicef.org/media/54796/file>).

### 3.4. Methodology Challenges

Contracting for this study was only finalised at the end of August 2022, with an initial deadline for the final report set for the end of February 2023. To achieve this timeframe, fieldwork needed to be completed before November 2022 to allow time for survey collection before the summer holidays in South Africa. This left a very tight timeframe of two months for all planning, tool development, piloting of tools, mobile phone logistics (purchasing, SIM card registration, uploading the online survey and uploading data), ethics clearance processes, travel arrangements, sampling of sites, and sourcing and contracting host organisations. These organisations needed to facilitate access to parents and arrange fieldworkers, as well as recruit diverse parents to participate in this study at short notice. Possible host sites were

identified and contacted with a request to host. However, not all the originally identified host sites were available to support the study, due to various reasons including a full end-of-year schedule, involvement in other research projects, and a lack of available staff to manage the survey. Fortunately, there is a large pool of ECD Service Providers, and all the final contracted host sites met the criteria for national representation. This did, however, result in some sample bias. The timeline was subsequently extended to mid-May 2023.

## 3.5. Data Analysis

### 3.5.1. Quantitative data analysis

Survey data from the central online database was collated and cleaned. The cleaning of the data involved:

- Checking local sites against provincial and district areas to ensure that all sites which may have been given different names were allocated to the right sample group.
- Consolidating broad response choice categories into analysable categories—for example, taking all ages of parents and allocating them to three categories: under 25; 26–39; over 40.
- Discarding surveys that did not meet the criteria for inclusion—e.g., if a certain number of responses were not completed.

An audit of the final usable data was then conducted to check that desired sample sizes were achieved and that the overall sample size maintained representation, ensuring the study remained nationally representative.

An initial round of data analysis provided details of the sample demographics and ensured that the sample was adequate. In a further round of analysis, the 12 practice and 19 attitude items from the survey were analysed against the following demographic variables, looking for any significant differences in results:

- Rural vs urban groups
- Province
- Age of parent/caregiver
- Age of child

For some relevant items, the gender of the parent and the gender of the child were also checked for any significant differences.

### 3.5.2. Qualitative data analysis

All the data collected was collated in a data matrix/datasheet according to the questions asked and the participant(s) who answered. This data was captured province by province, which enabled the analysts to report triangulated findings and to easily identify common perceptions, as well as differing ideas.

Key findings from the raw data for each province were then summarised into provincial profiles for all nine provinces and analysed for general trends and perceptions, any provincial differences, or any differences in perception based on the profile of the respondent. The Nurturing Care Framework was used as an analysis framework for the qualitative data that was gathered through the study. The team grouped the data gathered into the five interrelated and indivisible components of nurturing care:

- **Good health**
- **Adequate nutrition**
- **Safety and security**
- **Responsive caregiving**
- **Opportunities for learning** (with particular focus on how health, nutrition and safety impact on responsive caregiving and learning opportunities).

In addition, data was scrutinised to understand what KAPs were being reported according to the Early Learning Development Areas (ELDA) sub-categories from the ECD National Curriculum Framework for children from birth to four years (ECDNCF).

### 3.5.3. Participatory data analysis

#### 3.5.3.1. Team analysis workshop

The research and fieldwork team met on 29 March 2023 to continue with the next steps of the qualitative data analysis, to validate initial findings, engage in further interpretation, and contribute to sense-making. The data was divided into three sections:

- The Nurturing Care Framework, including health, nutrition, safety and responsive caregiving
- Early learning (category from the Nurturing Care Framework) using the National Curriculum Framework, ELDAs
- Programmatic enablers and barriers.

The research team divided into three groups, and each group analysed one of the above sections, investigating key findings, including common themes, enablers, barriers, and recommendations. The key findings of each group were then presented to the whole research

team for discussion, interpretation, and to extract salient overarching results and any obvious recommendations.

The qualitative data was then further analysed to find the common themes across the Nurturing Care Framework and the National Curriculum Framework.

The data collected from the stakeholder focus groups was collated and then analysed under the following themes, which were already populated with data from parents and community members: knowledge of parents towards play-based learning; attitudes towards play-based learning; and practices taking place for play-based learning. In addition, enablers, barriers, and recommendations were grouped and collated into findings.

### **3.5.3.2. Steering committee analysis workshop**

On 8 March 2023, the initial data analysis findings were presented to the steering committee. The meeting ran as follows:

- An explanation of the data analysis frameworks that were used to analyse the raw data was presented to the steering committee: we used the Nurturing Care Framework and the National Curriculum Framework to assess parent/carer KAP
- Presentation of the following data:
  - » Initial analysis of the quantitative data from the survey, including: where, with whom, and what children play, and parent and carer attitudes and practices with regards to play-based learning
  - » Analysis of the qualitative data according to the data analysis frameworks.

The steering committee participants divided into two groups to further analyse the data. The groups then gave feedback and high-level thoughts about the data they had scrutinised, highlighting any important findings. Recommendations, report format and usage were also discussed at the meeting.

### **3.5.4. Analysis to report writing process**

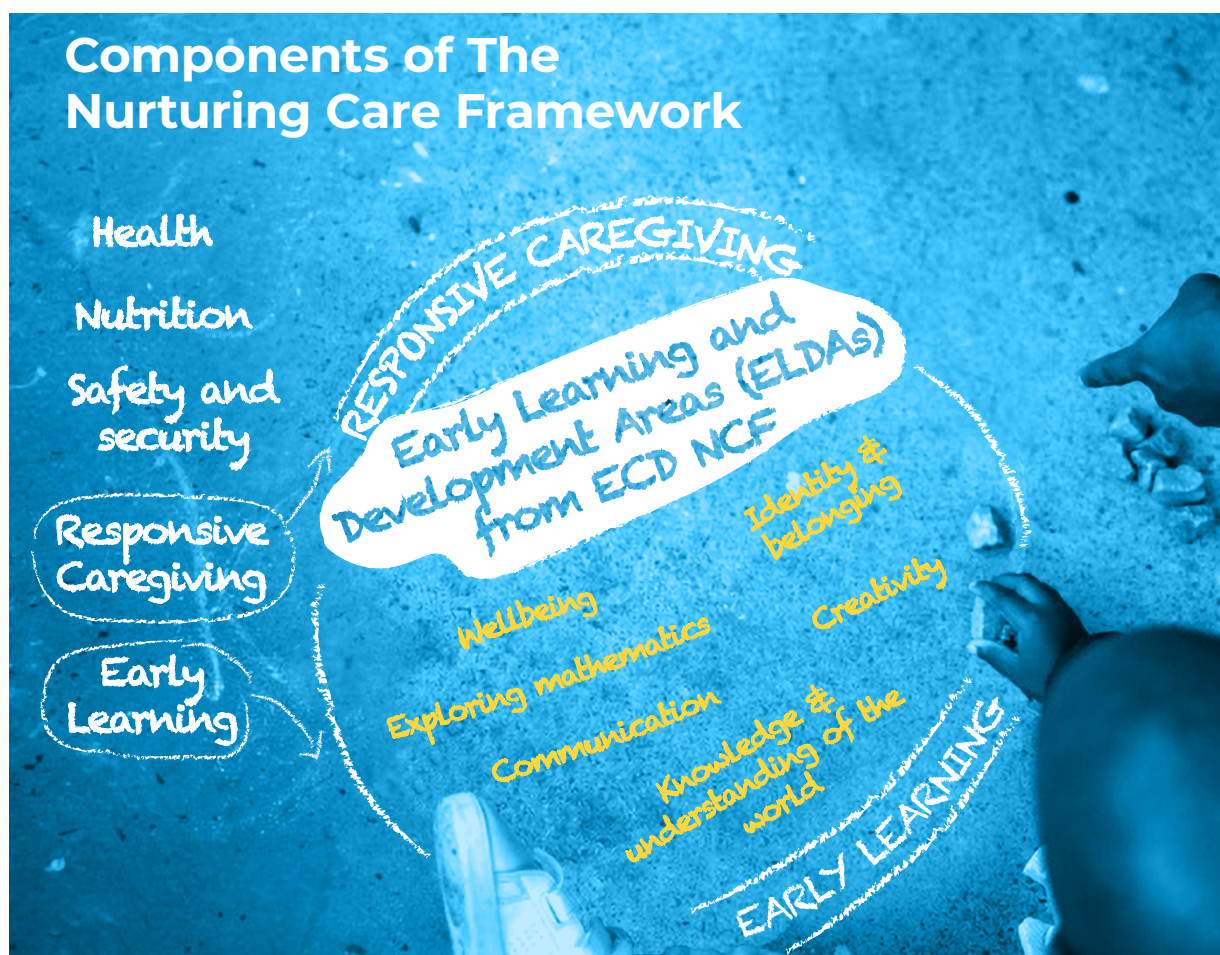
After the data was written up following the above analysis process, it underwent a further round of analysis involving writing and review. During this process, the findings were consolidated to remove duplications and to group relevant findings together to clarify meaning and identify trends and patterns.

## 4. Findings

### 4.1. Parents' Knowledge, Attitudes, and Practices Towards Play-Based Learning

Results presented here are from the parent KAP survey and all qualitative enquiry from across the country. The KAP survey attempted to ascertain parents'/primary carers' levels of knowledge, prevalent attitudes, and existing practices related to the importance of play and play-based learning in the development and early learning of their young children in South Africa. Findings were initially analysed according to the categories in the Nurturing Care Framework and the National Curriculum Framework ELDAs, and all findings are now presented according to KAPs. The diagram below shows how the categories of the NCF and the ECDNCF ELDAs map to each other, and how we considered them in the analysis:

**Figure 7.** *The Nurturing Care Framework and ELDAs*



As shown above, the components of the Nurturing Care Framework and the South African ECD National Curriculum Framework align; the ELDAs form sub-categories of the Responsive Caregiving and Early Learning components. In the Findings section, we highlight KAP data about all of these components.

### 4.1.1. Knowledge

While parents displayed some knowledge about what young children should be learning, there was limited knowledge regarding the link between learning and play. Qualitative enquiry revealed that younger parents tended to display lower levels of knowledge about how to care for their children in terms of tending to their wellbeing.

Parents understood their role to be strongly focused on taking care of the physical and emotional health of their children. There was good knowledge about personal health and hygiene routines, which were reported as including keeping the children clean, potty training and toilet habits. Daily routines such as bath time were recognised as opportunities for play-based learning, for example, to sing songs with children and teach them about body parts in playful ways. Parents knew that it was important that infants in the zero to two age group were dressed properly, and that children were taught to dress themselves from the age of two years; parents of three to six year old children indicated that children learned how to dress and take care of themselves by being allowed to try, and by making and rectifying mistakes. The importance of keeping immunisations up to date was understood, though access to adequate healthcare services was reported to be challenging for some parents. Parents displayed lower levels of understanding of different developmental domains of a young child, with their focus being predominantly on physical care.

Parents clearly understood the importance of good nutrition and nourishment to support child growth and development, including prenatal nourishment, breastfeeding and weaning diets: “the introduction of a weaning diet is very important for brains and bones of a child” (Community Leader focus group, Limpopo, October 2022). Parents knew that mealtimes provided an opportunity for learning and, in particular, they thought it was useful to teach their children table manners: “we ask the children to do something that teaches good manners” (Parent/Parent Focus Group, Gauteng, November 2022). Family food security was a huge concern reported by parents and echoed by parenting programme service provider implementers: “One of the biggest threats to young children’s early development is lack of access to nutrition; there is a need to improve food security” (Provider Focus Group, March 2023).

The safety of children was raised in all focus groups, and parents clearly understood the importance of their role in teaching children about safety (both inside and outside the home,

including “stranger danger” and sexual abuse risks). Parents explained that there was a need for safe spaces in which children could play freely, such as parks (this is discussed further in the section on factors affecting practice): “It’s safe at home because the gates will be locked and we will be watching them, but out in the street they are not safe because of cars and criminals” (Community Leader, KwaZulu Natal, October 2022). There was recognition of the different safety needs of age groups—parents knew that children aged birth to two years needed to be protected and kept safe through constant vigilance, monitoring and boundary setting, whereas children aged three to six years old should know their parents’ contact details. Furthermore, there was a good understanding that parents need to model safe behaviours because participants understood that children learn by imitating their parents. There was also acknowledgement that it was important for parents to monitor whether children were reaching their developmental milestones and that it was important that all five senses developed properly as they grew.

Parents were aware and expressed that children needed supportive, loving relationships within a safe, secure and stable environment, while experiencing good health and nourishment so that they could develop into active individuals who playfully explored their world. Encouragingly, the child’s need for loving care was clearly identified as important by all participating parents. Parents also knew that children needed time to play and that play between parents and young children builds emotional bonds that foster children’s growth and development: “They learn through bonding with an adult who talks, plays and teaches them things” (Rural Parent Focus Group, Mpumalanga, October 2022). This links with the NCF ELDA, which outlines how children need to establish a sense of identity and belonging and that this happens when they bond with the parent through play.

Parents recognised that children, especially from birth to two years old, “want to play any time they are awake” (Parent Focus Group, North West Province, October 2022), i.e. that they constantly want to play. Parents in the study understood that children benefit from playing with different family members and others, including siblings, older children, mothers, nannies, grandparents, uncles, aunts, other toddlers and teachers at crèche. They expressed how children needed the opportunity to socialise so that they could develop social skills. Parents understood that children learned through copying and imitating (including what they see on television), talking with others, playing and exploring; and that the parent had a responsibility to set boundaries and instil manners and respect for others. Parents knew that, through play, children could learn discipline, respect, how to ask for permission, how to take turns, and patience. “They learn best by being guided, reprimanded on wrong they might be doing, and they are taught all this by the person responsible at their infant stage” (Rural Parent Focus Group, Limpopo, November 2023).

Survey responses validated these findings: parents knew that ‘play can help the child develop social skills such as cooperating and making friends’ (Survey Item (SI) 02 (96 per cent agreed)). A slightly lower percentage of parents (88 per cent agreed) knew that ‘children learn when you

play traditional/cultural games with them' (S112). Interestingly, more parents in rural areas were aware of this (97% vs 95%), as were more parents of three- to six-year-old children than those with younger children (97%). This understanding was higher in two rural provinces, the Free State (100%) and Limpopo (99%), both of which have a strong presence of ECD providers and community awareness of traditions belonging to a specific cultural group.

Parents and caregivers recognised that culture and traditional games helped children to learn, and they understood that these games teach "identity and respect". Some participants reported that children should learn how to talk to and "respect people regardless of ethnic group" (Rural Community Leader Focus Group, Limpopo, November 2022), and that they should know "manners" and understand religious customs.

Parents are mostly unaware of their role as the first "teachers" of their young children, and many felt that learning happened at school or at ECD programmes, not seeing home as a learning site. They displayed limited knowledge of the pedagogy of play, and limited understanding that play in young children is a learning process. Thus, parents were not aware that they could be part of the child's learning through playtime. There was even less understanding of early learning for children from birth to two years old, and about how play develops communication skills and higher-order cognitive skills.

Almost half of respondents (43%) expressed that they thought that 'children only learn when they play with other children' (S119),

## Parental Knowledge Strengths

- ✓ **Strong on physical/emotional care:** hygiene, potty training, bathing (as play: songs, body parts).
- ✓ **Nutrition:** prenatal, breastfeeding, weaning ("important for brains and bones").
- ✓ **Safety:** stranger danger, age-specific needs (vigilance for 0-2; contact details for 3-6), modelling behavior.
- ✓ **Play benefits:** bonding, social skills (turns, patience), self-care (dressing from age 2 via trial/error).
- ✓ **Communication:** talking to babies in utero, repetition, songs/stories.
- ✓ **Daily learning:** mealtimes (table manners), household tasks, counting/colours via play.

## Gaps & Misconceptions

- ⚠ **Limited grasp of play-learning link:** 0-2 year-olds in particular (communication/cognitive skills).
- ⚠ **Home vs school:** Home seen as non-learning vs school/creche for learning.
- ⚠ **Care priority:** Focus on physical care over developmental domains.
- ⚠ **Math:** Emphasis on numbers and counting but not shapes, puzzles, and problem-solving.
- ⚠ **Tech:** heavy TV/phone exposure seen as a positive for world knowledge.

with knowledge being lower in urban areas (47%), and with a significantly higher percentage of younger parents having better knowledge about this (61 per cent of under 25-year-old parents had this understanding compared to the average of 53%). These responses are in line with the focus groups' findings that parents believed children only learn when they attend crèche. The survey showed that more than a quarter (26%) of survey respondents (n=1088) did not know that a child 'learns when he/she plays freely on their own' (*S118*), with knowledge being significantly lower in rural areas, and in the provinces of Mpumalanga and the North West where only half of the respondents had this knowledge.

Participants knew that the following activities done with children and which children do with other children are useful for learning: singing, drawing and playing games. Ideas for games came from activities that the adults had played when they were young. Parents mentioned that children learn through visual imagery, from learning the rules of various games, and from having the opportunity to make mistakes (creativity and knowledge and understanding of the world). Additionally, children were reported to be learning the names of body parts, their own names, and their parents' names, phone numbers and addresses. FGD participants displayed knowledge about how young children learn counting, colours, communication and speech through play and through active physical movement.

Parents in focus groups acknowledged that children should learn self-care routines (dressing and feeding themselves, making the bed and putting away dishes) as well as to respect and put away belongings. In the survey, a fairly high percentage of parents (82% overall, n=1086) knew that 'You can play with the child by including him/her in household tasks' *S101*. There was significantly higher knowledge about this item in the Eastern Cape, Free State and the Northern Cape (95%, 92% and 97%), and much lower than average knowledge in Limpopo and the North West (69% and 68%). Interestingly, a lower percentage of younger parents (under 25 years old) knew this than their older counterparts (74%), and fewer parents with children aged 0–2 years old (77%).

With regards to communication, parent survey responses showed a high level (97% agreeing) of comprehension that 'Play can improve the child's language and communication' *S103*. FGDs indicated that some parents understood the importance and benefits of speaking to babies in utero, and also knew that communication with young children should be at a level that children could understand because children developed language by imitating an adult's speech. Some participants were aware of the need for constant repetition for learning, and the significance of constantly answering children's questions. Participants understood that singing rhymes and songs together enhances bonding with parents, and some knew that children should have stories read to them, and that opportunities should be made for children to scribble and ultimately write.

In all the focus groups, parents understood children's learning about exploring mathematics to be strongly focused on numbers and counting. There was some mention of children



learning about colours, objects, shapes and textures, but this link to mathematics was not clearly understood, nor was the importance of playing with puzzles and problem-solving to cognitive development.

Regarding knowledge and understanding of the world, some participants expressed that children learned by seeing, doing, touching, asking and imitating—and that through play, children became familiar with the world around them. However, many respondents expressed that young children were exposed to a lot of technology, mainly television but also phones and social media, and they believed that this was a good avenue for children to gain this kind of understanding of the world.

### 4.1.2. Attitudes

Very encouragingly, parents' attitudes towards play were generally positive, which promises a good foundation for parents to receive the knowledge, skills and potentially resources that will help them enhance practices that promote play-based learning.

The respondents wanted to care for their children; however, there were a number of factors that could impact on their children's wellbeing. In terms of health, many focus group participants perceived that it was challenging to access health services, as there were insufficient services for what they needed for their young children. In general, parents had a positive approach to potty training and felt children should learn good health and hygiene habits. Healthcare routines, such as bath time, were viewed as opportunities to interact playfully with children.

The focus group participants did not discuss their attitudes to children's nutrition in any depth; however, some expressed that nourishment and development of muscles are interlinked. ECD programme providers raised food security as an issue—malnourishment has severe negative effects on children's development, and they reported that parents sometimes miss parenting programme activities because they are busy trying to source food.

Although parents expressed a desire for children to play outside, they felt that it was not safe for their children to be outside their homes. The safety and security of young children was a huge concern that was raised by all participant groups. Apart from a few rural communities where there are strong community structures and community cohesion, participants reported that they did not feel that their children were safe anywhere other than at home, and only a few mentioned feeling comfortable letting them be in a neighbour's house. Parents explained that in the past, three- to six-year-old children would have had the opportunity to be involved in many different kinds of play for hours, often outdoors, and with other boys and girls. The adults in the communities would monitor all the children. However, they noted that this is

no longer the case—children are no longer raised “by the community”, as such, because communities are no longer safe, and there is very little social cohesion.

Most focus group participants were of the opinion that young children needed to learn discipline at home. Parents had mixed ideas about what types of discipline were appropriate, and some parents believed that spanking and physical discipline was appropriate and acceptable: “They learn through punishment, there are consequences to what we do, they must know when it is wrong to do something, they need a beating, to be smacked, talk sternly to them” (Parent Focus Group, Mpumalanga, October 2022); others believed that it was preferable to use methods such as verbal reprimands and time-outs:

*“I do not do that [spank], I give my child time out for about 30 minutes” (Parent Focus Group, Mpumalanga, October 2022)*

*“They go to the naughty corner” (Parent Focus Group, Mpumalanga, October 2022)*

Violence was considered to be not acceptable and parents expressed:

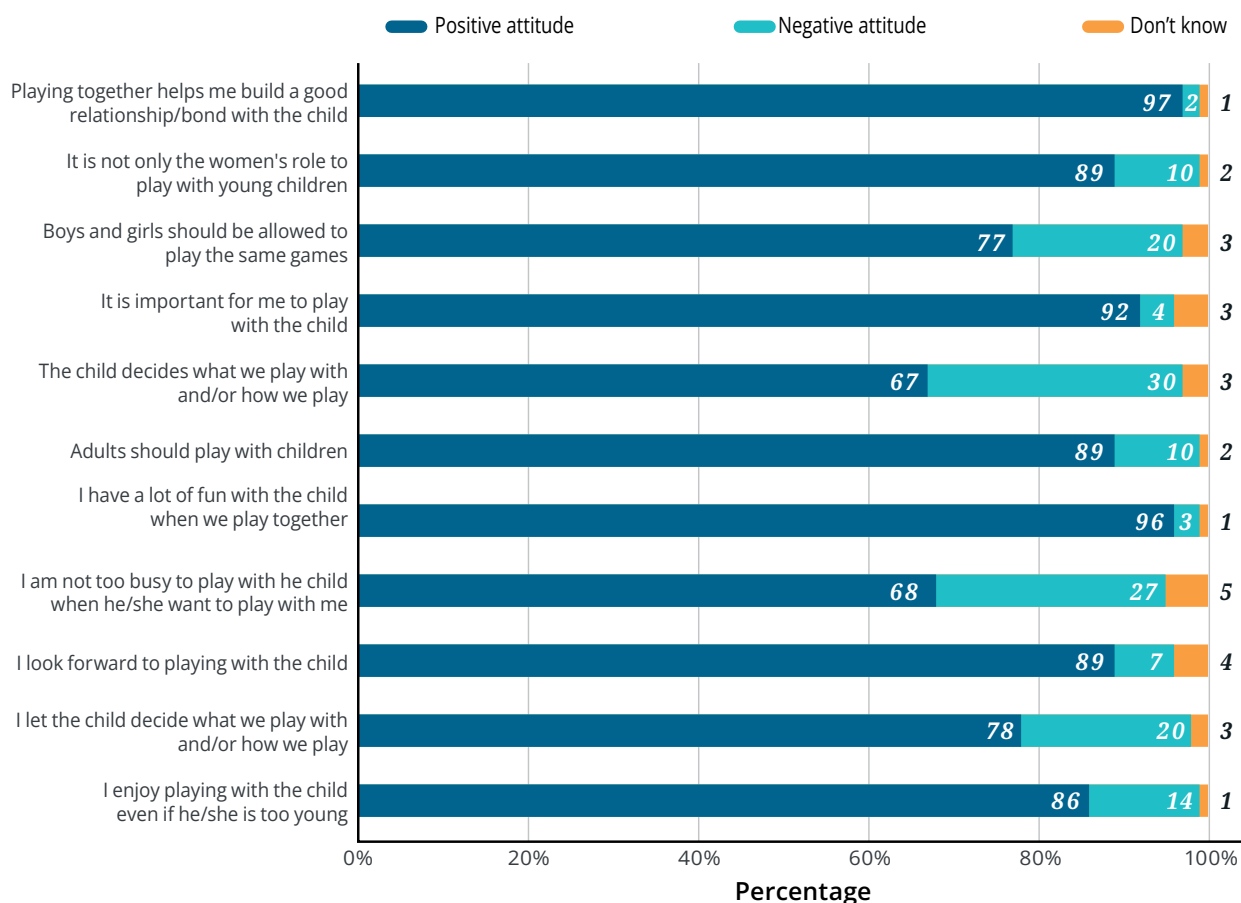
*“As parents we should teach about bullying” (Rural Parent Focus Group, KwaZulu Natal, October 2022)*

*“When at an ECD, they learn not to bully others, and that they must not fight with others” (Rural Parent Focus Group, North West, October 2022)*

Parents relayed that children were often teased or bullied for “being different”, which was damaging to their self-esteem and development. However, parents in focus groups expressed the belief that children were generally more accepting of children with special needs than adults were.

As can be seen in the graph that follows, most parents expressed favourable attitudes towards play in young children.

**Figure 8. Attitudes data**



Encouragingly, 92 per cent of survey respondents agreed that 'It is important for me to play with the child' (*SI09*), with a significantly higher percentage of urban parents agreeing (94% urban versus 90% rural).

Some parents talked about how they wished to correct what they perceived as negative aspects of their own upbringing and to avoid repeating these in their own parenting. They felt that it was important to make time to play with their children, as this would foster bonding and allow them to identify any developmental problems early.

Although most parents believed that it was important to play with their children, more than a quarter (27%) expressed that 'I am too busy to play with the child when he/she wants to play with me' (*SI01<sup>4</sup>*), with a significantly higher percentage of older parents (over 40 years old) feeling that they were often too busy (32%). A significantly higher percentage of parents whose children were between birth and two years old expressed that they had more time to play with their children than those with three- to six-year-old children (73% with younger children versus 65% with older children). In Gauteng, KwaZulu Natal, and Mpumalanga, 6 per cent, 10 per cent, and 7 per cent of parents, respectively, did not feel that playing with their young children was important. In these

three provinces, there were also significantly higher percentages of parents who responded that they did not know if this was important or not (8%, 5%, and 5%, respectively).

Attitudes about play as a source of bonding and joy were very positive; almost all survey respondents (n=1088) agreed with the following statements:

- *'I have a lot of fun with the child when we play together'* (SI13: 96% agreed, n=1086)
- *'Playing together helps me build a good relationship/bond with the child'* (SI05: 97% agreed, n=1088).

A slightly lower percentage of parents indicated that they *'look forward to playing with the child'* SI15 (n=1086), but this was still very high, with 89 per cent of respondents agreeing, and significantly more urban parents agreeing (92%). A significant difference was also found provincially in this regard: specifically, in the Northern and Western Cape, where 95 per cent and 97 per cent of parents (respectively) had favourable attitudes to play, whereas a lower than the national average percentage of parents in Gauteng and KwaZulu Natal (82% and 83%) felt the same way.

Most parents expressed that they enjoyed playing with their child even though their children were young (although significantly more parents with children aged three to six years old enjoyed the playtime); 17 per cent of those with zero to two-year-olds felt that children were too young for play to be enjoyable, versus only 12 per cent of those with three to six-year-olds expressing that it was not enjoyable. Significant differences were found in the different provinces, with many more parents in KwaZulu Natal and the North West Province who enjoyed playing with children despite them being young. Unfortunately, almost all parents (93% and above) in the Eastern Cape, Free State, Limpopo, and Western Cape provinces expressed that they *'don't really enjoy playing with the child because he/she is too young'* SI17.

In the survey, 84 per cent of respondents agreed that *'You can play with the child by including him/her in household tasks'* SI01, but some parents in focus groups expressed that they felt that children should be doing chores rather than playing.

When it came to attitudes about who should play with young children at home, only 89 per cent of survey respondents agreed that adults should play with children, with significantly fewer parents believing this in KwaZulu Natal and the North West and Northern Cape. In focus groups, parents noted that they thought that playing with older children could help young children develop faster, but it could also lead to them picking up bad habits and behaviours. A knowledge item indicated that almost half (43%) of survey respondents also believed that young children only learned from other children. A few (10%) of parents believed that *'it is only the women's role to play with young children'* SI07, with 17 per cent and 14 per cent of parents in KwaZulu Natal and the Northern Cape believing this (a significant difference).

Two survey items asked respondents about their attitude towards how play activities are chosen and carried out (*'I decide what we play with and/or how we play'* SI10 and *'I let the child*

decide what we play with and/or how we play' *SI16*). On the whole, parents determined what type of play took place between them and the child, though more three to six-year-old children were allowed to choose.

With regards to parents' attitudes about play being a way for children to learn, only about half of parents who responded to the survey had favourable attitudes about this, with 52 per cent of parents agreeing that 'it is more important to teach/instruct the child than to play with him/her' *SI04*. A significantly higher percentage of urban parents agreed with this statement (56%), and more parents with children aged three to six years agreed than those with younger children.

In terms of children learning about identity and belonging, focus group participants believed that children's attitudes mirrored parents' attitudes and that parents should model good behaviours because children imitate their behaviour: "They learn from us, they are taught by us, through modelling certain behaviours. They also learn from older siblings and children around them who are the same age, for example how to sit, stand, they try and copy those things from others" (Rural Parent Focus Group, Mpumalanga, October 2022). They noted that during play children sometimes imitated destructive behaviours that they witnessed at home, and some felt that a child who imitates negative behaviour must be disciplined.

*"Children copy how we act and speak. This comes out in their play. Because of the increasing alcohol abuse, when children play house, they act like the drunk adults"* (Rural community focus group, Free State, November 2022)

*"Some community members play a role in teaching children when they are not doing the right thing, they may take an active role in reprimanding behaviour".*

*(Rural community focus group, Mpumalanga, October 2022).*

Parents noticed that young children were surprisingly capable when it came to communication and reported that they generally understood stories that they were told. They also believed that children learn to communicate from others and could also learn bad things (like swearing) in this way from other children and adults. Many also believed that technology was an effective way to help children learn English.

To develop a foundation in literacy and mathematics (including communication and vocabulary, to learn what they need to be ready for Grade R), parents widely believed that this happens through a structured learning programme, such as those offered in playgroups, crèches and ECD centres.

Many parents believed that learning happens at school or an early learning programme, and that teachers are solely responsible for children learning these things. Linked to this attitude was the perception that learning is formal and that even play is formal. Many parents did not consider what a child learns in their early years to be important, and that all valuable learning happens at school. Most parents felt that by two years old, children should be in a playgroup or some early learning programme, even though they did have some concerns that children could also learn bad things at these places. Some parents' concern about this was centred around the fact that teachers are not allowed to physically discipline children, leading to the perception that bad behaviours could not be stopped at playgroup.

In some communities, there was an attitude that if children were dirty, they must be neglected. This attitude has led to some parents discouraging their children from becoming involved in messy play, therefore effectively limiting free play. Another prevalent attitude that came out in the focus groups was that children should be dressed appropriately for their gender: "Gender dynamics and understanding is important and how to dress as a boy or girl" (Rural Parent Focus Group, KwaZulu Natal, October 2022). In the survey, most parents did not indicate that gender should drive play choices, but a fifth of all parents (20%) did feel that 'boys and girls should not be allowed to play the same games' <sup>SI08</sup>. There was a significant difference in the results from different provinces, with the most sexist attitudes found in the Northern Cape and KwaZulu Natal. One game in which traditional gender roles were being learnt, parents reported, was when children "play house".

Parents believed that play-friendly spaces, such as parks and early learning centres, would help children develop creativity faster and that children needed the opportunity to exercise their imagination with their peers in such spaces. Some make-believe play was observed by parents. The responses for knowledge and understanding of the world were mostly focused on technology. There were divergent attitudes toward technology: some parents felt that being on a phone was not healthy for children aged zero to six years – that phones damage the eyes, make children antisocial, delay their speech and stunt creativity. Others, however, believed that phones had some utility for learning, with some recognising that this activity should be supervised by parents. Other participants felt that a phone could be used safely by a young child to play music, and to teach children gospel music and about religion. A widespread attitude was that technology – and watching television in particular – was useful for teaching children to speak English and to help with English pronunciation. There were some concerns that screen time should be limited for the birth-to-two-year-old age group, but these concerns were mainly based around the fact that it prevented socialisation.

### 4.1.3. Practices

To understand what play-based learning practices are taking place in South Africa, we present here findings from the survey (which focused on play practices with young children and adult members within their households) and from the qualitative enquiry (which revealed practices



with regards to young children and play from a wider perspective than just within individual households). The two sets of data complement each other to paint a robust picture of young children's involvement in play-based learning.

### **Who do young children play with?**

Mothers and siblings were most often reported to play with young children in a household. Where fathers lived in the household, some reportedly played with their children and helped them with their homework, whereas others (as reported by participants in focus groups) would rather drink or read a newspaper than play with their children in the evenings. Young children also played alone sometimes, or with siblings, parents, grandparents, other family members, peers and neighbours' children. Through this, their sense of identity and belonging develops. Polyadic play across age groups takes place in some communities (where there is safe space for this to occur), and adults usually supervise this play. Children who attended an early childhood programme played with their teachers.

### **What are young children playing?**

#### **Routines as playtime**

Parents felt at ease incorporating play while attending to their young children's wellbeing, and reported playing with their children during daily health and hygiene routines, such as bathtime and nappy changing. Play during these routines included singing songs and naming body parts, which also helped children to learn about personal hygiene during these daily rituals. "They learn chores, they learn to sustain themselves and to be independent so when they are now pretending to clean, they actually learn that this is a chore" (Rural Parent Focus Group, Mpumalanga, October 2022).

Parents also mentioned the importance of having a routine: “You need to find a routine, I did this with my child and you find it helps that you can actually work around the house, they must eat at a certain time, play, sleep and rest and then as a parent you can play and find enough energy to give them the time they need” (Urban Parent Focus Group, Gauteng, November 2022). In both urban and rural areas, some play occurred while chores were being done.

Children were reported to be learning the following during daily routines:

*“How to eat, eating different things” (Rural Parent Focus Group, Eastern Cape, November 2022)*

*“They want to dress themselves; you should allow them that’s when they learn”. (Urban Parent Focus Group, Eastern Cape, November 2022)*

*“To protect themselves from bad habits, for example alcohol abuse and drinking, they need to learn schedules and routine, teach them to go to the toilet, say please and thank you”. (Urban Parent Focus Group, Gauteng, November 2022).*

### **Play-based learning activities**

Children’s play activities, as shared by parents, included playing with toys, exploring while crawling, playing with everyday objects, watching TV (cartoons), playing with soil and water, and pretending to cook. Play activities for younger children mentioned by parents included peekaboo, musical toys, and playing with dolls and soft toys. When available, children also played with crayons, playbooks, Lego, puzzles, drawing materials, jerrycans, marbles, balls, phones and tins, as well as playing football, running, and engaging in fantasy play. Physically active play included flying kites, hopscotch, hide and seek, running with wire cars and tyres, playing on jungle gyms and swings, climbing, playing with sand and water, cycling, ball games, football, five-stones (game using stones), and homemade skipping ropes and balls. Some children carried a shoe on their backs as if it were a doll and, although not frequent (and more often urban than rural), other children liked to play with spoons and brooms and to take things out of cupboards (when permitted). Children also sometimes played with lotion or with water outside.

The types of play-based learning activities that children were reported to already be involved in included self-care routines; the chore curriculum (household chores as play); asking questions; fantasy play; singing songs (including mathematical songs); sorting activities; matching activities; classifying activities; exploring their own movements; exploring their

own environments; and using their imaginations. Indigenous games were also played in some communities, although rules and guidelines for these are not documented for all games. In some areas, the singing of traditional songs was reported, but only during national heritage month. On the latter point, some parents felt that these traditional songs should be sung throughout the year.

The focus groups also revealed that children's creativity was being fostered, with parents reporting that they develop creative skills by engaging in activities such as building, organising, sharing, counting, collaborating and coordinating. Focus group participants noted that children could learn about family roles and the home from creative play, and that through this they learned communication, strengthened their bodies and developed their minds: "They learn to think critically while playing, sharing; they learn to aspire to the things they play with like professions: Police, Nurses, Teachers" (Rural Parent Focus Group, KwaZulu Natal, October 2022). Some children still played 'mudslides'; however, frequent use of technology has resulted in many children no longer playing outside. Focus group participants noted that even when given paper and crayons, children would choose to watch children's programmes on TV instead, and then mimic what they were watching.

In terms of fostering communication, singing at bath-time was mentioned during focus groups as a common practice to teach children concepts and vocabulary—including the naming of body parts, counting, and remembering phone numbers. During pretend play, children also used their voices when playing with toys and games. Young children played with toys that make sounds, which developed their listening skills. Speaking to and with children was not often mentioned by focus group participants during sessions, but parents did acknowledge that it was important to speak to children when the topic was brought up.

*"You must speak with the child, a lot of us Black people don't. It's important to speak to the child like 'you will burn' even from nine months. I know that I must speak and communicate with the child even when they are still in the stomach (womb). I would make up a story and when say it the next day they will see that yesterday I didn't say the same, so the children learn a lot when you speak to them"*  
**(Urban Community Leader Focus Group, Eastern Cape, October 2022).**

It was reported that children gained their knowledge and understanding of the world through electronic devices to a large degree—parents reported increasingly using TVs and phones to occupy their children, but some viewed this activity as a learning avenue and not just a means

of keeping children quiet and out of the way. In both urban and rural areas, traditional games were reported to be being replaced by bought toys and technology. In rural areas, it was reported that children played on phones and watched TV a lot, and there was a perception among parents that apps and devices could teach colours, sounds, pressing buttons and imitation, “and children learn language by watching TV which helps them to learn English” (Rural Community Leader Focus Group, Western Cape, October 2022).

The focus group participants mentioned that children learned about numbers through songs and memorising their telephone numbers, which supports emergent mathematics. In addition, there was reference to “rough play”, in which children learn skills such as building, organising, sharing, counting, collaborating and coordinating. “They can learn skills such as building, organising, sharing and counting” (Rural Parent Focus Group, Limpopo, November 2022). Children learned to take care of their belongings when playing, through which they also learned to sort and classify.

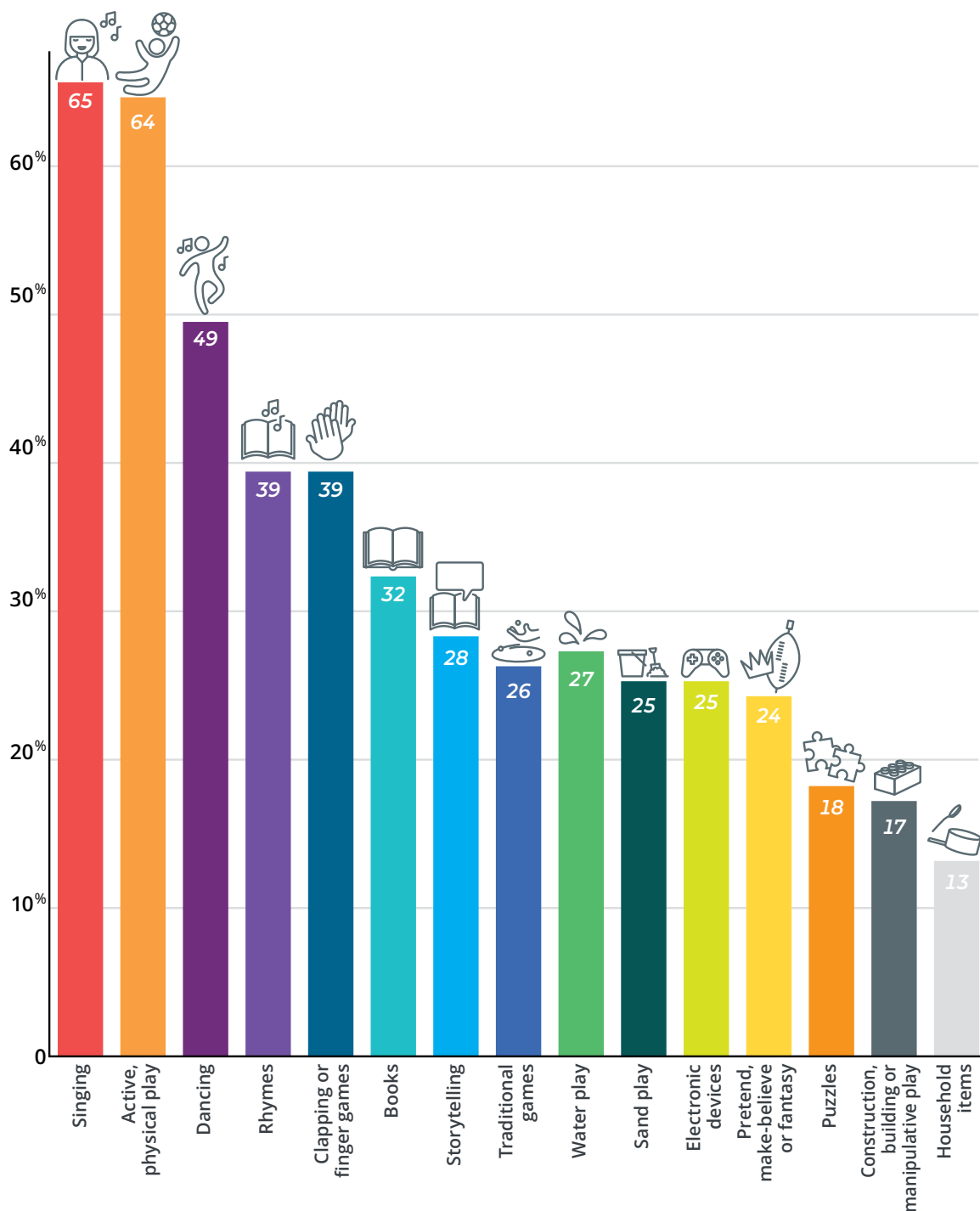
Traditional games still played in some communities included hide and seek, stone games, skipping, playing with dolls, house/fantasy games, playing with mud after rain, singing songs, reciting rhymes, three tins, traditional dance, ball games and hopscotch. In these communities, boys still made wire cars and girls made their own dolls. Parents and service providers felt that traditional games could be used as ways of teaching and could help parents to interact with their children: “In my childhood, I liked traditional song and dance, mine likes to sing” (Rural Parent Focus Group, North West Province, October 2022). Traditional games also included playing with balls made of plastic bread wrappers, donkey cart, mud play, hide and seek, hopscotch, drumming with boxes, traditional dance, drawing on the road, hand games, singing, storytelling, fantasy games, Ingabisa, baca, ishulwane, puca (stones and numbers), ‘poppiehuis’, making animals from clay or playdough, soccer qandas, Tottie, and Skalooloo. Younger children were observed to sometimes copy traditional games played by older siblings, such as skipping, tins, stones, hand games, singing, and playing with dolls. While traditional games were still played in some homes and in ECD centres, focus group participants noted a drop in traditional songs and dancing since COVID-19. They felt that children developed and learnt through these games. Parents admitted that they did not fully understand the learning value of these games, even though they noticed that they did have a learning value.

If children were attending an early childhood programme, they were involved in activities that included football, hula-hoops, puzzles, running, hide and seek, cars, dolls, playing with sand and water, hand clapping, singing and watching TV.

### **What play activities young children are involved in within households**

The graph below shows a breakdown of activities that household members engaged in with children aged from birth to six years old. Responses reported what happened in the week prior to the survey being completed and are shown in descending order based on how frequently households engaged in each activity in the preceding week.

**Figure 9. Activities of children from birth to six years old**



As the above graph shows, young children in over two-thirds of households were engaged in singing and active physical play (65% and 64% respectively), with just under half of households engaging in dancing activities (49%). Rhymes and finger games/clapping formed part of the activities in 39 per cent of households nationwide, while books were part of young children's activities in less than a third of households (32%). Only around a quarter of households did storytelling, played traditional games, engaged in water or sand play, gave young children access to games on electronic devices (phones, tablets, gaming consoles etc., but not TV), or

played make-believe games. Fewer than a fifth of households did any puzzles or construction/building activities or played with household items.

As indicated in Table 7 below, which shows the significant differences in the types of play amongst different parental cohorts, different cohorts of parents played differently with their young children. Differences in the types of play were mostly found based on the parent's level of education and employment status.

**Table 7.** *Significant differences in practices based on parent employment status and education levels*

| Type of play                                  | NA  | Significant differences in different parent groups                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
|-----------------------------------------------|-----|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Singing (N=336)                               | 65% | <b>Employment: Significantly higher if formal employment: 80%</b><br>(Informal employment: 73   Social grants only: 51%)                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| Active, physical play (N=788)                 | 64% | <b>Age of caretaker: More under 25s: 75%.</b> Fewest over 40s: 61%<br><b>Employment: Significantly more if formal employment: 70%</b><br>(Informal employment: 69%   Social grants only: 58%)                                                                                                                                          |
| Dancing (N=349)                               | 49% | <b>Employment: Significantly higher with formal employment 65%</b><br>(Informal employment: 45%   Social grants only: 43%)                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| Rhymes (N=748)                                | 39% | <b>Employment: Significantly higher with formal employment: 49%</b><br>(Informal employment: 44%   Social grants only: 32%)<br><b>Education of parent: Very low with no schooling: 11%</b><br>(Below average if some or all primary school: 30%   Average if some high school   Completing high school: 45%   Tertiary education: 49%) |
| Clapping/finger games (N=801)                 | 39% | <b>Employment: Far higher if formal or informal employment: 44% &amp; 45%</b><br>(Social grants: 34%)<br><b>Education of parent: Lower if no schooling: 19%</b><br>(If parents started primary school: 27%   Higher if parents attended high school or beyond)                                                                         |
| Books (N=748)                                 | 32% | <b>Employment: Significantly higher if formal employment: 48%</b><br>(Informal employment: 28%   lower if social grants only: 26%)<br><b>Education of parent: Only 15% if parent had no schooling</b><br>(Some or all primary school: 16-21%   Some or all high school: 35% & 33%   Tertiary education: 46%)                           |
| Story telling (N=349)                         | 28% | <b>Employment: Significantly higher if formal employment: 40%</b><br>(Informal employment: 16%   Social grants only: 28%)                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| Traditional games (N=788)                     | 26% | No significant differences based on employment or education                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| Water play (playing with or in water) (N=801) | 27% | <b>Education: Far lower if no schooling: 8%</b><br>(Some schooling: 22%–30%   Lower with tertiary education: 18%)                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| Sand play (playing with or in sand) (N=801)   | 25% | <b>Education: Far lower if no schooling or started primary school: 8% &amp; 18%</b><br>(Some schooling: 25%–31% : Tertiary education: 14%)                                                                                                                                                                                             |

| Type of play                                                                                                     | NA  | Significant differences in different parent groups                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Electronic devices (phones, tablets, gaming consoles) (N=801)                                                    | 25% | <b>Employment: Significantly higher if formal employment: 38%</b><br>(Informal employment: 28%   Social grants only: 17%)<br><br><b>Education: None if no schooling</b><br>(Some or all primary school: 11% & 12%   Some or all high school: 27% & 28%   Highest if tertiary education: 39%) |
| Pretend/ make-believe/ fantasy games (N=801)                                                                     | 24% | <b>Employment: Significantly higher if formal employment: 31%</b><br>(Informal employment: 27%   Social grants only: 19%)<br><br><b>Education: Lower if no schooling: 6%</b><br>(Started or completed primary school: 16%   High school and tertiary education: 23%–30%)                     |
| Puzzles (N=801)                                                                                                  | 18% | <b>Education: Very low if no schooling: 2%</b><br>(Some or all primary education: 10% & 8%   High school or tertiary education: 17%–23%)                                                                                                                                                     |
| Construction/building/ manipulative play (blocks, stones, sticks, pillows, toys that fit together, etc.) (N=801) | 17% | <b>Age of caretaker: Significantly higher if older parents (&gt; 40s): 21%</b><br>(Under 25s: 11%)<br><br><b>Employment: Significantly higher if formal employment: 24%</b><br>(Informal employment and social grants only: 15%)                                                             |
| Household items (pots, pans, spoons, etc.) (N=801)                                                               | 13% | <b>Employment: Significantly higher if formal employment: 19%</b><br>(Informal employment: 12%   Social grants only: 10%)<br><br><b>Education: None if no schooling</b><br>(Some or all primary school: 6% & 4%   Above average if some or all high school, tertiary education: 14–17%)      |

As seen in the table above, parents with schooling and employed parents indulged in divergent and process-orientated play more often than parents who had no schooling or were unemployed, which correlates with Saracho and Spodek's (2003) finding that educated parents view play as divergent and process-orientated, whereas parents with lower levels of education view play as convergent and content-based. Thus, parents' education levels may determine the type of play in which they participate with their children.

The survey and qualitative enquiry results show that too many young children did not have access to stories, books, or sound and word games, nor were they recording their experiences through drawing, language and sound games (communication), and creative arts. Emergent mathematical activities were also not being practised with children because of the belief that mathematics is a formal activity which needs to be taught at Early Childhood Development (ECD) centres only; this meant children missed out on gaining pre-mathematical skills from sorting, matching, classifying, and exploring space and patterns. Additionally, children were not often given the opportunity to problem-solve and become resilient. Children had limited exposure to visual art activities, and thus did not gain enough opportunity to develop sensory motor skills and fine motor coordination. This is particularly concerning because visual arts for young children are precursors to writing (communication).

## **Where do children play?**

Children were mostly kept indoors for their safety. Indoor play with adults involved using ideas learnt from TV, the community or parents' own childhood, although parents may not have always considered how to ensure a safe and nurturing environment. Children were often kept entertained inside on electronic devices instead of playing outside, due to the scarcity of safe outdoor play spaces. In rural areas, where safe areas for young children to play were available, they reportedly preferred playing outside with soil and water rather than playing inside. Participants responded that as children became more physically able, they wanted to play outdoors more. It was reported that children with special needs generally didn't play outside in public.

In some urban areas, churches can be a safe space to play and there is a rural town in the Northern Cape in which an attempt is being made to keep the school grounds open, with adult volunteers monitoring, for children to play during out of school hours. In some urban areas, backyard coaches reportedly coach some children in sports games. One of the least safe "play" areas is when children play in dustbins and follow refuse collectors.

In some areas there was a common practice of children starting at an early childhood programme at a young age, often before they were potty trained, and parents assumed that they learned a lot there. It was believed that children also learned at Sunday School, and they were sent there for their instruction. Some participants shared that working parents had limited time to play with their children because of work, so play happened at these early childhood programmes, or with grandparents or babysitters.

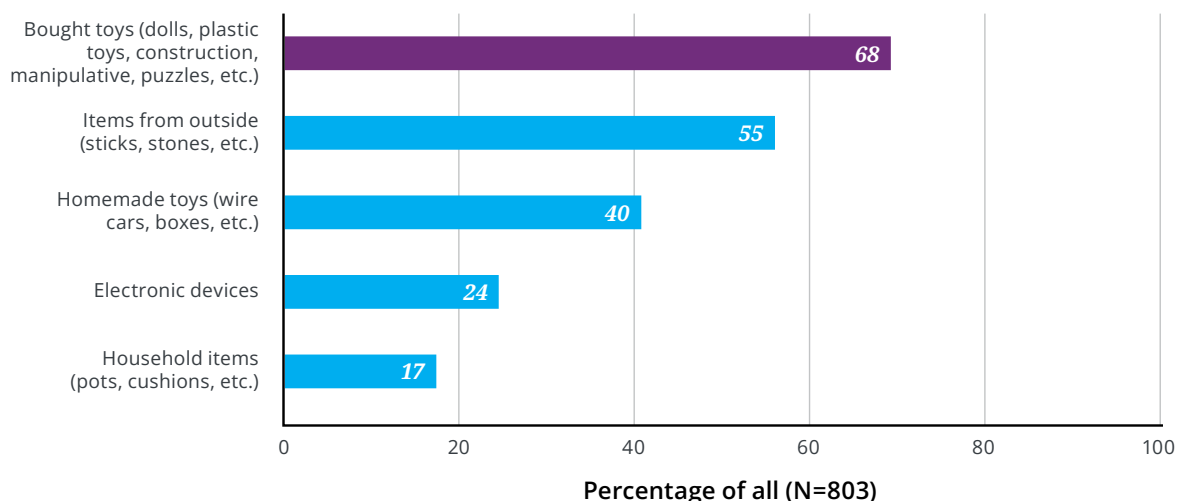
## **How often are parents and young children playing together?**

In the survey, 7 per cent of respondents noted that neither they nor any household member played with the child at all; 35 per cent indicated someone had played only once or twice; and just over half (59%) reported that a young child had been played with "many times" in the past week. The only stand-out significant differences amongst provinces were in the North West, where a staggering 21 per cent of respondents reported that they "never" played with their children, while a significant 79 per cent of parents in the Western Cape said they did so many times (more than three times in a week)—which was much higher than the national average of 59 per cent. In Gauteng and the Northern Cape, only 37 per cent and 35 per cent respectively reported playing with young children many times in a week—significantly lower than the national average of 59 per cent.

## **What materials are available for young children to play with?**

A common attitude among parents was that expensive stationery and materials were needed for children to learn. The survey findings show that young children in South Africa had reasonable access to materials at the time of the survey, as shown below; this attitude was corroborated by the findings, as it is evident that bought toys were preferred (used by 68% of households) over found or homemade objects.

**Figure 10. Materials available to the child**



Only just over half of households used items from outside, and only 17 per cent allowed their children to play with household items. This may be explained by the fact that in some poor or resource-scarce households, there were fewer such items available for children to play with. Although quantitative reports cite technology as widely used, it was evident that this mostly refers to TV, as only 24 per cent of households reported giving children electronic devices to play with.

The following significant differences in terms of material use were found amongst different groups of parents:

- Bought toys were more commonly used in urban areas, and use varied depending on parent employment and education levels, as well as between provinces.
- Use of items from outside differed between provinces and according to the employment status of the parent(s).
- Homemade toys were more prevalent in rural areas, and use was also affected by parent education level and by province.
- Electronic devices were more commonly used in urban areas, and use varied depending on parent employment and education levels, as well as by province.
- Playing with household items differed according to parent employment and education levels (higher income could mean that there were more household items available), and differed between provinces.

**Table 8.** *Access to materials by province*

| Material                                                                     | EC<br>(N=113) | FS<br>(N=71) | GP<br>(N=224) | KZN | LP<br>(N=174) | MP<br>(N=75) | NW<br>(N=45) | NC<br>(N=37) | NC<br>(N=37) |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------|--------------|---------------|-----|---------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| Bought toys (dolls, plastic toys, construction, manipulative, puzzles, etc.) | 97%           | 52%          | 76%           | ND  | 31%           | 77%          | 82%          | 68%          | 81%          |
| Items from outside (sticks, stones, etc.)                                    | 50%           | 90%          | 44%           | ND  | 68%           | 45%          | 18%          | 76%          | 50%          |
| Homemade toys (wire cars, boxes, etc.)                                       | 40%           | 85%          | 25%           | ND  | 33%           | 48%          | 36%          | 60%          | 42%          |
| Electronic devices                                                           | 46%           | 14%          | 28%           | ND  | 2%            | 20%          | 0%           | 54%          | 41%          |
| Household items (pots, cushions, etc.)                                       | 22%           | 13%          | 26%           | ND  | 3%            | 8%           | 2%           | 32%          | 30%          |

### Access to children's or picture books

The survey revealed some very concerning realities with regard to practices and materials that can stimulate and foster communication in young children: 43 per cent of households had no picture or children's book in the home, and only 16 per cent had more than five. As shown in the table below, the fewest of these books (fewer than five) were in the provinces of Limpopo, the North West, Gauteng and the Free State, and the most were in the Western Cape (19%), Eastern Cape (21%) and KwaZulu-Natal (27%).

**Table 9.** *Number of books in homes per province*

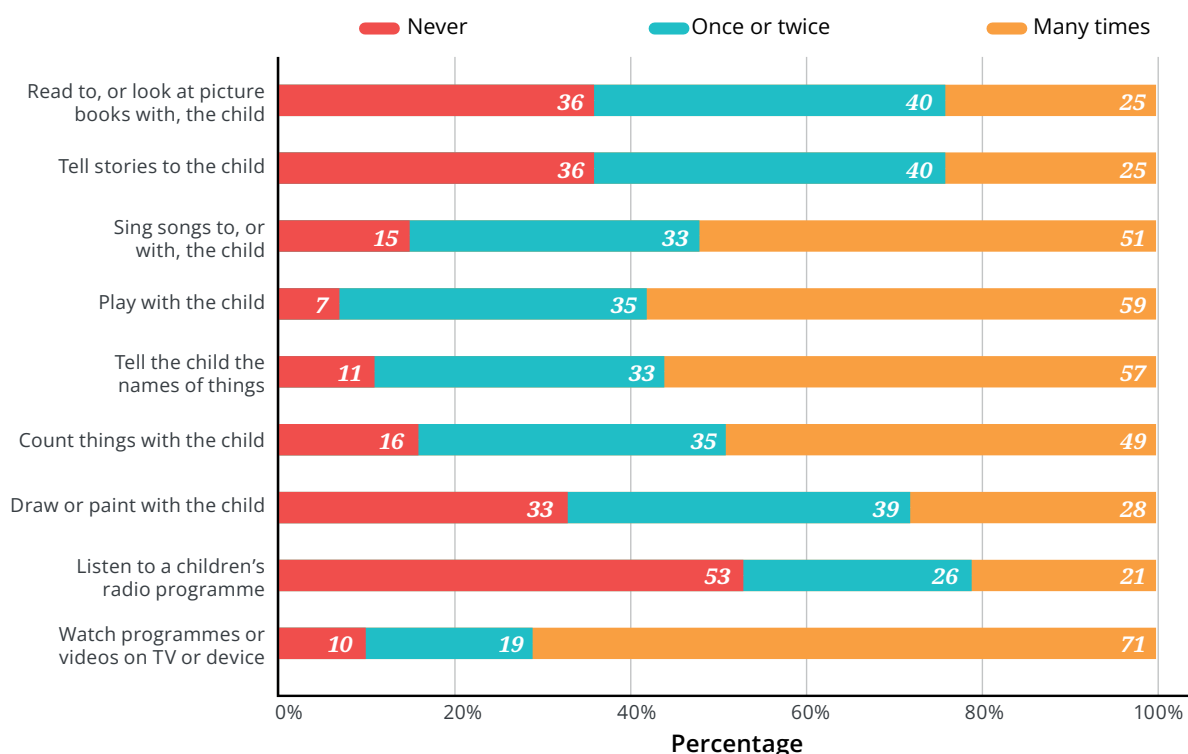
| Number of books | EC<br>(N=113) | FS<br>(N=71) | GP<br>(N=223) | KZN<br>(N=187) | LP<br>(N=175) | MP<br>(N=76) | NW<br>(N=95) | NC<br>(N=37) | NC<br>(N=110) |
|-----------------|---------------|--------------|---------------|----------------|---------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|---------------|
| 0 books         | 20%           | 51%          | 53%           | 44%            | 55%           | 33%          | 56%          | 24%          | 17%           |
| 1-5 books       | 58%           | 45%          | 27%           | 28%            | 42%           | 55%          | 36%          | 70%          | 64%           |
| >5 books        | 21%           | 4%           | 20%           | 27%            | 3%            | 12%          | 8%           | 5%           | 19%           |

There was also reportedly insufficient support for fathers, and not enough support for parents of children with disabilities.

### How often do parents play with young children?

The figures that follow show the survey responses in terms of the frequency of play practices that take place in a household within a week.

**Figure 11. Frequency of play practices occurring between parents and children: national averages**



The reading of books and telling of stories was concerningly low as a frequent practice, whereas the use of media to entertain children was concerningly high.

### Counting things

Survey respondents indicated that, in the past week, they or a member of their household had counted things with the child as follows:

- **16%** never
- **35%** once or twice in the week
- **49%** many times (55% of those with children aged three to six years old counted things many times, i.e. more than three times a week)

**Figure 12.** *Counting as an activity: national, rural, urban and per province*

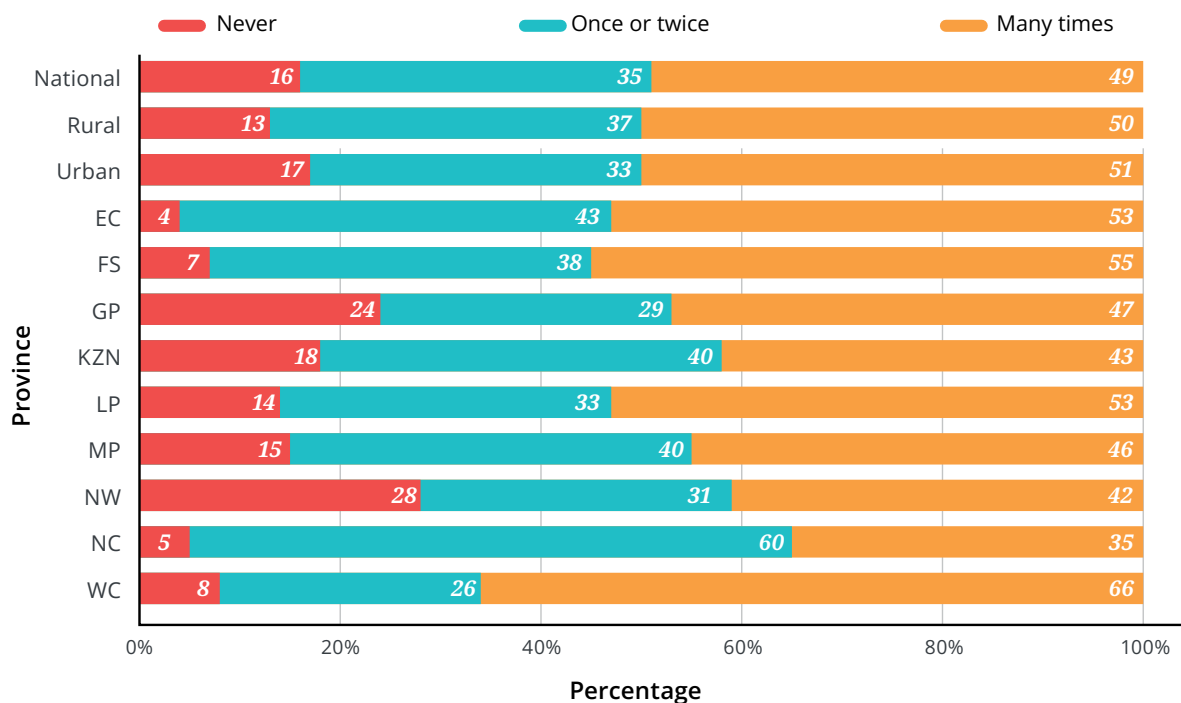
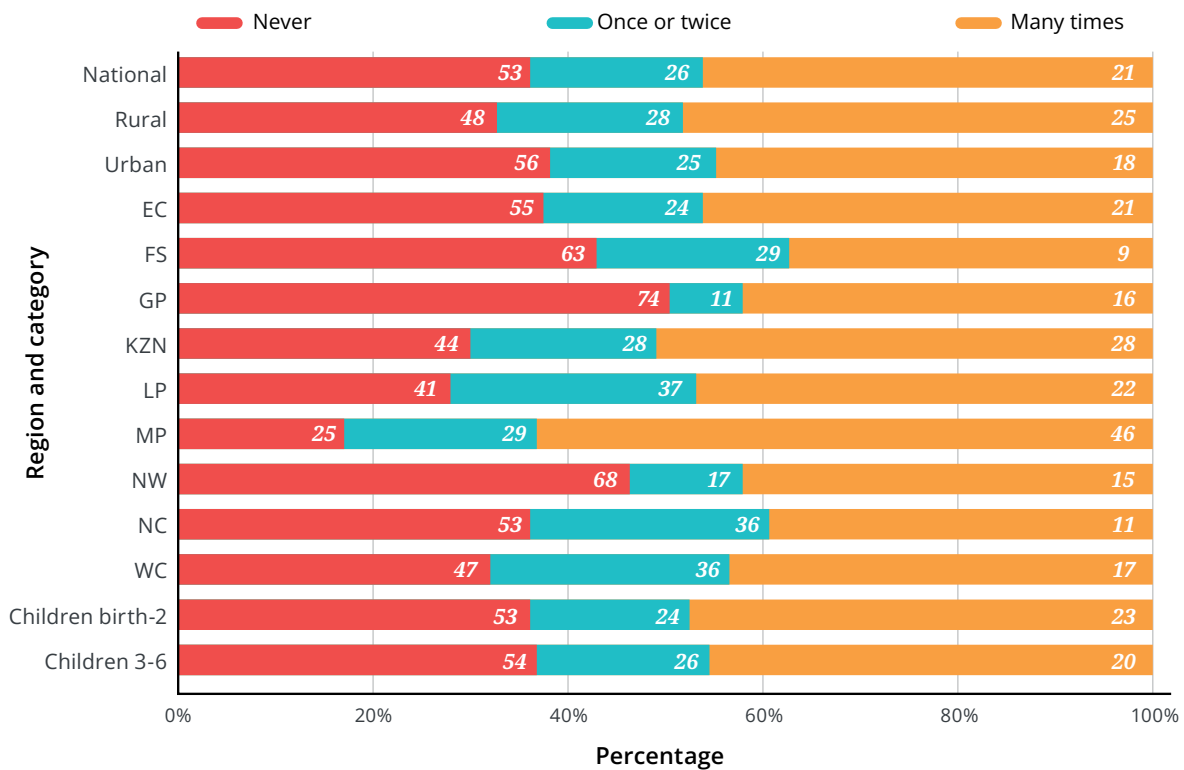


**Figure 13.** *Percentage of households where young children listened to children's radio*



## Children's radio

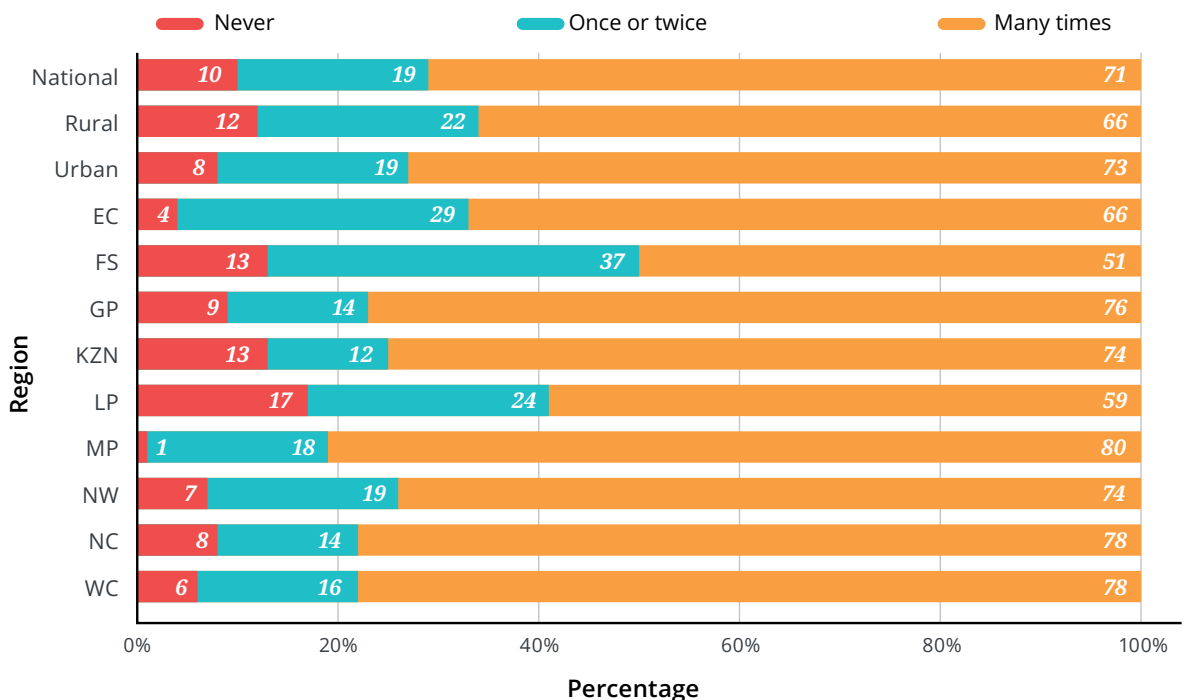
As the graph above shows, a higher percentage of children in rural areas had listened to children's radio many times in the previous week than in urban areas. The survey did not ask what programmes were being listened to, so this information is unknown. Additionally, it was found that older children (aged three to six years) listened less, with 54 per cent never listening to a radio programme at all. There were significant provincial differences, with a higher percentage of children in Limpopo, Mpumalanga and KwaZulu-Natal listening to the radio many times, and a significantly lower percentage listening many times in the Northern Cape and Free State.

## Use of technology

Children were found to be exposed to the world of connectivity through television and electronic devices. Television was reportedly used as the parent's go-to to keep children busy. A downside to children spending time on TV and with internet-connected electronic devices was that they were potentially exposed to inappropriate sexual and violent content, especially if their technology use was not regulated by their parents.

Children were reportedly using only electronic devices and not engaging in other forms of technology such as woodwork, box construction, and so forth. It was felt that children's natural curiosity and imagination were likely being stifled by the amount of television they watched. Research participants noted that if children did not have opportunities to explore and investigate their world – nature, life science, history etc. – then they did not gain access to the tools and techniques to operate and make things, nor tools that would help them to explore and investigate time and space (knowledge and understanding of the world).

**Figure 14. Time spent watching programmes/videos**



It is very worrying that 71 per cent of young children watch TV or other programmes/videos many times a week. As the graph above shows, a higher percentage of children in urban areas (73%) watch programmes or videos more often than in rural areas, and older children watch more frequently than younger children. The drawbacks of this practice were discussed a lot during FGDs, and parents noted that it limited the amount of time for reading and outside play. Watching TV or playing with gadgets, phones or PlayStations has also reportedly eroded interest in traditional games, although some children do still have 'Waentjies' (little carriages) and "wire cars", which they push around. An unintended but positive outcome of load shedding that was reported was that it supposedly reduced the ability for families to use technology and electronic devices, meaning that they spend more time on play activities. However, concerns about overly high usage remain.

Differences in parent cohorts in terms of how often they play with their young children: Table 10 summarises the significant differences between different groups of parents with regards to how often they engaged in play practices with their young children.



**Table 10. Significant differences in frequency of play practices between parents and young children**

| Frequency of play practice                   | Significant differences in different groups                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
|----------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Read books together or look at picture books | <p><b>Province: Yes</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• NW very little (58% never, only 17% many times)</li> <li>• FS (51% never, 9% many times)</li> <li>• WC most (17% never; 35% many times)</li> <li>• KZN (25% many times)</li> <li>• Age of child: Yes (42% never)</li> <li>• Employment: Yes</li> <li>• Education: Yes</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| Tell stories                                 | <p><b>Province: Yes</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• NW 60% never, only 14% many times; only 6% many times</li> <li>• FS (almost half between never and once or twice)</li> <li>• WC highest 44% many times and 43% once or twice, only 14% never Gauteng 52% never</li> <li>• Age of child: Yes, 0–2 (42% Never vs NA of 26% Never) Employment: Yes</li> <li>• Education: Yes</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                |
| Sing songs, including lullabies              | <p><b>Province: Yes</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• FS highest never 42% and only 25% many times</li> <li>• WC highest 73% many times with only 7% never</li> <li>• Rest of provinces between 41 and 58% many times</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| Tell the child the names of things           | <p><b>Province: Yes</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• WC highest 80% many times and only 6% never</li> <li>• NC lowest many times at 38%</li> <li>• KZN 43%</li> <li>• Urban vs Rural: Yes, urban has higher “many times”</li> <li>• Age of child: Yes, 3–6 has higher percentage of “many times” (60%)</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| Draw or paint with the child                 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>33%</b> never; <b>39%</b> once or twice; <b>28%</b> many times</li> </ul> <p><b>Province: Yes</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Highest never FS (52% never and only 6% many times)</li> <li>• NW low (45% never)</li> <li>• Mpumalanga highest many times at 38%</li> <li>• GP (25% and KZN 33%)</li> <li>• Urban vs Rural: Yes, rural has higher “once or twice” and many times; least never was rural (27%)</li> <li>• 0–2 had highest “never” (46%)</li> <li>• Employment: Yes</li> </ul> |

#### 4.1.4. Provincial differences in parent KAPs regarding play-based learning

Table 11 below shows each of the play practice types investigated in the survey, and all the significant differences in terms of play materials and parents' KAPs. The table shows the percentages for each province where significant differences were found, against the national average (NA) for each item.

**Table 11.** *Provincial differences in parent KAPs regarding play-based learning*

| Region      | Significant differences in materials                                                                                                                                                                                       | Significant differences in knowledge                             | Significant differences in attitudes                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | Significant differences in practices                                                |
|-------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1. National | <p>No significant differences between provinces with regards to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Bought toys in Northern Cape and NA (68%).</li> <li>Homemade toys in the Eastern Cape and NA (40%).</li> </ul> | <p>All items have significant differences between provinces.</p> | <p>No significant differences between provinces with regards to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>SI02:</b> Play can help the child develop social skills such as cooperating and making friends - NA 96% agree.</li> <li><b>SI03:</b> Play can improve the child's language and communication - NA 97% agree.</li> <li><b>SI05:</b> Playing together helps me build a good relationship/bond with the child - NA 97% agree.</li> <li><b>SI07:</b> It is only the women's role to play with young children - NA 89% disagree</li> <li><b>SI09:</b> It is important for me to play with the child - NA 92% agree</li> <li><b>SI11:</b> Adults should not play with children - NA 89% disagree</li> <li><b>SI12:</b> Children learn when you play traditional/cultural games with them - NA 88% agree</li> <li><b>SI13:</b> I have a lot of fun with the child when we play together - NA 96% agree</li> <li><b>SI15:</b> I look forward to playing with the child. NA 89% agree</li> <li><b>SI16:</b> I let the child decide what we play with and/or how we play NA 78% agree</li> <li><b>SI17:</b> I don't really enjoy playing with the child because he/she is too young NA 86% disagree</li> </ul> | <p>All items have significant differences between provinces, as outlined below.</p> |

| Region          | Significant differences in materials                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | Significant differences in knowledge                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | Significant differences in attitudes                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | Significant differences in practices                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
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| 2. Eastern Cape | <p><b>Significantly higher than national average</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Bought toys: 97% vs. 68% NA.</li> <li>Electronic devices: 46% vs. 24% NA.</li> <li>Household objects used as play materials: 22% vs. 17% NA.</li> </ul> <p><b>Significantly lower than national average</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Outside objects used as play material: 50% vs. 55% NA.</li> </ul>                                         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Only co-playing with other children brought value to young children: 82% of parents in EC did not feel that children learn more when playing with other children (vs. 53% NA).</li> <li>Learning value in free play: belief no value in solo free play (26% in the Eastern Cape vs. 18% nationally).</li> </ul> | <p><b>Significantly higher than national average have a favourable response</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>S101:</b> 95% agree that you can play with the child by including him/her in household tasks vs. 82% NA.</li> <li><b>S104:</b> 65% do not think that it is more important to teach/instruct the child than to play with him/her vs. 42% NA.</li> <li><b>S106:</b> 94% agree that playing with the child is more useful than teaching him/her vs. 60% NA.</li> <li><b>S114:</b> 76% of caregivers are not too busy to play with the child when the child initiated play vs. 68% NA.</li> </ul> <p><b>Significantly lower than national average have a favourable response</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>S104:</b> 27% do not think that it is more important to teach/instruct the child than to play with him/her vs. 42% NA.</li> </ul> | <p><b>Significantly lower than national average have a favourable response</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Storytelling: 12% EC reported never telling stories to their child vs. 36% NA.</li> <li>Singing: 5% of parents in the EC reported never singing songs to or with their child vs. 15% NA.</li> <li>Playing with child: 2% of parents in EC reported never playing with their child vs. 7% NA.</li> <li>Naming things: parents in the EC reported never telling the child the names of things (6% vs. 11% NA).</li> <li>Counting things: 4% of parents in the EC reported never count things with the child vs. 16% NA.</li> <li>Radio: parents in the EC (55%) reported that the child had never listened to a children's radio programme vs. 53% NA.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| 3. Free State   | <p><b>Significantly higher than national average</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Outside objects used as play material: 90% vs. 55% NA.</li> <li>Homemade toys: 85% vs. 40% NA.</li> </ul> <p><b>Significantly lower than national average</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Bought toys: 52% vs. 68% NA.</li> <li>Electronic devices: 14% vs. 24% NA.</li> <li>Household objects used as play materials: 13% vs. 17% NA.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Learning value in free play: Belief in no learning benefits in solo-free-play (26% NA to 18% FS)</li> <li>Only co-playing with other children brought value to young children: (44% NA to 25% FS).</li> </ul>                                                                                                   | <p><b>Significantly higher than national average favourable response</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>S104:</b> 61% do not think that it is more important to teach/instruct the child than to play with him/her vs. 42% NA.</li> </ul> <p><b>Significantly lower than national average have a favourable response</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>S114:</b> 52% of caregivers are not too busy to play with the child when the child initiated play vs. 68% NA.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | <p><b>Significantly higher than national average</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reading books/picture books: 51% of parents in the FS reported never reading books or looking at picture books with their child vs. 36% NA.</li> <li>Storytelling: 48% of parents in FS reported never telling stories to their child vs. 36% NA.</li> <li>Singing: 42% of parents in the FS reported never singing songs vs. 15% NA.</li> <li>Radio: FS (63%) reported that the child had never listened to a children's radio programme vs. 53% NA.</li> </ul> <p><b>Significantly lower than national average</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Playing with child: 0% of parents in FS reported never playing with their child, vs. 7% NA.</li> <li>Naming things: parents in the FS reported never telling the child the names of things (6% vs. 11% NA).</li> <li>Counting things: 7% of parents in the Free State reported never counting things with the child vs. 16% NA.</li> </ul> |

| Region           | Significant differences in materials                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              | Significant differences in knowledge                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              | Significant differences in attitudes                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | Significant differences in practices                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
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| 4. Gauteng       | <p><b>Significantly higher than national average</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Bought toys: 76% vs. 68% NA.</li> <li>Electronic devices: 28% vs. 24% NA.</li> <li>Household items being used as play materials: 26% vs. 17% NA.</li> </ul> <p><b>Significantly lower than national average</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Outside objects being used as toys: 44% vs. 55% NA.</li> <li>Homemade toys: 25% vs. 40% NA.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Learning value in free play: 23% respondents did not know this compared to 27% NA.</li> <li>Only co-playing with other children brought value to young children: less (23%) than 44% NA.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                        | <p><b>Significantly lower than national average have a favourable response</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>S104:</b> 37% do not think that it is more important to teach/instruct the child than to play with him/her vs. 42% NA.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                           | <p><b>Significantly higher than national average</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Telling stories to children: more who have never in Gauteng compared to NA: (52% GP vs. 36% NA).</li> <li>Naming things for child: More (16%) responded "never" vs. 11% NA.</li> <li>Drew or painted things with child: more (40%) responded "never" vs. 33% NA.</li> <li>Listening to children's radio: More (74%) responded "never" vs. 53% NA.</li> </ul> <p><b>Significantly lower than national average</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Fewer parents in Gauteng (11%) never sing to their children vs. NA 15%</li> <li>Fewer parents in Gauteng (5%) never play with their children vs. NA 7%</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| 5. KwaZulu-Natal | Data unavailable                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>More than half the respondents in KZN agreed with the learning value of free play (60%), however this is less than the 66% NA.</li> <li>Learning value in free play: 33% of respondents in KZN thought that free play did not have learning value vs. 27% NA.</li> <li>Only co-playing with other children brought value to young children: 43% KZN vs. 44% NA.</li> </ul> | <p><b>Significantly lower than national average have a favourable response</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>S104:</b> 26% do not think that it is more important to teach/instruct the child than to play with him/her vs. 42% NA.</li> <li><b>S114:</b> 48% of caregivers are not too busy to play with the child when the child initiated play vs. 68% NA.</li> </ul> | <p><b>Significantly higher than national average</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Singing: 21% of parents in KZN reported never singing songs to or with their child vs. 15% NA.</li> <li>Playing with child: 12% of parents in KZN reported never playing with their child vs. 7% NA.</li> <li>Naming things: 13% FS vs. 11% NA.</li> <li>Counting things: 18% of parents in KZN reported never counting things with the child vs. 16% NA.</li> </ul> <p><b>Significantly lower than national average</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reading books/picture books: 32% KZN reported never reading books or looking at picture books with their child vs. 36% NA.</li> <li>Radio: 44% KZN reported that the child had never listened to a children's radio programme vs. 53% NA.</li> <li>Watchable media: Parents that reported children who had never been exposed to watchable media 10% KZN vs. 13% NA.</li> </ul> |

| Region        | Significant differences in materials                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            | Significant differences in knowledge                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | Significant differences in attitudes                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | Significant differences in practices                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
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| 6. Limpopo    | <p><b>Significantly higher than national average</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Outside objects used as playmaterial: 68% vs. 55% NA.</li> </ul> <p><b>Significantly lower than national average</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Bought toys: 31% vs. 68% NA.</li> <li>Homemade toys: 33% vs. 40% NA.</li> <li>Electronic devices: 2% vs. 24% NA.</li> <li>Household objects used as play materials: 3% vs. 17% NA.</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Learning value in free play: 14% saw no learning value in free-solo-play compared to the 26% NA.</li> <li>Only co-playing with other children brought value to young children: 52% believed that children only benefited from co-playing vs. 44% NA.</li> </ul>                 | <p><b>Significantly higher than national average have a favourable response</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>S104:</b> 61% do not think that it is more important to teach/instruct the child than to play with him/her vs. 42% NA.</li> <li><b>S114:</b> 83% of caregivers are not too busy to play with the child when the child initiated play vs. 68% NA.</li> <li><b>S118:</b> 86% of caregivers think that the child learns when s/he plays freely on their own vs. 66% NA.</li> </ul> <p><b>Significantly lower than national average have a favourable response</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>S101:</b> 69% agree that you can play with the child by including him/her in household tasks vs. 82% NA.</li> </ul> | <p><b>Significantly higher than national average</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Singing to child: 22% LP responded “never” to the question of singing to child vs. 15% NA.</li> <li>Drawing/painting with child: 37% LP responded “never” to the question of painting or drawing with the child vs. 33% NA.</li> <li>Watchable media: LP (17%) responded “never” to the question of children consuming watchable media compared to 10% NA.</li> </ul> <p><b>Significantly lower than national average</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Telling stories to children: 33% LP responded “never” to reading stories to child vs. 36% NA.</li> <li>Radio: 41% LP responded “never” to the child listening to children’s radio vs. 53% NA.</li> </ul> |
| 7. Mpumalanga | <p><b>Significantly higher than national average</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Bought toys: 77% vs. 68% NA.</li> <li>Homemade toys: 48% vs. 40% NA.</li> </ul> <p><b>Significantly lower than national average</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Outside objects used as play-material: 45% vs. 55% NA.</li> <li>Electronic devices: 20% vs. 24% NA.</li> <li>Household objects used as play materials: 8% vs. 17% NA.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Learning value in free play: MP (49%) thought that there was no learning value in solo-free-play vs. 26% NA.</li> <li>Only co-playing with other children brought value to young children: MP (66%) thought that only play with other children was beneficial vs. 44</li> </ul> | <p><b>Significantly higher than national average have a favourable response</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>S114:</b> 80% of caregivers are not too busy to play with the child when the child initiated play vs. 68% NA.</li> </ul> <p><b>Significantly lower than national average have a favourable response</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>S106:</b> Only 47% agree that playing with the child is more useful than teaching him/her vs. 60% NA.</li> <li><b>S118:</b> Only 42% of caregivers think that the child learns when s/he plays freely on their own vs. 66% NA.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                  | <p><b>Significantly lower than national average</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Storytelling: (22%) MP reported “never” telling stories vs. 36% NA.</li> <li>Singing: (3%) MP responded “never” to the question of singing to the child vs. 15% NA.</li> <li>Playing with child: 1% MP responded “never” to the question of playing with young child vs. 7% NA.</li> <li>Naming things: 5% MP responded “never” to naming things for child vs. 11% NA.</li> <li>Radio: MP (25%) responded “never” to child listening to children’s radio vs. 53% NA.</li> <li>Watchable media: 1% MP responded “never” to a child consuming watchable media vs. 10% NA.</li> </ul>                                                                                             |

| Region           | Significant differences in materials                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | Significant differences in knowledge                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          | Significant differences in attitudes                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | Significant differences in practices                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
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| 8. North West    | <p><b>Significantly higher than national average</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Bought toys: 82% vs. 68% NA.</li> </ul> <p><b>Significantly lower than national average</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Outside objects used as play-material: 18% vs. 55% NA.</li> <li>Homemade toys: 36% vs. 40% NA.</li> <li>Electronic devices: 0% vs. 24% NA.</li> <li>Household objects used as play materials: 2% vs. 17% NA.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Only co-playing with other children brought value to young children: NW (70%) thought that play-based learning only took place when children played together vs. 44% NA.</li> <li>Learning value in free play: NW (51%) did not believe in solo-free-play as a form of learning vs. 26% NA.</li> </ul> | <p><b>Significantly lower than national average have a favourable response</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>S101:</b> 68% agree that you can play with the child by including him/her in household tasks vs. 82% NA.</li> <li><b>S104:</b> 20% do not think that it is more important to teach/instruct the child than to play with him/her vs. 42% NA.</li> <li><b>S106:</b> Only 53% agree that playing with the child is more useful than teaching him/her vs. 60% NA</li> <li><b>S108:</b> 58% Think that boys and girls should be allowed to play the same games – NA 77% agree</li> <li><b>S114:</b> 61% of caregivers are not too busy to play with the child when the child initiated play vs. 68% NA.</li> <li><b>S118:</b> 44% of caregivers think that the child learns when s/he plays freely on their own vs. 66% NA.</li> </ul>      | <p><b>Significantly higher than national average</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Storytelling: respondents responding “never” to the question of telling stories: 60% NW vs. 36% NA.</li> <li>Singing: 21% NW responded “never” to the question of singing to child vs. 7% NA.</li> <li>Naming things: respondents responding “never” to the question of naming things for child 16% NW vs. 11% NA.</li> <li>Counting: respondents responding “never” to the question of counting things with child: 28% NW vs. 16% NA.</li> <li>Drawing and painting with child: those that responded never to drawing and painting with child 45% in the NW province vs. 33% NA.</li> <li>Radio: those responding “never” to the question of children listening to children’s radio: 68% NW vs. 53% NA.</li> </ul> <p><b>Significantly lower than national average</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Watchable media: those responding “never” to the question of children consuming watchable media: 7% NW vs. 10% NA.</li> </ul> |
| 9. Northern Cape | <p><b>Significantly higher than national average</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Outside objects used as playmaterial: 76% vs. 55% NA.</li> <li>Homemade toys: 60% vs. 40% NA.</li> <li>Electronic devices: 54% vs. 24% NA.</li> <li>Household objects used as play materials: 32% vs. 17% NA.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Learning value in free play: solo free play has no value: NC 35% vs. 26% NA.</li> <li>Only co-playing with other children brought value to young children: 51% NC vs. 44% NA.</li> </ul>                                                                                                               | <p><b>Significantly higher than national average have a favourable response</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>S101:</b> 97% agree that you can play with the child by including him/her in household tasks vs. 82% NA.</li> <li><b>S106:</b> 81% agree that playing with the child is more useful than teaching him/her vs. 60% NA.</li> </ul> <p><b>Significantly lower than national average have a favourable response</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>S104:</b> 24% do not think that it is more important to teach/instruct the child than to play with him/her vs. 42% NA.</li> <li><b>S108:</b> 57% Think that boys and girls should be allowed to play the same games – NA 77% agree</li> <li><b>S114:</b> 60% of caregivers are not too busy to play with the child when the child initiated play vs. 68% NA.</li> </ul> | <p><b>Significantly lower than national average</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Naming things: Those responding “never” to the question of telling the child the names of things: 5% NC vs. 11% NA</li> <li>Counting: those responding “never” to the question of counting things with child: 5% NC vs. 16% NA.</li> <li>Drawing and painting: those responding “never” to the question of drawing and painting with child: 22% NC vs. 33% NA.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |

| Region           | Significant differences in materials                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | Significant differences in knowledge                                                                                                                                                                                                         | Significant differences in attitudes                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | Significant differences in practices                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
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| 10. Western Cape | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Bought toys: 81% WC vs. 68% NA.</li> <li>Outside objects used as toys: 50% WC vs. 55% NA.</li> <li>Electronic devices: 41% WC vs. 24% NA.</li> <li>Household items used as toys: 30% WC vs. 17% NA.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Learning value in free play: thought solo free play no learning value: 17% WC vs. 26% NA.</li> <li>Only co-playing with other children brought value to young children: 29% WC vs. 44% NA.</li> </ul> | <p><b>Significantly higher than national average have a favourable response</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>S114</i>: 86% of caregivers are not too busy to play with the child when the child initiated play vs. 68% NA.</li> </ul> <p><b>Significantly lower than national average have a favourable response</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>S104</i>: 32% do not think that it is more important to teach/instruct the child than to play with him/her vs. 42% NA.</li> </ul> | <p><b>Significantly lower than national average</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Storytelling: parents responding “never” to the question of telling stories to the child: 14% WC vs. 36% NA.</li> <li>Singing: parents responding “never” to the question of singing to the child: 7% WC vs. 15% NA.</li> <li>Playing with child: parents responding “never” to the question of playing with the child: 0% WC vs. 7% NA.</li> <li>Naming things: Parents responding “never” to the question of naming things for the child: to 6% WC vs. 11% NA.</li> <li>Counting things: parents responding “never” to the question of counting with the child: 26% WC vs. 35% NA.</li> <li>Painting and drawing: parents responding “never” to the question of painting and drawing with the child: 30% WC vs. 33% NA.</li> <li>Radio: parents responding “never” to the question of the child listening to the children’s radio: 47% WC vs. 53% NA.</li> <li>Watchable media: parents responding “never” to the question of the child consuming watchable media: 6% WC vs. 10% NA.</li> </ul> |

## 4.2. SUMMARY ANALYSIS OF KAPs

### 4.2.1. Parents’ knowledge of play-based learning

Interviews and FGDs revealed that parents viewed their parenting responsibilities largely in relation to the child’s physical needs for health, adequate nutrition and protection, and self-care and socialisation skills. These included learning to feed and dress themselves, tidy up, manners, respect for others, and getting on with others. To support growth and development they explained that children need loving care, attention, encouragement, time to play, and knowledge about safety inside and outside the home. In the discussions, it was indicated that

younger parents display lower levels of knowledge about how to care for their own children, a finding which was mirrored in a recent local study.

There was an understanding that play helps children to bond with their parent/s – including in the first two years – and that a range of adults and other children should play with them. Examples were also given of playful interactions during care routines. Singing, drawing, and playing games were seen as avenues for learning. Respondents noted the role of culture and traditional games in teaching ‘identity and respect’. They reported drawing on their own childhood experiences to understand what and how children should play.

Understanding was low with regards to how positive parent-child relationships support children’s development in terms of forming a secure base for trust, communication, and stimulation, and the role of play-based learning was understood mostly in relation to its socialisation role. It was emphasised that children learn by copying what they observe in play.

With regards to language and maths development, most examples given were of structured learning rather than learning through play. There was more emphasis on counting and numbers than on problem-solving and developing the skills needed for learning to read. Attending crèche was seen by parents as the main avenue for learning. Parenting programme providers also reported that most parents perceive that children are learning when they attend an early childhood service, and there is also a perception that children learn when they are involved with technology – especially watching television (cartoons) and playing on telephone apps.

So, while play was acknowledged as an important part of childhood, the link between learning and play, as opposed to instruction, was not strongly understood, particularly in relation to mathematics and literacy. This aligns with patterns in the sub-Saharan African region (Biersteker and Marfo, 2011; Oppong and Strader, 2022). Furthermore, how play is understood is unclear. Two-thirds of parents agreed that children learn when playing on their own, with greater agreement in urban areas. This suggests a lack of adult/child play, and no examples were given of adults intentionally playing with children to scaffold particular skills, which was confirmed in interviews with ECD and parenting programme service providers. Traditional understandings that children play as a leisure activity on their own or with other children were still prevalent, but more so among rural and older parents.

The study’s findings regarding understandings of play echo the challenge for the promotion of play: that its importance is not widely understood, as identified in the NIECDP. It also shows that, as is common in many African contexts, play is largely polyadic, with children playing with other children, especially in rural areas (Dawes and Biersteker, 2011; Swart, 1996), and that parents understand that physical care and socialisation are priorities for child rearing in the early years.

There is a lack of overall understanding of early learning for zero to two-year-olds, which hampers the use of practices that enable early play-based learning, particularly in the domain of communication and higher-order cognitive skills.

The transmission of knowledge to parents needs to be appropriate to the audience, and many theoretical child development concepts that exist only in the English language need to be decoded so that parents can understand them without learning new vocabulary. To frame this differently, there should not be such a focus on terminology and concepts as they are framed in English, that is, in a Western-centric way. Rather, effort should be made to understand how the words and concepts translate into different cultures, languages, and ways of interacting with the world. The pertinent ideas could then be conveyed to audiences in ways that make sense to them and their worldviews. What is not necessary is to try to “educate” people in a paternalistic way that makes them feel even less equipped to be the primary teachers for young children.

#### 4.2.2. Parent’s attitudes to play-based learning

On the attitude scale items in the survey, parent responses were overwhelmingly positive—with the majority feeling that play was important, that it promoted bonding, that they looked forward to it, that it was fun, that it was important that adults play with children, and that it was not just a woman’s role to play with the child. Most parents did not believe that boys and girls should play different games. A lower percentage of parents believed in letting children have some agency in what was played, but a substantial number still did let them choose—particularly those who had children who were three to six years old. These attitudes indicate a responsive caregiving approach from South African parents in general and provide a useful basis for promoting play. However, more work needs to be done to build an understanding of the importance of play for learning.

Traditional attitudes about learning through instruction prevailed in just over half of the parents who participated in the study, including the urban sample, and with a slight bias towards instruction of older children. A strong perception that learning takes place at school or in a crèche/ECD centre and that it should be formal also emerged in the focus groups, which has also been noted in other regional studies (for example, Oppong & Strader, 2022). This is similar to the finding in a Malaysian study that parents did not view stand-alone parent-child play as capable of impacting cognitive and language development, and so parents may be less likely to engage in this type of play (Jayaraj, 2022). In addition, a third indicated being too busy to play with their children, as discussed below.

A significant concern from the survey items with regards to attitudes is that children from birth to two years old are considered too young for books and learning through play.

FGDs with parents reflected their emphasis on children learning discipline at home, and that playing was understood to be for bonding and enjoyment. There were some indications of attitudes about play as an opportunity for learning, but only in some communities. Other parents felt that children should be doing chores rather than playing. However, the majority agreed that including children in household tasks could be seen as play. This reflects the playful element to chores that Lancy (2012) refers to as common in cultures where helping with family work is more significant than in Western childrearing practice.

Attitudes to using technology with young children varied, though there was some awareness of the potential damage of exposure to technology. Respondents indicated that screen time should be limited for children from birth to two years old as it might prevent proper socialisation, but they also felt that phones could safely be used with a young child to play music and to teach gospel music and religion. Caution about screen time from some respondents is a welcome consideration, given the evidence-based South African movement guidelines for birth to five years (Draper et al (2020), which do not recommend any screen time for children under two and limited time thereafter.

A concern was raised that, due to safety concerns, outdoor play where children could play different games together (as they would have done in previous generations) was no longer possible. This has been noted in other local case studies (Biersteker et al, 2023). Another concern was that when children are dirty, they are viewed as neglected, and so parents are reluctant to let them get dirty whilst playing, which is very limiting to free play.

### 4.2.3. Parent practices of play-based learning

As previously noted, a constraint for nearly a third of parents (and more so for those attempting to play with three- to six-year-olds) was a perceived lack of time to play with their child. The ELPO study (Dawes et al, 2019) similarly found that nearly three-quarters of parents played with their children for two hours or less a week or at the weekend. Despite time constraints, only 7 per cent of respondents in the current survey said that neither they nor any household member played with the child at all; 35 per cent indicated someone had played with the young child only once or twice in the week; and over half (59%) reported that a young child had been played with “many times” in the week. The ELPO study findings were similar: 4 per cent of respondents reported that no one had played with the child. Siblings and mothers most often engaged in play with young children. The qualitative data suggested the role of other children in play and included mention of siblings’ and neighbours’ children.

Parental play with children most commonly included singing and physical play (close to two-thirds of households engaged in this), followed by rhymes and clapping (about half of households). A pattern emerged of significantly less engagement with more direct support for early literacy and numeracy development. Less than a third of parents had told stories or

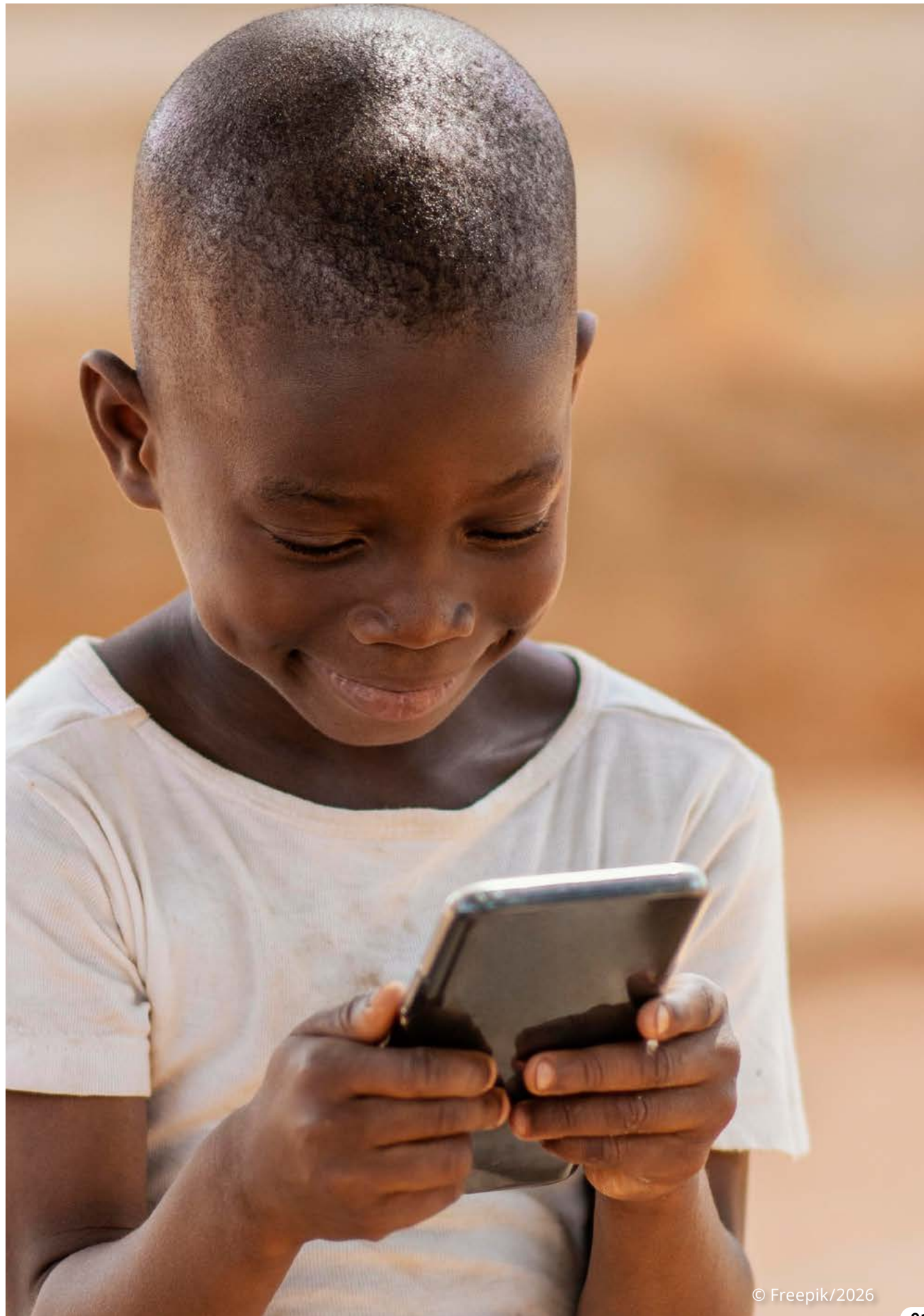
read books to their young children in the week preceding their survey response. Similarly, in the ELPO study, many parents reported that their children were never read to (32%) and never had stories told to them (33%). By contrast, only 12 per cent of the children in the General Household Survey (GHS) sample (Statistics South Africa, 2020) were reportedly never read to or told a story. Half (51%) of households in the current study reported limited activities involving counting with children, and 33 per cent never drew or painted with them, a similar pattern to that found in the GHS study.

Limited reading may relate to access to books, as 43 per cent of households have no children's or picture books at all (similar to the 40% finding in the ELPO study), but storytelling as a traditional practice was also not prominent. Traditional games were only played in about a quarter of households. More than two-thirds (68%) of households reported that toys (commercial) were available, but there was no indication of what these were. Less than a fifth of households reported engaging in problem-solving activities like puzzles or construction with children.

While only a quarter of children were reported to have access to electronic devices (i.e. smartphones, tablets or gaming consoles), and only a fifth listened to children's radio programmes, almost three-quarters (71%) of children of all ages between birth and six years old regularly watched TV or videos on a phone or television set. This presents both a threat (in terms of exposure to inappropriate content and time not spent in hands-on and mediated play and reading stories) and an opportunity to be examined for educational programming opportunities.

Focus groups with parents revealed the common traditional practice of children playing with other children in mixed age groups. There were many examples of play being included in routine care times such as bath time and during chores, and only a few examples of fathers playing with children. Many examples were given of different kinds of play and play materials in these groups, including exploratory play by younger children; some examples of more 'educational' play materials; active physical play; fantasy play with dolls and wire cars; and numerous games with rules, some of which had been traditionally passed on by older children. These are indications that some indigenous forms of play have prevailed, as also found in studies by Joseph et al (2014) and Swart (2006).

Indoor play was the norm with young children, for safety reasons, and any outdoor play (if it took place at all) was reported to be supervised by adults. A crèche or preschool was considered a safe play space. Unfortunately, being indoors proved to lend itself to the use of technology or TV watching, which was prevalent in all areas. There was a perception that watching television teaches children English and is a convenient way of occupying children. This has eroded other types of play—children are not spending sufficient time exploring and investigating their world, such as being in nature or constructing, making and building objects, nor spending sufficient time investigating and exploring time and space.



## Implications for early learning using the South African Early Childhood Development National Curriculum Framework for children birth to four years (NCF)

The key findings from this study with regard to parents' KAP about early learning for young children are summarised below in terms of how they apply to the six ELDA of the South African ECDNCF:

1. For the ELDA **Wellbeing**, parents had basic knowledge, fair practices and caring attitudes towards nourishment, health, personal hygiene, safety and security both inside and outside the home, and during physical activities. Learning through play took place during daily routines such as bath time, when children mostly played with their mothers or other children. Concerns in this ELDA area included food security, access to health services, the lack of safe play spaces and children's safety. Parental KAPs with respect to building children's resilience were not evident.
2. For the ELDA **Identity and Belonging**, KAPs focused on relationships with the primary parent and other family members and peers, as well as self-care and belonging to a specific cultural group. Young children played with parents, other family members, and peers, and it was reported that the children showed better acceptance of other children with special needs than adults did. Some discipline methods exercised with young children were inappropriate. Early learning institutions were viewed as places where children learn social skills. There was limited focus on children as capable and confident learners, and little mention of how children living in dysfunctional family environments could experience childhood stress.
3. In terms of the ELDA **Communication**, differences were seen amongst parents' KAPs. The importance of speaking and learning through song was acknowledged, but there were few instances of storytelling and reading stories, and drawing was mentioned only once. There was a strong preference for children acquiring emergent literacy in an early learning environment and learning English through the use of technology.
4. The focus of parental KAPs for **Exploring Mathematics** was on counting and learning numbers through singing, with minimal mention of problem-solving, sorting, classifying and exploring shape, space and measurement. There was the perception that children receive a foundation in mathematics at an early learning environment and through forced formal academic learning. There was no evidence that early mathematics was consciously developed during physical play. However, physical play can provide important opportunities for children to develop spatial awareness and problem-solving skills.
5. Pretend and make-believe play was the focus of parental KAPs for the **Creativity** ELDA. Singing, ball games and traditional games were also mentioned. Children played these with parents, grandparents, siblings or with other children of a wide age range. However, when parents had limited time to play with children because of work, creative play happened at crèche/ECD centres/programmes for those children enrolled in early learning programmes. There was a variety of places where children played, whom they played with and what they played, but all play was limited by the scarcity of safe spaces. Visual arts activities such as drawing and painting were not common and therefore problem-solving was not being

scaffolded through the creative arts. Additionally, traditional game playing has decreased since the COVID-19 pandemic.

6. Parental KAPs for **Knowledge and Understanding of the World** highlighted the reliance on the use of television, mobile phones and social media for children to learn about the world around them, although some parents felt that the use of mobile phones was not appropriate for young children. There was the common belief that watching television taught children English. Due to frequent use of such technology, many children were not spending sufficient time exploring and investigating the world around them. In addition, children being on screens meant that during this time they were not investigating and exploring time and space.

## 4.3. Biopsychosocial Contextual Factors

In summary, many children live in challenging contexts (i.e. harsh environments at home, in the community and at a systemic level). However, some contextual factors encourage young children to engage in learning through play, and there are good foundations on which to improve parental KAPs to enhance play-based learning.

### 4.3.1. Community and living environment factors that affect parent KAPs regarding play-based learning

#### 4.3.1.1. Social cohesion

It was reported that children learn through play by interacting with adults and other children. Sadly, however, reports from all participants in the qualitative enquiry indicated that in most communities (apart from some more traditional communities in rural areas with strong traditional leaders), there is a breakdown of social cohesion, community structures and trust in community members. This lack of trust is fuelled by high crime within the communities. The breakdown in “ubuntu”, an African philosophy that can be said to place “emphasis on ‘being self through others’” (Ewuoso and Hall, 2019), has reportedly resulted in a loss of collective identity and the notion that “we are who we are through other people”. This, it is reported, results in fewer opportunities for young children to play communally. When parents or primary caregivers are occupied, community members do not step in to meet the child’s needs, and there are no safe environments in the community for children to play in where trusted adults would be in charge.

#### 4.3.1.2. Cultural/traditional beliefs/norms

The study revealed that in some South African communities, constitutional rights are sometimes not upheld due to clashes with religious or cultural norms—for example, around corporal punishment or gender norms. Some gender norms dictate that children (especially young children) are “women’s business”, and some parents restrict certain play activities for children according to their gender or the gender of those they are playing with. These norms affect play for young children, and in some communities, fathers were reported not to play with their children at all.

#### 4.3.1.3. Living environment: housing and services, and where children play

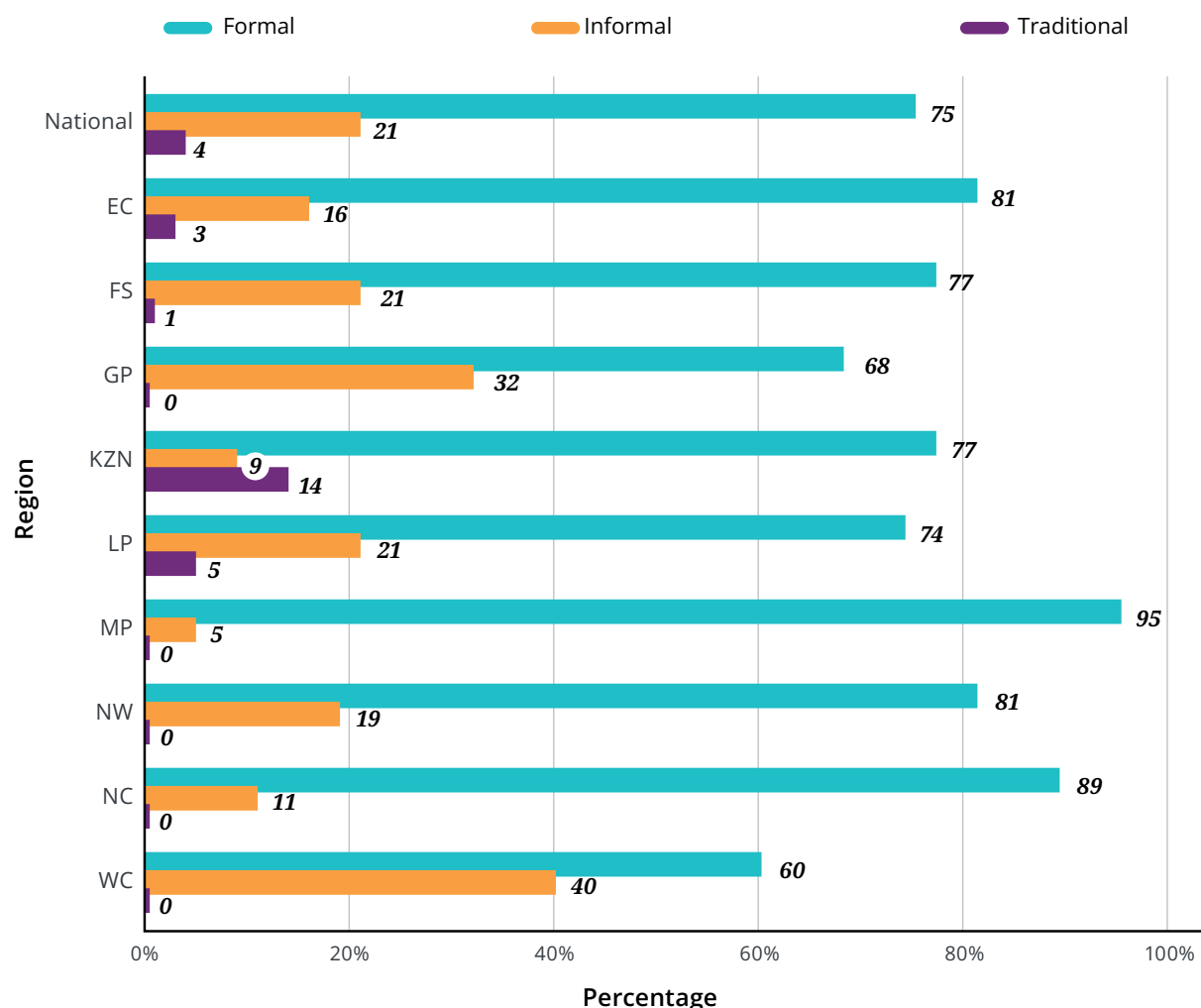
Many communities in South Africa do not enjoy access to basic services, especially regarding clean water and sanitation. Access to electricity has also been a nationwide problem, particularly since 2022. Focus group participants widely reported that health services and referral services were inadequate to meet the needs of young children and parents.

Focus group participants also reported corruption in municipalities, which partly accounts for the aforementioned lack of services. Young children are not considered in local government decisions, and functioning structures that deal with them at that level do not exist.

Research participants reported that in some municipalities, communal parks are being sold for housing. Regarding housing, three-quarters of families with young children live in formal housing, as can be seen in the graph below, and formal housing is, encouragingly, by far the most common dwelling type in all nine provinces. Informal housing is the next most common category in all provinces except KwaZulu-Natal, where more of the families included in the sample lived in traditional housing. In Mpumalanga, the North West province, the Northern Cape and the Western Cape, none of the families sampled lived in traditional houses.



**Figure 15. Dwelling type per province**

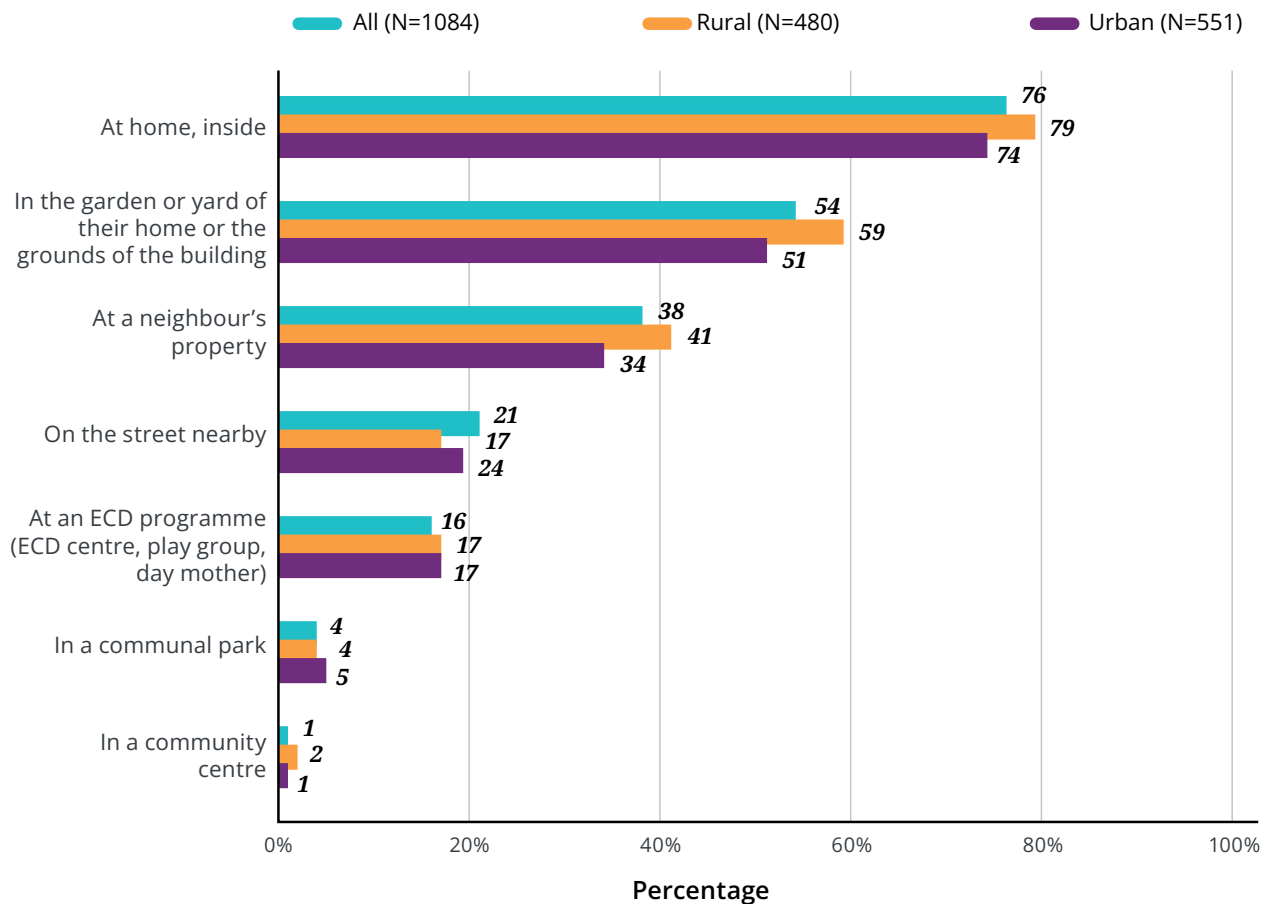


In some rural communities (only two of the 18 sites from this study), it was safe for children to play outside their homes; in these settings, they were often involved in group polyadic play. In these types of rural community (where social cohesion is higher), traditional structures and systems were reported to enable play-based learning and provide a safer environment for children to play outside and with people outside their immediate family.

The issue of safety for young children was a significant, reported concern both within and outside the home. Focus group participants reported that there were almost no safe play spaces, such as parks, for children. Issues that compromise safety include heavy traffic in areas where the children live, and the risk of abuse and child trafficking from strangers if children are not kept close to their parent(s). As can be seen in the graph below, the study revealed a shocking result: only 4–5 per cent of children, in both rural and urban areas, played in a communal park, and only 1–2 per cent accessed any kind of community centre to play.

Most children (76%, n=1084) played inside, with a higher proportion of children in rural areas playing inside than in urban areas. Only half of young children played outside, and about a third played at neighbours' houses. Just 16 per cent accessed ECD at a centre, playgroup, or with a day mother.

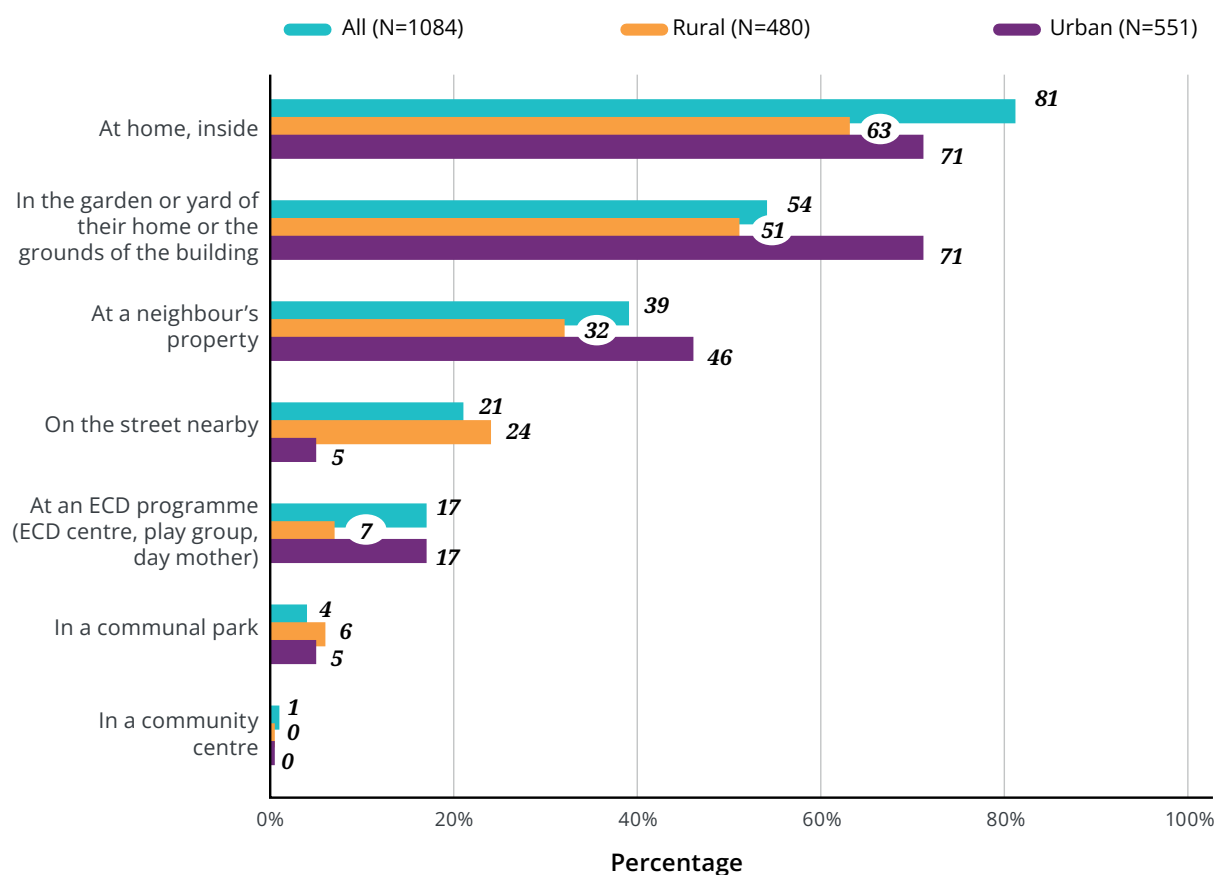
**Figure 16.** Comparison of urban vs rural environments with regards to where children play



When checking these results in terms of the type of dwelling children resided in (see graph), the results were similar, except that there seemed to be more children playing outside and in neighbours' properties for those who lived in traditional dwellings. This ties in with the qualitative finding that certain more traditional communities had better social cohesion and were safer for children to play communally.

FGDs revealed that, while children were playing in the street in some communities, they felt that this was less prevalent than previously.

**Figure 17. Where the child plays in relation to their environment**



Focus group participants also reported that when children do not play outdoors, but play indoors instead, wi-fi “becomes the nanny” as the children watch programmes on YouTube and Netflix. Consequently, these children are not engaging in physical or manipulative play.

## 4.3.2. Family set-up and factors that affect parent KAPs regarding play-based learning

### 4.3.2.1. Number of children in the household

The vast majority of households that participated in the survey (n=1088) had more than one child living in the house, as seen in Table 12. A similar percentage of households had two, three, or more than three children.

**Table 12.** *Number of children per household, rural vs. urban*

| Number of children            | Rural      |            | Urban      |            | Total<br>(incl. missing area) |            |
|-------------------------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|-------------------------------|------------|
|                               | Count      | %          | Count      | %          | Count                         | %          |
| None                          | 4          | 1          | 5          | 1          | 9                             | 1          |
| One                           | 78         | 16         | 89         | 16         | 173                           | 16         |
| Two                           | 127        | 26         | 160        | 29         | 306                           | 28         |
| Three                         | 110        | 23         | 115        | 21         | 240                           | 22         |
| More than three               | 119        | 25         | 132        | 24         | 260                           | 24         |
| Unsure (either three or more) | 43         | 9          | 51         | 9          | 100                           | 9          |
| <b>Total</b>                  | <b>481</b> | <b>100</b> | <b>552</b> | <b>100</b> | <b>1088</b>                   | <b>100</b> |

This complements the qualitative finding that young children frequently play with children of other ages, as they are able to do so within their homes.

#### 4.3.2.2. Age of parent

Older parents were reported to be more likely to spend time playing with their children (as corroborated in the survey results) and to pass down traditional games. In some instances, indigenous rhymes were reported to be passed on predominantly by fathers. Intergenerational families had benefits for young children in terms of play, as different types of activities (e.g. storytelling, singing, and physical play) were spread amongst the different ages of adults in the household.

Parenting programme and ECD service providers noted with concern that young parents, especially young mothers, “are still children themselves.” Often, young single mothers did not have the father’s support, even if they had support from extended families. Providers observed that young mothers often did not play with their children or make time for them, as their interests were being absorbed (in the providers’ opinions) by their mobile phones, social media and drinking. It was perceived that young parents were less likely to spend SASSA grant monies to meet their child’s needs. Service providers noted that young children were also often left in the care of siblings, both temporarily and in child-headed households. Although older parents and grandparents had more maturity and a better understanding of children’s play-based development, socio-economic circumstances and/or health problems were reported to prohibit them from interacting with young children in play activities.

### **4.3.2.3. Family dynamics**

Sadly, all research participants reported that many young children were living within unhealthy and dysfunctional homes and communities. Children were witnessing gender-based violence (GBV), sexual conduct, alcohol abuse and drug abuse, often in their own homes and communities, and they imitated such destructive behaviours (through fantasy play when they were younger, and then through acting these behaviours out as they got older). Physical punishment was also a common form of discipline. Repeated exposure to such behaviours teaches children that this is “normal” and that people who behave in this way are their only role models.

There was also reportedly a high level of neglect for children in their homes and communities. Absent fathers were reported as an issue in most provinces, which impacts children’s upbringing.

It was noted that emotional stress is often transferred from parent to child. It was reported that SASSA grants are sometimes used to buy alcohol, and in these instances young children are taken to the shebeens when the adults go to drink.

## **4.3.3. Factors related to the parent and the child**

### **4.3.3.1. Health, hygiene and nutrition**

Parents who engaged in this study’s qualitative enquiry were committed to meeting the physical needs of children in terms of their health, hygiene and nutrition. If parents had health problems, such as TB, HIV and non-communicable diseases (which are common across South Africa), this affected their ability to play with their children or even take good care of them in other ways. Many parents noted that they did not feel that they had access to adequate health services to meet their young children’s or their own needs. In one rural area, parents reported approaching the royal household and elders for health service support, including midwifery services, but this was not common.

Due to high levels of poverty in South Africa, food security is unfortunately a real concern. Undernourished children will not reach their full potential, and parental focus is often on sourcing food to the detriment of engaging with children in play-based learning. Additionally, service providers reported that parents would often not attend workshops or programmes if there was no incentive (stipend, food, clothes washing) offered. Encouragingly, there were examples of food security initiatives, such as food gardens, that exist in communities to ensure that children can receive nutritious food and develop well. In rural communities, traditional structures were reported to be supporting access to clean water and food. “Some of us do

grow vegetables - beetroot, marogo, carrots - it helps, if we have surplus we sell it" (Rural Parent Focus Group, Gauteng November 2022). Breastfeeding of babies depended on the mother's availability, especially since children may be left with grandparents. It was reported that parents opt for cheaper, unhealthy foods that do not need cooking (such as crisps and *nik naks*), more so in both rural and urban areas of the Western Cape, KwaZulu Natal, the Northern Cape and North West provinces.

#### **4.3.3.2. Mental health, confidence and involvement in parenting, relationships and wellbeing**

Mental health illness (depression, anxiety etc.) was noted to be high amongst parents. If parents do not have stable mental health, it is very unlikely that play-based learning activities can be implemented successfully. In the focus groups, the positive benefits of parents playing with children were spoken about, including how playing strengthened parental confidence, strengthened the relationships and bonds between the parent and child, and improved child and parental wellbeing (especially psychosocial health). There was a focus on how loving care was necessary from parent to child in all the focus groups, which provides a strong foundation to promote play-based learning. It was also noted that children form a sense of identity within their families, especially during self-care and hygiene routines. During these routines, play-based learning was taking place, for example, during activities such as singing while dressing or bathing.

However, parenting programmes and ECD service providers expressed that there was an intergenerational historical legacy of parents thinking they are not good enough, and feeling they can give nothing to children in terms of learning due to a lack of education and/or money. Many parents, it was reported, experienced trauma related to living in poverty (including food insecurity and unemployment) that is expressed as depression, stress and anxiety. Focus group participants discussed that if parents were not having their basic daily essential needs met, this impacted on their psychosocial health, and this is something which needs to be considered in programming.

Concern was raised about young parents, especially single females, with respect to their mental health, educational levels and understanding of their child's needs. Younger parents were perceived to need specific support to understand their role. There was also a long-standing narrative from ECDs and the schooling system to parents of "you are not good enough and you do not show up enough".

This narrative needs to be broken. Programme providers are offering a range of different programmes, and all acknowledge that supporting parents and sharing practical activities to do with children enhances parental confidence to be involved in play-based activities with their children. There are success stories of continued implementation when adults and children

attend programmes together. These programmes include book sharing, home visiting, toy libraries, parenting workshops and mobile ECD services. Parents were more likely to request specific topics for programmes to cover once they gained more confidence (from becoming more informed and skilled). Programmes with teenage parents have also had a good impact, as younger parents indicated in focus groups that they wanted to parent differently to how they were parented. When young mothers attended programmes with their children, it worked well if they did the play activities by themselves first while children watched, and then did the activities with their children. Peer group support for parents was also shown to be valuable.

Programmes that have been successful in shifting parents' beliefs that they are 'not good enough' have created much success in getting parents more involved in and/or encouraging play-based activities for young children. Additionally, when the parents played with their children themselves, this impressed their children and created stronger bonds for future interaction. There was also a reported reduction in stress levels when parents played with their children. When parents were involved in advocacy activities, it also resulted in changes in approaches to play-based learning for children.

Many face-to-face parenting programmes were stalled during the COVID-19 pandemic and some have not resumed at full capacity since. It was reported that there was often poor attendance at programmes for parents, and one of the many reasons for this was parent self-stigma, accompanied by a belief that 'if I attend a programme, it means I am a bad parent'.

#### **4.3.3.3. Parent knowledge and conceptual knowledge**

Participants expressed that there was insufficient knowledge about breastfeeding, and many parents did not understand the importance of the first 1000 days of a child's life. In addition, it was reported that most parents did not understand the concept of play as a pedagogy, and that the concepts are often based on English terminology. Most parents lacked role models who engaged in play-based learning, and believed that bought materials were needed for a child to play. Furthermore, parents often lacked knowledge and understanding of child development. While grandparents generally played an important role in early learning, they also mostly did not understand play-based learning. Parents who were excluded from ECD services and play activities when they were young mostly had no experience of play-based learning activities, and did not always want advice about it.

#### **4.3.3.4. Parent attitudes that affect play-based learning**

Influenced by societal and governmental paradigms where play is seen as separate from learning (mainly due to the way the formal schooling system is set up), many parents have adopted the notion that play and learning are distinct. Service providers also noted that play

is often not associated with learning because learning is believed to only constitute structured activity conducted by a teacher. Service providers reported that many parents also believed that children need to sit still in order to learn. The attitude that “play is not learning”, and that learning needs to be instructional (especially in respect of literacy and mathematical skills) has, in many instances, led to an assumption that learning does not happen at home and that children need to attend an ECD service to learn anything. A prevalent perception that was expressed was that children learn even health routines and social skills only at ECD centres and not at home. Conversely, access to ECD services was often limited due to the cost, and migrant children could also not access these as they did not always have the correct documents needed for registration (birth certificates and clinic cards).

Another cultural belief that was expressed was that parents are responsible for the discipline of the child, and playing with their children would compromise this disciplinarian role, if the parent is seen as an authority figure, and children “may not take you seriously”.

Additionally, some cultural beliefs advocated that certain types of play are for boys only, and other types of play for girls only, and participants believed that boys were physically stronger—however, this attitude was not prevalent. Play was not valued in contexts where women (who were also caring for young children) were expected to work in the house (i.e. cooking and cleaning), and if they were seen to be having fun then the mothers were viewed as being ‘lazy’. Survey results about gendered perspectives on play showed that these were, however, not widespread perceptions.

Parent circumstances and context were noted to influence parent attitudes about play. Parents who were bringing their children up within the context of growing poverty and unemployment, and struggling to ensure that their children had something to eat, could not focus on play-based learning when trying to provide basic necessities.

Another perception that was expressed by research participants was that parents had no time to play with children—whether they were unemployed or doing piecemeal work to generate an income, or walking around trying to find a way to feed their children or going to a job. In some instances, this was especially true for working parents who left their homes early and then had to undertake physically demanding chores (including collecting water in some cases) when they returned home.



## 4.3.4. Factors in terms of materials and play tools/methods

### 4.3.4.1. Types of play

It was found that children were already involved in a variety of play-based learning activities, such as self-care routines, the chore curriculum (household chores presented as play), asking questions, fantasy play, singing songs (including mathematical songs), and sorting, matching, and classifying activities, as well as exploring their own movements and environments, and using their imaginations. Indigenous games were being played in some communities (the rules and guidelines for these indigenous games should be documented where they are not). In some areas, traditional songs were reported to be sung only during heritage month, when heritage is the focus; however, these should be sung throughout the year.

### 4.3.4.2. Access to materials and tools/methods for play

A common attitude was that expensive stationery and materials were needed for children to learn. The survey findings showed that young children in South Africa do have a fair amount of access to materials, as shown below, but the attitude is corroborated by the findings, as it is evident that bought toys are preferred (used by 68% of households) over found or homemade objects. Only just over half of households use items from outside, and only 17 per cent let their children play with household items. This may be explained by the fact that, in some poor or resource-scarce households, there are fewer items which children could play with. Although quantitative reports cite technology as widely used, it appears that this would mostly be in the form of TV, as only 24 per cent of households give children electronic devices (smartphones, tablets, gaming consoles) to play with.

The results from the survey and from qualitative enquiry showed that too many young children do not have access to stories, books, or sound and word games. Likewise, these children are not recording their experiences through drawing, language and sound games, and creative arts. Emergent mathematical skills were also not being fostered in children because of the belief that mathematics is a formal activity which needs to be taught at ECD services only, and this saw children missing out on gaining pre-mathematical skills from sorting, matching, classifying, and understanding space and patterns. Additionally, children were not often given the opportunity to problem solve and become resilient. Children were exposed to limited visual art activities, and thus did not gain enough opportunity to develop sensory motor skills and fine motor coordination. This is particularly concerning because visual arts for young children are precursors to writing. Traditional game playing was reported to have decreased since the COVID-19 pandemic. There was also reportedly insufficient support for fathers, and not nearly enough support for parents of children with disabilities.

#### 4.3.4.3. Technology

Children are exposed to the world of connectivity through television and electronic devices. An unexpected, though positive, outcome of loadshedding has been that it has reduced the ability for families to use technology and electronic devices, meaning they spend more time on play activities.

Television was reportedly a common choice for parents to keep children busy. A downside to children spending time watching TV and using electronic devices connected to the internet was that they were exposed to inappropriate sexual and violent content, especially when technology use was unregulated by parents. It was felt that children's natural curiosity was likely being stifled by the amount of television they watched. Children were reported to be using only electronic devices and no other forms of technology – for instance, woodwork, box construction, and so forth.

Research participants reflected that if children did not have opportunities to explore and investigate their world – nature, life science, history, etc. – then they would not gain access to the different types of tools and techniques to operate and make things, nor tools that would help them explore and investigate time and space.

### 4.4. Summary Analysis of Contextual Enablers and Barriers for Parent Mediated Play-Based Learning



FGDs with parents and service providers highlighted a number of contextual enablers and barriers for parent-mediated play-based learning. Some of these relate to interventions to address knowledge gaps and change attitudes and practices that do not support playful learning, but others relate to broader support to enable parents to engage more confidently and responsively with their children, and to access resources that may enable this.

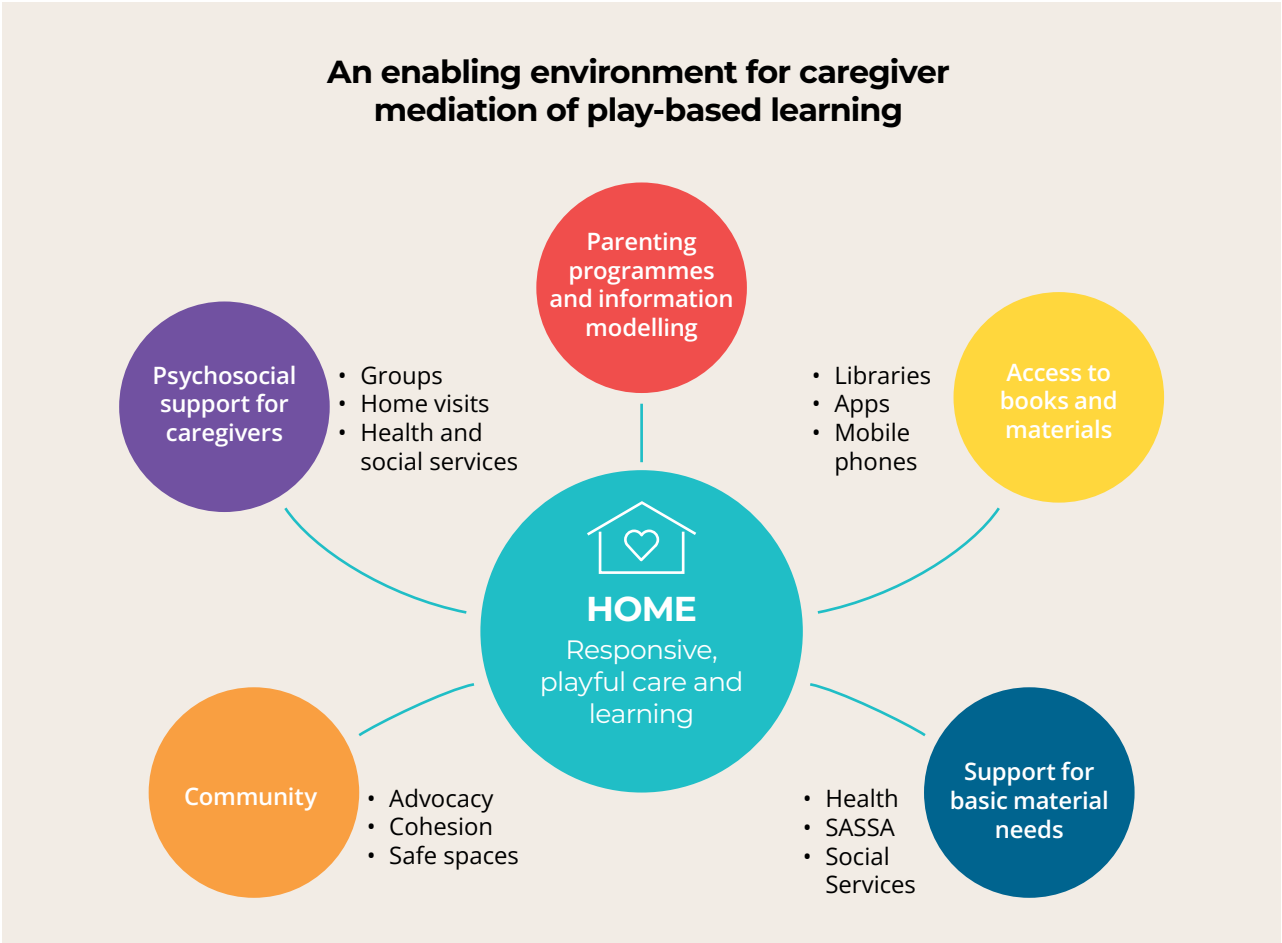
In the FGDs, several enabling factors were noted which provide a foundation for developing a culture of play-based learning. As discussed above, parents described love, care, and bonding with their children as a priority for their development. There was an understanding that play is important for children's development, and attitudes towards adults playing with children were positive. Most parents believed playing with their children was enjoyable and that children learned through play. Numerous play activities for children were described. Certain play materials (mostly purchased) were available, which have been shown to support interactive learning through play. In intergenerational and larger households there were multiple carers, including siblings, who could play with children. Access to media (and television especially)

was extensive, and this provides an opportunity for advancing play-based learning despite the dangers of overuse and inappropriate viewing.

However, the overall results of this study indicate serious challenges to nurturing and responsive care from the broader environment. In particular, a lack of social cohesion and safety (except in some rural communities) confines children to indoor play and has changed the pattern of play activities to more sedentary, screen-based activities, which do not appear to be parent-mediated. A lack of particular types of play materials, such as puzzles, conceptual games, drawing materials and books, represents a challenge. Parents are stressed by trying to meet the basic needs of their families and have a lack of time for play, and are often isolated and lacking social support. Moreover, they lack confidence in their parenting. The risks that parental stress and lack of responsiveness pose for early development are well documented in the literature. Large numbers of very young parents do not appear to have the interest or knowledge to engage meaningfully with their children.

Figure 19 outlines the enablers that this study indicated were needed to enhance learning through play in the home.

**Figure 18.** *An enabling environment for parent mediation of play-based learning*



## 4.5. Programmes for Parents Regarding KAPs for Play-Based Learning

The following data sets were used to inform this section, which provides information about existing programmes that offer parenting interventions (some specifically with regard to play-based learning):

1. Quantitative data from two parenting programme mapping surveys (100 respondents, with 37 of those respondents providing details about play-based learning programmes in particular—the data presented is mostly from the detail provided by the 37 play-based learning programme providers)
2. Qualitative data from parent FGDs, service provider FGDs and key informant interviews

### 4.5.1. Description of existing programmes

#### 4.5.1.1. Target groups of existing programmes

Programmes are distributed across all provinces and are found in a reasonable number of districts. Programmes are offered mostly in rural and peri-urban communities, with urban programmes offered in the larger cities.

Programmes are presented to individuals, large groups, small groups and families, with the vast majority working with a combination of parents and children, and fewer working with parents alone.

There is a large variance in the number of parents reached by programme providers.

There are programmes for parents who have children aged from birth to six years old; some programme providers offer programmes to parents with children aged from birth to five years old.

There are not many programmes focusing on children from birth to two years old.

The majority of programmes are offered to parents of all ages, with a small number offered to youth only (some for under 35s or some for under 18s only). The majority of programmes are offered to parents of any gender, with occasional programmes offered to men only.

There are various inclusion criteria for programmes in terms of what groups may join play-based learning interventions, for example:

- Children who are not in an ECD service
- Households with low incomes
- Children with special needs
- Orphans and vulnerable children
- Parents ordered to join a programme by the court
- Parents whom social workers have recommended
- Those who meet donor/grant requirements
- Parents of a certain gender
- Parents of a certain age
- Parents of children who attend playgroups and ECD centres.

#### **4.5.1.2. Programme dosage**

Most organisations run longer-term programmes—for six months or a year. Fewer programmes run for under six months.

#### **4.5.1.3. Programme reach**

The majority of programmes for parents are offered at more than one site, with four to six sites being the average from the sample. Only a few programmes offered their services at one site.

#### **4.5.1.4. Maturity of programmes**

Many programmes are well established and have been running for longer than 10 years. Only a few new programmes (running for under a year) participated in the study, but it is unlikely that there are many new programmes due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

#### **4.5.1.5. Methodology and content of programmes**

Most organisations offer face-to-face programmes to parents. Some organisations also offer services online or via WhatsApp messaging/groups.

The content of programmes is not usually focused purely on play-based learning, but integrates this topic into other themes, including health, nutrition, early learning, responsive care, safety and security. Some of the programme providers also offer Adult Basic Literacy,

communication and socialisation, child development, the power of play, mental health, gender awareness, trauma containment, and food gardens.

Content is presented in different forms and formats. The UNICEF Parental/Primary Parent Capacity Building Training Package is used by a number of programme providers, but a number of programme providers have also developed their own materials and guides to suit the context in which they work.

Some programmes are presented by organisational employees only, whereas others use a cascading model of implementation. Versions of the cascading model include: ECD practitioners being trained to offer the programme to parents; training of other organisations to offer the programme; partnerships between organisations where materials and resources are shared; and training specific groups to offer the programme (such as community health workers).

#### **4.5.1.6. Participation incentives**

The majority of programmes in the sample offer some sort of incentive to participants for taking part, whether at every session, fortnightly, monthly, or as a one-off. The incentives include food vouchers, food parcels, travel stipends, general attendance stipends, childcare supplies, personal care supplies, food garden items, refreshments, data to access digital programmes, DSD parcels, reading packs/books, and toys.

#### **4.5.1.7. Funding sources**

Play-based learning programmes are mostly supported by private funding. Government funding accounted for less than a quarter of funding for most organisations in the sample, and user fees made up less than a quarter of programme funding.

### **4.5.2. Programme effectiveness and gaps in programming**

Parents, community leaders, providers of parenting programmes, and key informants reflected on programming, identifying enablers, barriers, and gaps, with the aim of improving parental knowledge, attitudes, and practices (KAPs) regarding play-based learning. Additional insights also emerged from the mapping survey data.

#### **4.5.2.1. Enablers/success factors and effective methods**

Programmes have had success in unlocking parental beliefs that they are not good enough. As parenting programme providers described: “Helping parents feel supported and sharing practical activities enables the feeling of joy and the aha moment of ‘I can do it’”. Once this has been done, there are a number of success stories of different ways in which parents are becoming involved in, and/or encouraging, play-based activities for children.

Programmes focusing on teenagers are also having an impact, as they want to raise their children differently to the way they were raised. When young mothers attend programmes with their children, they want to do the activities first while the children watch, and then do the activities with their children.

Programme providers are offering a range of different programmes, and all acknowledge that supporting parents and sharing practical activities to do with children enhances parental confidence to engage in play-based activities. Providers report that parents begin to request specific topics in programmes once they have gained confidence. There are success stories of continued implementation when adults and children attend programmes together. These programmes include book sharing, home visiting, toy libraries, parenting workshops and mobile ECDs. Additionally, when parents play with their children, the children are impressed by them, and a strong bond is created for future interaction. There is a reduction in stress for parents who play with children and, it was reported, physical discipline lessens with those parents who are enrolled in a play-based parenting programme. “If parents are invested in their children, less investment would be needed in children”. Good recruitment and selection criteria are therefore important, because once parents show up and become involved initially, they quickly become engaged and committed and understand the value. One method of recruitment is through the Community Works Programme (CWP). When unemployed people join the CWP, one of their requirements is to attend parenting workshops irrespective of gender, which enables fathers to attend parenting training as well.

Peer group support for parents has been proven to be valuable for improving KAPs about play-based learning.

Embedding programmes within community contexts ensures a democratic and developmental approach to ensure every child is cared for and able to access services and safe places to play. Investigations are in place to establish initiatives to create safe play spaces, especially when services are closed (such as school playgrounds, church gardens, and drop-in centres), using volunteer community members to monitor the space children are playing in. Other safe play spaces include libraries, play mats and clinics. In addition, programme providers are learning from parents in the community. For instance, one Western Cape programme has created a community understanding of the need for safe spaces for children to play, resulting in gang

leaders on the Cape Flats advising programme providers in advance of when the gangs will be shooting so that parks can be cleared of children.

Some of the content in such programmes that has proven to be effective includes information and skills that build on indigenous knowledge and indigenous storytelling; traditional games that the parents themselves used to play; the chore curriculum (i.e. using chores as a form of mutual play with child); encouraging parents to read to themselves and to their children; and helping parents to use items they may have at home for playtime (for example, how to use playing cards to play with their young children in a way that enables children to learn through these games).

When programmes follow a cascading model, it creates longevity—such as in the case of training ECD providers, who then train ECD practitioners, who then train parents, who then take their learning on play-based learning to their community. One initiative successfully uses ECD centres as hubs for activities.

#### **4.5.2.2. Challenges for existing and future programmes**

The challenges identified for current and future programmes that aim to improve parental KAP about play-based learning mirror the biopsychosocial factors found in the study (and discussed in detail in the section above)—namely, challenges in terms of:

- Community and living environment factors
- Living environment: housing and services, and where children play
- Family set-up and dynamics
- Factors related to the parent profile and the child profile
- Health, hygiene and nutrition (including mental health)
- Parent knowledge and conceptual knowledge
- Parent attitudes
- Factors in terms of materials and play tools/methods
- Technology.

Specifically, alongside the challenges described in the section above, consideration must be given when designing programmes such as this to the times that the programme is offered, so as to include working parents. Some key attitudes that were reported to be particularly challenging for favourable play-based learning KAP included a lack of understanding that:

- Children do not need an adult to instigate play; children need adults to be witnesses and willing participants in play. Children know how to play as it is in their DNA; it is their job and an innate means of learning. Parents struggle to find the time to be willing participants and therefore limit play instead of allowing it.

- Parents often do not understand how positive relationships can support children's development and, within families, many parents do not understand how being in a good relationship with their child (i.e. being responsive, listening to them, paying attention, using language to support them, being available, and engaging in a supportive way), can support children's development. There is a misconception that education is exclusively formal and requires attendance at a specific location.

#### **4.5.2.3. Gaps and needs**

1. In general, there was a feeling that programmes need to be extended in terms of reach, with more effort being made to reach men and fathers, and parents with babies under two years old. "In terms of our culture and tradition, there are programmes to support young men equipping them for adulthood – not about parenting as a father" (Community Leader, October 2022). In general, it was felt that there was a great need to provide more psychosocial support for mothers, particularly young mothers and single mothers – an anger management programme was suggested specifically for single mothers.
2. Indigenous games need to be documented, including their link to early learning areas.
3. Parent participation is needed in advocacy at all levels. Some contextual barriers can be addressed through programming, but others need advocacy and holistic intervention, such as the creation of safe play spaces for young children. Creative ways to create safe spaces are needed, and this may require a cadre of trained auxiliary staff — in streets, schools, churches, ECD centres, parks, neighbours/play groups, after school, drop-in centres, and so forth.
4. There are numerous programmes for parents nationwide, which means there are lots of opportunities for play-based learning and books to be incorporated into household practice. Community health workers could be key points to disseminate information about the importance of the first 1000 days of a child's life. Health facilities could be a place to find parents for implementation, including by auxiliary staff. It was noted by participants that South Africa's public health system is already overburdened, and though this is an ideal place to situate some of this work ideologically, it is probably not feasible in reality.
5. A broad evidence base would be useful to effectively track and improve the success of programmes, ensure that KAPs are significantly enhanced, and that young children have a more enabling home environment in which to thrive. In this regard, some standardised monitoring and evaluation would be useful, with opportunities for multiple stakeholders to learn together using data generated from various sources. Appendix D proposes some ideas for a MEL framework based on the experiences from this study.



### 4.5.3. Summary analysis: Programmes for parents

A very wide range of parenting programmes are available, most of which are broad-based and cover all aspects of early development. This is critical, given the findings in this study regarding the contextual barriers to play-based learning. There were also a number of practical suggestions about platforms for scaling parenting programmes, such as faith-based and community groups; savings clubs would be another option. While there is insufficient detail on the individual programmes to allow substantive comment on how likely they are to be effective on the basis of research evidence (discussed in the literature review), the following observations can be made:

- In terms of timing programmes to reach parents when content is most applicable, the focus on 3–6 year olds for most programmes is appropriate. A gap in programme content for 0–2 year olds was noted, and it may be more appropriate for this to be delivered in smaller, age-related sections, which would be feasible through mobile apps and/or community health worker visits.
- There were limited mentions of programmes specifically targeting fathers, pregnant women and adolescents. There is merit in specialised target groups for whom different material would be salient. More attention should also be given to the different play companions of children at household level, including child-to-child options.
- The dosage of programmes for at least six months or a year seems reasonable, but there is no indication of the regularity of content, which is also a factor for consideration.
- There was no direct question about whether these interventions targeted attitude and skills as well as knowledge, but some service providers indicated a growth of confidence in parents.
- There are also examples of parents actively trying the play activities.
- Many of the programmes were face-to-face, which would assist in building social support among participants and changing attitudes and practices.
- Some respondents indicated that the programmes were fun, which, along with social support, creates enjoyment, relieves stress and encourages future attendance. Parenting programmes which help parents cope with stress and build their self-efficacy are more likely to be successful.
- There were many examples of programmes also providing access to play resources and books as well as information. This encourages practical application of what was learned at home.

### 4.5.4. Actions to be considered

To promote parent engagement in early learning through play, some KAP and contextual barriers can be addressed through parent programming, but others will require advocacy and holistic interventions at the community level.

#### 4.5.5. Changing knowledge, attitudes and practices

The following interventions could contribute to changing parent knowledge, attitudes and practice on play in early learning, and will require planning, adequate budgetary provision, and a partnership approach:

- **A communication campaign on play in early learning** at points where parents with young children gather, such as health facilities, SASSA pay points, feeding schemes, savings groups, and through NGOs and faith-based organisations, as well as through social media, radio, and television.
- **Identifying and engaging community leaders and institutions to become champions** and messengers for play in early learning, and to emphasise the importance of parental involvement in this.
- **Including specific content about play as preparation for academic learning** to address this knowledge gap.
- **Recognising that parents have limited time** and explaining ways of integrating play-based learning into chores and care routines.
- **Encouraging parenting interventions with focused target groups** – programmes for fathers and young parents especially, such as preparation for parenting courses as part of antenatal care.
- **Emphasising traditional practices such as storytelling and games** as valuable playful learning practices, and building on what parents already know and do.
- **Providing information to parenting programme providers** on what enables effective parent programming and sustainable behaviour change. For example, programmes should affirm parents, be fun, provide peer support, be culturally appropriate, address understandings of play, and provide referrals where more support is needed.
- **Supporting parents to use technology more strategically and carefully**, and to understand the effects of screen time on young children.
- **The DBE should develop a set of indicators and tools to measure programme outputs**, coverage, and outcomes of programmes to support play-based learning in the home.
- **Strengthening systemic channels for delivering messages** about learning through play, including:
- **Using the Road to Health booklet's child development milestones** as an opportunity to promote developmental play activities.
- **First thousand days initiatives, such as the Western Cape Department of Health's programme**, which is delivered through the health system and includes a focus on all aspects of the nurturing care framework.
- **Budgetary support for ECD programmes** targeting parents.
- **Including a learning through play component** as part of community health worker, ECD practitioner, social auxiliary worker, and community development worker training.

#### 4.5.6. Provision of early learning resources

- Providing book and toy libraries at points of contact with parents, such as clinics, mobile services, ECD centres and schools, and public (mobile) libraries.
- Encouraging play with open-ended and safe recycled materials.
- Engaging relevant departments, including Health, Education, Arts and Culture, and the Municipality, as well as businesses and the NGO sector, to assist with this.

#### 4.5.7. Creating a safe supportive environment for children's play

- Find innovative ways to create safe spaces in streets, schools, churches, ECD centres, community parks, neighbour/play groups, after-school programmes, and drop-in centres. This will require a cadre of trained auxiliary staff or volunteers, as well as resources.
- Provide ideas to encourage parents to create safe exploring spaces for young children within their homes.
- Ensure broader community awareness about child safety and the importance of play.
- At a systemic level, advocate for a referral system for maternal mental health support and ensure budgeting to support communal public safe spaces for young children.

## 5. Conclusion

The study indicates that there is a good foundation for improving parents' KAP regarding play-based learning for young children: favourable attitudes can be readily converted into good practices through appropriate transmission of knowledge about how play links to early learning, and how it can be incorporated into daily life. Significant external barriers affect success in this regard, and some will require a coordinated response from multiple stakeholders; however, many enablers also exist that can be built upon while larger systemic issues are considered. A key enabler for the improvement of parent KAPs is the fact that many effective parenting programmes already exist around the country – some of which even focus specifically on KAPs regarding play-based learning – with good potential to add to or enhance programming for success, based on good practice and the needs identified through the study.

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113. [https://www.sesameworkshop.org/sites/default/files/2019-05/ped\\_evaluation\\_findings\\_may\\_2019.pdf](https://www.sesameworkshop.org/sites/default/files/2019-05/ped_evaluation_findings_may_2019.pdf) Findings from an Evaluation of Sesame Workshop's Play Every Day

# 7. Appendices

## Appendix A

### Sampling strategy

There are approximately 8 million children aged birth to 6 years in South Africa. The distribution of children indicates that more than fifty per cent live in provinces with large rural populations, namely KwaZulu-Natal, the Eastern Cape and Limpopo. Indeed, these provinces accommodate almost half of all young children in South Africa. While approximately 30 per cent of children live with both biological parents, more than 40 per cent live with their mothers only and 20 per cent live with neither biological parent. Female-headed households and children not living with their biological parents are the most common type of household in provinces with large rural areas such as Eastern Cape, Limpopo and KwaZulu-Natal.

Access to ECD programmes is highest in Gauteng and the Western Cape. However, nationally, more than 50 per cent of children aged birth to 4 years stay at home with parents or guardians. Approximately 30 per cent of birth to 3 year olds, and 70 per cent of 4 year olds participate in Early Learning Programmes, while more than 90 per cent of 5 to 6 year olds participate in an Early Learning Programme.

See:

1. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1261022/child-population-as-a-share-of-totalpopulation-in-south-africa-by-age-group>
2. <http://childrencount.uct.ac.za/indicator.php?domain=1&indicator=1>
3. <https://www.statssa.gov.za/publications/P0318/P03182019.pdf>
4. <https://www.statssa.gov.za/publications/P0318/P03182019.pdf> • <https://www.education.gov.za/GHSUpdate.aspx>

All nine provinces in South Africa were included in the sample, so as to gain a representative picture of what is happening throughout the country with regards to parents' KAPs about play-based learning. Within the nine provinces, we ensured representation from rural and urban settings, and ensured that we reached parents with and without access to ECD services. Within the study sites, we worked with partner ECD and parenting programme organisations who worked in the area to target parents. Although selection was as random as possible, we did have to allow for convenience as we did not attempt to access participants who had not been "introduced" to the study by someone that they trusted (our local partners).

Alongside a desired eight to 10 parent participants in focus group discussions (FGDs) at each rural and urban site in every province, the proposed sample size for each population

group for the application of KAPs across provinces and in rural/urban areas is seen in the table below.

**Table 13. Calculating the percentage distributions of parents/parents to be surveyed**

| Region | Number of children under 6 years |         |         | Number of households with children under 6 years |                     |         | Percentage distributions of parents or parents to be surveyed (assuming one parent per household with children under 6 years) |                                                     |       |
|--------|----------------------------------|---------|---------|--------------------------------------------------|---------------------|---------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|-------|
|        | Total                            | By type |         | Total                                            | By type (estimates) |         | Total (% per province, adding to 100% in column)                                                                              | By type (% in each province, adding to 100% in row) |       |
|        |                                  | Urban   | Rural   |                                                  | Urban               | Rural   |                                                                                                                               | Urban                                               | Rural |
| KZN    | 1408000                          | 556000  | 852000  | 849000                                           | 335259              | 513741  | 18%                                                                                                                           | 39%                                                 | 61%   |
| GP     | 1501000                          | 1451000 | 50000   | 1195000                                          | 1155193             | 39807   | 26%                                                                                                                           | 97%                                                 | 3%    |
| EC     | 876000                           | 336000  | 540000  | 496000                                           | 190247              | 305753  | 11%                                                                                                                           | 38%                                                 | 62%   |
| WC     | 702000                           | 654000  | 48000   | 463000                                           | 431342              | 31658   | 10%                                                                                                                           | 93%                                                 | 7%    |
| LP     | 906000                           | 145000  | 761000  | 567000                                           | 90745               | 476255  | 12%                                                                                                                           | 16%                                                 | 84%   |
| MP     | 613000                           | 204000  | 409000  | 417000                                           | 138773              | 278227  | 9%                                                                                                                            | 33%                                                 | 67%   |
| NW     | 497000                           | 246000  | 251000  | 335000                                           | 165815              | 169185  | 7%                                                                                                                            | 49%                                                 | 51%   |
| FS     | 326000                           | 278000  | 48000   | 239000                                           | 203810              | 35190   | 5%                                                                                                                            | 85%                                                 | 15%   |
| NC     | 149000                           | 104000  | 45000   | 105000                                           | 73289               | 31711   | 2%                                                                                                                            | 70%                                                 | 30%   |
| RSA    | 6978000                          | 3974000 | 3004000 | 4666000                                          | 2784473             | 1881527 | 100%                                                                                                                          | 60%                                                 | 40%   |

**Table 14. Calculating the final number of parents or parents to be surveyed, by province and urban/rural classification**

| Region | Percentage distributions of parents or parents to be surveyed (assuming one parent per household with children under 6 years) |       | Number of parents or parents to be surveyed (calculated for a sample of 1000) |       |       |     | Number of parents/parents to be surveyed, (calculated for an adjusted sample of 1110) |       |       |     |
|--------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------|-------|-----|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------|-------|-----|
|        | Urban                                                                                                                         | Rural | Urban                                                                         | Rural | Total |     | Urban                                                                                 | Rural | Total |     |
| KZN    | 39%                                                                                                                           | 61%   | 70                                                                            | 110   | 180   | 18% | 70                                                                                    | 110   | 180   | 16% |
| GP     | 97%                                                                                                                           | 3%    | 252                                                                           | 8     | 260   | 26% | 250                                                                                   | 30    | 280   | 25% |

| Region | Percentage distributions of parents or parents to be surveyed (assuming one parent per household with children under 6 years) |       | Number of parents or parents to be surveyed (calculated for a sample of 1000) |       |       |      | Number of parents/parents to be surveyed, (calculated for an adjusted sample of 1110) |       |       |      |
|--------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------|-------|------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------|-------|------|
|        | Urban                                                                                                                         | Rural | Urban                                                                         | Rural | Total |      | Urban                                                                                 | Rural | Total |      |
| EC     | 38%                                                                                                                           | 62%   | 42                                                                            | 68    | 110   | 11%  | 40                                                                                    | 70    | 110   | 10%  |
| WC     | 93%                                                                                                                           | 7%    | 93                                                                            | 7     | 100   | 10%  | 90                                                                                    | 30    | 120   | 11%  |
| LP     | 16%                                                                                                                           | 84%   | 19                                                                            | 101   | 120   | 12%  | 30                                                                                    | 100   | 130   | 12%  |
| MP     | 33%                                                                                                                           | 67%   | 30                                                                            | 60    | 90    | 9%   | 30                                                                                    | 60    | 90    | 8%   |
| NW     | 49%                                                                                                                           | 51%   | 34                                                                            | 36    | 70    | 7%   | 30                                                                                    | 40    | 70    | 6%   |
| FS     | 85%                                                                                                                           | 15%   | 43                                                                            | 7     | 50    | 5%   | 40                                                                                    | 30    | 70    | 6%   |
| NC     | 70%                                                                                                                           | 30%   | 14                                                                            | 6     | 20    | 2%   | 30                                                                                    | 30    | 60    | 5%   |
| RSA    | 60%                                                                                                                           | 40%   | 597                                                                           | 403   | 1000  | 100% | 610                                                                                   | 500   | 1110  | 100% |

Small sample totals of less than 30; each was adjusted to equal 30 (the absolute minimum for analysis) in the final sample. Sample totals of different sizes that were rounded to the nearest interval of 10 in the final sample.

## Appendix B

**Table 15.** Table 3: Generational types of South African families

| Type              | WC   | EC   | NC   | FS   | KZN  | NW   | GP   | MP   | LP   | RSA  |
|-------------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Unclear           | 2,5  | 4,3  | 3,5  | 2,2  | 3,8  | 3,0  | 3,5  | 4,2  | 2,4  | 3,4  |
| Skip Generation   | 1,8  | 8,5  | 5,7  | 6,6  | 5,4  | 4,7  | 2,3  | 4,8  | 6,8  | 4,5  |
| Triple Generation | 10,6 | 18,4 | 17,7 | 15,2 | 18,4 | 15,0 | 10,6 | 17,5 | 19,0 | 14,7 |
| Double Generation | 48,1 | 34,5 | 41,0 | 42,4 | 35,2 | 36,9 | 42,3 | 40,0 | 39,3 | 40,1 |
| Single Generation | 18,1 | 12,3 | 12,0 | 11,9 | 13,1 | 12,0 | 16,4 | 12,0 | 9,4  | 13,9 |
| Single Person     | 19,0 | 22,1 | 20,1 | 21,6 | 24,2 | 28,3 | 25,1 | 21,6 | 23,1 | 23,4 |

## Appendix C: Barriers And Enablers For NCF ELDAS

| NCF Area            | Enablers                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | Barriers                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
|---------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Health              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Play strengthens confidence of the parent and relationship/bond and wellbeing of the parent (psychosocial health).</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Problematic access to health services and poor health (physical and mental) of parent; inadequate referral services for parents or children to keep them healthy.</li> <li>• General low access to water and sanitation negatively affects ability to be healthy.</li> <li>• Psychosocial ills and stresses (eg, depression (FS &amp; NC), community leaders (EC), GBV = other symptoms of psychosocial stressors, bullying, unemployment, alcohol, violence etc. - young child neglected etc.)</li> <li>• Young parents' instability of mental health vs. older parents'/parents being more emotionally stable.</li> <li>• Parents' lack of confidence and feeling inadequate/unimportant to be part of their child's learning.</li> <li>• Bad health and older parent inability to play physically.</li> <li>• Parents not prioritising play:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Psychological, mental health issues</li> <li>• Overworked</li> <li>• Tired</li> <li>• In survival mode</li> <li>• Drug and alcohol abuse</li> </ul> </li> </ul> |
| Nutrition           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Food gardens for nutrition</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of sufficient knowledge about BF.</li> <li>• Most parents do not come to workshops without stipend or food offered.</li> <li>• Poverty and lack of food security.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| Safety and Security | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rural safe communities where playing happens naturally. In group of own children and play outdoors.</li> <li>• In Limpopo and Mpumalanga: traditional structures enable play-based learning. Therefore, social structures are better which means the environment is safer and there is more access to water and food.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inadequate safe spaces (eg, parks) with no danger of traffic or crime; fear of abuse and trafficking, which is reportedly occurring in most communities.</li> <li>• Exposure of the children to the inappropriate sexual and violent content on the TV/ devices and the effects on the child—the threat of unsupervised device time. Barriers to monitoring due to parents stress and workload and hours.</li> <li>• Breakdown of social cohesion and structures and trust in community members: less communal play.</li> <li>• Corruption in municipalities and lack of services.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |

| NCF Area              | Enablers                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | Barriers                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
|-----------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Responsive Caregiving | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Loadshedding and subsequent lack of technology.</li> <li>• Older parents more likely to spend time and pass on traditional play (and have access to social grants).</li> <li>• Indigenous rhymes can be passed on by fathers, even uninvolved ones.</li> <li>• Knowledge of how play leads to learning is a great enabler.</li> <li>• Programmes help parents... and assist with school readiness.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Many parents do not understand the importance of a child's first 10 months (UCL).</li> <li>• Children imitate destructive behaviours they witness at home, e.g., sexual abuse, violence, substance abuse.</li> <li>• In most provinces, absent fathers was an issue that impacted children's upbringing.</li> <li>• Grandparents were responsive and played a significant role. Although they did not always understand 21st-century play-based learning, they were very involved in parenting their grandchildren, offering generosity and availability whenever needed.</li> <li>• Poverty, single parents, lack of child representation in local government, willingness of parents to learn more—e.g., the FGD was seen as a workshop and learning opportunity on positive parenting.</li> <li>• Technology was a huge barrier to learning for young people.</li> <li>• Children in the NW seen at home during school hours because the parents felt that they could not afford to take children to preschools, churches, libraries, or other resources.</li> <li>• Ubuntu—a growing loss of who we are through other people—affects the child's right to play. When parents or primary carers are occupied, there is less opportunity to experience the community providing a safe environment for play.</li> <li>• The loss of transmission of traditional games.</li> <li>• Social grants not always used on the child.</li> <li>• Lack of child representation in local government.</li> <li>• No role models/experience of play-based learning for current parents.</li> <li>• Low education level.</li> <li>• Not enough parent support.</li> <li>• No knowledge of play-based learning.</li> <li>• Parents believe that they need materials to play.</li> <li>• ECD centres not accessible (not affordable, and children not having documentation, e.g., migrants).</li> <li>• Parents not wanting advice.</li> <li>• Instructional culture (play is not learning).</li> <li>• Not understanding various aspects of development, e.g., creativity (not just counting colours).</li> </ul> |

| NCF Area                    | Enablers                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | Barriers                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
|-----------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Responsive Caregiving       |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Concepts of play and learning are in English; do not understand play as a pedagogy: there is a need to figure out how to relay these ideas to ordinary people in different languages.</li> <li>• Belief that learning happens at school only; parents not taking a role.</li> <li>• Unregulated overuse of technology.</li> <li>• View that children being clean = status.</li> <li>• Single parent = not enough time.</li> <li>• Cultural beliefs re: learning, e.g., don't disturb the brain.</li> <li>• Gender norms: childcare for women and restricting play types by child's gender and who they play with.</li> <li>• Constitutional rights clashing with religious/cultural "morals".</li> </ul> |
| Elda Wellbeing              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The understanding of good nutrition.</li> <li>• There is knowledge of the importance of health and hygiene.</li> <li>• Physical play is mostly taking place.</li> <li>• Loving care is happening.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• An ECD service is viewed as the place children learn social skills. There are incidents of poor interpersonal skills—hurting others, inappropriate language.</li> <li>• Child stress is occurring in dysfunctional family environments.</li> <li>• Celebrating differences was not mentioned in any of the focus groups.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| Elda Identity and Belonging | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Children are exploring their movements and environment. Children are playing, mostly with peers, siblings, neighbour's children.</li> <li>• Adults are playing with children.</li> <li>• Children are completing self-care and routine tasks.</li> <li>• Children are forming an identity within their families.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• An ECD service is viewed as the place children learn social skills. There are incidents of poor interpersonal skills—hurting others, inappropriate language.</li> <li>• Child stress is occurring in dysfunctional family environments.</li> <li>• Celebrating differences was not mentioned in any of the focus groups.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| Elda Communication          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self-care routines are opportunities for singing and learning concepts.</li> <li>• Children are read stories.</li> <li>• Children ask questions.</li> <li>• Children make meaning in pretend play and singing.</li> </ul>                                                                                                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There is an assumption that emergent literacy is only learnt within an early learning environment.</li> <li>• There is no focus on storytelling or reading.</li> <li>• Word and sound games were omitted.</li> <li>• Recording experiences through drawing are not encouraged.</li> <li>• Different styles of communication are not considered.</li> <li>• "Reading" and books are not regular activities.</li> <li>• Children are not encouraged to record their experiences through language, sounds, art, drama and later on through "writing".</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                            |

| NCF Area                                      | Enablers                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | Barriers                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
|-----------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Elda Exploring Mathematics                    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Singing is used to teach numbers and counting.</li> <li>• Taking care of belongings consolidates sorting, matching and classifying.</li> <li>• Children are differentiating between colours, shapes and textures.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There is a belief that mathematics is taught at early learning services and not at home.</li> <li>• Classifying, sorting and matching needs to take place.</li> <li>• Although counting is taught, this does not always relate to number concept.</li> <li>• Awareness of number, counting alone is learning the vocabulary without the awareness of meaning of the number.</li> <li>• Patterns in the environment are not used.</li> <li>• Mathematical language is not introduced.</li> <li>• Positions in space are not identified.</li> <li>• Measurement is not encouraged.</li> <li>• Problem-solving needs to be encouraged.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                |
| Elda Creativity                               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Children are involved in a variety of pretend/fantasy play, dance and traditional games.</li> <li>• Children are playing mostly with other children—polyadic play.</li> <li>• Children are investigating and exploring through play.</li> <li>• There is some creativity happening in some areas.</li> <li>• Children are using their imagination.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There are limited visual art activities and thus sensory motor skills and fine motor coordination may not be on par with developmental norms.</li> <li>• Visual arts are precursors to writing and these are not favoured.</li> <li>• Problem solving is not being scaffolded through creative arts.</li> <li>• Traditional game playing has decreased since the COVID-19 pandemic.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
| Elda Knowledge and Understanding of the World | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Children are being exposed to the world of connectivity through television and electronic devices.</li> <li>• Children are obtaining a world view from the television.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Children do not have the opportunities to explore and investigate their life world – nature, life science, history etc.</li> <li>• Children should use all their senses to explore their life world, but this is being restricted by the amount of television being watched.</li> <li>• Children are not being given the opportunity to show interest in other resources.</li> <li>• Children are not learning how things work.</li> <li>• Children are not using different types of tools and techniques to operate and make things.</li> <li>• Children's natural curiosity may be stifled by the amount of television they watch.</li> <li>• Children are only using electronic devices and no other forms of technology—woodwork, box construction etc.</li> <li>• Exploring and investigating time and space.</li> </ul> |

## Appendix D: MEL Framework

Considerations for a framework to guide future monitoring and evaluation activities for programmes related to the advancement of parents'/primary caregivers' KAPs regarding the importance of play in child development, early learning and education.

Ideally, any intervention aimed at improving parent KAPs about play-based learning would capture data about a few common key indicators on a broad scale. This would allow for a central repository of data that could help to gauge the cumulative effect of interventions, and make comparisons across methodologies to assess the effectiveness of different interventions. Therefore, a shared monitoring and evaluation framework would be recommended across interventions, at a national level.

### Rationale for the M&E framework

- Standardise KAPs indicators and questionnaire items that programme providers can use to gather data towards a broad-scale evidence base
- Gather evidence on parental KAPs to gauge shifts over time
- Monitor the effectiveness of play-based parent KAPs programmes and methodologies, and change over time
- Use M&E data on parental KAPs to inform programme design, relevant methodologies, new intervention offerings, frameworks and policies

### Components of the framework

The framework should remain simple so that it can be used across many contexts and should not depend on programme providers having high levels of research or monitoring and evaluation expertise to administer it. It is therefore recommended that a truncated version of the KAPs survey that was used for this study is used as the base, and administered to programme participants pre- and post-intervention. Parent participant focus groups with a few key common questions could then be run throughout programme interventions, to understand emerging survey results.

## Use of the framework

It is envisaged that any play-based parenting programme would gather qualitative and quantitative pre- and post-data. It is recommended that a quantitative survey is run pre- and post-intervention, and qualitative focus groups with parents run post-intervention.

- The pre-survey results can be used to inform and tailor programmatic support according to emerging needs and gaps in parent KAPs
- The post-survey results can be used to assess the effectiveness of methodologies on KAPs, compare results with other programme methodologies and contexts, and to improve subsequent programme interventions
- Data can be used to build a nation-wide picture of play-based learning to inform support, policy, budget etc. This data could be supplemented at programme level with other information useful for different interventions.

## Operationalising the framework

- Obtain funding for the processes, possibly integrating M&E Framework implementation costs into developing the DBE ECD database, or using the tool as a sub-study as part of the Thrive by Five Index.
- Finalise the survey and focus group questions through a participatory stakeholder process.
- Develop a centralised data capture system to collate data (if the survey is administered online, we would recommend using one Kobo Toolbox survey with multiple user IDs as this would collate the data; an online repository for focus group data could also easily be set up). It would be important to consider how the data would integrate with the ECD-EMIS, if at all.
- Consider hardware, i.e. smartphones or tablets, to capture data and a possible loan library for these during survey times.
- Train programme providers to use the administration and capture tools. This training would need to include details about who should administer the surveys, to whom (sampling and, in particular, recommended sample size), and when.
- Hold regular evidence-based participatory reflection sessions to analyse data and learn sectorally. It would be necessary to involve DBE EMIS and IT staff at district, provincial and national levels.
- Adjust tools, interventions and policy as needed.

## Roles

The following roles would need to be defined while designing the framework:

- Convening of participatory design and reflection sessions
- Finalisation of the framework, including tools and data capture tools
- Paying for the operationalisation of the framework, including hard costs, such as for phones or travel costs
- Managing the data - quality control and cleaning and migrating as necessary over time.

## Tools

The survey items and responses used in this study are shown below; it is recommended that these are adapted (mostly truncated) for the MEL framework. This should be done in a participatory way, perhaps selecting the items most likely to show differences, and adding further items that measure desired but uncommon KAP. A set of focus group questions (focusing on practices, enablers and barriers) should also be developed participatively.

# 8. Parenting KAPs Survey of Play-Based Learning in ECD

| Item                                            | Responses                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
|-------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| What is your name?                              | (Fieldworker name)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| Which organisation are you from?                |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| From which site are you conducting this survey? |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| In which district is this site located?         | <input type="radio"/> Eastern Cape<br><input type="radio"/> Free State<br><input type="radio"/> Gauteng<br><input type="radio"/> KwaZulu Natal<br><input type="radio"/> Limpopo<br><input type="radio"/> Mpumalanga<br><input type="radio"/> Northern Cape<br><input type="radio"/> North West<br><input type="radio"/> Western Cape |
| In which district is this site based?           |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |

| Item                                                                                               | Responses                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| What type of family are you interviewing for this specific survey?<br>What is the familial set-up? | <input type="radio"/> Single caregiver<br><input type="radio"/> Nuclear family (mother, father and children)<br><input type="radio"/> Extended family (nuclear plus other family members)<br><input type="radio"/> Only grandparent/s<br><input type="radio"/> Sibling headed<br><input type="radio"/> Other Please specify                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| Do you consent to this survey?                                                                     | <input type="radio"/> Yes<br><input type="radio"/> No                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| What type of house do you live in?                                                                 | <input type="radio"/> Dwelling/house or brick/concrete block structure on a separate stand or yard or on farm<br><input type="radio"/> Informal dwelling/shack not in backyard, eg in an informal/squatter settlement or on farm<br><input type="radio"/> Traditional dwelling/hut/structure made of traditional materials<br><input type="radio"/> Informal dwelling/shack in backyard<br><input type="radio"/> Room/flatlet on a property or a larger dwelling servants' quarters/granny flat Flat or apartment in a block of flats<br><input type="radio"/> Dwelling/house/flat/room in backyard<br><input type="radio"/> Town house (semi-detached house in complex)<br><input type="radio"/> Cluster house in complex<br><input type="radio"/> Caravan/tent |
| How many adults (18+) live in your household?                                                      | <input type="radio"/> 1 adult<br><input type="radio"/> 2 adults<br><input type="radio"/> 3-5 adults<br><input type="radio"/> 5 or more adults                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| How many children from birth to 24 months old live in your household?                              | <input type="radio"/> One child between birth to 24 months old Two children between birth to 24 months old<br><input type="radio"/> More than two children between birth to 24 months old<br><input type="radio"/> None                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| How many children aged 2-6 years old live in your household?                                       | <input type="radio"/> One child between 2-6 years old<br><input type="radio"/> Two children between 2-6 years old<br><input type="radio"/> More than two children between 2-6 years old<br><input type="radio"/> None                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| How many children aged 6-18 years old live in your household?                                      | <input type="radio"/> One child between 7-18 years old<br><input type="radio"/> Two children between 7-18 years old<br><input type="radio"/> More than two children between 7-18 years old<br><input type="radio"/> None                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |

| Item                                                                           | Responses                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| What are the sources of income in your household? <i>(tick all that apply)</i> | <input type="radio"/> Social grant<br><input type="radio"/> Fixed salary/wages<br><input type="radio"/> Casual wages<br><input type="radio"/> Informal trading (not registered as a business for tax purposes)<br><input type="radio"/> Self-employed (registered as a business for tax purposes)<br><input type="radio"/> Court ordered maintenance<br><input type="radio"/> Other<br><input type="radio"/> Old age pension<br><input type="radio"/> Child support grant<br><input type="radio"/> Care dependency grant<br><input type="radio"/> Foster grant<br><input type="radio"/> Other <i>(please specify)</i> |
| What is the child's name?                                                      |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| What are the main languages that <i>[name/the child]</i> is spoken to in?      | <input type="radio"/> Afrikaans<br><input type="radio"/> English<br><input type="radio"/> Xhosa<br><input type="radio"/> Zulu<br><input type="radio"/> Southern Sotho<br><input type="radio"/> Northern Sotho/Sepedi<br><input type="radio"/> Tswana<br><input type="radio"/> Tsonga<br><input type="radio"/> Venda<br><input type="radio"/> Swati<br><input type="radio"/> Ndebele<br><input type="radio"/> Sign Language<br><input type="radio"/> Other <i>(please specify)</i>                                                                                                                                     |
| How old is (name/this child)?                                                  | <input type="radio"/> Under one year old<br><input type="radio"/> 1 year old<br><input type="radio"/> 2 years old<br><input type="radio"/> 3 years old<br><input type="radio"/> 4 years old<br><input type="radio"/> 5 years old<br><input type="radio"/> 6 years old - not attending Grade R                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| Does (name/this child) have a disability?                                      | <input type="radio"/> No<br><input type="radio"/> Yes<br><input type="radio"/> Other <i>(please specify)</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| What is the gender of (name/this child)?                                       | <input type="radio"/> Male<br><input type="radio"/> Female<br><input type="radio"/> Other                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |

| Item                                            | Responses                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
|-------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| What is your relationship to (name/this child)? | <input type="radio"/> Biological Mother<br><input type="radio"/> Biological Father<br><input type="radio"/> Grandmother<br><input type="radio"/> Grandfather<br><input type="radio"/> Sister<br><input type="radio"/> Brother<br><input type="radio"/> Aunt<br><input type="radio"/> Uncle<br><input type="radio"/> Foster mother<br><input type="radio"/> Foster father<br><input type="radio"/> Other ( <i>please specify</i> ) |
| How old are you?                                | <input type="radio"/> Under 18 (If respondent is under 18 please thank them and end the interview here.)<br><input type="radio"/> 19-25<br><input type="radio"/> 26-40<br><input type="radio"/> 41-60<br><input type="radio"/> 61-80<br><input type="radio"/> 81+                                                                                                                                                                 |
| Do you have a disability?                       | <input type="radio"/> No<br><input type="radio"/> Yes ( <i>please specify</i> )                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| What is your gender?                            | <input type="radio"/> Male<br><input type="radio"/> Female<br><input type="radio"/> Other                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| What is your highest level of education?        | <input type="radio"/> No schooling<br><input type="radio"/> Started primary school<br><input type="radio"/> Completed primary school<br><input type="radio"/> Started high school<br><input type="radio"/> Completed high school/Matric<br><input type="radio"/> Tertiary education<br><input type="radio"/> Please specify                                                                                                       |
| In which province are you based?                | <input type="radio"/> Eastern Cape<br><input type="radio"/> Free State<br><input type="radio"/> Gauteng<br><input type="radio"/> KwaZulu Natal<br><input type="radio"/> Limpopo<br><input type="radio"/> Mpumalanga<br><input type="radio"/> Northern Cape<br><input type="radio"/> North West<br><input type="radio"/> Western Cape                                                                                              |

| Item                                                                               | Responses                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| What district are you in?                                                          | <input type="radio"/> Alfred Nzo (Eastern Cape)<br><input type="radio"/> Amathole (Eastern Cape)<br><input type="radio"/> Buffalo City (Eastern Cape)<br><input type="radio"/> Chris Hani (Eastern Cape)<br><input type="radio"/> Joe Gqabi (Eastern Cape)<br><input type="radio"/> Nelson Mandela Bay (Eastern Cape)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| To whom/where do you go for advice about [name/the child]? (select all that apply) | <input type="radio"/> Parent support groups/Parenting programmes<br><input type="radio"/> School<br><input type="radio"/> Early learning programme (ECD centre, play group, day mother)<br><input type="radio"/> Work programmes (education/care<br><input type="radio"/> initiatives provided by workplace/employers)<br><input type="radio"/> Clinics<br><input type="radio"/> Religious leaders<br><input type="radio"/> Traditional/Community leaders/Traditional healers<br><input type="radio"/> Social workers<br><input type="radio"/> Healthcare professionals (private)<br><input type="radio"/> Books/Pamphlets/News papers/Magazines<br><input type="radio"/> Media (TV, radio, social media, apps)<br><input type="radio"/> None<br><input type="radio"/> Other (please specify) |
| Where does [name/the child] play? (select all that apply)                          | <input type="radio"/> At home, inside<br><input type="radio"/> In the garden/yard of their home/grounds of the building<br><input type="radio"/> At the neighbour's property<br><input type="radio"/> On the street nearby<br><input type="radio"/> In a communal park<br><input type="radio"/> In a community centre<br><input type="radio"/> At an ECD programme (ECD<br><input type="radio"/> centre/play group/day mother)<br><input type="radio"/> Other (please specify)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |

| Item                                                                                                                                                                              | Responses                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| In the past week, have you or any member of your household played any of the following games/activities with <i>[name/the child]</i> ?                                            | <input type="radio"/> Active, physical play<br><input type="radio"/> Books<br><input type="radio"/> Story telling<br><input type="radio"/> Rhymes<br><input type="radio"/> Clapping/Finger games<br><input type="radio"/> Singing<br><input type="radio"/> Dancing<br><input type="radio"/> Traditional games<br><input type="radio"/> Pretend/Make-believe/Fantasy games<br><input type="radio"/> Household items (pots, pans, spoons, etc.)<br><input type="radio"/> Electronic devices (phones, tablets, gaming consoles)<br><input type="radio"/> Construction/building/manipulative play (blocks, stones, sticks, pillows, toys that fit together, etc)<br><input type="radio"/> Sand play (playing with or in sand)<br><input type="radio"/> Water play (playing with or in water)<br><input type="radio"/> Puzzles<br><input type="radio"/> Other ( <i>please specify</i> ) |
| What play materials are available for <i>[name/the child]</i> ?                                                                                                                   | <input type="radio"/> Items from outdoors (sticks, stones, etc)<br><input type="radio"/> Bought toys (dolls, plastic toys, construction, manipulative, puzzles, etc)<br><input type="radio"/> Homemade toys (wire cars, boxes, etc)<br><input type="radio"/> Electronic devices<br><input type="radio"/> Household items (pots, cushions, etc)<br><input type="radio"/> Other                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| How many children's books or picture books do you have for <i>[name/the child]</i> ?                                                                                              | <input type="radio"/> 0 books<br><input type="radio"/> 1-5 books<br><input type="radio"/> 6-10 books<br><input type="radio"/> More than 10 books                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| In the past week, how often did you or any member of your household read books or look at picture books with <i>[name/the child]</i> ?                                            | <input type="radio"/> Many times (more than three times a week)<br><input type="radio"/> Once or twice<br><input type="radio"/> No, not at all                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| In the past week, how often did you or any member of your household tell stories to <i>[name/the child]</i> ?                                                                     | <input type="radio"/> Many times (more than three times a week)<br><input type="radio"/> Once or twice<br><input type="radio"/> No, not at all                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| In the past week, how often did you or any member of your household sing songs to or with <i>[name/the child]</i> ? (Including lullabies/songs when the child is going to sleep?) | <input type="radio"/> Many times (more than three times a week)<br><input type="radio"/> Once or twice<br><input type="radio"/> No, not at all                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| Who sang songs/lullabies with/to the child?                                                                                                                                       | <input type="radio"/> Many times (more than three times a week)<br><input type="radio"/> Once or twice<br><input type="radio"/> No, not at all                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |

| Item                                                                                                                    | Responses                                                                                                                                      |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| In the past week, how often did you or any member of your household play with <i>[name/the child]</i> ?                 | <input type="radio"/> Many times (more than three times a week)<br><input type="radio"/> Once or twice<br><input type="radio"/> No, not at all |
| In the past week, how often did you or any member of your household tell <i>[name/the child]</i> the names of things?   | <input type="radio"/> Many times (more than three times a week)<br><input type="radio"/> Once or twice<br><input type="radio"/> No, not at all |
| In the past week, how often did you or any member of your household count things with <i>[name/the child]</i> ?         | <input type="radio"/> Many times (more than three times a week)<br><input type="radio"/> Once or twice<br><input type="radio"/> No, not at all |
| In the past week, how often did you or any member of your household draw or paint things with <i>[name/the child]</i> ? | <input type="radio"/> Many times (more than three times a week)<br><input type="radio"/> Once or twice<br><input type="radio"/> No, not at all |
| In the past week, has <i>[name/the child]</i> listened to a children's radio programme?                                 | <input type="radio"/> Many times (more than three times a week)<br><input type="radio"/> Once or twice<br><input type="radio"/> No, not at all |
| In the past week, how much time did <i>[name/the child]</i> spend watching programmes or videos (TV, phone, computer)?  | <input type="radio"/> Many times (more than three times a week)<br><input type="radio"/> Once or twice<br><input type="radio"/> No, not at all |
| You can play with <i>[name/the child]</i> by including him/her in household tasks.                                      | <input type="radio"/> Agree<br><input type="radio"/> Disagree<br><input type="radio"/> I don't know                                            |
| Play can help <i>[name/the child]</i> develop social skills such as cooperating and making friends.                     | <input type="radio"/> Agree<br><input type="radio"/> Disagree<br><input type="radio"/> I don't know                                            |
| Play can improve <i>[name's/the child's]</i> language and communication skills.                                         | <input type="radio"/> Agree<br><input type="radio"/> Disagree<br><input type="radio"/> I don't know                                            |
| It is more important to teach/instruct <i>[name/the child]</i> than to play with him/her.                               | <input type="radio"/> Agree<br><input type="radio"/> Disagree<br><input type="radio"/> I don't know                                            |
| Playing together helps me build a good relationship/bond with <i>[name/the child]</i> .                                 | <input type="radio"/> Agree<br><input type="radio"/> Disagree<br><input type="radio"/> I don't know                                            |
| Playing with <i>[name/the child]</i> is more useful than teaching him/her.                                              | <input type="radio"/> Agree<br><input type="radio"/> Disagree<br><input type="radio"/> I don't know                                            |
| It is only the woman's role to play with young children.                                                                | <input type="radio"/> Agree<br><input type="radio"/> Disagree<br><input type="radio"/> I don't know                                            |

| Item                                                                                    | Responses                                                                                           |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Boys and girls should not be allowed to play the same games.                            | <input type="radio"/> Agree<br><input type="radio"/> Disagree<br><input type="radio"/> I don't know |
| It is important for me to play with <i>[name/the child]</i> .                           | <input type="radio"/> Agree<br><input type="radio"/> Disagree<br><input type="radio"/> I don't know |
| I decide what we play with and/or how we play.                                          | <input type="radio"/> Agree<br><input type="radio"/> Disagree<br><input type="radio"/> I don't know |
| Adults should not play with children.                                                   | <input type="radio"/> Agree<br><input type="radio"/> Disagree<br><input type="radio"/> I don't know |
| Children learn when you play traditional/ cultural games with them.                     | <input type="radio"/> Agree<br><input type="radio"/> Disagree<br><input type="radio"/> I don't know |
| I have a lot of fun with <i>[name/the child]</i> when we play together.                 | <input type="radio"/> Agree<br><input type="radio"/> Disagree<br><input type="radio"/> I don't know |
| I am too busy to play with <i>[name/the child]</i> when he/she wants to play with me.   | <input type="radio"/> Agree<br><input type="radio"/> Disagree<br><input type="radio"/> I don't know |
| I look forward to playing with <i>[name/the child]</i> .                                | <input type="radio"/> Agree<br><input type="radio"/> Disagree<br><input type="radio"/> I don't know |
| I let <i>[name/the child]</i> decide what we play with and/or how we play.              | <input type="radio"/> Agree<br><input type="radio"/> Disagree<br><input type="radio"/> I don't know |
| I don't really enjoy playing with <i>[name/ the child]</i> because he/she is too young. | <input type="radio"/> Agree<br><input type="radio"/> Disagree<br><input type="radio"/> I don't know |
| <i>[name/the child]</i> does not learn when he/she plays freely on their own.           | <input type="radio"/> Agree<br><input type="radio"/> Disagree<br><input type="radio"/> I don't know |
| <i>[name/the child]</i> learns only when playing with other children.                   | <input type="radio"/> Agree<br><input type="radio"/> Disagree<br><input type="radio"/> I don't know |

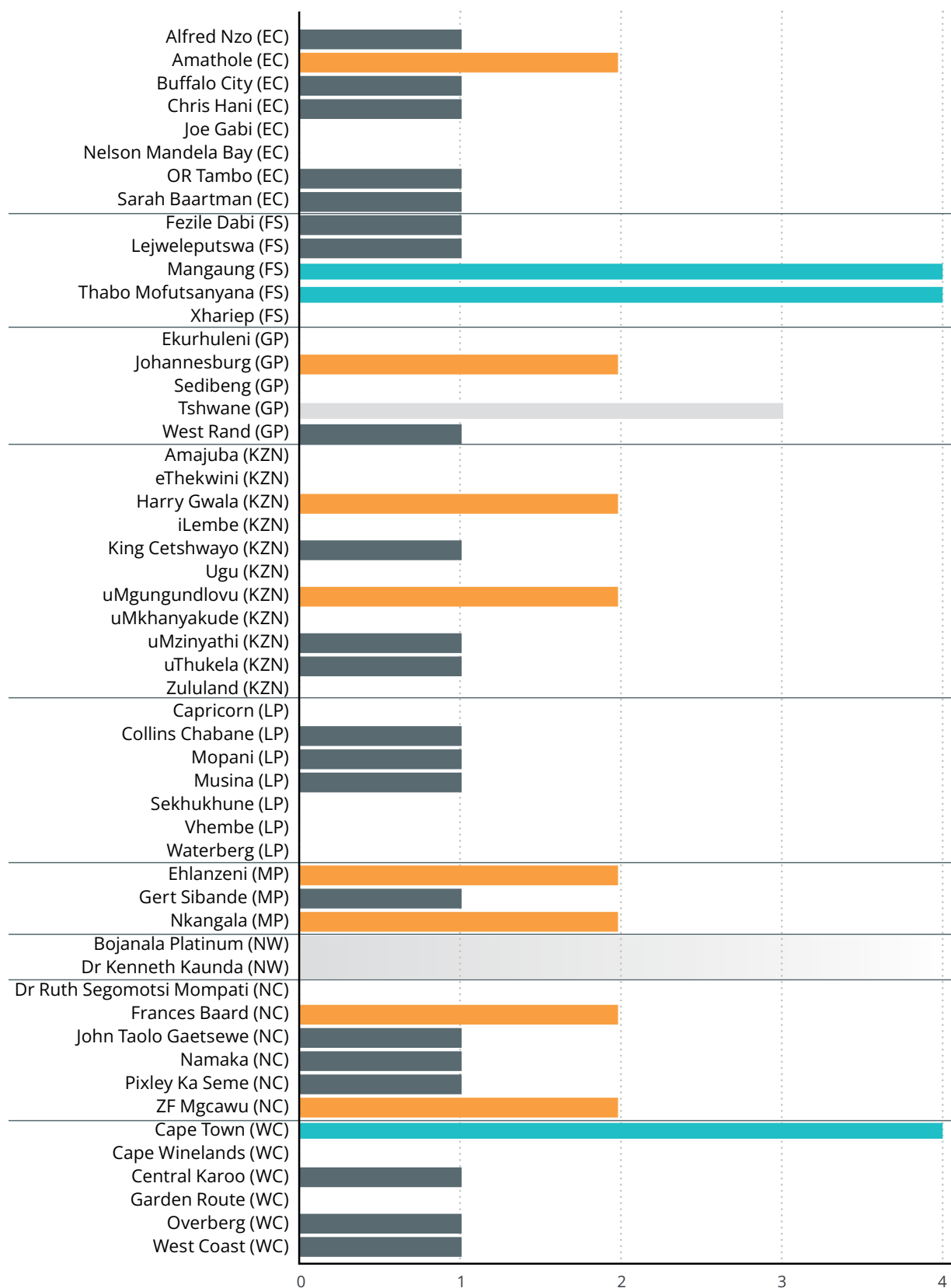
## 9. Appendix E: Mapping Data

### Programmes per district

| Province       | District           | No. of programmes |
|----------------|--------------------|-------------------|
| Eastern Cape   | Alfred Nzo         | 1                 |
|                | Amathole           | 2                 |
|                | Buffalo City       | 1                 |
|                | Chris Hani         | 1                 |
|                | Joe Gqabi          | 0                 |
|                | Nelson Mandela Bay | 0                 |
|                | OR Tambo           | 1                 |
|                | Sarah Baartman     | 1                 |
| Free State     | Fezile Dabi        | 1                 |
|                | Lejweleputswa      | 1                 |
|                | Mangaung           | 4                 |
|                | Thabo Mofutsanyana | 4                 |
|                | Xhariep            | 0                 |
| Gauteng        | Ekurhuleni         | 0                 |
|                | Johannesburg       | 2                 |
|                | Sedibeng           | 0                 |
|                | Tshwane            | 3                 |
|                | West Rand          | 1                 |
| Kwa-Zulu Natal | Amajuba            | 0                 |
|                | eThekwini          | 0                 |
|                | Harry Gwala        | 2                 |
|                | iLembe             | 0                 |
|                | King Cetshwayo     | 1                 |
|                | Ugu                | 0                 |
|                | uMgungundlovu      | 2                 |
|                | uMkhanyakude       | 0                 |
|                | uMzinyathi         | 1                 |
|                | uThukela           | 1                 |
|                | Zululand           | 0                 |

| Province      | District                  | No. of programmes |
|---------------|---------------------------|-------------------|
| Limpopo       | Capricorn                 | 0                 |
|               | Collins Chabane           | 1                 |
|               | Mopani                    | 1                 |
|               | Musina                    | 1                 |
|               | Sekhukhune                | 0                 |
|               | Vhembe                    | 0                 |
|               | Waterberg                 | 0                 |
| Mpumalanga    | Ehlanzeni                 | 2                 |
|               | Gert Sibande              | 1                 |
|               | Nkangala                  | 2                 |
| North West    | Bojanala Platinum         | 0                 |
|               | Dr Kenneth Kaunda         | 0                 |
|               | Dr Ruth Segomotsi Mompati | 0                 |
| Northern Cape | Frances Baard             | 2                 |
|               | John Taolo Gaetsewe       | 1                 |
|               | Namakwa                   | 1                 |
|               | Pixley Ka Seme            | 1                 |
|               | ZF Mgcawu                 | 2                 |
| Western Cape  | Cape Town                 | 4                 |
|               | Cape Winelands            | 0                 |
|               | Central Karoo             | 1                 |
|               | Garden Route              | 0                 |
|               | Overberg                  | 1                 |
|               | West Coast                | 1                 |

**Appendix Figure 1. Number of ECD programmes per district**



## Appendix F: Detail on Existing Programmes

### *Which Offer Interventions About Play-Based Learning For Parents, From Specific 37 IC Survey Respondents*

#### Number of programmes and sites per organisation

Interestingly, more than half of these 27 organisations run more than one programme for parents that supports knowledge and practice of play-based learning in children between birth and six years old—eight organisations indicated running more than four such programmes. More than half (14 of 27) of the responding organisations ran the programmes across six or more sites, and only four had one site.

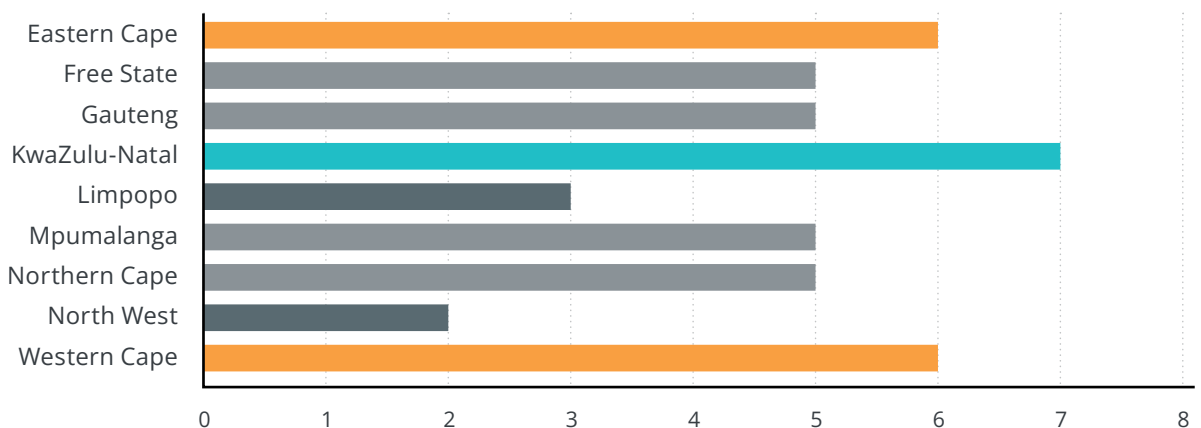
#### How established are the programmes?

Half (48%) of the 27 programmes are well established, having been running for over 10 years, with only three of the responding programmes having started in the past year and being less than 3 years old.

**Appendix Figure 2.** Programmes based on the number of years they have been running



**Appendix Figure 3.** ECD Programmes per province



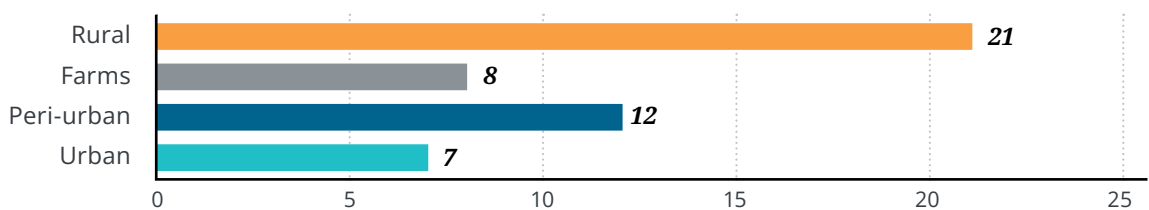
There are 34 districts which have play-based learning for parent programmes running—as shown per province in the table below.

| Province       | Number of districts | Number of programmes in the province |
|----------------|---------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Eastern Cape   | 6                   | 7                                    |
| Free State     | 4                   | 10                                   |
| Gauteng        | 3                   | 6                                    |
| Kwa-Zulu Natal | 6                   | 7                                    |
| Limpopo        | 3                   | 3                                    |
| Mpumalanga     | 3                   | 5                                    |
| North West     | 0                   | 0                                    |
| Northern Cape  | 5                   | 7                                    |
| Western Cape   | 4                   | 7                                    |
| <b>TOTAL</b>   | <b>34</b>           | <b>52</b>                            |

### Types of communities served by ECD programmes

- Mostly rural and peri-urban communities are served by organisations offering ECD programming. Rural: 21 organisations
- Farms: 8 organisations
- Peri-urban: 12 organisations
- Urban: 7 organisations

**Appendix Figure 4.** *Types of communities served by ECD programmes*



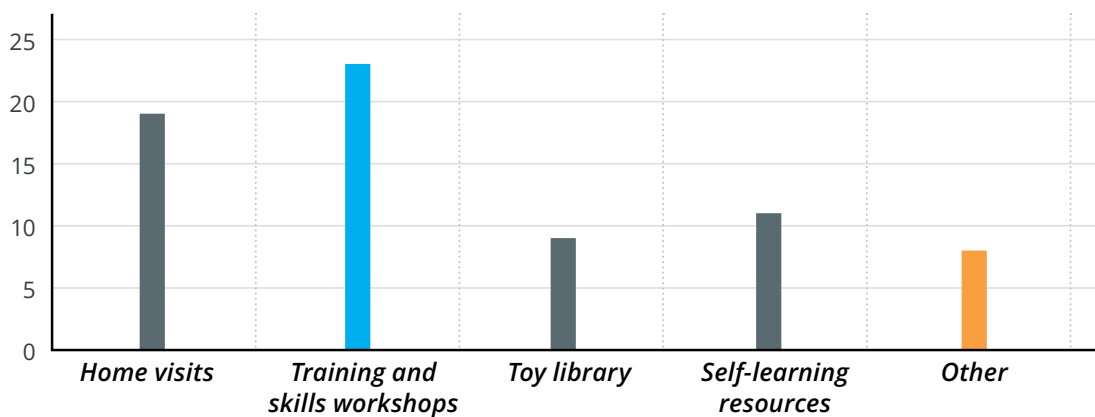
## Overview of Programmes Offered

### Modalities and Mediums That Programme/S Use

Many organisations offer their programme services to parents through home visits and workshops, typically interacting with them face-to-face. Some organisations also offer services online or via WhatsApp messaging or groups.

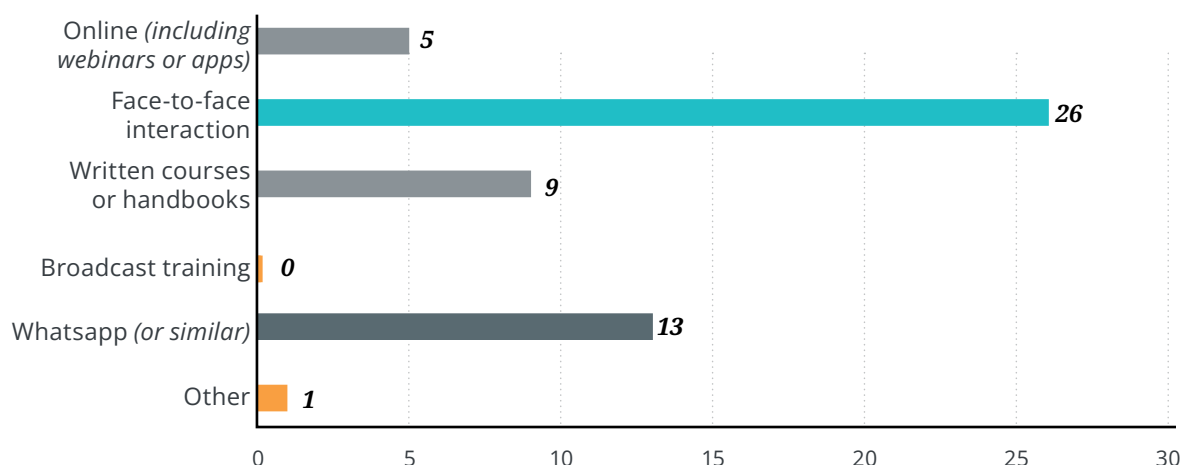
- Home visits: 19 organisations
- Training and skills workshops: 23 organisations
- Toy library: 9 organisations
- Self-learning resources: 11 organisations
- Other: 8 organisations
  - » Playgroups: 3 organisations
  - » Parents meetings: 1 organisation
  - » Centre based support for training: 1 organisation
  - » Food gardening: 1 organisation
  - » After care support: 1 organisation
  - » Digital SD cards with resources: 1 organisation

**Appendix Figure 5.** *Count of types of communities served by ECD programmes*



Most (26) organisations offer programmes face to face; 5 have an online programme; 9 have a written course; and 13 work through WhatsApp.

**Appendix Figure 6. Mediums of parent/caregiver play-based learning programmes**

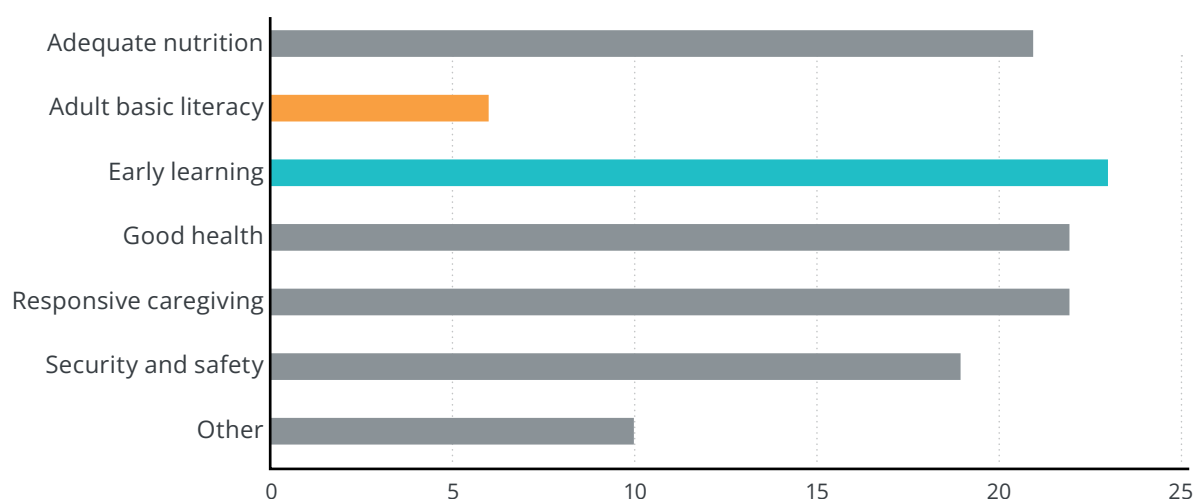


### What content is covered?

The content of the programmes offered largely focuses on good health and nutrition, early learning, responsive caring and safety and security.

- Good health: 22
- Adequate nutrition: 21
- Responsive caregiving: 22
- Security and safety: 19
- Early learning: 23
- Adult basic literacy: 6
- 'Other': 10
  - » Treatment, cleaning: 1
  - » Communication and socialisation: 1
  - » Child development: 1
  - » Power of play: 1
  - » Adherence to health treatment: 1
  - » Gender-based awareness: 1
  - » Encouraging the importance of early learning: 1
  - » Mental health: 1
  - » Trauma training: 1
  - » Food gardens: 1

**Appendix Figure 7. Content covered in parent/caregiver play-based learning programmes**



### Age of children for targeted parents and age and gender of targeted parents

56% of programming was offered to parents/parents who had children from birth to six years old, with 33% offering programmes to parents with children from birth to five years old.

Almost all (93%) of programmes were offered to parents of all ages (2 of 37 offered to youth only— one for under 35s and the other for under 18s). 92% of organisations offered programming to parents of any gender, with only one organisation offering programming to only men.

### Which parent/parents are included in your parent/parent play-based learning programme/s?

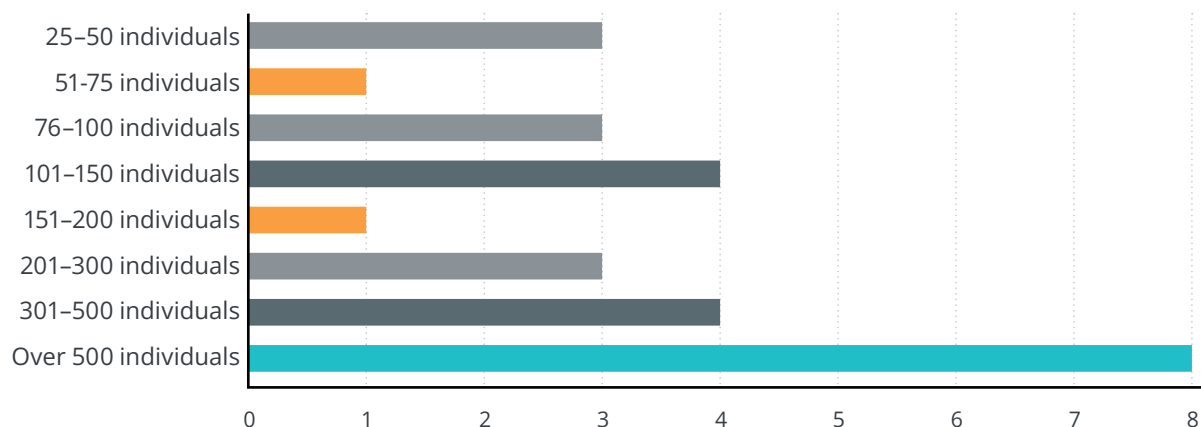
- Those with children who are not in an ECD service: 17 organisations
- Those with low household incomes: 22 organisations
- Those with special needs children: 15 organisations
- Those who care for orphans and vulnerable children: 18 organisations
- Those who have been ordered by the Court: 1 organisation
- Those whom a social worker has recommended to join: 5 organisations
- Those who fulfil your donor/grant requirements: 10 organisations
- Parents of a particular gender: 1
- Parents of a particular age: 3
- Other: 8
  - » Any parent who has a child between 0–7: 1
  - » HIV exposed children and mothers; mothers on PrEP: 1
  - » Parents of children affected by Albinism: 1
  - » “Social dad”— a male community member: 1
  - » Playgroup 3–5 years: 1
  - » Those who have children at ECD centres: 2

- » Parents of children aged 0–5: 1

## Intervention

Most organisations (23) ran programmes for over 6 months, and 15 of those ran for over a year. Only 3 organisations offered short term projects (ie, under 6 months). Programmes ran with individuals, large groups, small groups and families, with the vast majority running with parents and children, and only 4 with parents only. Programmes generally tried to reach large numbers of parents.

**Appendix Figure 8.** *How many parents/caregivers does the programme aim to reach in one year?*

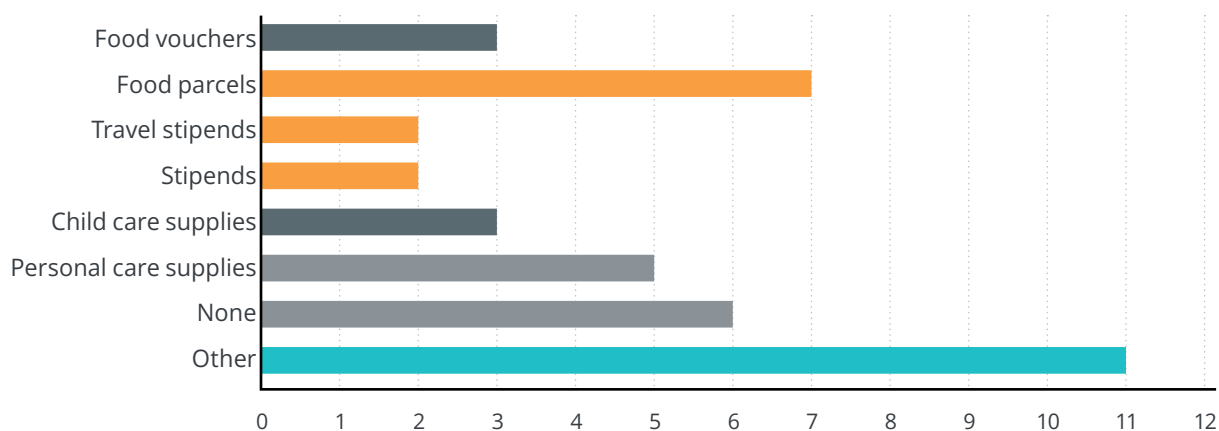


## Participation

Do the participants receive any incentives for taking part of the programme?

- Food vouchers: 3
- Food parcels: 7
- Travel stipends: 2
- Stipends: 2
- Child care supplies: 3
- Personal care supplies: 5
- None: 6
- Other: 11
  - » Items from food garden: 1
  - » Refreshments: 3
  - » Data to access digital programme: 1
  - » DSD parcels: 1
  - » Reading pack/books: 2
  - » Toys: 2
  - » Airtime: 1

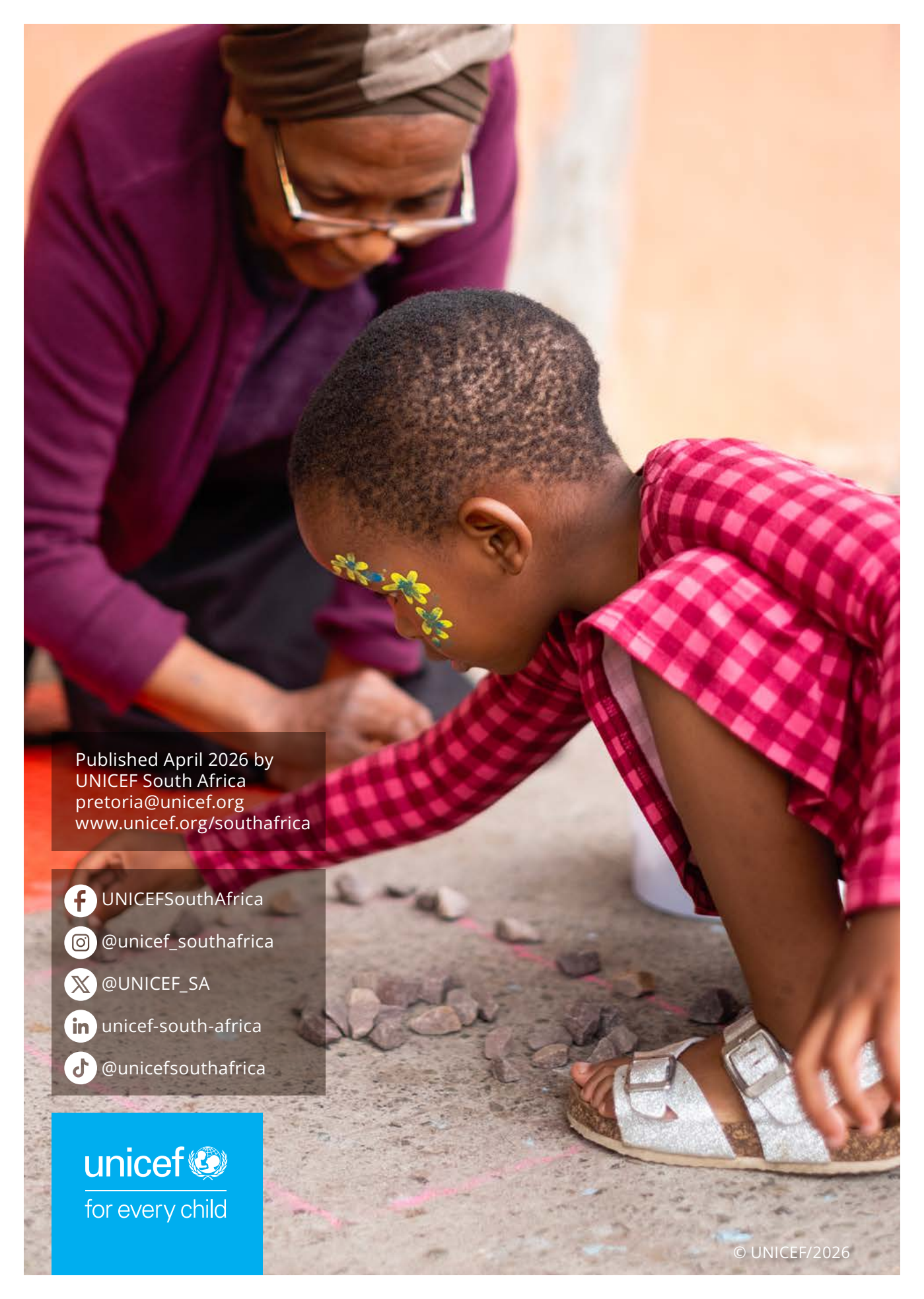
**Appendix Figure 9. Incentives received for taking part in the programme**



Play-based learning programmes were mostly supported by private funding. For 12 of the 27 organisations, private sources accounted for 76–100% of funding, and 17 of the 27 received over half of their funding from private sources. Government funding constituted less than a quarter of funding for most organisations, and user fees accounted for less than a quarter of funding for almost all programmes.

### Programme Effectiveness

Most organisations (22/27) were confident that their programmes “very effectively” changed parenting knowledge and understanding, and 10 organisations rated that they felt they were moderately effective in shifting parenting attitudes (what they believe is important or necessary for their child), while 16 felt they were “very effective”. The majority (20) believed that they were very effective in shifting parenting behaviour/practices (what they put into practice with their child), and only six felt that they only achieved moderate effects in this regard.



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[pretoria@unicef.org](mailto:pretoria@unicef.org)  
[www.unicef.org/southafrica](http://www.unicef.org/southafrica)

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