

The Expression of the Nurturing Care Framework in Child-rearing Practices of Marginalised Communities in South Africa: A Case Study

A Master's Thesis



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DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis, *The Expression of the Nurturing Care Framework in Child-rearing Practices of Marginalised Communities in South Africa: A Case Study*, is my own unaided work. It is submitted for the degree of Master of Arts in Community-Based Counselling Psychology at the University of the Witwatersrand. To the best of my knowledge, it has not been submitted before for the award of any other degree, diploma or for examination at any other university. And this thesis contains no material previously published by any other person except where due acknowledgements have been made.



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Date: October 2024

ABSTRACT

The Expression of the Nurturing Care Framework in Child-rearing Practices of Marginalised Communities in South Africa: A Case Study

This study explores the expression of the Nurturing Care Framework (NCF) principles in the child-rearing practices of marginalised communities in South Africa, focusing on a case study of Ububele Early Childhood Development (ECD) centre in Alexandra, Johannesburg. Using Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) as a theoretical lens, the research employs a qualitative methodology, using semi-structured interviews and direct observations, to delve into the lived experiences of caregivers and parents and educators.

The findings reveal that despite significant socioeconomic constraints, caregivers and educators demonstrate resilience and creativity in providing nurturing care. Key themes identified include socioeconomic challenges, cultural continuity and adaptation, community dynamics and the practical application of NCF principles. The expression of NCF principles is often hindered by limited government support, financial barriers and environmental challenges. However, the study underscores the importance of community support systems, adequate educator training, cultural practices including language diversity, the need for government services in shaping child-rearing practices. The study also emphasises the importance of creating safe and supportive environments for children, addressing the historical legacies and socioeconomic disparities affecting marginalised communities.

This research contributes to the understanding of how marginalised communities navigate the complexities of child-rearing in light of the NCF principles and offers practical recommendations for policy and practice to support the holistic development of children in similar settings.

Keywords: Child-rearing practices; Cultural Historical Activity Theory; early learning opportunities; ECD; health and nutrition, marginalised communities; NCF; responsive caregiving; safety, and protection.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

CHAT Cultural Historical Activity Theory

CSG Child Support Grant

DHET Department of Higher Education and Training

ECD Early Childhood Development

HPCSA Health Professions Council of South Africa

NACCW National Association of Child Care Workers

NCF Nurturing Care Framework

NELDS National Early Learning and Development Standards

WHO World Health Organization

ZPD Zone of Proximal Development

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

1.1 Introduction

In recent years, the significance of early childhood development (ECD) in shaping the trajectory of a child's life has gained widespread recognition. The Nurturing Care Framework (NCF) for ECD, a collaborative effort spearheaded by the World Health Organization (WHO), UNICEF and other partners, outlines a set of fundamental principles critical for fostering the young children's overall development (WHO et al., 2018). These principles encompass ensuring good health, providing adequate nutrition, ensuring safety and security, promoting responsive caregiving, and offering opportunities for early learning (WHO et al., 2018).

This study explores the child-rearing practices within marginalised communities in South Africa. These communities, grappling with socioeconomic challenges such as limited access to resources and services, often face unique hurdles in providing the nurturing care essential for optimal child development. The study will look into the Ububele ECD centre on the borders of the Alexandra community, Johannesburg, where the researcher seeks to unravel the intricate ways in which parenting and childcare practices in marginalised communities express the principles set forth by the NCF.

This research seeks to delve into the heart of child-rearing practices, acknowledging the agency of parents, caregivers and communities in nurturing the potential within each child. Through interviews, observations and an immersive exploration of learning and home environments, the researcher aims to unearth the delicate expressions of the NCF principles within the context of marginalised communities.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Despite the strides made in recognising and safeguarding children's rights in post-apartheid South Africa, children in marginalised communities continue to face multifaceted challenges that hinder their optimal development. The Nurturing Care Framework (NCF) for ECD, a comprehensive guide established by global health entities, sets forth principles encompassing safety, responsive caregiving, health, nutrition and early learning (WHO et al., 2018). However, the translation of these principles into the daily child-rearing practices of parents, caregivers and communities in marginalised settings remains a complex and underexplored terrain.

In examining the landscape of child-rearing practices, it is evident that socioeconomic inequalities, historical disparities, and limited access to resources create a unique environment for parenting in marginalised communities (Kalil & Ryan, 2020). The legislative efforts post-apartheid has laid the foundation for children's rights, yet the actualisation of these rights faces

significant challenges. The persistence of issues such as poverty, inadequate healthcare, and limited educational opportunities necessitates an in-depth exploration of how the NCF principles manifest within the intricate web of child-rearing practices in these communities.

This research seeks to address the disjunction between policy ideals and on-the-ground realities, acknowledging the lived experiences of children in marginalised communities. By focusing on the Ububele ECD centre in Alexandra, Johannesburg, the researcher aims to unravel the complexities surrounding child-rearing practices and explore the hindrances, cultural influences and historical legacies that shape the expression of the NCF principles within this specific context.

In essence, the problem at hand lies in understanding how the principles designed to foster optimal child development are navigated, interpreted and sometimes impeded within the socioeconomic constraints and historical legacies of marginalised communities in South Africa. The answers to this problem hold the key to informed interventions, policy adjustments and community strategies that can genuinely uplift and empower children within these contexts.

Against this background, this study used the Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) to provide a framework for understanding human behaviour and development within social and cultural contexts. It emphasises the interconnectedness of individuals, tools and the environment in which they operate, as well as the role of language in mediating thought and learning. The theory also introduces the concept of contradictions, which refers to the tension and conflicts that arise within and between activity systems (Engeström, 1987; Kaptelinin & Nardi, 2012; Vygotsky, 2012).

In the context of this study, CHAT is used to explore the child-rearing practices of parents and teachers in marginalised communities in South Africa. The theory helps in understanding how individuals, societal norms and the physical and historical context of society influence human growth and development. By applying CHAT, the study aims to gain insights into the nurturing care practices within these communities and how they are shaped by cultural, historical, and social factors further the contradictions will be identified which would assist in facilitating change and transformation. (Engeström, 1987; Kaptelinin & Nardi, 2012).

1.3 The Research Aim

This research aims to investigate how the principles of the NCF of development are expressed in the child-rearing practices of marginalised communities, with a specific focus on the Ububele ECD centre in Alexandra, Johannesburg. The study seeks to understand the challenges and opportunities faced by parents, caregivers and ECD centres in implementing

these principles, as well as to gain insight into the cultural factors that influence child-rearing practices in these communities.

The research was conducted using a qualitative approach, with data collected through interviews and observation, and analysed using thematic analysis. The participants will include parents, caregivers and ECD centre teachers.

1.4 Rationale of the Study

The rationale for this research emanates from a deeply rooted commitment to unravelling the intricate dynamics influencing child-rearing practices in marginalised communities within the South African landscape. The post-apartheid era has witnessed significant strides in acknowledging and codifying the rights of children, encapsulated in legislations and policy frameworks aimed at fostering their wellbeing (Republic of South Africa [RSA], 2008; RSA, 1996). However, the persistent challenges faced by children in marginalised communities necessitate a closer examination of the practical expressions and impact of these policies on the ground (Cross & Atinde, 2015)

1.4.1 Socioeconomic Disparities, Historical Legacies and Interconnected Challenges in Child-Rearing

Historically rooted socioeconomic disparities continue to cast long shadows over the upbringing of children in South Africa (Ashley-Cooper et al., 2019). The aftermath of apartheid has left a legacy of inequality, poverty, and limited access to fundamental resources (Nnadozie, 2013). These disparities are particularly pronounced in marginalised communities, where families grapple with multifaceted challenges such as inadequate healthcare, substandard living conditions, and limited educational opportunities (Seekings & Nattrass, 2005). These contextual factors intersect to create a complex environment for child-rearing, shaping parenting practices and influencing the developmental trajectories of young individuals.

Child-rearing practices in marginalised communities are intricately connected to broader societal challenges. Poverty, inadequate healthcare, and limited educational opportunities form a complex web of interconnected challenges that parents and caregivers navigate daily (Seekings & Nattrass, 2005; Nnadozie, 2013). Understanding how these challenges intersect, and impact child-rearing is crucial for formulating holistic and effective interventions. This research seeks to disentangle the multifaceted nature of these challenges, providing a comprehensive view of their interconnectedness and implications for child development.

1.4.2 Legislative Strides, Implementation Gaps and Bridging Policy-Reality Disparities in Child-Rearing

The post-apartheid legislative framework has undeniably championed children's rights, emphasising their entitlement to quality education (RSA, 1996), healthcare, and protection from harm (RSA, 2008). However, the translation of these legislative ideals into tangible improvements in the lives of children faces notable challenges. The persistence of issues such as poverty and limited access to essential services impacts child-rearing practices within marginalised communities (Tomlinson et al., 2022).

The disparity between policy ideals and on-the-ground realities is a central concern addressed by this research. While legislative frameworks set forth a vision for children's wellbeing, the practical experiences of families in marginalised communities often diverge from these ideals. Bridging this gap requires a refined understanding of the contextual factors influencing child-rearing practices. This study aims to provide insights that can inform policy adjustments, community initiatives, and educational strategies, ensuring that policies are not only aspirational but also attuned to the lived experiences of those they aim to serve (Tomlinson et al., 2022).

1.4.3 Potential for Positive Transformation and Contribution to Social Development

Despite the challenges, there exists a potential for positive transformation within marginalised communities. By deeply understanding the factors influencing child-rearing practices, this research aspires to contribute to the identification of strengths, resilience and assets within these communities. Insights gained from the study can inform the development of specific interventions that harness existing resources and foster positive change (Tomlinson et al., 2022). Recognising and building upon this potential for transformation is essential for the sustainable wellbeing of children in marginalised settings.

The significance of this research extends beyond academic inquiry; it holds practical implications for social development. Marginalised communities, often underrepresented in research, stand to benefit significantly from the insights gained through this exploration. By amplifying the voices of parents, caregivers and community members, the study seeks to contribute to a more inclusive and equitable approach to social development. The findings can serve as an important resource for policymakers, educators and community leaders, fostering collaboration and a collective effort toward creating environments conducive to the best possible development for children (Tomlinson et al., 2022).

1.4.4 The Nurturing Care Framework as a Theoretical Anchor

The Nurturing Care Framework (NCF) provides a valuable theoretical anchor for understanding and addressing the challenges faced by children in marginalised communities. Developed by UNICEF, the NCF outlines the essential elements that underpin optimal child development: early care and learning, responsive caregiving, and safety, health, nutrition and protection (WHO et al., 2018). While the NCF offers a comprehensive guide, its applicability in diverse socioeconomic contexts requires closer examination. This research aims to unravel how the principles of the NCF manifest in the daily lives of parents, caregivers and communities within marginalised settings, shedding light on the potential gaps between theory and practice.

The rationale for this study is a comprehensive exploration of the contextual factors, theoretical frameworks and societal dynamics that shape child-rearing practices in marginalised communities. The detailed examination of these elements is essential for formulating targeted interventions, addressing expression gaps, and fostering positive transformations within the intricate tapestry of South Africa's diverse socioeconomic landscape. The research findings will provide a deeper understanding of the complex interplay between child-rearing practices, societal challenges and policy implications, paving the way for more effective and equitable approaches to promoting child wellbeing in marginalised settings.

South Africa, like many other countries, faces social and economic inequalities that disproportionately affect young children in marginalised communities. Despite post-apartheid legislative measures acknowledging and safeguarding children's rights, challenges persist, hindering optimal child development. This study seeks to explore child-rearing practices in these disadvantaged communities, aiming to understand how parents, teachers and community members navigate the challenges posed by poverty, limited access to ECD programmes, and other socioeconomic factors against the ideals of the NCF.

1.5 Research Questions

This study aims to unravel the intricate dynamics of parenting and childcare practices within marginalised communities in South Africa, employing the CHAT as its guiding theoretical framework. The primary research question guiding this exploration is:

- *How do parenting and childcare practices in marginalised communities, as analysed through Cultural Historical Activity Theory, reflect the principles of the NCF?*

To delve into the multifaceted nature of this overarching question, the study seeks answers to the following subsidiary questions:

- *What is the nature of parenting and childcare practices in marginalised communities of South Africa, considering the cultural historical influences through the lens of the Cultural Historical Activity Theory?*
- *How do cultural and historical influences, as understood within the NCF, shape parenting and childcare practices in these communities?*
- *What cultural and historical factors hinder the realisation of the NCF principles in marginalised communities?*

This structured inquiry aims not only to understand the manifestation of NCF principles but also to contextualise these expressions within the dynamic interplay of cultural historical factors, as illuminated by the CHAT.

1.6 Significance of the Study

This research holds paramount significance in several dimensions, contributing to both academic discourse and practical implications. This study contributes to scientific literature on child rearing practices in marginalized communities by employing CHAT as an epistemological approach. By integrating CHAT, the study provides a novel perspective on understanding how cultural and historical factors influence child-rearing activities. Through the extensive study this research provides empirical insights into the expression of NCF principles in marginalised communities into the lived experiences of parents, caregivers and children.

This data can contribute valuable information that can inform future research and policy decisions by serving as a foundation for informing policies related to ECD and care in marginalised communities. By understanding the challenges and strengths of parenting practices in these contexts, policymakers can develop targeted interventions to support child development.

The study also has the potential to empower communities by shedding light on the factors influencing child-rearing practices. Community leaders, educators, and healthcare professionals can use the insights gained to develop community-specific strategies that enhance the overall wellbeing of children. Moreover, the study can enhance the governments awareness of marginalised communities struggles which would optimise the NCF principles. As the study focuses on the expression of NCF principles, the findings can guide the possible implementation of this framework in real-world settings. By identifying barriers and facilitators, the study contributes practical knowledge for optimising possible application of the NCF.

Scholars and researchers in the fields of ECD, cultural studies and education will benefit from the enriched academic discourse resulting from this study. The research can stimulate further inquiries into the intersections of cultural historical factors and child-rearing practices. This study's significance lies in its potential to bridge theoretical frameworks with practical implications, fostering a comprehensive understanding of child-rearing practices in marginalised communities and contributing to the advancement of both academic and applied knowledge.

1.7 The Outline of This Thesis

In the opening chapter of this thesis, the origins and necessity of the study are explored. The foundations are laid, articulating the need to delve into child-rearing practices within marginalised South African communities. The objectives are set, aiming to uncover historical, socioeconomic, and cultural determinants shaping child-rearing. Key questions are posed, investigating the historical roots and socioeconomic influences on child-rearing practices. The significance of exploring child-rearing practices is highlighted, emphasising their crucial role in ECD

The second chapter shifts focus to a comprehensive exploration of relevant literature. Existing literature is reviewed, organised thematically to provide a global and South African contextualisation.

Further, this chapter introduces CHAT and highlights its relevance to the study, emphasizing its role as the guiding theoretical framework. This chapter traces the historical development of CHAT, articulates its core principles, and demonstrates the applicability of its third generation to the current research context. It elucidates how this theoretical framework provides a robust structure for understanding the dynamics of child-rearing practices in marginalised communities.

Chapter 3 details the research design, sampling methods and procedures employed. Ethical considerations are addressed in alignment with established guidelines. The researcher's reflexivity is explored, offering insights into the subjective experience throughout the research process. The chapter also discusses the data collection and analysis procedures, including the use of thematic analysis in conjunction with CHAT. This chapter sets the stage for the empirical findings by grounding the study in theory and method.

Chapter 4 presents the core findings and discussion of the study, which are organised thematically and contextualised within the existing literature. Key empirical findings are discussed and encapsulated, drawing conclusions aligned with research questions and

theoretical frameworks. This chapter provides a comprehensive overview of the data collected from the Ububele ECD centre, including representative data extracts to substantiate the themes and provide a vivid account of the participants' perspectives. The discussion delves into how the themes identified relate to the broader social context and contribute to our understanding of nurturing care practices.

Finally, the fifth chapter concludes by addressing central research questions and highlighting broader implications for ECD and education. The significance is reiterated, with transparent acknowledgement of limitations for future research. Potential avenues for future research are outlined, and the chapter concludes by synthesising relevant aspects, acknowledging strengths and limitations and offering recommendations for further exploration.

1.8 Summary

This chapter lays the foundation for an in-depth exploration of child-rearing practices in South African communities against the ideals of the NCF. It highlights the significance of understanding these practices within cultural and historical contexts, emphasising the complexity shaped by socioeconomic factors. The subsequent chapters will navigate historical landscapes, delve into teachers' and children's perspectives, and examine alternative disciplinary measures, all framed by the CHAT.

This chapter serves as a gateway to a profound investigation into the persisting nuances of child-rearing practices. It provides the reader with a roadmap for the upcoming chapters, where the multifaceted layers of this subject will be peeled back, revealing a richer understanding of child development dynamics at play in post-apartheid South Africa.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Introduction

This chapter situates the study at the intersection of two key areas: literature related to the research topic and its theoretical foundation. It explores existing academic and policy literature on the NCF and its application in child-rearing practices within marginalised South African communities, using CHAT as a lens to understand the dynamics of these practices.

The first section reviews literature across four themes: an overview of the NCF within marginalised communities, its interconnections with socio-political and historical contexts, stakeholder reactions to NCF principles in child-rearing, and the benefits and challenges of applying these principles. These themes provide a foundation for the empirical exploration and analysis of findings.

The second section introduces CHAT as the study's theoretical framework. Originating from Vygotsky's work and evolving through successive generations, CHAT examines human development in historical and cultural contexts. This study employs the third generation of CHAT to investigate the interplay of activity systems and contradictions as drivers of change, focusing on NCF principles in child-rearing within marginalised communities.

By integrating the literature review with the theoretical framework, this chapter establishes a foundation for examining child-rearing practices in South Africa, offering insights with academic and practical implications for policy and community initiatives aimed at improving child development.

2.2 Literature Review

2.2.1 Theoretical Frameworks Informing the Nurturing Care Framework

The NCF is based on many theories, prominently featuring the ecological systems theory of human development and the life course theory (WHO et al., 2018). Understanding these theoretical underpinnings can provide more profound insights into the formation, goals and impacts of the NCF.

Ecological systems theory, developed by Urie Bronfenbrenner, explains that human development is affected by different types of environmental systems and their interactions (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). These systems range from immediate surroundings such as family and school (microsystem) to larger societal constructs such as cultural values and economic factors (macrosystem) (Perron, 2017). The NCF reflects this by acknowledging that children grow and develop not in isolation but within a network of relationships and environments that impact their wellbeing (WHO et al., 2018).

Life course theory emphasises the significance of timing in the historical context, and interconnectedness of lives in understanding human development (Elder & Johnson, 2018). It reinforces the idea that early life experiences have lasting impacts on an individual's life trajectory.

NCF also aligns with attachment theories that emphasise the importance of secure and responsive relationships for children's development (Bosmans et al., 2020). These theories underscore the integral role of caregivers in providing responsive care which is a central pillar of the NCF.

Integrating a broader range of theoretical perspectives, it is crucial to consider the social constructivist approach to understanding child-rearing practices in marginalised communities. This approach posits that human development understanding and knowledge are constructed through social interactions and experiences (Vygotsky, 2012). In African and most marginalised communities, child-rearing practices often reflect shared or collective responsibility, demonstrating the influence of societal and cultural norms on parenting behaviours.

2.2.2 The Foundations and the Contextual Understanding of the NCF

The NCF, spearheaded by the WHO and its partners, offers a unique, comprehensive approach towards ECD. It recognises the interplay of five key components essential for children to thrive – **adequate nutrition, opportunities for learning, good health, safety and security, and responsive caregiving** (WHO et al., 2018).

Van Voorhis et al. (2013) underscored the pivotal role of caregivers – including family and the broader community – in the child's life. They highlighted that the surrounding environment could significantly shape the development trajectory by providing a conducive atmosphere for the child's physical, cognitive and emotional growth (Van Voorhis et al., 2013). The integral premise here is that caregivers, in fostering a nurturing environment, accelerate the child's development and maximise their potential.

The NCF also emphasises the importance of national policies that foster holistic child development, such as the South African National Early Learning and Development Standards (NELDS of 2009 (Republic of South Africa, [RSA] 2015). It outlines a set of developmentally appropriate goals and objectives for children from birth to four years of age (RSA, 2015). NELDS guided the development of the NCF along with other stakeholders from other countries by providing a holistic perspective on child development, emphasising the role of play, communication, and social interaction in promoting children's cognitive, emotional and physical development.

Before the NCF came into existence, the South African government had policies and regulatory bodies to govern child development. The NIECD Policy of 2015 (RSA, 2015), approved by the South African Cabinet, is a landmark initiative aimed at ensuring a better future for the country's children. The policy acknowledges the significant impact of early learning opportunities on children's lives and emphasises the government's commitment to providing education, quality early stimulation and care for all children, particularly those in vulnerable communities (RSA, 2015).

The policy places a strong emphasis on a child-centred approach, highlighting the vital role that parents and primary caregivers play in nurturing, supporting and raising their children. It acknowledges the necessity of integrating a variety of services to ensure that infants and young children can thrive. These services include promoting good nutrition and food security, providing social protection, offering early learning and development opportunities, and ensuring a safe environment free from violence and abuse, where children can play and enjoy themselves (RSA, 2015).

The policy addresses all elements necessary for guiding and establishing a comprehensive, multi-sectoral system that acknowledges the importance of government-led ECD support and services. It outlines the requirements for creating an institutional and regulatory framework as well as for strengthening and developing the ECD system. This is aimed at laying a robust and supportive foundation for enhanced and effective service delivery (RSA, 2015).

The policy also highlights the need to address significant disparities in the provision of various ECD services essential for the optimal development of young children. It acknowledges that despite considerable progress in delivering key services like maternal and child health, social security and birth registration to the majority of children, several ECD services remain neither universally accessible nor equitable and are plagued by quality challenges. These services include nutritional support, parenting support, early care and learning, specialised ECD services for children with disabilities, and information as well as education about ECD (RSA, 2015).

However, it is crucial to note that while these standards and guidelines provide an essential blueprint for child-rearing practices, their effectiveness is potentially affected by the socio-cultural contexts within which they are applied. The marginalisation of certain communities, could limit access to resources and services essential for implementing the NCF, resulting in a lesser impact on the child's development.

In exploring the expression of the NCF principles in the child-rearing practices of marginalised communities in South Africa, this study examined how these principles are implemented within these unique socio-cultural contexts. Furthermore, it would investigate existing barriers to implementing the NCF and propose strategies to enhance its effectiveness within these communities.

Understanding the myriad of factors that could influence the successful implementation of the NCF's principles in marginalised communities might pave the way for more inclusive and effective ECD interventions. Such a holistic understanding might help design policies and strategies that are contextually relevant and sensitive to the unique needs of these communities, ensuring all children, irrespective of their socioeconomic backgrounds, have an opportunity to realise their full potential.

2.2.3 NCF Principles in Conjunction With the Policies of the NIECDP

Opportunities for Early Learning

Opportunities for early learning are crucial for ECD, encompassing services and activities that stimulate children's language, conceptual, socio-emotional development, and learning (RSA, 2015). These opportunities, provided from birth until school entry, can occur in various environments such as the home, healthcare facilities, home visits, childcare settings, community groups, and early learning programmes (Ginsburg, 2007; RSA, 2015). Research highlights the significant impact of high-quality early learning on child development. Mkhize and Sibanda (2020) found that two years of preschool lead to better cognitive and social outcomes than one year, while Fukkink and Lont (2007) showed that training for early childhood educators enhances the quality of early learning. Play-based learning, as noted by the WHO et al. (2018), is also vital for developing critical thinking, creativity, and social skills. However, access to these opportunities is not equal, with children in under-served rural and urban areas, those living in poverty, and those with disabilities facing significant barriers (RSA, 2015).

Responsive Caregiving

Responsive caregiving involves the timely and appropriate response of parents or caregivers to a child's needs (WHO et al., 2018). This includes but is not limited to responding to hunger cues, changing diapers to prevent discomfort or rash, and attending to illnesses. Responsive caregiving is central to all other components of child development as it directly influences the child's wellbeing.

Responsive caregiving is not just about meeting a child's basic needs for food, sleep and safety. It also involves responding to a child's emotional needs by providing comfort, reassurance and affection. It includes recognising and responding to a child's cues and signals and engaging in reciprocal interactions that promote learning and development (Kelly & Barnard, 2000).

Research has shown that responsive caregiving can have a significant impact on a child's development. For example, a study by Kelly and Barnard (2000) demonstrated that children who received more responsive caregiving in their first three years of life had better language skills, social skills, and cognitive abilities at age three.

Responsive caregiving also plays a crucial role in the development of secure attachment relationships between children and their caregivers. Secure attachment relationships, in turn, provide a foundation for healthy social and emotional development (Kelly & Barnard, 2000).

In the context of the NIECD Policy of 2015, responsive caregiving includes actions such as responding to signals of hunger by infants, changing nappies timeously before they burn the infant and attending to child illnesses amongst other caring measures from a parent to an infant.

Safety and Security

Safety and security are a fundamental aspect of ECD. It refers to the provision of a safe and secure environment for children, free from health-threatening substances, potential physical harm, abuse, neglect, and punishment (WHO et al., 2018).

In the context of the South African Constitution, the right to safety and security is enshrined in several sections. Section 12 of the Constitution of the RSA (1996, p. 6) "guarantees the right to freedom and security of the person. This includes the right to be free from all forms of violence, whether from public or private sources, and the right not to be treated or punished in a cruel, inhuman, or degrading manner".

Furthermore, Section 28 specifically "focuses on the rights of the child, stating that" "every child has the right to be shielded from maltreatment, neglect, abuse, or degradation" (RSA, 1996 p. 11). This aligns with the principles of safety and security in ECD, emphasising the need for protection against harmful circumstances.

Research has shown that a safe and secure environment is crucial for a child's development. For instance, a study by Schoon et al. (2011) found that family hardship and instability, which can compromise a child's sense of safety and security, can negatively impact cognitive development.

Moreover, a report by Shonkoff et al. (2012) highlighted that adverse early experiences and toxic stress in childhood, often resulting from unsafe and insecure environments, can lead to physical and mental health problems later in life. Therefore, ensuring safety and security in early childhood is not only a matter of rights but also a crucial aspect of health and wellbeing.

Adequate Nutrition and Good Health

Adequate nutrition and good health are fundamental rights and are crucial aspects of ECD (WHO et al., 2018). They are essential for the physical and cognitive development of children, and its absence can lead to severe health issues, including stunting, wasting and micronutrient deficiencies (Black et al., 2015).

In the context of South Africa, the RSA (2015) reports a high level of poor nutrition among young children, with 27% of children under 3 years of age being stunted, and vitamin A deficiency posing a significant public health problem. The policy underscores the need for preventative and curative food and nutritional support for both pregnant women and children.

Section 28 of the South African Constitution “guarantees every child’s right to basic nutrition, shelter, basic health care services, and social services” (RSA, 1996 p.11). This right is immediate and unqualified, obligating the state to ensure these rights are fulfilled.

The NCF (WHO, 2018 p.2) also emphasises the importance of adequate nutrition in ECD. It suggests nursing exclusively during the “first six months of life”, then introducing safe and wholesome foods and continuing to nurse “until the child is two years old” and older.

Moreover, the NIECD Policy of 2015 (RSA, 2015) outlines strategies to improve nutrition among young children. These strategies include the provision of essential nutrition services, the development of norms and standards for hygiene and food safety, and improved food security and access to nutritious foods in households with infants, young children and pregnant women.

2.2.4 Interventions Promoting the Principles of NCF

Several initiatives and interventions have been designed to promote nurturing care principles, centred around enhancing health, nutrition, responsive caregiving, safety and security and early learning. A notable example is the NCF provided by the WHO, UNICEF and the World Bank, which provides a roadmap for action premised on world class evidence about ECD. It outlines several strategic actions, including interventions that can be integrated into existing health, nutritional, and educational services (WHO et al., 2018).

In South Africa, the Isibindi programme is a community-based intervention designed and implemented by the National Association of Child Care Workers (NACCW) (Kvalsvig &

Taylor, 2015). This innovative programme trains community members to become child and youth care workers, providing nurturing care and support to vulnerable children and families in their own homes and communities (Kvalsvig & Taylor, 2015)

The effectiveness of such interventions has been gauged through numerous evaluation studies. For example, studies assessing the impact of the Isibindi model found it effectively improved child wellbeing on several fronts, including schooling, nutrition and psychosocial wellbeing (Kvalsvig & Taylor, 2015)

In the global context, Britto et al. (2017) in the WHO Recommendations on Caregiving Interventions reviews numerous interventions focused on nurturing care and their effectiveness. The review found that caregiver interventions addressing responsive care and early learning have notable positive effects on child growth and development outcomes.

It is also acknowledged that interventions are more effective when they are part of a broader framework of nurturing care embedded in existing systems, reinforcing the importance of comprehensive and integrated support mechanisms (Britto et al., 2017)

2.2.5 The role of culture in shaping child-rearing practices

Bornstein's (2012) research provides a comprehensive understanding of how culture shapes child-rearing practices. The author emphasises that societal beliefs, values, and traditions, which are passed down through generations, significantly influence parenting practices. For instance, societies that value freedom and self-reliance may encourage these traits in their children, while those that value interdependence and unity may foster these values in their child-rearing practices.

The cultural context in which parenting takes place is crucial. It influences the language parents use with their children, the discipline methods they employ, and the developmental milestones they emphasise. For example, in some cultures, breastfeeding and co-sleeping are common practices, while in others, they may be less prevalent (Atmore, 2012; Mawusi, 2013). These practices are not only influenced by cultural beliefs but also by socioeconomic factors (Ferrari, 2002).

Culture also plays a significant role in the socialisation process of children. It shapes their behaviours, beliefs and attitudes towards themselves and the world around them (Bornstein, 2012). This understanding of the cultural influences on child-rearing practices is crucial for policymakers and practitioners. It can help them design and implement effective interventions and programmes that respect cultural diversity and promote optimal child development outcomes.

2.2.6 Historical Influences on Child Development: The Legacy of Colonialism and Apartheid

The effects of colonialism and apartheid have created a lasting impact on child development in South Africa. It is important to note that these impacts have not only physical, but also psychological and emotional consequences that are multifaceted and intergenerational.

Colonialism introduced a cultural shift which transformed the indigenous societal structures and family setups (King, 2015). The resultant individualism and focus on the nuclear family clashed with traditional African values, producing a tension that could affect parenting practices and, consequently, child development.

Apartheid further deepened these impacts, causing severe socioeconomic disparities that persist today. By enforcing racial segregation and discrimination, it disrupted families and communities, causing chronic stress, trauma, and poverty (Basson, 2022). These factors, along with inadequate access to healthcare, nutrition, and quality education, resulted in compromised child development, featuring developmental delays and cognitive impairment (Tomlinson et al., 2022).

High levels of poverty and social inequality continue to pervade South Africa, particularly in marginalised communities. This socioeconomic disadvantage manifests in malnutrition, poor health outcomes and limited access to quality education (Basson, 2022) creating a cycle that is hard to break and continues to hinder children's development.

The historical context also underscores the importance of understanding the cultural nuances and broader societal factors that influence child development. There might be cultural resilience factors that have served as protective mechanisms throughout these hardships. Understanding these can help in developing culturally sensitive and effective interventions.

Furthermore, research by Barbarin and Richter (2013) has suggested that the impact of apartheid continues to affect children's experiences within the education system, with clear disparities in access to quality education and resources between children from different racial and socioeconomic backgrounds.

2.2.7 Effects of Socio-Environmental Factors on Child Development in Impoverished Communities.

The environmental conditions in which a child grows up can have substantial effects on their development, particularly in marginalised communities such as Alexandra in Gauteng, Johannesburg, South Africa. These environmental factors extend beyond physical conditions like access to clean water, nutritious food and healthcare facilities (WHO et al., 2018) to include

socio-environmental factors such as exposure to violence, discrimination and poverty. Numerous studies have shown the adverse effects of poverty on child development, where children raised in impoverished environments often encounter a plethora of environmental risk factors such as poor nutrition, inadequate healthcare, limited educational opportunities and exposure to environmental toxins (see Evans, 2004; Black et al., 2015; Villarreal & Castro, 2016). These conditions can lead to delayed cognitive and motor development, poor physical health and long-lasting cognitive effects. Additionally, violence and discrimination critically impact child development within marginalised communities. Exposure to violence can cause traumatic stress and mental health problems, disrupting social and emotional development (Malti, 2020). Children facing discrimination due to factors such as race, gender or socioeconomic status may encounter limitations in accessing resources, opportunities, and even basic needs.

Moreover, the stress of living in such challenging conditions can contribute to toxic stress, a type of prolonged stress that can impair brain development and affect cognitive, emotional, and social development (Shonkoff et al., 2012). Understanding these environmental factors is crucial in developing strategies to mitigate their impacts. Interventions need to address these complex environmental issues and provide sufficient support to children and families in marginalised communities (Malti, 2020). Children growing up in rural settings or marginalised societies often face a unique set of environmental challenges. For example, access to quality education and healthcare facilities may be limited due to geographical distances, lack of infrastructure or resource scarcity. These challenges must be considered while devising policies or interventions for child development in these settings.

2.2.8 Navigating Cultural Influences on Parenting in South African

Parenting styles and practices are integral to child development and are influenced by the cultural, economic, and social contexts in which they occur. In marginalised communities, such as those in South Africa, these styles and practices are shaped by a complex interplay of historical legacies and contemporary challenges.

Research by Kagitcibasi (2017) reveals the predominance of three parenting styles—authoritative, authoritarian and permissive – each associated with different outcomes for children. The authoritative parenting style, characterised by a balance of discipline and nurture, is linked with positive child outcomes. However, in South Africa, the authoritative style is less common due to lingering impacts of colonialism and apartheid (Zhou, 2022). This historical backdrop has fostered an environment where authoritarian parenting, marked by strict

discipline and control, is more prevalent, especially in low-income households. Regrettably, this style could lead to less favourable child outcomes like low self-esteem and poor academic achievement (Zhou, 2022).

South Africa's cultural richness also shapes parenting practices. An example is the practice of ubulawu, a traditional medicinal practice that is believed to promote a child's physical, emotional and cognitive development (Sobiecki, 2012). However, its intersection with mainstream Western medicine often involves contention, given concerns over the safety and effectiveness of certain traditional medicines.

Compounding these cultural aspects are socioeconomic constraints. Poverty and limited access to resources can severely impact parenting practices in marginalised communities. Scarce access to health care, education and social services can jeopardise parents' ability to offer a nurturing environment for their children (Shonkoff et al., 2012). Economic pressure may also lead parents to work exceedingly long hours or multiple jobs, leaving them with little time for active parenting.

Parenting styles and practices in marginalised communities are influenced by a myriad of factors ranging from historical legacies and cultural beliefs to socioeconomic challenges (Roopnarine & Jin, 2016). Understanding these influences can help in developing effective interventions and policies for fostering healthier child development in these communities.

2.2.9 Importance of Community and Social Support in Child Development

Community and social support systems are recognised universally as critical elements in child development, irrespective of socioeconomic or cultural contexts. These support systems encompass a diverse range of factors, from familial and neighbourly support to community-based organisations and societal structures.

Research consistently suggests that strong social support networks can contribute to positive childhood outcomes. This resonates with Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory of child development, which emphasises the role of different environmental systems in shaping a child's growth (Bronfenbrenner, 1994).

These networks can help buffer the stressors children may encounter, from family issues to school-related stress. When children feel supported and understood by their social networks, they tend to exhibit higher self-esteem, better academic performance and improved emotional and social development (Spies Shapiro & Margolin, 2013).

Moreover, community resources such as quality schools, safe recreational spaces, and access to healthcare and nutrition can also significantly impact a child's development trajectory.

For instance, community-based ECD programmes have been documented to have a positive impact on children's cognitive and social-emotional development (Sherr et al., 2017).

Culture also shapes the role of community and social support in child-rearing practices, a phenomenon that extends beyond marginalised or African communities (Mawusi, 2013). In many societies worldwide, including western ones, child-rearing is often a communal responsibility, involving not only immediate family but also extended family, friends and neighbours (Mawusi, 2013).

This broad perspective emphasises that the role of community and social support in child development is not confined to marginalised communities or specific cultural contexts. It forms a fundamental aspect of child-rearing and child development applicable universally, reinforcing the necessity of strong support systems for all children.

2.2.10 Interplay between Marginalisation, Poverty and Discrimination on Parenting Practices and Child Development

Children in marginalised communities often face a complex interplay between numerous adversities that negatively impact their developmental trajectory. These adversities include limited access to quality education and healthcare, exposure to neighbourhood and domestic violence and inadequate access to basic amenities like clean water and nutritious food (Evans, 2004). The stress from these adversities can accumulate, leading to 'toxic stress,' defined by the American Academy of Paediatrics as extended activation of the stress response mechanisms in the body when there are no linkages that provide protection (Shonkoff et al., 2012). This type of stress can cause structural changes in the developing brain and hinder cognitive, emotional and social development. Without intervention, the effects of toxic stress can persist into adulthood, impacting both mental and physical health (Evans, 2004).

Poverty, a predominant characteristic of marginalisation, imposes immense stress on parents. Financial insecurity can lead to mental health problems like depression and anxiety affecting a parent's ability to provide nurturance (Tomlinson et al., 2022). Social exclusion further exacerbates these challenges by limiting parents' access to supportive social networks and community resources. Social isolation can deprive parents of the emotional support and practical help typically provided by family and friends (Brandt et al., 2022). Conversely, strong social support networks can mitigate the negative effects of poverty and enhance outcomes for children (Casale et al., 2015).

Discrimination also significantly impacts child development and parenting practices. Discrimination based on race, ethnicity, gender, or socioeconomic status can limit families'

access to essential resources and opportunities, such as education, jobs and housing (Williams et al., 2010). Experiences of discrimination can increase stress among parents, potentially leading to less responsive parenting and harsher disciplinary practices, both of which are associated with poorer child development outcomes (Williams et al., 2010). Additionally, children who experience discrimination directly may develop heightened perceptions of threat, resulting in chronic stress, anxiety, depression, and lower self-esteem – all of which negatively affect their development and overall wellbeing (Tomlinson et al., 2022).

2.2.11 The Influence of Social Policies on Nurturing Care and Child-rearing Practices

Social policies significantly affect child-rearing practices and nurturing care, particularly in marginalised communities. These policies can create an environment that either supports or hinders parents' ability to provide nurturing care and positively influence ECD.

Social policies, including those concerning health, social security, housing and education, directly and indirectly affect child-rearing practices. For instance, policies that ensure universal access to quality healthcare can support parents in maintaining their children's health, thereby promoting healthy child development (Shonkoff et al., 2012). Conversely, policies or lack thereof addressing systemic inequities such as poverty, unemployment and housing instability can exacerbate stressors for parents, affecting their capacity to provide a nurturing environment for their children (Centre for Social Development in Africa 2019; Shonkoff et al., 2012).

In marginalised communities, social policies are especially crucial due to the heightened challenges these communities face. Unfortunately, these communities often suffer most from gaps and inadequacies in social policies. In the South African context, the introduction of the Child Support Grant ([CSG], a policy initiative providing cash transfers to low-income families with children, has positively impacted child nutrition, schooling and mental health, all critical aspects of ECD (Aguero et al., 2006). Similarly, the Sure Start programme in the UK, aimed at enhancing the wellbeing and development of children living in disadvantaged communities, has been found to improve home learning environments, parenting practices and children's social behaviour (Melhuish et al., 2008).

South Africa's social policies have significant implications for parenting and nurturing care. In many South African communities, particularly marginalised ones, the concept of kinship is powerful (Mkhize, 2006). This is reflected in the common practice of 'kin work,' where child-rearing is a shared responsibility among extended family members, ensuring the

welfare of the child even when parents may be economically disadvantaged or absent (Mkhize, 2006).

Moreover, the South African CSG represents a significant social policy aimed at improving child wellbeing in poor households. The CSG provides a monthly cash amount to caregivers of children, intending to assist with basic needs and thereby aiding in children's development (Gomersall, 2013). Studies have found that CSG beneficiaries show improved nutritional status and a higher likelihood of school attendance, both critical indicators of child development (Aguero et al., 2006).

Changes in South Africa's social policies over the years have significantly influenced ECD outcomes. For instance, the impact of various child welfare reforms, like the CSG, is evident in the improved wellbeing of children in marginalised communities (Patel et al., 2021). Additionally, the South African government introduced the National ECD Policy in 2015, emphasising the importance of providing comprehensive and integrated services for children, including healthcare, nutrition, and psychosocial support (RSA, 2015). This policy aims to ensure that children, especially those from poor communities, get a head start in life, highlighting the importance of the early years in fostering cognitive, social-emotional and physical development. Reports indicate that this policy has led to an increase in the coverage and quality of ECD services.

2.2.12 Role of Parenting Education in Fostering Nurturing Care

Quality parenting education programmes can significantly enhance nurturing care by equipping parents with the knowledge and skills necessary to promote their children's healthy development. These programmes often cover critical areas such as child health and nutrition, responsive caregiving, early learning, and strategies to ensure safety and security (WHO et al., 2018). They also foster an understanding of developmental milestones, encourage positive discipline techniques, strengthen parent-child communication, and create a more structured home environment, all of which are integral components of the NCF (Jeong et al., 2021).

In the South African context, several organisations have been instrumental in providing parenting education and support. The Parent Centre and the Seven Passes Initiative offer comprehensive programmes tailored to different stages of parenthood (The Parent Centre, 2023). These initiatives align well with the principles of nurturing care, though further studies are needed to assess their overall effectiveness. The Ububele Trust represents a unique initiative that works alongside these principles. It is an educational and psychotherapy trust aiming to

improve the emotional development and wellbeing of children under seven years old and their parents and caregivers (Ububele, n.d.).

Evidence from a study conducted in the Eastern Cape highlights the positive impacts of parenting support programmes in South Africa. The study found reductions in child abuse, parenting stress, depression and substance use among parents, along with improvements in parental supervision, positive parenting, and social support. These findings indicate the effectiveness of support programmes for parents in high-stress environments (Lachman et al., 2016).

Socioeconomic disparities often create unjust conditions, posing unique challenges for parents. Kalil & Ryan (2020) elucidated the tension between economic stress and parenting outcomes, proposing a model illustrating how economic hardship affects parenting behaviours and subsequently child outcomes through interconnected mechanisms involving marital conflict and parental mood (Conger et al., 1992). Evans (2004) further explored this link, highlighting the role of chronic stress stemming from poverty in influencing parenting quality and children's self-regulation abilities.

The complexities of parenting within marginalised communities have been extensively explored. Parents in these spaces frequently grapple with systemic disparities, including racial and economic discrimination, which deeply influence their parenting practices. For example, Jarrett & Coba-Rodriguez (2017) examined the survival strategies of low-income African American women, revealing how they navigate the challenges of raising children in socioeconomically disadvantaged neighbourhoods.

2.3 Theoretical Framework

2.3.1 Historical Evolution of CHAT

The CHAT has its genesis in the early 20th century, with the pioneering work of Lev Vygotsky, whose intellectual legacy laid the groundwork for a profound understanding of the human psyche within its cultural and historical context (Leont'ev, 1997). Vygotsky's foundational ideas centred on the role of social interaction and cultural tools in cognitive development, positing that higher mental functions are the product of mediated activities.

The first generation of CHAT emerged from Vygotsky's insights, focusing on the mediation of human thought and behaviour through cultural artefacts, language, and signs. This generation established the premise that human consciousness and activity are inextricably linked to the cultural and social milieu (Leont'ev, 1997).

Building upon Vygotsky's work, the second generation of CHAT was spearheaded by his student Alexei Leont'ev, who introduced the concept of activity systems. Leont'ev's contributions expanded the scope of CHAT by emphasising the collective nature of human activities and the importance of the division of labour and the distribution of roles within social groups (Vygotsky, 2012).

Yrjö Engeström, a key proponent of the second generation, further developed the theory by incorporating the idea of an interconnected activity system comprising subjects, objects, mediating artefacts, rules, community, division of labour and outcomes. Engeström's (1987) model highlighted the systemic nature of human activities and the potential for contradictions within and between activity systems to serve as catalysts for change and development (Engeström, 1987; Engeström & Sannino, 2010).

The third generation of CHAT, which is the focus of this study, emerged in response to the need for a more dynamic and interconnected understanding of activity systems (Igira & Gregory, 2009). This generation emphasises the complexity of multiple interacting activity systems and the importance of networked interactions across different systems (Igira & Gregory, 2009; Sannino et al., 2018). It acknowledges the role of contradictions as sources of change and the necessity for expansive learning that transcends the boundaries of individual systems (Sannino et al., 2018).

The third generation of CHAT is particularly relevant to the current study as it allows for an analysis that accounts for the historical, systemic and collective aspects of child-rearing practices within marginalised communities in South Africa. By employing this generation of CHAT, the study aims to explore the intricate web of relationships and factors that influence the nurturing care practices within these communities (Sannino et al., 2018; Kaptelinin & Nardi, 2012).

2.3.2 Core Principles of CHAT and Their Evolution

CHAT has undergone significant evolution since its inception, with each generation refining and extending the theory to better encapsulate the complexities of human activities within their cultural and historical milieus (Mayisela, 2017). This section outlines the core principles of each generation of CHAT and discusses their application in existing research, highlighting the significance of this theoretical modality.

First generation: Mediation and internalisation

The first generation of CHAT, grounded in the work of Leont'ev (1997), introduced the principle of mediation. Vygotsky's theory posited that human cognition and behaviour are

mediated by cultural tools, such as language and signs, which are internalised through social interactions. This foundational principle established the importance of cultural artefacts in shaping human development and the process of internalisation, where individuals absorb and transform external cultural practices into internal cognitive structures (Leont'ev, 1997).

Vygotsky's principle of mediation has been applied extensively in educational research. For example, Fadeev, (2019) explored how psychological tools, including language and educational materials, mediate learning. This research has significant implications for the design of educational interventions, particularly in addressing the needs of children with learning difficulties in digital learning.

Second generation: Activity systems and contradictions

Vygotsky (2012) and Engeström (1987) expanded upon Vygotsky's ideas to form the second generation of CHAT, which introduced the concept of activity systems. This generation emphasised the collective nature of human activities and the interplay between the individual (subject), the object of activity, and the community within which the activity occurs (Engeström & Sannino, 2020). Engeström's (1987) model of the activity system included additional elements such as tools, rules and the division of labour, highlighting the systemic nature of human activities and the potential for contradictions within and between activity systems to serve as catalysts for change.

Engeström's (1987) model has been applied in organisational studies to understand workplace learning and development. Blackler (1993) used the activity system framework to analyse knowledge creation and management within organisations, revealing how systemic contradictions can lead to organisational change and learning.

Third generation: Interconnected activity systems and expansive learning

The third generation of CHAT, which emerged from the work of Engeström and colleagues, addresses the interaction of multiple activity systems and recognises the role of contradictions as drivers of change (Engeström, 2001). This generation emphasises the complexity of multiple interacting activity systems and the importance of networked interactions across different systems. The third generation of CHAT has been applied in educational research to understand the use of corporal punishment in relation to various discipline features in schools in South Africa (Mayisela, 2017).

By employing the third generation of CHAT, the current study can consider the historical, systemic and collective aspects of child-rearing practices within marginalised

communities in South Africa. It allows for an analysis of the activity system, considering the dynamic interactions between individuals, tools, rules and the socio-cultural context.

The application of CHAT in existing research underscores its significance as a robust theoretical framework for understanding and addressing complex social issues. By highlighting the interconnectedness of individual and collective activities, CHAT provides a lens through which researchers can examine and facilitate transformative change in various contexts, from education and organisational development to healthcare and community engagement.

2.3.3 Application of CHAT Components to the Current Study

Subjects within the activity system

In the context of this study, the Subject refers to the individuals who are directly involved in the child-rearing practices within marginalised communities, primarily parents and teachers. These subjects are not isolated actors but are deeply embedded within their cultural and historical contexts. Their actions, decisions and interactions are influenced by a myriad of factors including personal beliefs, cultural norms, socioeconomic status and historical legacies.

The subjects' engagement in child-rearing practices is mediated by their experiences and the tools available to them, which include both material resources and intangible assets such as knowledge, skills and cultural values. As Vygotsky (2012) posited, the development of higher psychological processes in individuals is mediated by cultural tools, which in this case, can be the knowledge of child development principles, pedagogical methods and parenting strategies.

The subjects' perspectives are crucial for understanding the dynamics of child-rearing practices. They are the viewpoint through which the study examines the nurturing techniques and the expression of the NCF principles. The subjects' roles and the challenges they face are central to the investigation, as they navigate the complexities of providing care and education within constrained environments.

Engeström's (1987) expansion of CHAT to include the collective nature of activities and the interplay between the individual and the community highlights the importance of understanding the subjects not only as individual agents but also as members of a community with shared goals and challenges. This collective dimension is particularly relevant in the context of marginalised communities where resources are limited, and communal support plays a vital role in child-rearing.

The study aims to uncover the historical, socioeconomic, and cultural determinants that shape the subjects' child-rearing practices. By doing so, it seeks to provide insights into how

these determinants influence the subjects' ability to implement the NCF principles effectively. This understanding is essential for developing interventions that are culturally sensitive and contextually appropriate.

The subjects' narratives and experiences are a rich source of data for the study. Through qualitative methods such as interviews and observations, the study captures the voices of parents and teachers, offering a deeper understanding of their lived realities. This approach aligns with the CHAT principle that human development and activities are socially situated and historically developed (Kaptelinin & Nardi, 2012).

By focusing on the subjects within the activity system, the study acknowledges the agency of parents and teachers in shaping child development outcomes. It recognises that despite the challenges, these subjects possess the potential to foster resilience and positive change within their communities (Darling-Hammond et al., 2019).

Objects within the activity system

The object in the context of this study refers to the intended outcomes or goals of the child-rearing practices employed by parents and teachers within the marginalised communities. Specifically, the study aims to explore how the nurturing techniques align with the principles of the NCF, which emphasises the importance of ECD in areas such as health, nutrition, responsive caregiving, opportunities for early learning, safety, and security and supportive and enabling environments.

The object is multifaceted and dynamic, reflecting the complex nature of child development and the various factors that contribute to it. It encompasses the cognitive, emotional, social, and physical growth of children, and the study seeks to understand how caregivers' actions and interactions support these developmental domains.

In line with the third generation of CHAT, the object is not isolated but is situated within a network of interconnected activity systems (Engeström, 2001). This perspective allows the study to consider the broader socio-cultural and historical influences on child-rearing practices and how they shape the object of nurturing care.

The study recognises that the object of child-rearing practices may be subject to contradictions and tensions, as caregivers navigate the challenges of implementing nurturing care principles within the constraints of their environment (Engeström, 2001). These contradictions can arise from disparities between the ideals of the NCF and the realities of the caregivers' socioeconomic conditions, cultural beliefs and available resources.

By examining the object, the study aims to identify the strategies employed by caregivers to achieve the desired developmental outcomes for children. It also seeks to uncover

the barriers that may impede the realisation of these outcomes, such as limited access to resources, social inequities or conflicting cultural practices.

The object-oriented approach of the study is informed by the work of Engeström (1987), who highlighted the importance of understanding the purpose and motive behind activities within an activity system. This understanding is crucial for developing interventions that are not only effective but also sustainable and culturally relevant.

The study's focus on the object aligns with Vygotsky's (2012) emphasis on the goal-directed nature of human activities. By exploring the object of child-rearing practices, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of how caregivers' actions are directed towards fostering children's development within the unique context of marginalised South African communities.

Tools within the activity system

In the context of the current study, Tools encompass the various physical and symbolic resources used in child-rearing practices within marginalised communities in South Africa. These tools mediate the interaction between the subjects (parents and teachers) and the objects (desired developmental outcomes for children) within the activity system.

Physical tools in this study include tangible items such as playbooks, toys, educational materials and the physical environment of the home or Ububele ECD centre. These tools are instrumental in providing stimuli for children's learning and development and are often the most visible aspects of the caregiving environment.

Symbolic tools are equally important and include language, disciplinary tactics, cultural norms and pedagogical approaches. These intangible tools are crucial for shaping the cognitive and socio-emotional development of children. Vygotsky's (2012) work highlights the role of language as a primary symbolic tool that mediates cognitive development, while Engeström (1987) emphasises the role of both physical and symbolic tools in shaping activity systems.

The study also considers the role of tools in the transmission of cultural values and practices from one generation to the next. This aligns with the concept of enculturation, where cultural activities and tools are passed down within a social group, as discussed by Greenfield et al. (2000).

The use of tools is not static but evolves with the historical and cultural context. The study examines how tools for child-rearing have been adapted or transformed over time within the marginalised communities, reflecting the dynamic nature of cultural practices.

The effectiveness and appropriateness of the tools are also considered in relation to the NCF principles. The study explores how well these tools facilitate the expression of the principles and whether they align with the best practices for ECD.

The study acknowledges that there may be tensions and contradictions in the use of tools, as highlighted by the third generation of CHAT. For example, certain traditional disciplinary tactics may conflict with contemporary views on child-rearing. Understanding these contradictions is essential for identifying areas where changes or interventions may be needed.

By examining the tools within the activity system, the study aims to provide insights into how the physical and symbolic resources available to caregivers influence the nurturing care practices within these communities. This understanding is crucial for developing strategies that enhance the capacity of caregivers to provide nurturing care that aligns with the principles of the NCF.

Rules within the activity system

Within the framework of CHAT, Rules refer to the explicit and implicit regulations, norms, and conventions that govern the actions and interactions within an activity system (Mayisela, 2017). In the context of the current study on child-rearing practices in marginalised communities in South Africa, rules are the guiding principles, societal expectations and legal frameworks that shape how caregivers nurture and educate young children.

Rules in this study encompass a broad range of influences, from cultural traditions and social norms to national policies and educational standards (Mayisela, 2017). Depending on the context these rules can facilitate or constrain the child-rearing practices of parents and teachers, impacting the expression of the NCF principles. For example, in some communities, cultural norms may dictate that children should be raised collectively by extended family members, which can facilitate the provision of nurturing care by ensuring that children receive attention and support from multiple caregivers. This collective approach aligns with the NCF's emphasis on responsive caregiving and social support. However, in other contexts, national policies that mandate formal schooling at an early age may constrain parents' ability to provide nurturing care in a manner consistent with their cultural practices. For instance, parents who value traditional, home-based child-rearing practices may find it challenging to comply with policies that require young children to attend formal educational institutions, thereby creating tension between cultural norms and legal requirements. This tension can impact the effectiveness of nurturing care practices and highlight the need for culturally sensitive policies that balance respect for cultural heritage with the demands of modern education.

Cultural norms and community standards within the South African context play a significant role in shaping parenting practices. The study explores how these cultural influences

intersect with the NCF principles and how they are negotiated by caregivers in their daily practices.

The study examines how rules, such as those related to the South African CSG and the National ECD Policy, influence caregivers' ability to provide nurturing care. These policies are designed to support families in meeting the basic needs of children and promoting their development (RSA, 2015).

In addition to formal policies, the study also considers the role of informal rules, such as cultural beliefs about parenting and community expectations. These informal rules can be powerful determinants of behaviour, shaping the daily practices of caregivers and the environments in which children are raised.

The study acknowledges that rules are not static and can evolve over time. Changes in social policies, such as the introduction of the CSG, can have significant impacts on ECD outcomes, as evidenced by improvements in child nutrition, schooling and mental health (Aguero et al., 2006).

The concept of kin work in South African communities, where child-rearing is a shared responsibility among extended family members, is an example of a cultural rule that supports the welfare of children, even in economically disadvantaged or absent parent situations (Mkhize, 2006).

The study explores the potential contradictions and tensions that may arise when the rules of the NCF intersect with existing cultural practices and socioeconomic realities. Understanding these contradictions is crucial for identifying areas where changes or interventions may be needed to support caregivers in providing nurturing care (Engeström, 1987).

By examining the rules within the activity system, the study aims to provide insights into how the formal and informal regulatory frameworks influence nurturing care practices within marginalised communities. This understanding is crucial for developing strategies that enhance the capacity of caregivers to provide nurturing care that aligns with the principles of the NCF.

Division of labour within the activity system

In the context of the current study, the division of labour refers to the distribution of responsibilities, roles, and tasks among the various participants involved in child-rearing practices within marginalised communities in South Africa (Mayisela, 2017). This includes how tasks are allocated and executed by parents, teachers and other community members at the Ububele ECD centre and within the broader community setting.

The division of labour is critical in understanding how the collective effort (Mayisela, 2017) of various individuals contributes to the nurturing care and development of children. It reflects the social structure and organisation of the community, as well as the cultural expectations regarding the roles of different caregivers in a child's life.

In the study, the division of labour is examined to understand how the roles of parents and teachers intersect and complement each other in providing a holistic nurturing environment for children. This includes exploring how tasks such as feeding, teaching, supervising play and providing emotional support are shared or divided among caregivers.

The study also considers the impact of gender roles and socioeconomic factors on the division of labour. For example, in some communities, child-rearing responsibilities may fall more heavily on women, which can influence the types of activities and interactions children experience (Frosch et al., 2019).

The division of labour within the ECD centre, such as the Ububele Trust, is also explored. This includes how different staff members contribute to the children's development and how their roles are defined by the centre's policies and the community's expectations.

By examining the division of labour, the study aims to provide insights into how collaborative efforts among caregivers are organised and how they contribute to or hinder the expression of the NCF principles. This understanding is crucial for developing strategies that enhance the capacity of caregivers to provide nurturing care that aligns with the principles of the NCF.

The community within the activity system

In the study of child-rearing practices within marginalised communities in South Africa, the Community component of CHAT encompasses the broader social, cultural, and institutional context in which individuals (parents and teachers) engage in the nurturing care of children. This includes the Ububele ECD centre, families, neighbours, extended kinship networks and the wider societal structures that influence and support child development.

The community aspect of the activity system is critical for understanding how collective beliefs, values, and shared knowledge impact child-rearing practices (Engeström, 2001). It provides the social fabric that either enables or constrains the nurturing care practices aligned with the NCF principles.

The study examines the role of community resources, such as local health services, educational institutions, and social support networks, in supporting caregivers and children. These resources are essential for providing a supportive environment that can enhance child development outcomes.

The historical context, including the legacy of apartheid and its ongoing effects on social and educational disparities, is a crucial aspect of the community component. Research has shown that these historical factors continue to influence children's experiences and opportunities within the education system (Barbarin & Richter, 2013). The apartheid regime in South Africa systematically marginalised Black communities, creating deep-seated inequalities that persist to this day. These inequalities manifest in various forms, including limited access to quality education, inadequate educational resources, and socioeconomic challenges that hinder children's development.

The study also considers the potential for community resilience factors that have served as protective mechanisms throughout hardships. Despite the oppressive conditions imposed by apartheid, many communities developed strong social networks and support systems that helped them navigate these challenges. These resilience factors include collective child-rearing practices, community solidarity and cultural traditions that emphasise mutual support and cooperation. Understanding these resilience factors is essential for developing culturally sensitive and effective interventions that leverage community strengths.

By examining the community within the activity system, the study aims to provide insights into the broader social context of child-rearing practices and how it influences the expression of nurturing care principles. This understanding is crucial for **developing** strategies that are genuinely responsive to the needs and realities of the community.

Contradictions within the activity system

Contradictions are a fundamental analytical concept in CHAT, representing the primary sources of change and development within an activity system. According to Engeström (1987), contradictions are not merely conflicts or problems to be resolved but are seen as driving forces for innovation and transformation. They fuel the evolution of practices by challenging existing norms and structures. In CHAT, contradictions can be understood as historically accumulating structural tensions within and between activity systems, emerging due to diverse and often conflicting demands, goals and practices.

The third generation of CHAT, which emerged from the work of Engeström and colleagues, addresses the interaction of multiple activity systems and recognises the role of contradictions as drivers of change. This generation emphasises the complexity of multiple interacting activity systems and the importance of networked interactions across different systems. By employing the third generation of CHAT, the current study considers the historical, systemic and collective aspects of child-rearing practices within marginalised communities in

South Africa. This framework facilitates an analysis of the activity system, considering the dynamic interactions between individuals, tools, rules and the socio-cultural context.

The division of labour within the activity system can be a significant source of tension and contradiction. Discrepancies may arise between the expectations set by the NCF and the actual practices within the community. These discrepancies can be influenced by various factors such as available resources, cultural beliefs, and historical legacies (Sanvictores and Mendez, 2021). Such contradictions can hinder the effective implementation of the framework and may require re-evaluation of roles and responsibilities to better align with the framework's goals.

The interconnected nature of various activity systems within the community can also lead to contradictions and tensions (Engeström, 2001). There might be a mismatch between the community's traditional expectations of child-rearing and the ideals proposed by the NCF. This could create resistance among community members and necessitate a more culturally sensitive approach to reconcile these differences.

Historical and cultural legacies further contribute to contradictions. Deeply ingrained cultural practices regarding child-rearing may conflict with the guidelines provided by the NCF. These cultural contradictions necessitate a careful balance between respecting traditional practices and introducing new, evidence-based methods.

2.4 Summary

This chapter has provided a general overview of the literature related to the NCF and its practical manifestations in the child-rearing practices of marginalised South African communities while simultaneously establishing a solid theoretical foundation for the study using the CHAT as our guiding framework.

The literature review was organised around four intertwined themes, each contributing to a deeper understanding of the research subject. The first theme provided an overview of the NCF, highlighting its contextual interpretation and expression within marginalised communities. The second theme amalgamated a variety of resources illustrating the profound interconnections between the NCF, child-rearing practices, and the socio-political and historical milieu framing these communities' lived experiences. The third theme immersed into literature presenting various stakeholders' reactions to the expression of NCF principles in child-rearing practices, examining the responses of caregivers, children, parents and other community members. Finally, the fourth theme rigorously reviewed selected literature on the general and specific effects of employing NCF principles in child-rearing, providing a critical

understanding of the impact of these principles on child development and the broader socio-cultural context.

In parallel, the theoretical framework section of this chapter dissected the components of CHAT– subjects, objects, tools, rules, division of labour and community– to provide a comprehensive lens through which to view and analyse the complex dynamics of nurturing care. The application of CHAT has allowed us to consider the multifaceted interactions between individuals and their socio-cultural environment, offering a rich understanding of how child-rearing practices are shaped by historical legacies, socioeconomic conditions and cultural norms. By examining each component of the activity system, we have gained insights into the potential for both harmony and tension within the practices of nurturing care, particularly as they relate to the principles of the NCF.

The literature review has highlighted the need for a context- and culture-specific understanding of the NCF and its application in child-rearing practices. It has underscored the importance of considering the socio-political and historical contexts that shape these practices. In the next chapter, the theoretical insights from CHAT will inform the empirical investigation, providing a structured approach to understanding the lived experiences of caregivers and children within the Ububele ECD centre and the broader community.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

The heart of this research lies in the exploration of child-rearing practices within marginalised communities in South Africa, with a particular focus on the Ububele ECD centre in Alexandra, Johannesburg. This study seeks to illuminate the complexities of nurturing care as experienced by parents and caregivers, delving into the challenges they face and the strategies they employ to foster the wellbeing of children. By examining the real-world application of the NCF principles, this research aims to bridge the gap between theoretical constructs and the lived realities of those in marginalised settings.

The methodology chapter is pivotal, as it outlines the qualitative research design and methods that were used to gather and analyse data. CHAT provides the theoretical scaffolding for this investigation, guiding the inquiry on how historical factors, societal norms, collective responsibilities and individual development intersect to shape child-rearing practices. Through a case study approach, this research will offer an in-depth perspective on the daily experiences of children and their caregivers, shedding light on the cultural, historical and socioeconomic factors that influence nurturing care in the context of a South African marginalised community.

3.2 Research Design – Case Study

The case study research design employed in this study is a qualitative approach that offers an in-depth examination of a specific instance or phenomenon within its real-life context (Simons, 2014). This approach is particularly beneficial for exploring the child-rearing practices within the Ububele ECD centre and its surrounding community, as it allows for a comprehensive understanding of the complex social, cultural and historical factors influencing parenting behaviours and strategies in a marginalised South African context.

Using a case study design in this research brought multiple benefits. One significant advantage is the rich, contextualised understanding it provided, enabling a detailed exploration of the processes and relationships at play within the ECD centre. This approach offered a delicate picture of child-rearing practices as they unfold in their natural setting (Simons, 2014). Additionally, the flexibility of the case study design allows it to adapt to the evolving nature of the research, accommodating unexpected findings or new directions that may emerge during the study (Simons, 2014).

A case study design also facilitates a holistic perspective of the phenomenon under investigation. Rather than focusing solely on individual behaviours, it encompasses the broader environmental and systemic influences that shape these behaviours (Simons, 2014; Yin, 2012).

This approach aligns well with theoretical frameworks like CHAT, offering insights into the practical application of its concepts in real-world settings (Simons, 2014; Yin, 2012).

Engagement with participants is another critical benefit of the case study approach. Prolonged interaction with caregivers and children at the Ububele ECD centre fostered trust, leading to more candid and comprehensive information (Simons, 2014; Yin, 2012). This engagement not only enriched the depth of the data collected but also enhanced the authenticity and reliability of the findings.

Focusing on the Ububele ECD centre provided a unique opportunity to delve into the lived experiences of caregivers and children within a marginalised community. The insights gained from this case study are expected to have significant implications for the implementation of NCF principles, potentially guiding interventions and support mechanisms for ECD in similar contexts.

The case study design employed in this research offered a robust and adaptable framework for exploring the intricate dynamics of child-rearing practices in a marginalised South African community. Its comprehensive, flexible and participant-engaged approach ensured a detailed and holistic understanding, setting the stage for meaningful contributions to both theory and practice in the realm of ECD (Simons, 2014; Yin, 2012).

3.3 Selection of the Case

The Ububele ECD centre, situated on the periphery of Alexandra, a historically marginalised community in Johannesburg, South Africa, was selected as the case for this study. This ECD centre is emblematic of the socioeconomic and cultural diversity that characterises the broader South African context. It serves a heterogeneous population that includes not only native South Africans from various ethnic backgrounds but also families who have migrated from other African countries. This diversity is further enriched by the presence of working-class individuals and self-employed entrepreneurs who are navigating the economic landscape of post-apartheid South Africa.

The selection of Ububele ECD centre as the case study is strategic for several reasons. Firstly, the centre caters for children from families with a wide range of socioeconomic statuses, from those facing severe economic challenges to those who are self-employed or part of the working class. This socioeconomic diversity ensures a comprehensive understanding of child-rearing practices across different economic backgrounds. Secondly, the inclusion of families from outside South Africa introduces a variety of cultural perspectives on child-rearing, providing a richer analysis of how these practices are shaped by cultural beliefs and values.

The diverse socioeconomic and cultural makeup of the participants helps to mitigate research bias, ensuring that the findings are more representative of the population and therefore more generalisable to other similar contexts. This variety of experiences offers insights into the realities of South African challenges, such as unemployment, poverty and social inequality, which are crucial for understanding the context in which child-rearing practices are situated and for developing interventions that are sensitive to these challenges.

The inclusive approach to participant selection is designed to capture the complex interplay between socioeconomic factors, cultural influences and historical legacies that shape child-rearing practices in South Africa. This balanced representation is essential for the study's credibility and for ensuring that a narrow sample does not bias the outcomes.

Moreover, this approach allows the researcher to address the nuances of the NCF principles as they are interpreted and considered imperative for global communities in the world across different family structures and socioeconomic conditions. The insights gained from this case study will contribute to a deeper understanding of the factors that support or hinder nurturing care in marginalised communities, informing policy and practice in a way that is responsive to the diverse needs of South African children and their families.

3.4 Participants

Participants in this study were voluntary and comprised four educators from the ECD centre and three parents of the ECD children. The majority of the participants were from Alexandra township, with one educator from Soweto. All parent participants were Black African females. The educators ranged in age from 35 to 43 years old, while the parents' ages ranged from 29 to 38 years old. The salary range for the participants varied from R2 900 to R7 400 per month.

The recruitment process involved presenting the study idea and request for participants during a scheduled meeting that the parents had with the principal of the school. Initially, about nine parents expressed interest in participating. However, several challenges were encountered during the recruitment process. A significant number of parents had work commitments that prevented them from adhering to the appointment schedule. Additionally, there were challenges in obtaining consent from parents to observe their home environments, as many expressed discomfort with the idea. This discomfort led to a number of parents withdrawing from the study. Ultimately, three parents explicitly mentioned their concerns before consenting to participate in the research study. The educators were selected using a purposive sampling technique, ensuring that they had been teaching at the ECD centre of Ububele.

3.5 Research Methods

To capture the multifaceted nature of child-rearing practices within the Ububele ECD centre and its surrounding community, this study employs a qualitative research approach, using semi-structured interviews and direct observations. Constructivism as a world view embedded in CHAT as a theoretical framework informing the use qualitative research approach, with parents and teachers as participants in the construction of child rearing practices through social interactions and shaped by cultural and historical (Engeström, 2001; Vygotsky, 2012).

3.5.1 Sampling

This study employed a purposive sampling approach to ensure the selection of participants and sites that were most likely to provide insights into the research problem. Purposive sampling is a non-random technique often used in qualitative research to deliberately select individuals or settings based on specific characteristics relevant to the research question (Etikan et al., 2016).

3.5.2 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Participants were included if they met the following criteria:

- **Educators:** Currently employed at the Ububele ECD centre with a minimum of one year of experience.
- **Parents:** Actively involved in the caregiving or parenting of a child enrolled at the ECD centre.

Participants who expressed discomfort with being observed in their home environments or who were unavailable for scheduled sessions due to work commitments were excluded from the study. Despite initial interest from nine parents, only three consented to full participation, reflecting logistical and personal barriers to engagement.

3.5.3 Addressing Sampling Limitations

The study acknowledges the limitations inherent in its sampling approach, including the small sample size and potential lack of broader generalizability. These limitations were mitigated through in-depth engagement with participants, the triangulation of interviews and observational data from the school, given that parents expressed discomfort in having their homes observed, and the integration of CHAT to provide a holistic understanding of child-rearing practices. The findings are intended to offer transferable insights that can inform policy and practice in similar marginalised settings, rather than statistically generalizable conclusions.

3.5.4 Semi-Structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews are a hallmark of qualitative research, providing the flexibility to delve into the complexities of human experiences and perspectives (Blandford et al., 2016). This method allows for the exploration of the caregivers' and parents' insights, beliefs and practices in relation to child-rearing within a marginalised South African context. The semi-structured nature of the interviews facilitates a guided yet open-ended dialogue, where participants can share their stories and reflections in a manner that is both structured by research aims and open to emergent themes (Blandford et al., 2016).

The use of semi-structured interviews in this study is particularly pertinent for understanding how the principles of the NCF are operationalised by caregivers. It provided a platform for participants to articulate their experiences in implementing the NCF principles, such as health, nutrition, responsive caregiving, safety and protection, and early learning opportunities (WHO et al., 2018). Through these interviews, the research aims to uncover the lived realities that shape and sometimes constrain the application of these principles (Willig, 2013). These interviews were audio-recorded and later transcribed verbatim to ensure accuracy in capturing participants' responses (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019). The interview guide included open-ended questions that align with the study's objectives, allowing participants to express their experiences, perceptions and practices related to child-rearing and the NCF's principles (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019; WHO et al., 2018). The interview process was sensitive to the participants' comfort and willingness to share, ensuring that they understood the purpose of the research and their rights as participants. Informed consent was obtained prior to the interviews, and participants were assured of their anonymity and the confidentiality of their responses (Kadam, 2017).

3.5.5 Direct Observations

Direct observations serve as a complementary method to interviews, offering a window into the actual practices and interactions within the ECD centre and the community (Van Heerden, 2016). Observations allowed the researcher to witness the nuances of child-rearing practices as they unfold in real-time, providing a rich context for the data collected through interviews. This method is particularly effective in capturing non-verbal communication, the physical setting and the spontaneous interactions that occur, which are often critical components of caregiving practices (Creswell, 2014).

In the context of this study, observations were conducted to gather data on how the environment, interactions and daily routines reflect and influence the expression of the NCF principles. Observing the caregivers in action provided an additional layer of understanding, revealing the tacit knowledge and unspoken rules that govern child-rearing practices in the community (Creswell, 2014). The observational data provided context to the interview findings, offering a more complete picture of the child-rearing practices and the environmental factors that support or hinder the expression of nurturing care.

3.6 Analysis procedure

The analysis procedure employed in this study is based on thematic analysis, a foundational method within qualitative research that offers a flexible and accessible approach to analysing complex datasets. Thematic analysis has a rich history, originating from early psychological research aimed at systematically extracting themes from qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Over time, it has evolved into a widely recognised method across various disciplines, including healthcare, education and social sciences (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Its relevance to the current study lies in its capacity to distil patterns and themes from rich qualitative data, providing deep insights into the nurturing care practices and resource availability within marginalised communities in Gauteng.

Thematic analysis is particularly advantageous for this study due to its less prescriptive nature compared to grounded theory and its more open-ended approach compared to content analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This flexibility permits themes to emerge directly from the data, avoiding the imposition of preconceived categories and making it an ideal tool for exploring the lived experiences of caregivers and educators within the ECD centre (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Yin, 2012).

When combined with CHAT, thematic analysis offers a powerful means of interpreting the socio-cultural and historical dimensions of the data. CHAT provides a theoretical lens through which the identified themes can be understood in terms of the broader social practices and historical context that shape and are shaped by the participants' experiences (Engeström, 2001; Vygotsky, 2012).

Triangulation was employed to enhance the validity of research findings. Triangulation is a method that combines multiple perspectives, sources of data, or methods of data collection (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In this study, triangulation was achieved through the use of interviews and observations, all analysed through the thematic analysis process. This multifaceted approach ensures a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under study.

The thematic analysis was conducted in six phases, as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). The first phase involved familiarisation with the data, which included transcribing interviews and observations, followed by thorough reading and annotation to identify initial patterns. This phase also involved translation for some interviews. During the second phase, generating initial codes, the data was systematically coded to highlight features relevant to the research questions. This process involved carefully reading through the transcripts and observations line by line and identifying segments of text that captured significant information or recurring ideas. These segments were then labelled with descriptive codes that succinctly captured their essence. In the third phase, searching for themes, the generated codes were collated into potential themes, examining their relevance to the data corpus. This involved grouping similar codes together and identifying overarching patterns or concepts that encapsulated the data.

Themes were then reviewed and refined in the fourth phase to ensure they accurately represented the data and formed a coherent pattern. This process included checking the themes against the data to confirm they were well-supported and adjusting as necessary. The fifth phase focused on defining and naming themes, finalising the specifics of each theme, and generating clear definitions and names. Finally, the sixth phase involved producing the report, selecting compelling data extracts and relating the analysis back to the research questions and existing literature.

Overall, the thematic analysis combined with CHAT and triangulation provided a robust framework for understanding the nurturing care practices within the Ububele ECD centre and its surrounding community. This methodological approach ensured that the findings were deeply rooted in the lived experiences of the participants and offered significant contributions to both theory and practice.

3.7 Data Storage and Management

The data collected from the semi-structured interviews and direct observations were stored securely on a password-protected Google Drive account. This cloud-based storage solution was chosen for its robust security features, ease of access and ability to facilitate collaboration between the researcher and the supervisor while maintaining strict access controls (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

To ensure the highest level of data security, multiple measures were implemented. The Google Drive account was secured with a strong password, which was regularly updated to prevent unauthorised access. Access to the data was restricted exclusively to the researcher and

the supervisor, ensuring that no other parties could view or modify the data. Additionally, the data stored on Google Drive was encrypted both in transit and at rest, providing an additional layer of security to protect sensitive information.

The data was meticulously organised to facilitate easy retrieval and reference. Data files were stored in clearly labelled folders, adhering to a consistent naming convention. This organisation ensured that all files could be easily located and distinguished. The version history feature of Google Drive allowed for tracking changes and reverting to previous versions of documents if necessary, ensuring the integrity and accuracy of the data throughout the research process.

The combination of security measures and meticulous organisation ensured that the data collected for this study was securely stored and easily accessible for analysis. The use of a cloud-based storage, Google Drive provided both the security and flexibility needed to manage the research data effectively, supporting the collaborative efforts between the researcher and the supervisor while safeguarding the sensitive information collected during the study.

3.8 Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations were integral to the conduct of this study. In adherence to ethical standards, ethical clearance was first sought from the University of the Witwatersrand's Human Research (Non-Medical) Research Committee (Appendix A). Thereafter, informed consent was obtained from all participants, including the parents or legal caretakers of the children involved in the study (Kadam, 2017). Participants were fully informed about the research objectives, procedures and their role within the study. They were also made aware of the potential risks and benefits of their participation. This information was provided through documents (Appendix B and Appendix C), which outlined participants' rights and detailed information about the study. Participants were required to read, agree, sign and give their consent voluntarily before the commencement of the study, with the assurance that they could withdraw at any time without any consequences (Kadam, 2017).

Confidentiality and anonymity were paramount throughout the research process. All information provided by participants was kept confidential and used solely for the purpose of the study. To further protect participants' identities, pseudonyms were used in the final report. This measure ensured that personal identifiers were not disclosed in any reports or publications, maintaining the anonymity of the participants despite the face-to-face nature of the interviews (Kadam, 2017).

The study was conducted with deep respect for the cultural differences and practices of the communities involved. The researcher, as a member of the Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA), was particularly mindful of these differences and committed to maintaining a stance of non-maleficence and non-judgement. The HPCSA's ethical guidelines obligate researchers to avoid causing harm to participants, whether intentionally or unintentionally, and this principle was strictly observed throughout the research (HPCSA, 2021).

3.9 Data Reliability and Validity

Ensuring data reliability and validity, particularly in qualitative research, is paramount to establishing the trustworthiness and credibility of the study. To achieve this, several measures were implemented.

Multiple strategies were employed to ensure the study's trustworthiness. First, triangulation was used, involving multiple data sources such as observations and interviews, this approach mitigated the biases inherent in relying on a single data source and provided a more comprehensive understanding of the nurturing care practices within the ECD centre (Creswell, 2014). Additionally, member checking was conducted, where participants were invited to review the research findings to verify the accuracy and resonance of the data with their experiences. This process allowed for participant validation and contributed to the credibility of the research results (Birt et al., 2016). An audit trail was also maintained, meticulously documenting all research decisions and processes, including detailed notes on data collection, coding, theme development and the rationale behind interpretive decisions. This provided transparency and allowed for external verification of the research process (Carcary, 2021).

Credibility was achieved through several techniques. Prolonged engagement and persistent observation were key, with the researcher spending a significant amount of time in the field to facilitate a deeper understanding of the context, thus increasing the credibility of the findings (Ahmed, 2024). Reflexivity also played a crucial role; the researcher critically reflected on her own background, experiences and potential biases that could influence the study. This self-awareness helped mitigate the impact of the researcher's subjectivity on the data collection and analysis process (Ahmed, 2024). Furthermore, rich, thick descriptions were provided, detailing the context, participants and the research process. This not only contributed to the credibility of the research but also allowed for the transferability of the findings to other contexts (Ahmed, 2024).

Validity, in terms of applicability and transferability, was supported by offering a thorough description of the setting, participants and their demographics. This detailed contextualisation will enable future researchers to assess the transferability of the findings (Leung, 2015). Clear methodological documentation was also provided, ensuring that the research process is replicable and that the findings were grounded in a systematic approach (Leung, 2015)

3.10 Summary

The methodology chapter has meticulously laid out the qualitative research design and methods that underpin this study's exploration of child-rearing practices at the Ububele ECD centre in Alexandra, Johannesburg. Employing a case study approach, the research is grounded in the CHAT, which provides a robust theoretical framework for understanding the complex interplay of societal, cultural and individual factors in nurturing care. The use of semi-structured interviews and direct observations enables an in-depth examination of the lived experiences of caregivers and parents, ensuring that the data collected is rich. Thematic analysis, as the chosen method for data interpretation, was conducted with a clear and systematic approach, allowing for the emergence of meaningful themes that are consistent with the researcher's epistemological stance.

The integrity of the research process was upheld through rigorous ethical considerations and methodological transparency, ensuring trustworthiness and credibility. The study's findings, which are discussed in the following chapter, are expected to provide valuable insights into the application of the NCF within a marginalised South African context. The discussion delves into how the themes identified relate to the broader social context and contribute to our understanding of nurturing care practices, ultimately informing policy and practice in similar settings.

CHAPTER 4: DATA ANALYSIS, FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Introduction

Following the comprehensive methodology outlined in chapter 3, this chapter presents and discusses the results of the thematic analysis conducted on the data collected from the Ububele ECD centre. This analysis aims to elucidate the emergent themes that encapsulate child-rearing practices within the community, informed by the NCF and viewed through the lens of CHAT.

The thematic analysis, guided by the procedures established by Braun and Clarke (2006), yielded a set of coherent themes that reflect the complexities and dynamics of nurturing care in the ECD centre. The initial thematic map, refined through an iterative process of coding and recoding, led to the development of a final thematic structure. This structure captures the essence of the participants' experiences and the socio-cultural context of child-rearing practices in Alexandra, Johannesburg.

The findings from this thematic analysis revealed several significant themes, including the challenges of accessing government support, the reliance on private services, the preservation and adaptation of cultural practices, and the environmental factors impacting health and safety. These themes are critical in understanding the lived experiences of parents, caregivers and educators in marginalised communities and their efforts to provide nurturing care under constrained circumstances.

This chapter systematically unpacks each theme, providing a narrative that delves into the nuances of the data. Sub-themes, where applicable, are discussed to illustrate the hierarchy of meaning within the data and to offer a structured understanding of larger, more complex themes. Representative data extracts are included to substantiate the themes and provide a vivid account of the participants' perspectives.

In addition to presenting the empirical findings, this chapter synthesises key insights derived from the exploration of child-rearing practices within marginalised South African communities. The primary aim of this discussion is to interpret the empirical findings in relation to the research questions and the theoretical framework of CHAT. By doing so, the researcher seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of how historical, socioeconomic, and cultural determinants shape child-rearing practices and the expression of NCF principles.

Delving deeper into the identified themes, discussing their implications for ECD and education. The broader theoretical and practical implications of findings are also considered, reflecting on how they align with or challenge existing literature and theoretical constructs. By

integrating the empirical findings with the theoretical insights from CHAT, this discussion aims to bridge the gap between theory and practice, offering valuable contributions to both academic discourse and practical interventions aimed at supporting the wellbeing and development of children in marginalised settings.

4.2 Understanding the Intrinsic Nature of the Study and its Purpose

The NCF is a comprehensive guide developed by the WHO, UNICEF and other partners to support ECD (WHO et al., 2018). It emphasises the importance of providing nurturing care for young children, which includes opportunities for early learning, health, nutrition, responsive caregiving, and safety and security (WHO et al., 2018). This framework is particularly relevant in the context of marginalised communities, where access to resources and support systems may be limited, yet the need for such nurturing care is most critical.

In South Africa, marginalised communities often face a unique set of challenges that can impact child-rearing practices and the expression of the NCF principles. These challenges include socioeconomic constraints, cultural and historical influences, and community dynamics (Hall et al., 2018). Understanding how these factors affect parenting and childcare practices is essential for developing culturally sensitive interventions that promote children's well-being.

This case study explores the expression of the NCF principles within the child-rearing practices of marginalised communities in South Africa. By examining the lived experiences of parents, caregivers and educators, the study seeks to uncover the strategies employed to provide nurturing care under constrained circumstances. It also aims to identify the cultural and community assets that support resilience and positive child development.

The significance of this study lies in its potential to inform policy and practice, ensuring that the NCF principles are adapted and integrated in ways that resonate with the realities of South African communities. By highlighting the voices of those directly involved in raising children, the research provides valuable insights into the strengths and needs of marginalised populations, ultimately contributing to creating a more supportive environment for nurturing the next generation.

With this understanding, the study delves into various themes that emerge from participants' narratives, each shedding light on different aspects of the NCF within the context of South African marginalised communities.

4.3 Demographics of the Participants

A summary of the participants' demographics, including their age and salary ranges, is provided in Table 1. The codes P1 – P3 denote the parents who participated while the codes E1 – E4 denote the educators who participated. These codes are used for purposes of anonymity in presenting the verbatim extracts from their interviews.

Table 1: Summary of participant demographics

Participant Code	Role	Age	Qualification	Salary (per month)	No. of Children
P1	Parent	38	Self-Employed, Project Management	R6 000	2
P2	Parent	29	ECD Assistant, Matric	R2 900	2
P3	Parent (Malawi)	30	Domestic Worker, Grade 8	R3 000	3
E1	Educator	35	Level 5 ECD Training	R7 400	N/A
E2	Educator	37	Assistant Teacher	R5 000	N/A
E3	Educator	36	Level 5 ECD Training	R7 400	N/A
E4	Educator	43	Level 4 ECD Training, Pursuing Diploma	R7 400	N/A

4.4 Analysis of Data

The analysis of the study's findings reveals a complex interplay of socioeconomic challenges and parental aspirations that impact the realisation of the NCF principles. The excerpts from interviews with participants provide a rich narrative that illustrates the lived experiences of parents within the community.

The analysis yielded five themes, with each of the themes presenting sub-themes as indicated in Table 2.

Table 2: Summary of themes and sub-themes

Themes	Community Dynamics and Support Systems	Socio-Economic Challenges and Parental Aspirations	Health, Safety, and Environmental Considerations	Navigating the Nurturing Care Framework in Marginalised Contexts

Sub-themes	Community support and networking in child-rearing practices, mental health and development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Economic constraints and nutritional decisions • Educators' well-being and socio-economic challenges in the ECD sector • Educational aspirations amidst financial and commuting challenges 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trust and distrust in government and institutions • Safety, stability, and environmental challenges • Access to government support and reliance on private services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategies employed by parents and educators to align with NCF within constraints • Impact of socio-cultural context on the application of NCF principles
Research question focus	What is the nature of parenting and childcare practices in marginalised communities of South Africa?	What are the hindrances of the realisation of the nurturing care framework principles in marginalised communities?		How do parenting and childcare practices in marginalised communities express the principles of Nurturing Care Framework?

4.5 Observational Analysis of Findings

The observational analysis of Ububele, the preschool for children from Alexandra and surrounding areas, revealed several key insights into the expression of the NCF principles, particularly in the context of a marginalised community. The observations were conducted in this well-maintained ECD centre, focusing on various aspects of childcare and development.

Ububele demonstrated a commitment to maintaining good health practices. There was a handwashing station available, and clean water was readily accessible for hygiene practices. Proper waste disposal was in place, and basic health supplies, such as first aid kits, were available. Although the absence of security at the gate was noted, this was mitigated by a buzzer system and a strict sign-in procedure for parents. The presence of fire equipment in the classrooms further emphasised the centre's focus on safety. This aligns with the NCF principles, which emphasise ensuring sanitary living conditions and access to healthcare facilities (WHO et al., 2018).

Nutrition is a critical component of the NCF, and Ububele made significant efforts to provide nutritious food options for the children. The children were served two hot meals a day, consisting of a balanced diet with starch, vegetables and a curry, accompanied by fruit, which is supplemented by a daily snack. This aligns with research by Black et al. (2015), which emphasises the importance of nutrition in the first 1 000 days of life. Yet, the challenge of ensuring that children from economically deprived backgrounds receive adequate nutrition at home remains. Parents expressed concerns about the cost of nutritious food, highlighting the need for community support and interventions to address food insecurity. Babar et al. (2010) support this by indicating that socioeconomic constraints significantly impact the nutritional status of children, underlining the need for integrated approaches combining health, nutrition and social protection programmes.

Ububele took several measures to ensure the safety and security of the children. Childproofing measures were in place, and the furniture and equipment were secure and age-appropriate. The classrooms were spacious enough to accommodate the children, and the number of children per teacher was kept low to ensure quality teaching and learning, with all teachers being qualified ECD educators. The use of time-out as a disciplinary measure, rather than corporal punishment, reflects a positive approach to behaviour management. This approach is in line with the NCF principles, which emphasise the importance of security and safety for children's development (Britto et al., 2017).

Responsive caregiving is a cornerstone of the NCF, and Ububele's practices reflected this principle. Regular meal schedules were maintained, and appropriate feeding techniques were used. The children were trusted to feed themselves, promoting independence and self-reliance. The teachers' attentiveness to the children's needs and their use of age-appropriate utensils and dishware further supported responsive caregiving. According to WHO et al. (2018), responsive caregiving significantly influences children's cognitive and emotional development, underscoring its critical role.

Ububele provided many opportunities for learning, with educational resources, age-appropriate toys, books and structured learning activities available. The classrooms were filled with colourful charts and teaching aids, creating a stimulating learning environment. This aligns with Vygotsky's (1978) concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), where children learn through guided participation in activities with more knowledgeable others. Shonkoff et al. (2012) further emphasise the role of early learning environments, who argue that stimulating environments are essential for cognitive and language development.

Ububele's holistic learning environment addresses educational, psychosocial and physical development. Children who need it have access to therapy, and parents have access to parenting support through the Ububele Therapy and Assessment Clinic, which offers reduced rates for qualifying families. This holistic approach is critical, as the WHO et al. (2018) stress that comprehensive child development requires supportive environments both at home and within ECD centres.

However, the study had significant limitations. One was the inability to observe the children's home environments, as parents did not consent to home visits. This limitation highlights the challenges of gaining a comprehensive understanding of the children's overall care and development. Additionally, the limited space for play and rest areas at the ECD centre suggests room for improvement in providing a more conducive environment for the children's physical and emotional wellbeing.

While Ububele demonstrated commendable efforts in implementing the NCF principles, the analysis highlighted areas requiring further enhancement. Addressing issues such as food insecurity, enhancing home environment understanding and improving facility space are critical. Integrating culturally sensitive and resource-efficient strategies, alongside robust monitoring and evaluation systems, could significantly enhance the expression of the NCF in marginalised communities (Britto et al., 2017; WHO et al., 2018). The insights drawn from this analysis can provide a solid foundation for further research and policy development aimed at improving ECD outcomes.

4.6 Theme 1: Socioeconomic Challenges and Parental Aspirations

The theme of socioeconomic challenges and parental aspirations is central to understanding the barriers to the realisation of the NCF principles in marginalised communities. The findings reveal a complex interplay between socioeconomic challenges and parental aspirations that significantly impact child-rearing practices and the ability of caregivers and educators to provide nurturing care to their children as socioeconomic constraints restrict them. The narratives from participants offer a rich portrayal of the lived experiences within the community.

Economic Constraints and Nutritional Decisions

Economic constraints are a major factor influencing nutritional choices for children. Parents and educators make concerted efforts to ensure that children receive nutritious meals despite financial limitations. One parent's approach to nutrition emphasises prioritising the quality of food over its cost was:

“...when it comes to nutrition, I make sure with my kids are well fed you know and well fed does not mean it must cost an arm and a leg. You know people have that thing which is oh we bought this and that, no it’s what’s going in the body that builds the child you know okay.”– P1

This insight reveals the creativity and resourcefulness of caregivers in providing healthy food options within a tight budget, highlighting their commitment to the children’s wellbeing. The principal’s emphasis on healthy eating at the ECD centre demonstrated an institutional commitment to the wellbeing of the children:

“The principal she always emphasises that the children they must eat healthy food... they eat carrots, cucumber to get energy, just something fruits.”– E1

Educators’ efforts to provide healthy food options such as local fruits indicate their dedication to fostering a nurturing environment:

“...they eat healthy food, for like local, watermelon and like that.”– E1

Moreover, the collective effort to ensure children receive nutritious meals was underscored by the repeated commitment to providing healthy food:

“...we try and provide healthy food for the children.”– E3

These excerpts illustrate the community’s resourcefulness and the strategies they employ to overcome economic barriers. Institutional support, such as that provided by the ECD centre, is crucial in reinforcing the value of nutrition and health as part of a holistic approach to child development. These insights contribute to a deeper understanding of how the NCF principles are being expressed and adapted in the context of economic adversity.

Educators’ Wellbeing and Socioeconomic Challenges in the ECD Sector

The wellbeing of educators is crucial for the effective delivery of early childhood education. The data indicates that educators face financial and emotional challenges that impact their motivation and capacity to provide nurturing care. The wellbeing of educators directly affects their ability to provide quality care and education. This sub-theme explores the socioeconomic challenges faced by educators in the ECD sector and how these challenges impact their professional satisfaction and capacity to deliver nurturing care.

One educator’s statement reflected the broader socioeconomic issues within the ECD sector:

“I can’t be earning this for this long. So, it’s sort of demotivated to discourage you from doing what you love because... you need money to survive.”– E4

This sentiment underscores the need for better compensation and support for educators, essential for maintaining a high-quality ECD environment. The financial struggles endured by

educators affect their morale and commitment to the profession. One educator described the burden of commuting costs:

“And my transport cost is R 2000 from there, because I’m staying in Soweto, so I travel every day to here...”– E4

This significant expense illustrates the sacrifices educators make to continue working in the ECD sector, often at the expense of their financial stability. The strain of such costs can lead to a decrease in motivation, as another educator expressed:

“I can’t be earning this for this long. So, it’s sort of demotivated to discourage you from doing what you love because... you need money to survive.”– E4

The need for better compensation was further emphasised by the comparison to other sectors:

“I think educators must be taken as like any government employees or corporate for that matter, when it comes to salary, you have to earn. Much better.”– E3

This statement underscores the desire for parity with other professions, recognising the value and importance of ECD educators in society. The call for improved salaries is about acknowledging the critical role educators play in the early development of children.

The dual economy of schooling and teacher morale, as discussed by Shalem and Hoadley (2009), further complicates the landscape of socioeconomic challenges and parental aspirations. The disparities in educational resources and support between affluent and marginalised communities create a dual economy that impacts both students and educators. Shalem and Hoadley (2009) argue that the interplay between enduring economic inequalities, an underspecified new curriculum, and the bureaucratisation of teachers’ work has resulted in persistent educational disparities among teachers in South Africa. These disparities significantly affect teacher morale, as educators in under-resourced schools face greater challenges and fewer opportunities for professional growth and satisfaction.

Structural factors contributing to low teacher morale include inequalities in access to resources, cognitive preparedness of learners, curriculum and bureaucratic demands and economic inequalities. These factors create a challenging work environment for teachers, leading to high levels of job stress, low job satisfaction and a desire to leave the profession. The cumulative effect of these factors on teacher morale is profound, as teachers in under-resourced schools struggle to meet the demands of their work while receiving little support or recognition.

Further Training and Development Aspirations Amidst Financial and Commuting Challenges

The aspirations for further training and development among educators in the ECD sector reflect their dedication to professional growth and the quality of care they wish to provide. However, these aspirations are often met with significant financial and commuting challenges that can impede progress and lead to a sense of demotivation. One educator's sentiment reflected the frustration of educators passionate about their work but considering leaving the profession due to financial constraints:

"It demotivates you! We end up looking to other careers, you know, like, you know, I can't be earning this for this long." – E4

These challenges underscore the need for the professionalisation of ECD teachers, which includes ensuring adequate compensation and support for their continuous development. Despite the recognised importance of the ECD sector to the economy and child development, support for educators' professional development lags:

"...I think it's late that the government noticed very late that the ECD centre plays a very important role in our economy. Because obviously, yes, in developing children, because mostly at the beginning, ECD was mainly formed by illiterate women who wanted to provide a living for their children..." – E3

The challenges of limited staffing during training periods further exacerbate the situation:

"The challenge is that the other teachers are going to training. So now it will only be me and E3 who are left..." – E4

Despite these challenges, some educators actively pursue further qualifications:

"I did my ECD level 4, and now I'm busy studying for my Diploma in Foundation Phase teaching." – E4

The commitment to lifelong learning and improvement is evident among educators, as one explained:

"...I think, obviously because like most of us, I think continuous learning is like if I still want to, I still want to further my studies, education and merits, obviously, yeah, but it is easy to further, yeah, so that I don't stop and I improve on what I really know..." – E3

The professionalisation of ECD teachers is increasingly recognised as essential for improving the quality of early childhood education. Research supports the notion that higher levels of teacher training and professional development lead to better outcomes for children (Zulu et al., 2022). However, the financial and logistical barriers they face must be addressed to make these aspirations a reality for many educators, for instance, having to travel to far places because of the salaries that do not meet the household needs for their families while also renting accommodation close to work areas.

Implications for Policy and Practice

The findings of this study have significant implications for both policy and practice, particularly in the context of the professionalisation of ECD educators. There is a pressing need for improved policy adherence that addresses the socioeconomic challenges faced by marginalised communities, particularly in relation to child nutrition (Thow et al., 2018) and the wellbeing of educators. This includes providing financial support and resources to ensure that children receive nutritious meals and that educators are adequately compensated and supported.

For policymakers, it is crucial to prioritise the improvement of infrastructure and services in marginalised communities (Centre for Social Development in Africa, 2019). This involves ensuring that basic amenities such as clean water and sanitation are readily available and that public spaces are safe for children to play and explore (Thow et al., 2018). Additionally, healthcare services must be accessible, reliable and responsive to the needs of the community (Reid & Cakwe, 2011). Building trust in government institutions through consistent and effective service delivery is essential for encouraging families to use available resources and support.

The professionalisation of ECD educators is essential for improving the quality of early childhood education. Zulu et al. (2022) highlight that the level of training, education and experience of ECD practitioners has a positive relationship to teacher behaviour in the classroom. They contend that, as many rural practitioners have discovered, a lack of credentials negatively affects their sense of self as professionals, their level of dedication, and their level of job satisfaction. Obtaining certifications can help practitioners create high-quality care and learning environments that promote greater reflection, collaboration, and pedagogy (Zulu et al., 2022). This view is supported by the Policy on Minimum Requirements for Programmes Leading to Qualifications in Higher Education for Early Childhood Educators (DHET, 2017), which recognises the need to professionalise the ECD sector to ensure adequately trained teachers.

For practitioners, it is important to create safe and supportive environments for children. This involves being vigilant about potential hazards and taking proactive measures to ensure children's safety. Educators and caregivers must also be equipped with the necessary resources and training to manage health and hygiene effectively, even in challenging circumstances. By doing so, they can better support the health, safety and overall wellbeing of children in their care.

The findings align with existing literature on the social determinants of health, emphasising the impact of environmental factors on child development. Nxumalo et al. (2013)

discuss the importance of addressing social and environmental determinants” to improve health outcomes. The challenges of accessing reliable healthcare services and the financial burden of private healthcare are consistent with the findings of Reid and Cakwe (2011), who emphasise the need for strengthening public health systems.

The distrust in government institutions and the need for improved public services are also well-documented in the literature. Nxumalo et al. (2013) discuss the challenges of improving access to healthcare in South Africa, highlighting the importance of outreach services and community health worker programmes. Jaca et al. (2022) further underscore the need for effective government interventions to address the health and safety challenges faced by marginalised communities.

The dual economy of schooling and its impact on teacher morale, as discussed by Shalem and Hoadley (2009), provides additional context for understanding the socioeconomic challenges faced by educators. The disparities in educational resources and support between affluent and marginalised communities create a dual economy that affects both students and educators. This dual economy is characterised by significant differences in the quality of education and the working conditions of teachers, which in turn impact teacher morale and the overall educational experience of students.

The theme of Socioeconomic Challenges and Parental Aspirations directly responds to the research question by highlighting the socioeconomic factors that hinder the realisation of the NCF principles in marginalised communities. The findings indicate that economic constraints significantly impact nutritional decisions, the wellbeing of educators and the overall ability to provide nurturing care. Despite these challenges, the aspirations and resilience of parents and educators are evident as they strive to provide the best possible care under constrained circumstances.

4.7 Theme 2: Health, Safety and Environmental Considerations

This theme is integral to the study as it examines the environmental factors that influence the expression of the NCF principles in marginalised communities. Health, safety and environmental considerations are essential components of nurturing care, necessary for the optimal development of children. The theme explores how these factors either support or hinder the realisation of the NCF principles in the context of the communities being studied.

Trust and Distrust in Government and Institutions

The trust and distrust in government and institutions are pivotal in understanding how communities interact with and perceive the support systems designed to provide health, safety

and environmental stability. The excerpts from the participants revealed a complex relationship with these entities, often characterised by frustration and a lack of confidence in the services provided.

One parent described the urgency and challenges of seeking medical care for a sick child at night, highlighting the lack of accessible healthcare services during emergencies:

“Let’s say the child is sick at night, maybe midnight. Like I usually go, because like I can say, Emmanuel who is the one that likes to get sick most of the time. So even if it’s midnight, as long as I see that I don’t have any, maybe like Panado, I will just Taxify (e-hauling taxi) and go to the clinic. Even though they will shout, and say, “why you bring the child this time”, but what can you do? So, wake up at night and go to the clinic. Yeah...”– P3

The need to resort to private transportation services like Taxify due to safety concerns further illustrated the environmental challenges faced by the community:

“Um, because like at night I can’t go walking because it’s not safe. So, like I will just taxify and go there. Even when I’m coming back, I’ll have to taxify also. Because to walk is very dangerous. Yeah? Yeah. Okay. You see a little bit distance yeah.”– P3

Parents were also vigilant about the safety of their children’s play environments, which were often compromised by hazardous conditions:

“Uh, like, where I’m staying. We are many. And the things that are happening is dangerous because there’s people who are drinking, maybe sometimes they just throw their bottle there. So, like every time when he goes outside, I’ll be checking on him. Maybe he won’t notice that my mum is looking at me, but I’ll be checking that he is safe. If I see that where he’s playing is not good, I’ll say, I come this side. So, like I don’t allow them to go play where he’s, maybe he’s dirty or there’s water. No. I have to make sure where they’re playing is safe. Yeah. Even in the house, you know, there’s the electricity where they’re playing if they plug, they will have to say, hhayi (no) come play this side. Or don’t touch the... Yeah.”– P3

The dissatisfaction with government healthcare services was evident, as one parent expressed a preference for private healthcare due to the inadequacy of government clinics:

“For me the clinics, we do have the nearest clinics. Ah-no, for me they do not work because most of the time you take the child to the clinic, they will just tell you that they ran out of meds and they just give you prescription, so instead I would rather go to the doctor and pay, because I feel like it is a waste of time. Me standing there, sitting there by the queue, a long queue and the next thing, when it is your turn to the nurse or the

doctor and then they tell you ukuthi medication ayikho (and then they tell you that there is no medication available). So, what was the use of ukuthi ungibuze ukuthi umntwana uphethwe yini and nami akusikuthi ngiyathanda ukuma amaline ende but umntwana uyagula (so what was the use for you to ask me what's wrong with the kid and, even I, it's not like I enjoy staying in a long que but what else can I do because the child is sick) so I do not feel the use of people going to government hospitals, because they are not worth it to be honest.”– P2

Financial considerations also play a role in healthcare decisions, as another parent noted:

“... if he's got a temperature we're going to a clinic, or we are going to a doctor depending on because it's also about financial um financial but yeah...”– P2

These excerpts collectively paint a picture of a community grappling with a lack of trust in government institutions, particularly in the context of healthcare. The narratives underscore the need for accessible, reliable and safe services that are responsive to the community's needs. The distrust in government support, coupled with the environmental and safety challenges, significantly hinders the realisation of the NCF principles in marginalised communities. Addressing these issues is crucial for building trust and ensuring that families have the necessary support to provide a nurturing environment for their children.

Safety, Stability and Environmental Challenges

Safety, stability and environmental challenges are critical factors that influence the nurturing care environment for children, particularly in marginalised communities. These challenges can significantly impact the physical and psychological wellbeing of children, affecting their ability to learn and develop in a healthy manner. The excerpts from the participants in this study shed light on the various environmental factors that pose challenges to providing a nurturing and safe environment for children.

Parents and caregivers must exercise constant vigilance to ensure the safety of children in environments where hazards are prevalent. One parent described the proactive approach required to manage risks associated with an unsafe environment:

“Uh, like, where I'm staying. We are many. And the things that are happening is dangerous because there's people who are drinking, maybe sometimes they just throw their bottle there. So, like every time when he goes outside, I'll be checking on him. Maybe he won't notice that my mum is looking at me, but I'll be checking that he is safe. If I see that where he's playing is not good, I'll say, I come this side. So, like I don't allow them to go play where he's, maybe he's dirty or there's water. No. I have to make

sure where they're playing is safe. Yeah. Even in the house, you know, there's the electricity where they're playing if they plug, they will have to say, hhayi (no) come play this side. Or don't touch the... Yeah." – P3

This narrative demonstrates the lengths to which caregivers must go to protect their children from potential dangers, highlighting the need for a safe and stable environment conducive to healthy child development. The lack of basic services, such as water, presents a significant challenge, necessitating alternative hygiene practices to prevent illness and maintain health:

"If there is no water, we need to do this and that, let us make sure which we have is sanitiser, we have wet wipes so that they can wash or wipe wherever we need to." – E1

The adaptability and resourcefulness of caregivers were evident as they ensured that children's hygiene needs were met, even in the absence of running water. This underscores the importance of sanitation in the nurturing care environment. Furthermore, the spread of illness within a community setting is a pressing concern that affects the stability of the care environment. One educator noted the impact of shared spaces on health:

"...if one is sick, they all get ill." – E1

This statement highlights the close quarters typical of many community care settings, which can lead to rapid transmission of illnesses among children. It emphasises the need for effective health and safety practices to manage and prevent the spread of disease.

The environmental challenges extend beyond health to include concerns about safety and stability within the living environment. For example, one participant noted:

"One of the parents was mugged here at the gate... they broke in here and someone stole the computer and all that stuff." – E4

Such challenges underscore the pervasive threat of violence and instability that can hinder children's development and wellbeing. The lack of safe play areas and the prevalence of hazards such as broken glass, unsafe electrical outlets and unsanitary conditions point to the need for the daily vigilance required to safeguard children.

Implications for Policy and Practice

The implications of these findings are profound for both policy and practice. There is a need for comprehensive strategies that address the environmental and health-related challenges faced by marginalised communities. This includes improving access to basic amenities, ensuring safe play environments and building trust in public health services. Such measures

are essential for the successful implementation of the NCF principles and for supporting the holistic development of children (WHO et al., 2018).

For policymakers, it is crucial to prioritise the improvement of infrastructure and services in marginalised communities (Centre for Social Development in Africa, 2019). This involves ensuring that basic amenities such as clean water and sanitation are readily available and that public spaces are safe for children to play and explore. Additionally, healthcare services must be accessible, reliable and responsive to the needs of the community (Reid & Cakwe, 2011; Sishi, 2024). Building trust in government institutions through consistent and effective service delivery is essential for encouraging families to use available resources and support.

For practitioners, it is important to create safe and supportive environments for children. This involves being vigilant about potential hazards and taking proactive measures to ensure children's safety (WHO et al., 2018). Educators and caregivers must also be equipped with the necessary resources and training to manage health and hygiene effectively, even in challenging circumstances. By doing so, they can better support the health, safety and overall wellbeing of children in their care.

The findings of this study align with existing literature on the social determinants of health, which highlight the impact of environmental factors on child development. Tomlinson et al. (2022) discuss the importance of addressing social and environmental determinants to improve health outcomes. The challenges of accessing reliable healthcare services and the financial burden of private healthcare are consistent with the findings of Maphumulo and Bhengu (2019), who emphasise the need for strengthening public health systems.

The distrust in government institutions and the need for improved public services are well-documented in the literature. Nxumalo et al. (2013) discuss the challenges of improving access to healthcare in South Africa, highlighting the importance of outreach services and community health worker programmes. Jaca et al. (2022) further underscore the need for effective government interventions to address the health and safety challenges faced by marginalised communities.

The theme of Health, Safety, and Environmental Considerations directly responds to the research question by highlighting the environmental factors that influence the expression of the NCF principles in marginalised communities. The findings indicate that health, safety and environmental challenges significantly impact the ability of caregivers to provide nurturing care. These challenges include the lack of basic services, the prevalence of hazards and the rapid transmission of illnesses in community settings. Addressing these environmental

challenges is crucial for the wellbeing of children and the successful implementation of nurturing care practices in marginalised communities.

4.8 Theme 3: Cultural Continuity and Adaptation in Parenting

Cultural continuity and adaptation in parenting are central to understanding how communities maintain their heritage while adapting to changing social and historical contexts. This theme encompasses the ways in which cultural and religious beliefs are preserved and transmitted across generations, as well as how parents navigate the complexities of historical differences in child-rearing practices, including the enduring impact of apartheid on educational choices and language perceptions. The findings reveal a dynamic interplay between preserving cultural heritage and adapting to contemporary societal norms, addressing the research question: How do cultural and historical contexts influence child-rearing practices in marginalised communities?

Cultural Heritage and Educational Aspirations

The legacy of apartheid is evident in the attitudes toward language and education, with English often being equated with intelligence and success. One educator reflected on the shift in educational aspirations as a result of historical changes, as follows:

“...every parent, now they want to take their kids to model C schools or suburbs because now as we are here at Alex so it’s like everyone is saying that I want my child to go to town school, the suburbs and Model C schools...”– E4

This shift underscores the desire among parents to provide their children with better educational opportunities, often perceived to be available in more affluent areas. English, in particular, is seen as a marker of intelligence and success:

“...if a parent comes here and they find me talking Sesotho or IsiZulu, it’s then like Ahh this school is not good why are they not speaking English... I think to fit in– Fit in... Yeah, and again UM, I think even intelligence is measured with language, so when she speaks or he speaks English then it’s like ‘Hhayi its intelligence’ you know, and it’s not that.”– E4

These excerpts highlight the societal pressures to conform to certain linguistic and educational standards, which are remnants of apartheid-era policies. The preference for English and Model C schools reflects broader societal attitudes shaped by historical inequalities (Mkhize, 2006). Educators face the challenge of teaching in a multicultural environment, which requires them to be fluent in multiple languages to effectively communicate with children:

“...I am not a Zulu but now I know IsiZulu because it’s a dominant language for some of the kids. So, for me to be able to teach them, I have to translate from IsiZulu, Sotho to English.” – E4

This need for multilingualism in education underscores the importance of recognising and valuing linguistic diversity. It also highlights the practical challenges educators face in providing inclusive education that respects and incorporates multiple languages.

Cultural and Religious Influences on Parenting

Cultural practices and religious beliefs continue to shape parenting. One parent described how their Christian upbringing influences their approach to raising their children:

“Like I said, I was born into a Christian family. So, I grew up teaching us things that the Christians mustn’t do. Like an example, they say a woman can’t cut the hair, can’t wear a trouser, and you can’t have a boyfriend before you get married. So, you can’t jol around as a Christian. If you want to get married, which means you have to contact the pastor that I see a sister, the pastor has to know that guy. So, the stage is that you have to go through before you get married. So, all those things that they were teaching us is what I’m doing to my kids.” – P3

This excerpt illustrates the transmission of cultural and religious values across generations, highlighting the role of family and community in maintaining cultural continuity. However, it also points to the challenges parents face in balancing these traditional values with the need to adapt to modern societal norms.

Overall, this theme captures the dynamic interplay between cultural preservation and adaptation in parenting within marginalised communities. It highlights the importance of understanding the cultural and historical influences on parenting and childcare practices, as well as the challenges and strategies employed by parents and educators to navigate these influences. The excerpts illustrate the ongoing efforts to balance respect for cultural heritage with the need to adapt to contemporary educational and social environments.

Implications for Policy and Practice

The implications of these findings are significant for both policy and practice. Educational policies should recognise and value linguistic diversity, promoting multilingualism as a strength rather than a barrier (Makolane, 2020). This aligns with the recommendations of Heugh (2013), who advocates for educational policies that support linguistic diversity and inclusion. For practitioners, it is essential to create inclusive and supportive learning environments that respect and incorporate multiple languages and cultural practices. This involves providing educators with the necessary training and resources to teach in multicultural

and multilingual settings (Heugh, 2013). By doing so, educators can better support the holistic development of children and help them navigate the complexities of cultural continuity and adaptation.

The findings of this study align with existing literature on the importance of cultural practices in shaping child development. Rogoff (2003) discusses the role of cultural practices in cognitive development, emphasising the need to understand the cultural context in which these practices occur. Vygotsky (2012) also highlights the importance of cultural tools and symbols in cognitive development, underscoring the need for culturally sensitive interventions.

The legacy of apartheid and its impact on educational choices and language perceptions is well-documented in the literature. Heugh (2013) discusses the historical and ongoing challenges of promoting linguistic diversity in South Africa, highlighting the need for educational policies that support multilingualism. The findings of this study further underscore the importance of addressing these historical legacies to create more inclusive and equitable educational environments. By recognising and valuing the cultural and linguistic diversity within communities, policymakers and practitioners can promote a more inclusive and supportive environment for child development.

4.9 Theme 4: Community Dynamics and Support Systems

In the intricate landscape of child-rearing practices within marginalised communities, the theme of Community Dynamics and Support Systems emerges as a vital component. This theme delves into the collective fabric of relationships and support mechanisms that underpin parenting and childcare practices. It examines how these dynamics facilitate or hinder the application of the NCF principles, which are crucial for the holistic development of children.

This theme is particularly significant as it sheds light on the collective efforts and interdependencies that characterise the upbringing of children in these communities. The role of community support, extended family networks and community institutions is examined concerning their contributions to mental health and development. Community support and networking play a crucial role in the child-rearing practices within marginalised communities. This theme delves into how the collective efforts to the upbringing of children and how these networks embody the principles of the NCF.

The community's influence on child-rearing practices is profound and multifaceted. It encompasses the direct involvement of educational institutions, the emotional and practical support of extended family networks, and the broader societal norms that shape parenting strategies (Cochran & Niego, 2005). Within this context, community institutions such as

Ububele not only provide educational services but also serve as a hub for mental health support and the promotion of independence among children. Extended family members are indispensable, offering a safety net that bolsters the capacity of parents to nurture their children. Moreover, societal expectations and cultural norms play a role in guiding the practices and decisions of parents as they navigate the complexities of raising children in a rapidly changing world.

P3 highlighted the role of Ububele in fostering independence and life skills in children:

“I don’t know who is teaching Emmanuel how to do things or... Ububele is a very good school. Because my second child, she was also learning here. It was four years ago. So here I came back with Emmanuel again. So, it’s a very good school. And the teachers also, they are very good. They are friendly. So that’s why I bring Emmanuel here. So, I can say that Emmanuel was not like going to the toilet by himself. I don’t know, maybe it’s me, I spoil him. But when we came here, I heard on the meeting that the kids, they have to manage themselves at the toilet. So, which is a good thing also, that the kids, that the kids also, they must be a little bit independent.” – P3

This excerpt illustrates the role of community institutions in fostering independence and life skills in children. Ububele, as an educational institution, extends its impact beyond academic learning to include the holistic development of children, which aligns with the NCF’s emphasis on responsive caregiving and early learning. According to Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems theory, such proximal processes (interactions between the child and environment) are critical for development (Bronfenbrenner, 1994).

The reliance on extended family members for support is another critical dimension within this theme:

“...my sister, the one who helped, who helped, like she is there for me. She is there for us, for my family.” – P1

The multifaceted assistance provided by family members is crucial for the wellbeing of both children and parents, highlighting the importance of extended support networks in the community dynamics of child-rearing. Extended family often acts as a critical support system, especially in contexts where parents face socioeconomic challenges. This aligns with findings from Nsamenang (2006) who emphasises the importance of social support networks in promoting child development and caregiver wellbeing in low-resource settings.

The role of community institutions extends beyond education to include essential services such as therapy:

“Um well when we did therapy, we did it here at Ububele... therapy was here, yeah okay so I can basically say this place has raised all of us not just my children... black people don't believe in therapy but I had to do it to understand what it actually helps a child more than you would even understand... brought Moses here within three months there was a drastic change like Moses changed completely and I have always been grateful for doing that for bringing my son here for that so it's like it's home you know and this is the only place that I can say I have had um any form of government help from yes yeah.” – P1

This parent's testimony reflects a shift in cultural perceptions regarding mental health and the value of such community-based support systems. Community institutions like Ububele are not only educational centres but also provide essential services, which can be transformative for children's development. The availability of mental health support within the community is particularly important in promoting resilience and addressing the socio-emotional needs of children and families (Flisher et al., 2012; Van Breda, 2018; WHO, 2004)

The findings underscore the essential role of community dynamics and support systems in the upbringing of children within marginalised South African communities. The excerpts and analyses presented establish that community support, extended family networks and community institutions are integral to the nurturing care of children. These systems provide a safety net that enriches the developmental environment for children and supports parents in their caregiving roles. Recognising and strengthening these community dynamics is crucial for enhancing the wellbeing and development of children, ensuring that every child has the opportunity to thrive within a supportive communal framework.

The literature supports the notion that community-based support and extended family networks are vital for child development, particularly in contexts where resources are limited. For instance, Nsamenang (2006) discusses the communal nature of child-rearing in African contexts, where the extended family and community play significant roles in the upbringing of children. Such communal support systems align with the principles of the NCF, emphasising the importance of responsive caregiving, security and safety and opportunities for early learning.

Additionally, the community's influence on parenting strategies and the broader societal norms that shape these practices are essential for understanding the application of the NCF principles. According to Berg et al. (2018), the developmental niche framework highlights how cultural practices, parental beliefs and the physical and social settings of child-rearing environments shape child development. The interplay between cultural continuity, adaptation

and community support systems provides a comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing child-rearing practices in marginalised communities (Berg et al., 2018).

The theme of Community Dynamics and Support Systems highlights the collective efforts and interdependencies that are crucial for the holistic development of children in marginalised communities (WHO et al., 2018). Strengthening these support systems through policies and practices that recognise and enhance the role of community institutions, extended family networks and cultural norms is essential for promoting the wellbeing and development of children.

4.10 Theme 5: Navigating the NCF in Marginalised Contexts

The final theme of the study, Navigating the NCF in Marginalised Contexts, examines the practical application and adaptation of the NCF principles within the challenging environments of marginalised communities. This theme is crucial for understanding how caregivers and educators, despite facing numerous obstacles, strive to provide care that aligns with the NCF's objectives of promoting children's health, nutrition, security and safety, responsive caregiving and opportunities for early learning.

In exploring this theme, the researcher delves into the innovative and resourceful strategies that parents and educators employ to foster environments conducive to nurturing care. These strategies often involve adapting traditional practices, leveraging community support and finding creative solutions to circumvent the limitations imposed by their socioeconomic status, cultural context and the availability of resources.

Strategies Employed by Parents and Educators to Align with the NCF Within Constraints

This sub-theme explores the various strategies that parents and educators in marginalised communities employ to align with the principles of the NCF despite facing significant constraints. These strategies are a testament to the resilience and ingenuity of caregivers and educators who are committed to fostering the development and wellbeing of children in their care.

The excerpts from participants provide insight into the creative and adaptive measures taken to provide nurturing care. One parent shared how involving children in daily routines fosters a sense of responsibility and collaboration, key aspects of responsive caregiving:

“I don't even know where to start. But to be a mother is really a good thing. I've got three kids, but they never give me problems. They are really good. They can even help me as I'm working. So, when I come, you will find that maybe they already put in the

water. And the man will love cooking. So, when I come, you ask, how many tomatoes should I cut? So, I'll tell him, I'll take two or three. So, they are really helping. They are good children. And I'm also proud of myself. I'm raising them. Yeah. So yeah.” – P3

This involvement reflects a form of cooperative learning that is supported by Vygotsky's (1978) concept of the ZPD, where children learn through guided participation in activities with more knowledgeable others. Such engagement not only fosters practical skills but also strengthens familial bonds and emotional support systems.

The excerpt also highlights the need for enhancement of the NCF considering the lived experiences of parents from marginalised settings, it is essential to recognise and integrate several key elements. The excerpt demonstrates how children actively participate in household tasks, which not only helps the parent but also provides the children with a sense of responsibility and accomplishment. This aligns with the NCF's emphasis on responsive caregiving, where caregivers respond to children's needs and involve them in daily activities.

By engaging in cooking and other household tasks, children are provided with practical learning opportunities that contribute to their cognitive and social development. The NCF can be enhanced by promoting such home-based learning activities that are culturally relevant and accessible to families in marginalised communities. The cooperative nature of the family's interactions fosters strong emotional support systems and familial bonds. The NCF should emphasise the importance of family cohesion and mutual support as critical components of nurturing care.

Recognising and valuing the unique cultural practices and strengths of marginalised communities is crucial. The NCF can be enhanced by incorporating culturally sensitive approaches that respect and build upon the existing caregiving practices within these communities. The involvement of extended family members and the broader community in child-rearing practices can provide additional support and resources for families. The NCF should advocate for community-based interventions that leverage the collective strengths of the community to support child development.

Despite limited resources, educators prioritise emotional development, recognising its foundational role in a child's overall growth:

“Okay, I think with us, obviously like any other preschool because we are, there are psychologists here, mostly we focus mostly on emotional development, because you know that obviously like if your child is emotionally healthy and all that, and then we know that all these other areas of development, your child will be able to, you know, develop, I think, accordingly in a good way. Yeah, so...” – E2

This focus aligns with Vygotsky's perspective on the integral role of emotions in cognitive and psychological development. Vygotsky emphasised that emotions are not subordinate mental processes but are central to a person's psychological development. He argued that emotions contribute significantly to forming an individual's general view of life and character (Vygotsky, 1987). This perspective is particularly relevant in early childhood education, where fostering emotional wellbeing can create a foundation for other developmental domains.

Vygotsky's concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) also underscores the importance of guided emotional development. In the ZPD, children learn and develop through interactions with more knowledgeable others, which includes emotional learning. By focusing on emotional development, educators can help children navigate their feelings and build resilience, which in turn supports their overall cognitive and social development (Vygotsky, 1978).

Furthermore, Vygotsky's theorisation of *perezhivanie*, or emotional experience, highlights how children's emotional experiences mediate the influence of their environment on their psychological development. *Perezhivanie* acts as an intra-psychological prism that refracts external influences, shaping the evolution of the child's psyche (Vygotsky, 1994). This concept underscores the importance of creating emotionally supportive environments in preschools, as these settings can significantly impact children's developmental trajectories.

Ahrens et al. (2023) and Cong-Lem (2022) further elaborate on the importance of emotional development in educational settings, emphasising that emotional wellbeing is foundational to other developmental domains. They argue that emotional support within educational environments can enhance children's ability to engage in learning activities and develop critical thinking skills. This aligns with Vygotsky's view that emotional and cognitive development are deeply interconnected.

Additionally, the work of Chen (2018) on refining the teacher emotion model supports the idea that educators' emotional engagement with children can significantly impact their developmental outcomes. Chen (2018) argues that teachers who are emotionally attuned to their students can create more supportive and effective learning environments, which is consistent with Vygotsky's emphasis on the role of social interactions in development.

These strategies extend to addressing nutritional needs creatively:

"The principal she always emphasises that the children they must eat healthy food... they eat carrots, cucumber, energy, just something fruits." – E1

“...when it comes to nutrition, I make sure with my kids are well fed you know and well fed does not mean it must cost an almond like you know people have that thing which is oh we bought this and that, no it’s what’s going in the body that builds the child you know okay.” – P3

The emphasis on nutrition reflects an understanding of the crucial role of diet in early development, supported by research by Black et al. (2015) and Adebisi et al. (2021), which emphasises the importance of nutrition in the first 1 000 days of life. Nutritional interventions are vital for cognitive and physical development, and community efforts to provide healthy food options are essential in mitigating the risks associated with food insecurity (Fukuda-Parr & Taylor, 2015).

However, ensuring that children are fed with nutritious food in marginalised settings presents significant challenges, particularly for unemployed parents. Economic constraints often limit access to a variety of healthy food options, making it difficult for parents to provide balanced diets for their children (Fukuda-Parr & Taylor, 2015; Screti et al., 2024). Despite these challenges, parents in marginalised communities employ various strategies to ensure that their children receive adequate nutrition. For instance, they may rely on community support systems, such as food sharing and communal meals, to supplement their children’s diets. Additionally, parents often prioritise affordable yet nutritious food items, such as vegetables and grains, over more expensive options.

The NCF emphasises the importance of nutrition as a foundational element of ECD (WHO et al., 2018). However, the framework must be adapted to consider the economic and cultural realities of marginalised communities. In many cases, the principles of the NCF may not fully align with the lived experiences of parents who face economic hardships and food insecurity. For example, while the NCF advocates for a diverse and balanced diet, parents in marginalised settings may struggle to meet these recommendations due to financial limitations.

Cultural diversity also plays a role in shaping nutritional practices. Traditional diets in many marginalised communities are often rich in locally available and affordable food items, which may not always align with the dietary guidelines promoted by the NCF (Roos et al., 2013). Recognising and integrating these cultural practices into nutritional interventions can enhance their relevance and effectiveness. For instance, promoting the nutritional value of traditional foods and incorporating them into school meal programmes can help bridge the gap between cultural practices and the NCF’s nutritional guidelines.

Educators emphasise the importance of routine and stability for children’s development to foster a sense of security and predictability:

“I think the main important thing for them to be in a routine... It’s for them to have stability and to know what to expect...”– E2

“...we do our morning ring. Morning ring, that will be greeting the learners, doing the register, is there anyone’s birthday, celebration, things like that.”– E2

Routine and predictability create a stable environment that supports children’s mental health and development, as highlighted by Sciaraffa et al. (2017). Consistent routines help children understand their environment and reduce anxiety, which is particularly important in contexts of socioeconomic instability.

Communication with parents is maintained through modern technology, ensuring a partnership in the child’s development:

“Yes, not really, because we do have WhatsApp, so we communicate. We have newsletters that we send regularly and all that.”– E1

Using technology to maintain communication aligns with findings by Chen and Rivera-Vernazza (2022) which indicate that digital platforms can enhance parental engagement and support in early childhood education. This approach allows for continuous support and collaboration between parents and educators, facilitating a unified approach to the child’s development.

Educators face challenges when parents struggle to accept their child’s abilities or limitations:

“...Some parents, they’re not, they don’t accept that my child is like this and that, she can’t do this, you know. It becomes hard for them, and then it becomes just you feel like, okay fine, I don’t know, I don’t do my job well, or I don’t know what I’m doing, but I think that also is one of the challenges...”– E4

These challenges highlight the need for parental education and support programmes that help parents understand and accept their children’s developmental trajectories. Research by Smith and Samuels (2021) supports the importance of involving parents in intervention programmes to improve outcomes for children with developmental delays.

They also recognise the socioeconomic factors that affect children’s wellbeing:

“It’s winter and then this child is not dressed warm and then you’ll try to say OK, please tell Mommy to dress you up... But then you find that. I don’t see certain things the way you see them or when. Or maybe this child is not dressed because he doesn’t have those warm clothes. You don’t know.”– E4

The genuine interactions with children provide motivation and fulfilment for educators:

“So, with them, because they’re genuine, whatever that you receive from them, it’s yeah, it’s genuine and. It keeps you going.”– E4

Educators focus on children’s strengths and encourage them, fostering a positive learning environment:

“...I think one of the things that I do is to see their strength, which ones is their strength and then their weaknesses and then try to encourage where they’ve got, yeah where their strengths are, you know, to encourage them because obviously like I wouldn’t expect encourage even if I say like okay find this child is struggling but you know what to encourage and to praise because praising them is one of the things that makes them some like they say like oh okay teacher oh it means that I’m trying it means that I’m doing teacher is in this this is true okay then I should improve you know instead of like okay if I’m if a child is struggling with this I’m like I don’t know you know using discouraging words and all that but then yeah because yeah I know they’re all different and then obviously like one of the things that are that we’re growing is different and then yeah some they’re really yeah some they’re really fast learners they catch they understand quickly more than others but then even those that ones they do take time because some they take time to do activities but then you’d find out that like wow they follow the instructions very well it just that it’s their pace and then like I just allow them to be who they are...”– E1

This approach is consistent with positive reinforcement techniques advocated by Dweck’s (2006) research on growth mindset, which emphasises the importance of praising effort and progress to motivate children and promote resilience.

Lesson plans and activities are tailored to the children’s needs and developmental stages:

“We prepare a lesson plan, activities for the whole week... We talk about skipping, we talk about maybe... We do sensory development.”– E1

Cultural activities and language are incorporated into the learning process:

“...that’s where we do our assembly. That’s where the children, they sing, they are dancing, all of that. And then we do rhymes as well.”– E2

“...so, it’s not from iDepartment yalana eBubele (any Department from Ububele). That’s what she told me. And then we use this but umuntu uzibhalela yena, siyaEdita nje (But every educator edits and makes alteration to suit students), as you’re a teacher you prepare ukuthi (that) the Theme is this, so this is what I need to prepare and then ubhale,

ubhale (you write and write), uAdd yonke into for abantwana (and you add everything for the kids).” – E1

Incorporating cultural activities and language supports the development of cultural identity and linguistic skills, aligning with Cummins’ (2001) research on bilingual education which underscores the cognitive benefits of maintaining and developing multiple languages.

Educators strive to create an environment that encourages exploration and learning through play:

“...the children they have everything to nurture their growth and learning. Cause did you see, within this class there was no teacher, so I am trying to make it a better class for children because they need to explore and learn so the way they learn is to play.”– E1

Play-based learning is supported by research from Zosh et al. (2017), which highlights the importance of play in fostering children’s cognitive, social and emotional development.

Literacy is promoted through activities like book exchanges:

“...we’ve been doing a literacy month every morning, whenever the kids they arrive, we’ve been giving them books, and then whenever they finish work, they exchange books.”– E1

Promoting literacy through activities like book exchanges supports early reading skills, which are foundational for later academic success, as noted by Snow (2020). The strategies employed by parents and educators in marginalised communities are diverse and tailored to the unique needs of the children. They demonstrate a deep commitment to the principles of the NCF, using innovative approaches to overcome the constraints of their environment. This aligns with Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems theory, where the immediate environment (microsystem) and interactions within it are crucial for child development (Bronfenbrenner, 1994).

Impact of Socio-Cultural Context on the Application of NCF principles

This sub-theme addresses the influence of socio-cultural factors on the expression of the NCF principles in marginalised communities. It explores how cultural beliefs, social norms, historical contexts and economic realities shape the ways in which caregivers provide nurturing care to children.

The socio-cultural context significantly impacts the application of NCF principles, as seen in the following excerpts:

“Therapy was here, yeah okay so I can basically say this place has it has raised all of us not just my children... black people don’t believe in therapy but I had to do it to

understand what it actually helps a child more than you would even understand... brought Moses here within three months there was a drastic change like Moses changed completely and I have always been grateful for doing that for bringing my son here for that so it's like it's home you know and this is the only place that I can say I have had um any form of government help from yes yeah.”– P1

This participant's experience reflects a shift in cultural perceptions regarding mental health and therapy, highlighting the importance of culturally sensitive approaches to care. The loss of a family member and the resulting gap in support underscores the role of extended family and community in providing care, which is a key aspect of the socio-cultural context:

“My dad used to also come to the house a lot, but he passed away a year ago so now there was that break so with them I think also when they saw that fall apart, they also just played a big role in also helping out here like okay we understand the situation”– P1

This highlights the critical role of community support in the socio-cultural context. The community's role in supporting education through funding is crucial for children's access to early learning opportunities:

“So we've got all of those kind of things and then even those that can't pay their fees Yeah, they've got it as we've got funders who are paying their school fees Yeah, so I think In that way like yeah in so many ways we are our Preschool and I think even our parents we've got Understanding parents that obviously make you know that our backgrounds are different, but when the children they come here.”– E3

The community's involvement in child-rearing practices is evident here, demonstrating the collective effort required to nurture a child's development:

“I don't have to do that they'll come boys they'll walk with him to the garage they help me with those parts that I know as strong as I am I cannot do them so that's where I think yes it does take the community to help you build a child you can't do it by yourself...”– P1

The socio-cultural context plays a significant role in how the NCF principles are applied in marginalised communities. Cultural beliefs, social norms and community dynamics all influence the strategies employed by caregivers and educators. Understanding and respecting these factors is essential for the effective expression of nurturing care practices. According to Rogoff (2003), cultural practices and social interactions are pivotal in shaping developmental pathways, underscoring the importance of context-sensitive approaches to child-rearing.

The involvement of older children in the rearing system is a critical aspect of this community support. Mayisela and Oppong (n.d.) emphasise that in many Indigenous, non-industrialised communities, childcare is a rich collective practice shared by the community. Older siblings and peers play a significant role in engaging younger children through play, songs and games, which helps develop developmentally and culturally appropriate social, emotional and cognitive skills. This collective approach to child-rearing ensures that children receive cognitive stimulation and learning outside of their homes in multi-age playgroups with a variety of toys, games and songs in their naturally occurring environment (Mayisela & Oppong, n.d.).

The sub-theme of the Impact of Socio-Cultural Context on the Application of NCF principles reveals that parenting and childcare practices in marginalised communities are deeply intertwined with cultural and social factors. These practices are not only shaped by individual beliefs and behaviours but also by the broader historical and socioeconomic context. To support the application of the NCF principles, interventions must be culturally sensitive and inclusive of the community's values and resources. By acknowledging the socio-cultural context, caregivers and educators can better navigate the challenges and leverage the strengths within their communities to provide nurturing care that aligns with the NCF principles.

The theme of Navigating the NCF in Marginalised Contexts highlights the innovative and resourceful strategies employed by caregivers and educators to align with the NCF principles despite significant constraints. The sub-themes illustrate the profound impact of socio-cultural factors on child-rearing practices and underscore the importance of culturally sensitive interventions. By recognising and supporting these efforts, policymakers and practitioners can enhance the wellbeing and development of children in marginalised communities.

Theoretical Implications

The findings from this study have several theoretical implications that contribute to our understanding of socioeconomic challenges, cultural continuity and community dynamics in the context of ECD in marginalised communities. These implications are discussed in relation to the CHAT, which serves as the foundational theoretical framework guiding this study.

The themes in the chapter highlighted the multifaceted challenges faced by caregivers and educators in providing nurturing care for their children and underscore the critical role of community support, cultural preservation and systemic changes in enhancing the wellbeing and development of their children.

4.11 Analysis from the CHAT perspective

CHAT offers a robust theoretical lens for examining complex social phenomena by emphasising the interconnectedness of individual and collective activities within their cultural and historical contexts (Engeström, 1987; Vygotsky, 2012). CHAT has evolved through three generations, each contributing to a deeper understanding of human activities.

Employing the third generation of CHAT, the current study considers the historical, systemic and collective aspects of child-rearing practices within marginalised communities in South Africa. This framework facilitates an analysis of the activity system, considering the dynamic interactions between individuals, tools, rules and the socio-cultural context. The application of CHAT in existing research underscores its significance as a robust theoretical framework for understanding and addressing complex social issues (Engeström, 2010; Sannino & Engeström, 2018).

Breaking down each component of CHAT in the context of the findings provides a structured approach to understanding the multifaceted interactions that shape child-rearing practices. This approach helps to identify potential contradictions and tensions within the activity system, offering insights into the barriers and facilitators to the expression of the NCF principles. By focusing on the systemic nature of activities and the role of contradictions in driving change, this framework provides valuable insights into the mechanisms underlying child-rearing practices and the expression of the NCF. For instance, the contradictions between traditional practices and modern educational aspirations can be examined through the lens of activity systems, revealing how these tensions drive adaptive strategies among parents and educators.

The integration of historical, cultural and social dimensions in CHAT allows for a delicate understanding of how child-rearing practices evolve and adapt in response to changing socio-cultural contexts, ultimately contributing to the holistic development of children within these communities

Subjects

In the context of this study, the “subjects” refer to the individuals who are directly involved in the child-rearing practices within marginalised communities, primarily parents and teachers. These subjects are not isolated actors but are deeply embedded within their cultural and historical contexts. Their actions, decisions and interactions are influenced by a myriad of factors including personal beliefs, cultural norms, socioeconomic status and historical legacies.

The findings highlight the significant impact of socioeconomic challenges on the subjects, particularly educators, who face financial constraints and lack recognition for their

contributions. This aligns with the CHAT framework, which emphasises the role of socioeconomic conditions and historical legacies in shaping human activities (Engeström, 2010). The theoretical implication is that addressing these socioeconomic challenges requires systemic changes that acknowledge and address the realities faced by educators and parents in marginalised communities.

Research by Bronfenbrenner (1994) supports the notion that the environment in which individuals operate significantly influences their development and actions. Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory posits that human development is shaped by different environmental systems, ranging from immediate settings like family and school to broader societal contexts. This theory underscores the importance of considering the multiple layers of influence on parents and teachers in marginalised communities.

Moreover, the socioeconomic status of parents and teachers plays a crucial role in their ability to provide nurturing care and quality education. Studies have shown that low socioeconomic status is associated with higher levels of stress, limited access to resources, and reduced opportunities for professional development (Conger et al., 2010). These factors can negatively impact the wellbeing and effectiveness of educators and parents, further perpetuating the cycle of disadvantage.

Historical legacies also play a significant role in shaping the experiences of subjects in marginalised communities. For instance, the legacy of apartheid in South Africa has left a lasting impact on the socioeconomic conditions and educational opportunities available to many communities (Gumede, 2014). This historical context must be considered when developing interventions aimed at improving child-rearing practices and educational outcomes.

In addition to socioeconomic and historical factors, cultural norms and personal beliefs influence the actions and decisions of parents and teachers. Cultural values around education, child-rearing and community involvement can either support or hinder efforts to provide quality care and education. For example, collectivist cultures that emphasise community support and shared responsibility can provide a strong foundation for collaborative child-rearing practices (Masamba, 2024).

Addressing the socioeconomic challenges faced by educators and parents in marginalised communities requires systemic changes that go beyond individual interventions. Policies and programmes must be designed to provide financial support, professional development opportunities and recognition for the contributions of educators. Additionally, efforts to improve the socioeconomic conditions of marginalised communities must consider the historical and cultural contexts in which these communities operate.

Objects

The object of the activity system in this study is the goal of nurturing care practices that foster effective growth and development in children. This includes the expression of the NCF principles, which emphasise responsive caregiving, early learning and the overall wellbeing of children.

The findings reveal that the object of nurturing care is often hindered by socioeconomic constraints and cultural expectations. For example, the aspiration to send children to better-resourced schools (Model C schools) reflect a desire to achieve the object of providing quality education, yet this is often constrained by financial limitations. The CHAT framework helps to elucidate how these constraints create contradictions within the activity system, impacting the ability to achieve the desired object. Addressing these contradictions requires interventions that support both the socioeconomic and cultural dimensions of child-rearing practices.

Socioeconomic constraints significantly impact the ability to provide nurturing care. Research by Conger et al. (2010) indicates that low socioeconomic status is associated with limited access to resources, higher levels of stress and reduced opportunities for children's development. These constraints can hinder parents' and educators' ability to provide the responsive caregiving and early learning opportunities emphasised by the NCF. Financial limitations often force parents to prioritise immediate survival needs over educational investments, thereby limiting children's access to quality education and developmental resources (Hall et al., 2023).

Cultural expectations also play a crucial role in shaping child-rearing practices. In many communities, traditional beliefs and practices influence how children are raised and educated. For instance, in some cultures, there is a strong emphasis on communal child-rearing, where extended family members and community members collectively contribute to the upbringing of children (Nsamenang, 2006). While this can provide a rich support network, it may also conflict with the individualised approaches promoted by frameworks like the NCF. Understanding and integrating these cultural practices into nurturing care interventions can enhance their effectiveness and acceptance within the community (Rogoff, 2003).

The CHAT framework highlights the contradictions that arise within the activity system due to these socioeconomic and cultural constraints. For example, the desire to send children to better-resourced schools is often at odds with the financial realities faced by many families. These contradictions can create tensions and challenges that impede the achievement of the desired object of nurturing care. Engeström (2010) suggests that addressing these

contradictions requires systemic interventions that consider the broader socioeconomic and cultural context in which child-rearing practices occur.

Interventions aimed at supporting nurturing care practices must address both the socioeconomic and cultural dimensions of child-rearing. This includes providing financial support and resources to alleviate the economic burdens faced by families, as well as developing culturally sensitive programmes that respect and integrate traditional child-rearing practices. For instance, community-based programmes that leverage local knowledge and practices can enhance the relevance and effectiveness of nurturing care interventions (Zhou, 2022).

Tools

The “tools” in the activity system of child development include both material resources (e.g., educational materials, toys, classroom settings) and intangible assets (e.g., knowledge, skills, cultural values). These tools mediate the interactions between the subjects and the object of the activity. The findings underscore the importance of culturally relevant tools in mediating child-rearing practices.

Material resources such as educational materials and toys play a crucial role in stimulating cognitive development. Educational materials, including books, worksheets, and digital resources, provide structured learning opportunities. Children in multi-age playgroups benefit from a variety of educational materials that stimulate cognitive development. Play-based learning tools such as puzzles, building blocks, and role-playing toys are essential for developing critical thinking, creativity, and social skills (WHO et al., 2018). These tools are particularly effective when they reflect the cultural context of the children using them.

Classroom settings also significantly impact learning. The design and layout of classrooms can promote a conducive learning environment when they are safe, well-lit and equipped with age-appropriate furniture and learning stations (Zulu et al., 2022). Access to safe outdoor play areas is crucial for physical development and social interaction, allowing children to engage in physical activities essential for their overall wellbeing (Thow et al., 2018).

Intangible assets such as knowledge and skills are equally important. The professionalisation of ECD educators is essential for improving the quality of early childhood education. Zulu et al. (2022) highlight that the level of training, education and experience of ECD practitioners is positively related to teacher behaviour in the classroom. Training programmes should be culturally sensitive and inclusive to address the unique needs of marginalised communities (Zulu et al., 2022). Educated parents tend to invest more in their children’s education by providing books and engaging in educational activities. However, even

parents with limited formal education can provide significant cognitive stimulation through everyday interactions and cultural practices (Martinez et al., 2022).

Cultural values, including language and communication, play a significant role in child development. The use of multiple languages in teaching reflects the need to adapt educational tools to the linguistic diversity of the community. This aligns with Vygotsky's (2012) emphasis on the role of cultural tools in cognitive development. Educational interventions should leverage culturally relevant tools to enhance the effectiveness of nurturing care practices. Childcare is a rich collective practice shared by the community in many Indigenous, non-industrialised communities. Older siblings and peers play a significant role in engaging younger children through play, songs and games, which helps develop developmentally and culturally appropriate social, emotional and cognitive skills (Mayisela and Oppong, n.d.).

The theoretical implication is that educational interventions should leverage culturally relevant tools to enhance the effectiveness of nurturing care practices. Vygotsky's (2012) theory emphasises the importance of cultural tools in cognitive development, suggesting that educational materials and practices should be adapted to the cultural context of the children. This approach not only respects the cultural heritage of the community but also makes learning more relevant and engaging for the children.

Rules

The rules component encompasses the cultural norms, community standards and regulations that govern child-rearing practices. These rules influence the actions and interactions of the subjects within the activity system. The findings highlight the tension between traditional cultural norms and contemporary educational expectations. For example, the preference for English as a medium of instruction reflects a rule that equates English proficiency with intelligence and success, yet this can create contradictions with cultural practices that value Indigenous languages. The CHAT framework helps to identify these contradictions and the need for culturally sensitive policies that balance respect for cultural heritage with the demands of modern education.

Cultural norms and community standards play a significant role in shaping child-rearing practices. In many communities, traditional beliefs and practices are deeply embedded in the way children are raised and educated. For instance, in some Indigenous communities, child-rearing is a collective responsibility shared by extended family members and the community (Nsamenang, 2006). This communal approach to child-rearing can provide a rich support network for children but may also conflict with contemporary educational expectations that emphasise individual achievement and formal schooling.

The preference for English as a medium of instruction is a prime example of how contemporary educational expectations can create tensions with traditional cultural norms. In many post-colonial societies, English proficiency is often equated with intelligence and success, leading to a preference for English-medium education (Ngoepe, 2020). However, this preference can undermine the value of Indigenous languages and cultural practices, creating a disconnect between home and school environments. Research has shown that children learn best in their mother tongue, especially in the early years, as it provides a strong foundation for cognitive development and academic achievement (Dick, 2024).

The CHAT framework helps to identify these contradictions and the need for culturally sensitive policies that balance respect for cultural heritage with the demands of modern education. Engeström (2010) emphasises the importance of understanding the historical and cultural context in which activities occur, as well as the contradictions that arise within the activity system. In the context of education, this means recognising the value of Indigenous languages and cultural practices while also addressing the need for proficiency in global languages like English.

Culturally sensitive policies are essential for addressing these contradictions and supporting the holistic development of children. For example, bilingual education programmes that incorporate both Indigenous languages and English can help bridge the gap between home and school environments, promoting cognitive development and academic achievement while also preserving cultural heritage (UNESCO, 2023). Additionally, community-based education programmes that involve parents and community members in the educational process can help align educational practices with cultural norms and values (Eden et al., 2024).

Regulations and policies also play a crucial role in shaping child-rearing practices and educational outcomes. In many countries, educational policies are influenced by global standards and benchmarks, which may not always align with local cultural practices and needs (Casto, 2018). Policies that promote a more balanced approach to education, incorporating both academic and non-academic aspects of development, can help address these issues and support the overall wellbeing of children.

Division of Labour

The division of labour refers to the distribution of tasks and responsibilities among parents, teachers and the broader community. It explores the roles played by these individuals and groups in facilitating nurturing care practices. The findings reveal the critical role of extended family members and community institutions in supporting child-rearing practices. For instance, the reliance on extended family members for support underscores the collective

nature of child-rearing in marginalised communities. The CHAT framework emphasises the importance of understanding how the division of labour within the activity system influences the expression of nurturing care practices. The theoretical implication is that strengthening community support networks and recognising the contributions of all stakeholders are essential for enhancing the wellbeing of children.

In many Indigenous and non-industrialised communities, child-rearing is a collective practice that involves not only parents but also extended family members and the broader community. This collective approach to child-rearing is rooted in cultural traditions and social norms that emphasise communal responsibility and support (Nsamenang, 2006). Research by Bornstein and Putnick (2012) highlights the importance of shared caregiving practices in promoting the social, emotional and cognitive development of children. In such contexts, older siblings, grandparents and other community members play a significant role in providing care and guidance to young children, thereby distributing the responsibilities of child-rearing across multiple individuals.

The reliance on extended family members for support is particularly important in marginalised communities where parents may face significant socioeconomic challenges. Studies have shown that extended family support can buffer the negative effects of poverty and stress on child development (Francis et al., 2018). For example, grandparents often provide essential caregiving support, allowing parents to work and earn an income while ensuring that children receive the care and attention they need (Mzimela, 2019). This division of labour within the family unit helps to mitigate the impact of socioeconomic constraints on child-rearing practices.

Community institutions, such as local schools, religious organisations and community centres, also play a crucial role in supporting child-rearing practices. These institutions provide resources, educational opportunities and social support that are essential for the wellbeing of children and families. For instance, community-based early childhood education programmes can offer high-quality learning experiences that promote cognitive and social development (Ngoepe, 2020). Additionally, religious organisations often provide moral and spiritual guidance, as well as practical support such as childcare services and financial assistance (Mzimela, 2019).

The CHAT framework emphasises the importance of understanding how the division of labour within the activity system influences the expression of nurturing care practices. Engeström (2010) argues that the distribution of tasks and responsibilities among different actors within the activity system can create contradictions and tensions that impact the overall

effectiveness of the system. For example, if the burden of caregiving falls disproportionately on one individual, such as a single parent, this can lead to stress and burnout, ultimately affecting the quality of care provided to the child. Conversely, a well-balanced division of labour that leverages the strengths and resources of multiple stakeholders can enhance the overall wellbeing of children and families.

Strengthening community support networks and recognising the contributions of all stakeholders are essential for enhancing the wellbeing of children. Policies and programmes that promote community engagement and collaboration can help to build strong support networks that benefit both children and caregivers. For example, community-based parenting programmes that involve extended family members and other community members can provide valuable support and resources to parents, helping them to navigate the challenges of child-rearing (Kagiticbasi, 2017). Additionally, recognising and valuing the contributions of all stakeholders, including extended family members and community institutions, can foster a sense of shared responsibility and collective investment in the wellbeing of children.

Community

The community component acknowledges the interconnectedness of various activity systems and the potential for contradictions and tensions that may arise within and between these systems. The community includes the broader social context in which child-rearing practices occur, such as the Ububele ECD centre, parents' homes, and other social contacts. The findings underscore the importance of community institutions like Ububele in providing holistic support for children's development. These institutions not only offer educational services but also serve as hubs for mental health support and the promotion of independence among children. The CHAT framework helps to understand the dynamic interactions between different activity systems and the role of community in shaping child-rearing practices. The theoretical implication is that community-based interventions should be designed to leverage the strengths of community institutions and address the specific needs of marginalised communities.

Community institutions play a pivotal role in supporting child development by providing a range of services that extend beyond traditional educational offerings. For instance, ECD centres like Ububele often serve as comprehensive support hubs that address various aspects of children's wellbeing, including mental health, nutrition and social development. According to Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, the microsystem, which includes immediate environments like home and school, significantly influences a child's development

(Bronfenbrenner, 1994). Community institutions that integrate multiple support services can create a more cohesive and supportive microsystem for children.

Mental health support is a critical component of the services provided by community institutions. Research has shown that early intervention and mental health support can significantly improve developmental outcomes for children, particularly those from marginalised communities (Shonkoff et al., 2012). This is a testament that institutions like Ububele that offer mental health services are helping marginalised communities to address the emotional and psychological needs of children, thereby promoting their overall wellbeing and resilience. These services are particularly important in communities where access to mental health resources may be limited due to socioeconomic constraints (Patel et al., 2021).

The promotion of independence among children is another key function of community institutions. Programmes that encourage self-reliance and autonomy can help children develop essential life skills and a sense of agency. According to Vygotsky's (1978) theory of social development, children learn and develop through social interactions within their community. Community institutions that provide opportunities for children to engage in independent activities and decision-making processes can foster a sense of competence and confidence. This is particularly important in marginalised communities where children may face additional challenges and barriers to achieving independence.

The CHAT framework emphasises the dynamic interactions between different activity systems and the role of community in shaping child-rearing practices. Engeström (2010) highlights the importance of understanding the contradictions and tensions that arise within and between activity systems. For example, the goals and practices of community institutions may sometimes conflict with those of parents or other social contacts. Addressing these contradictions requires a collaborative approach that involves all stakeholders in the community. Community-based interventions should be designed to leverage the strengths of community institutions and address the specific needs of marginalised communities.

Community-based interventions that are culturally sensitive and contextually relevant are more likely to be effective in supporting child development. Research by Rogoff (2003) emphasises the importance of cultural context in shaping developmental pathways. Interventions that take into account the cultural practices and values of the community can enhance the relevance and acceptance of the programmes. For instance, incorporating traditional child-rearing practices and community rituals into ECD programmes can create a more inclusive and supportive environment for children and their families.

The application of CHAT in this study provides a comprehensive lens for understanding the complex dynamics of child-rearing practices in marginalised communities. By examining each component of the activity system, the study highlights the potential for harmony and tension within the practices of nurturing care. The theoretical implications underscore the need for culturally sensitive and contextually relevant interventions that address child-rearing practices' socioeconomic, cultural and historical dimensions.

Contradictions within activity systems of child-rearing practices

The analysis of the data collected from the Ububele ECD centre reveals several significant contradictions that impact the expression of the NCF within the community. These contradictions highlight the dynamic and often contentious nature of child-rearing practices in marginalised South African communities.

One major contradiction arises from the division of labour within the activity system. There are discrepancies between the expectations set by the NCF and the actual practices within the community. These discrepancies are influenced by various factors such as available resources, cultural beliefs, and historical legacies (Sanvictores & Mendez, 2021). For instance, parents are vigilant about their children's safety in hazardous play environments, which contrasts with the ideal safe environments promoted by the NCF (Sanvictores & Mendez, 2021). This discrepancy highlights a contradiction between the community's reality and the framework's expectations. Such contradictions can hinder the effective expression of the framework and may require re-evaluation of roles and responsibilities to better align with the framework's goals.

Another significant contradiction is evident in the community's healthcare practices. The dissatisfaction with government healthcare services and the preference for private healthcare due to inadequacies in government clinics illustrate a contradiction between the community's healthcare needs and the services provided by the government. Financial considerations also play a significant role in healthcare decisions, as parents may choose between clinics and doctors based on their financial situation, highlighting a contradiction between the need for accessible healthcare and the financial constraints faced by the community (Nicholson et al., 2020). One parent expressed this sentiment clearly: *“For me the clinics, we do have the nearest clinics. Ah– no, for me they do not work because most of the time you take the child to the clinic, they will just tell you that they ran out of meds and they just give you prescription, so instead I would rather go to the doctor and pay, because I feel like it is a waste of time.”*

Historical and cultural legacies further contribute to contradictions. Deeply ingrained cultural practices regarding child-rearing may conflict with the guidelines provided by the NCF. These cultural contradictions necessitate a careful balance between respecting traditional practices and introducing new, evidence-based methods. Educators face challenges when parents struggle to accept their child's abilities or limitations, which can create a contradiction between the educators' professional assessments and the parents' expectations (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011). This study has shown that when interventions are culturally sensitive and community-driven, they are more likely to be successful. The narratives of the participants reveal a deep-seated dedication to maintaining cultural continuity while adapting to contemporary educational and social norms.

The interconnected nature of various activity systems within the community also leads to contradictions and tensions. There might be a mismatch between the community's traditional expectations of child-rearing and the ideals proposed by the NCF. This could create resistance among community members and necessitate a more culturally sensitive approach to reconcile these differences. For example, the dissatisfaction with government healthcare services and the preference for private healthcare due to inadequacies in government clinics illustrate a contradiction between the community's healthcare needs and the services provided by the government. Financial considerations also play a significant role in healthcare decisions, as parents may choose between clinics and doctors based on their financial situation, highlighting a contradiction between the need for accessible healthcare and the financial constraints faced by the community.

4.12 Hindrances to the Realisation of the NCF

The findings from this study have several practical implications that can inform policy and practice to better support the ideals of the NCF in marginalised communities. These implications, derived from the themes explored in the study, address the socioeconomic, cultural and environmental challenges faced by caregivers and educators.

To better meet the needs of marginalised communities, it is essential to improve government support services. One key recommendation is to enhance the accessibility and quality of services through infrastructure development. Investing in the development of infrastructure in marginalised communities to ensure access to basic amenities such as clean water, sanitation and safe play areas will create a conducive environment for children's development and wellbeing. Improved infrastructure directly benefits parents by reducing the burden of securing basic needs, allowing them to focus more on responsive caregiving and early learning opportunities as advocated by the WHO (2018). Additionally, improving the

accessibility and quality of healthcare services, including mental health support, is crucial. This can be achieved through the use of mobile health clinics and community health workers to reach remote areas (Nxumalo et al., 2013). Access to reliable healthcare services ensures that parents can seek timely medical attention for their children, promoting good health and nutrition, which are core components of the NCF, eliminating parental stressors of having to travel long distances to health facilities.

Strengthening trust in government institutions is also imperative. This can be achieved by fostering transparent communication between government institutions and community members to rebuild trust. Regular updates on service improvements and promptly addressing community concerns can encourage parents to use available services, enhancing the overall effectiveness of nurturing care practices. Additionally, involving community members in the planning and implementation of government programmes can ensure that services are responsive to their needs and culturally appropriate (Taylor et al., 2020). Engaging parents in decision-making processes empowers them and ensures that interventions are aligned with their cultural values and practices, facilitating the application of NCF principles.

Providing financial support and subsidies for essential services such as education, healthcare and childcare can alleviate the financial burden on families. This can include scholarships, grants and fee waivers for low-income families. Financial support enables parents to access quality education and healthcare services for their children, promoting their overall development and wellbeing. By reducing financial and logistical burdens, parents can focus more on providing responsive caregiving, which is essential for the emotional and social development of children. Improved access to healthcare and nutrition services ensures that children receive the necessary medical care and healthy food, supporting their physical growth and cognitive development. Enhanced infrastructure and community engagement contribute to creating safe and secure environments for children, reducing the risk of harm and promoting a sense of stability. Furthermore, financial support and improved access to educational resources enable parents to provide early learning opportunities, fostering cognitive and language development from a young age.

Educators and parents play a crucial role in balancing cultural continuity with adaptation to modern educational practices. One strategy to achieve this is by incorporating Indigenous knowledge and cultural practices into the curriculum to ensure that children learn about their heritage while acquiring modern educational skills. This can include teaching in multiple languages and integrating traditional stories and practices into lessons (Vygotsky, 2012). Providing professional development opportunities for educators can enhance their

ability to teach in multicultural environments. This includes training in cultural competence, language skills and inclusive teaching practices (Engeström, 2010). Encouraging parental involvement in their children's education by creating opportunities for parents to participate in school activities and decision-making processes can also be beneficial. This can include parent-teacher meetings, cultural events and volunteer opportunities (Shalem & Hoadley, 2009).

Creating safe and supportive environments is essential for the holistic development of children. Investing in the development of safe play areas and recreational facilities for children, ensuring that these spaces are free from hazards and accessible to all children, is crucial (Buck & Gregory, 2013). Implementing community policing initiatives can enhance safety and security in neighbourhoods. This includes "collaboration between law enforcement and community members to address safety concerns and prevent violence. Providing safety education programmes for children and parents to raise awareness about safety practices and how to respond to emergencies is also important (WHO et al., 2018). Moreover, creating learning environments that support the holistic development of children by addressing their physical, emotional and cognitive needs is essential. This includes providing nutritious meals, emotional support, and opportunities for creative and physical activities (Engeström & Sannino, 2010).

The practical implications of this study highlight the need for a multifaceted approach to support the implementation of the NCF in marginalised communities. By improving government support services, balancing cultural continuity with modern educational practices, and creating safe and supportive environments, we can enhance the wellbeing and development of children in these communities. These recommendations and strategies are essential for ensuring that all children have the opportunity to thrive and reach their full potential.

4.13 Summary

The findings presented in this chapter offer an analysis of the application of the NCF within marginalised communities, particularly in the context of South African schools. Through the voices of educators and parents, the researcher has explored the multifaceted nature of nurturing care, and the strategies employed to align with its principles despite numerous challenges. This integrated analysis has illuminated the resilience and creativity of caregivers and educators in their commitment to the holistic development of children, even in the face of significant socioeconomic and cultural barriers.

The socio-cultural context has emerged as a critical factor influencing the application of the NCF. Caregivers have had to navigate complex social dynamics, historical legacies, and cultural expectations to create environments that support children's growth and learning.

The practical application of the NCF principles within these communities underscores the importance of creative and adaptive strategies. Educators and parents have demonstrated remarkable ingenuity in addressing nutritional needs, fostering emotional and psychological wellbeing, and maintaining routine and stability for children. These efforts are essential in creating a nurturing environment that aligns with the NCF's objectives of promoting health, nutrition, security and safety, responsive caregiving and opportunities for early learning.

The theoretical implications of this study, particularly through the lens of CHAT, have provided a structured approach to understanding the dynamic interactions within the activity system of child-rearing practices. By leveraging the third generation of CHAT, the study has effectively captured the complexity of networked interactions across different systems, highlighting the role of contradictions as drivers of change. This theoretical framework has been instrumental in identifying the barriers and facilitators of the expression of the NCF principles, offering valuable insights into the mechanisms that underlie child-rearing practices in marginalised settings.

The application of CHAT in this study has revealed the historical, systemic and collective aspects of child-rearing practices, emphasising the interconnectedness of individual and collective activities within their cultural and historical contexts. By examining these multifaceted interactions, the study has provided a delicate understanding of how traditional practices and modern aspirations intersect and influence each other. This comprehensive analysis underscores the importance of culturally sensitive and community-driven interventions in supporting the holistic development of children.

The findings advocate for policies and programmes that support the efforts of educators and parents, provide necessary resources and respect the socio-cultural context of each community. There is a clear need for improved infrastructure, accessible healthcare services and educational resources that recognise and value linguistic and cultural diversity. By providing these, we can ensure that all children have the opportunity to thrive in a nurturing environment, regardless of their circumstances.

This study has highlighted the critical importance of the NCF as a guiding framework for nurturing care and the significant impact of socio-cultural factors on its application. The resilience and creativity of caregivers and educators in marginalised communities serve as a testament to their dedication and commitment to the wellbeing of children. By leveraging

theoretical frameworks like CHAT and advocating for supportive policies and programmes, we can enhance the effectiveness of nurturing care practices and contribute to the holistic development of children in marginalised settings. The next chapter will synthesis the key findings of the study, addressing both practical and research limitations, and offering recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER 5: SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

5.1 Introduction

This chapter synthesises the critical findings of the study, summarises the practical limitations and research limitations encountered and outlines future research directions. Through an in-depth exploration of the socioeconomic challenges, cultural continuity and community dynamics that influence ECD in marginalised communities, this study has revealed valuable insights for consideration into the globalisation of the NCF. The preceding sections have highlighted the resilience and ingenuity of caregivers and educators who, despite significant constraints, strive to create nurturing environments for children.

This chapter aims to consolidate the key contributions of the study while recognising the areas that require further exploration. By addressing the outlined limitations and pursuing the recommended future research directions, scholars and practitioners can develop more effective strategies to implement the NCF and support the holistic development of children in marginalised communities.

5.2 Research Summary

This research undertook a comprehensive CHAT informed exploration on the expression of the NCF in the child-rearing practices within the marginalised South African communities. The study aimed to uncover the historical, socioeconomic, and cultural determinants shaping these practices while exploring the relevance of the NCF and to provide practical recommendations for enhancing ECD in these contexts. By employing CHAT as the guiding theoretical framework, the study was able to examine the interconnectedness of individual and collective child-rearing activities within their socio-cultural and historical contexts, allowing for a delicate understanding of how cultural tools, societal norms and historical legacies mediate child-rearing practices.

The research employed a case study design centred on the Ububele ECD centre in Alexandra, Johannesburg, to capture the refined and detailed experiences of parents and educators as participants. Using a qualitative methodology, in-depth interviews were conducted with parents, educators and community members within this specific marginalised community in South Africa. This case-study approach facilitated a thorough exploration of the lived experiences and perceptions of the participants regarding the expression of the NCF from their natural environment. The qualitative data was analysed thematically, identifying key themes related to socioeconomic challenges, cultural continuity, community dynamics and the practical application of the NCF principles. This focused, context-rich investigation provided

deep insights into the unique dynamics at play within the specific context of the Ububele ECD centre.

The study identified several key themes encapsulating the child-rearing practices within the community, including socioeconomic challenges and parental aspirations, cultural continuity and adaptation in parenting, community dynamics and support systems, health, safety, and environmental considerations and navigating the NCF in marginalised contexts. These themes highlight the multifaceted challenges faced by caregivers and educators and underscore the critical role of community support, cultural preservation and systemic changes in enhancing the wellbeing and development of children.

One significant finding was the impact of limited staffing during training periods, exacerbating the strain on resources and personnel. Educators' pursuit of further qualifications such as Diplomas in Foundation Phase teaching is crucial for the advancement of nurturing care practices. However, this pursuit requires significant personal investment and sacrifice, highlighting the need for more support to make these aspirations a reality. The commitment to lifelong learning and improvement among educators is commendable, yet systemic barriers must be addressed to sustain high-quality nurturing care in the ECD sector.

Health, safety and environmental considerations emerged as integral to the study, examining the environmental factors that influence the expression of the NCF principles in marginalised communities. Trust and distrust in government and institutions were pivotal in understanding how communities interact with and perceive the support systems designed to provide health, safety and environmental stability. The complex relationship with these entities, often characterised by frustration and a lack of confidence in the services provided, underscores the need for improved accessibility and quality of services.

The principles of the NCF, which emphasise responsive caregiving, early learning, health, nutrition and safety, were central to this exploration. The study sought to understand how these principles are expressed and implemented in the daily lives and child-rearing practices of parents, caregivers and educators in marginalised communities. By focusing on the Ububele ECD centre in Alexandra, Johannesburg, the research provided a detailed case study of the challenges and opportunities faced by these communities in fostering optimal child development.

5.3 Limitations of the Study

While this study provides valuable insights into the socioeconomic challenges, cultural continuity and community dynamics in the context of ECD in marginalised communities,

several limitations should be acknowledged. These limitations may have impacted the findings and their generalizability.

One of the primary limitations of this study is the sample size. The study was conducted with a relatively small number of participants, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other marginalised communities. While the qualitative approach provided in-depth insights into the lived experiences of the participants, a larger sample size would have allowed for more robust conclusions and greater generalisability. Thus, while the participant narratives were rich and informative, broader representation could have provided a more comprehensive picture of the ECD landscape across diverse marginalised settings. The strength of using a case study design for the current study is that by its nature has never assumed generalisability of findings, however its trustworthiness and procedural rigor serves as guideline for the replicability of the study in similar settings.

The geographic and cultural context of the study was another limitation. The research was conducted in specific marginalised communities within South Africa, which may limit the applicability of the findings to other geographic and cultural contexts. The unique socioeconomic, cultural and historical factors influencing these communities may not be representative of all marginalised communities in South Africa. Therefore, caution should be exercised when applying the findings to other contexts. This localised focus underscores the opportunity for future research to consider cross-cultural and cross-regional comparisons to enhance the applicability of the findings.

The study relied heavily on self-reported data from participants, which may be subject to biases such as social desirability and recall biases. Participants may have provided responses that they believed were socially acceptable or had difficulty accurately recalling past events and experiences. While efforts were made to ensure the authenticity and accuracy of the data, these biases may have influenced the findings. Self-reported data, while valuable, can sometimes lack objectivity, highlighting the need for complementary data collection methods in future research.

To mitigate these potential biases, the study incorporated observational methods alongside self-reported data. Observations were conducted to capture the naturalistic behaviours and interactions of participants in their everyday environments. This approach allowed for the triangulation of data, providing a more comprehensive and delicate understanding of child-rearing practices within the community. For instance, during observations, it was noted how caregivers navigated safe playing environments and managed health and safety concerns, which provided context and depth to the self-reported data.

Additionally, the study was cross-sectional in nature, capturing data at a single point in time. This approach does not allow for the examination of changes and developments over time. Longitudinal data would have provided a more comprehensive understanding of the evolving dynamics of child-rearing practices and the long-term impact of socioeconomic challenges and community support on children's development. The absence of longitudinal data limits the ability to track progress and changes, which are critical for understanding the long-term efficacy of interventions and support systems.

Access to participants in marginalised communities can be challenging due to various factors such as geographic isolation, socioeconomic barriers and distrust of outsiders, leading to failed plan to conduct ethnographic observations. These challenges have limited the diversity of the participant pool, and the richness of the data collected. Efforts were made to build trust and rapport with the community, but access limitations may have impacted the study's findings. Overcoming these barriers requires sustained community engagement and innovative outreach strategies as used in ethnographic studies to ensure a diverse and representative sample in future studies.

As with any qualitative research, there is a potential for researcher bias in analysis and interpretation. The researcher's background, perspectives, and assumptions may have influenced the study's design and the interpretation of the findings. Reflexivity and triangulation were employed to mitigate this bias, but it is important to acknowledge its potential impact. Despite efforts to maintain objectivity, the subjective nature of qualitative analysis means that some level of researcher influence is inevitable, underscoring the importance of methodological rigour and transparency.

The study's practical limitations include the need for improved government support services, balancing cultural continuity with modern educational practices, and creating safe and supportive environments for children's development. Recommendations were made to enhance accessibility and quality of services, strengthen trust in government institutions, provide financial support and involve parents and communities in decision-making processes. For instance, enhancing accessibility and quality of services, such as infrastructure development and healthcare services, directly benefits parents by reducing the burden of securing basic needs and allowing them to focus more on responsive caregiving and early learning opportunities. Strengthening trust in government institutions through transparent communication and community engagement encourages parents to use available services, enhancing the overall effectiveness of nurturing care practices. Financial support and subsidies

for essential services alleviate the financial burden on families, enabling parents to access quality education and healthcare services for their children.

Despite these limitations, the study provides valuable insights into the socioeconomic challenges, cultural continuity and community dynamics in the context of ECD in marginalised communities. The findings contribute to a deeper understanding of the barriers and facilitators to the expression of the NCF principles and offer practical recommendations for policy and practice. Future research should aim to address these limitations by employing larger sample sizes, longitudinal designs and diverse geographic and cultural contexts to enhance the generalizability and robustness of the findings. This would not only validate the current findings but also provide a more holistic view of the factors influencing ECD in various settings, ultimately contributing to more effective and contextually appropriate interventions.

5.4 Implications and Future Research Directions

The findings and limitations of this study highlight several areas for future research that can deepen our understanding of socioeconomic challenges, cultural continuity and community dynamics in the context of child-rearing practices and ECD in marginalised communities. Addressing these gaps and exploring new dimensions can enhance the ideals of the NCF and improve outcomes for children in these settings.

One key area for future research is the use of longitudinal designs. The cross-sectional nature of this study captured data at a single point in time, limiting our understanding of how child-rearing practices, socioeconomic conditions and community dynamics evolve. Longitudinal studies are essential for examining changes over time, providing a more comprehensive understanding of the long-term impact of interventions and the shifting needs of marginalised communities. By tracking developments over extended periods, researchers can identify trends, adaptations and sustained outcomes, offering valuable insights for policy and practice.

To enhance the generalizability of the findings, future research should include larger and more diverse samples. Expanding the sample size and including participants from different geographic regions and cultural backgrounds can provide a more representative understanding of the challenges and facilitators to the expression of the NCF. This approach can also help identify commonalities and differences across various marginalised communities, enriching our understanding of the universal versus context-specific aspects of nurturing care.

Mixed-methods approaches should be considered to provide a more holistic understanding of the issues. While this study uses the qualitative method, combining qualitative and quantitative data can capture both the depth of individual experiences and the breadth of

patterns across larger populations. Quantitative data can complement qualitative insights, providing robust evidence for policy and practice recommendations. Mixed-methods research enables a comprehensive analysis, balancing detailed personal narratives with broader statistical trends.

Given the limitations related to the inability to conduct home observations, future research should explore alternative ways to gain access to home environments and observe child-rearing practices in natural settings. Building stronger relationships with community members, employing participatory research methods and ensuring confidentiality and trust can facilitate home observations. Observational studies can provide valuable insights into the daily lives and challenges faced by families in marginalised communities, offering a more refined understanding of the context in which children are raised.

Intervention studies are also crucial. Designing and evaluating interventions aimed at addressing the socioeconomic, cultural and environmental challenges identified in this study can test the effectiveness of specific strategies. These strategies might include financial support programmes, culturally relevant curricula and community-based mental health services, all of which can improve the wellbeing and development of children. Rigorous evaluation of these interventions can provide evidence-based recommendations for scaling up successful programmes, ensuring that effective practices are implemented widely.

Further research is needed to analyse the impact of existing policies on the expression of the NCF in marginalised communities. Policy analysis can identify gaps and areas for improvement in current policies, providing recommendations for creating more supportive and inclusive policy environments. This research could also explore the role of advocacy and community engagement in influencing policy changes, ensuring that policies are responsive to the needs of marginalised communities and support the successful implementation of the NCF. For instance, policies such as the CSG are crucial in providing financial assistance to low-income families, enabling them to afford basic necessities and reduce the economic burden of childcare.

Comparative studies that examine child-rearing practices and the expression of the NCF across different cultural contexts can provide valuable insights into the universal and context-specific aspects of nurturing care. Cross-cultural comparisons can help identify best practices and innovative approaches that can be adapted and applied in various settings. By understanding how different cultures approach nurturing care, researchers can develop tailored interventions that respect and incorporate cultural diversity.

The implications of this study extend to policy, practice and future research. Policymakers should consider the socioeconomic and cultural contexts of marginalised communities when designing and implementing ECD programmes. Practitioners should be trained to recognise and leverage the strengths within these communities, fostering environments that support holistic child development. Future research should build on the findings and limitations of this study to further our understanding of the complex dynamics of ECD in marginalised communities. Employing longitudinal designs, larger and more diverse samples, mixed-methods approaches, observational studies, intervention studies, policy analysis and cross-cultural comparisons can generate robust evidence to inform policy and practice. By addressing these areas, we can develop more effective strategies and interventions that support the holistic development of children, fostering environments where all children can thrive.

The findings of this study suggest that the NCF will remain an idealistic goal if the genuine needs of marginalised communities are not addressed. One significant contradiction is the expectation for parents, to engage extensively with their children while working long hours in low-paying jobs (Mayisela, 2024). This economic reality forces parents to rely on extended family members, such as grandmothers, and older children to assist in child-rearing (Mayisela and Oponng, n.d.). Another critical issue is the affordability and quality of early learning programmes. Many parents cannot afford ECD services, and the affordable options often suffer from a lack of skilled educators (Mayisela, 2024). This gap in early childhood education further exacerbates the challenges faced by marginalised families, limiting children's access to quality learning opportunities.

It is recommended that the government should improve support services, balance cultural continuity with modern educational practices, and create safe and supportive environments for children's development. These recommendations aim to address the socioeconomic, cultural and environmental challenges identified in the study.

5.5 Conclusion

This research has undertaken a comprehensive CHAT-informed exploration on the expression of the NCF in the child-rearing practices within marginalised South African communities. Focusing on the unique socioeconomic, cultural and historical determinants shaping these practices, the research has highlighted the resilience, creativity and dedication of caregivers and educators in fostering the holistic development of children despite significant challenges.

Employing a case study design centred on the Ububele ECD centre in Alexandra, Johannesburg, this research used qualitative methodologies through in-depth interviews with parents, educators and community members. This approach allowed for a refined exploration of the lived experiences and perceptions of participants. The thematic analysis revealed several critical insights, including the impact of socioeconomic challenges, the importance of cultural continuity and adaptation, the role of community dynamics and support systems, and the influence of health, safety and environmental factors on child-rearing practices.

Key findings underscore the multifaceted challenges faced by caregivers and educators, such as economic hardship, cultural barriers and resource limitations. Despite these obstacles, participants demonstrated a profound commitment to nurturing care practices aligned with the NCF principles of responsive caregiving, early learning, health, nutrition and safety. The study highlighted the significant role of community institutions like the Ububele ECD centre in providing essential support and fostering resilience among children and families.

The practical implications of the study emphasise the need for a multifaceted approach to support the implementation of the NCF in marginalised communities. Recommendations for improving government support services, balancing cultural continuity with modern educational practices, and creating safe and supportive environments were provided. Enhancing accessibility and quality of services, strengthening trust in government institutions, providing financial support, and involving parents and communities in decision-making processes are crucial steps to ensure that all children have the opportunity to thrive.

Several limitations were acknowledged, including the small sample size, geographic and cultural specificity, reliance on self-reported data and the absence of longitudinal data. These limitations highlight the importance of future research directions, such as employing longitudinal designs, larger and more diverse samples, mixed-methods approach, observational studies, intervention research, policy analysis and cross-cultural comparisons. Addressing these areas will generate robust evidence to inform policy and practice, ultimately enhancing the wellbeing and development of children in marginalised settings.

The application of CHAT provided a comprehensive lens for understanding the complex dynamics of child-rearing practices in marginalised communities. By examining each component of the activity system, the study highlighted the potential for both harmony and tension within the practices of nurturing care. The theoretical contributions underscore the need for culturally sensitive and contextually relevant interventions that address the socioeconomic, cultural and historical dimensions of child-rearing practices.

This study has offered valuable insights into the socioeconomic challenges, cultural continuity and community dynamics affecting ECD in marginalised communities. The findings contribute to a deeper understanding of the barriers and facilitators to the expression of the NCF principles and offer practical recommendations for enhancing the wellbeing and development of children. The research underscores the significance of culturally sensitive and contextually relevant interventions that support the holistic development of children. By building on these findings and pursuing the recommended future research directions, policymakers, practitioners, and researchers can develop more effective strategies to support ECD, ensuring that all children, regardless of their circumstances, have the opportunity to reach their full potential.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Ethical Clearance



SCHOOL OF HUMAN AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT ETHICS COMMITTEE
CONSTITUTED UNDER THE UNIVERSITY HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (NON-MEDICAL)

CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE

PROTOCOL NUMBER: MACC/23/02

PROJECT TITLE:

Exploring the Expression of Nurturing Care Framework Principles in the Child-rearing Practices of Marginalized Communities in South Africa: A Case Study of Ububele ECD Center in Alexandra, Johannesburg

INVESTIGATOR

Dladla Ntokozo (1973141)

SCHOOL/DEPARTMENT OF INVESTIGATOR

SHCD/Psychology

DATE CONSIDERED

16 May 2023

DECISION OF THE COMMITTEE

Approved unconditionally

RISK LEVEL

Low Risk

EXPIRY DATE

31 December 2025

ISSUE DATE OF CERTIFICATE

23 May 2023

CHAIRPERSON

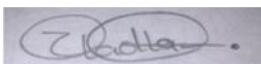

(Professor Dr Aline Ferreira Correia)

cc: Dr Simangele Mayisela (Supervisor)

DECLARATION OF INVESTIGATOR

To be completed in duplicate and **ONE COPY** returned to the Chairperson of the School/Department ethics committee.

I/we fully understand the conditions under which I am/we are authorized to carry out the abovementioned research and I/we guarantee to ensure compliance with these conditions. Should any departure be contemplated from the research procedure as approved, I/we undertake to submit an amendment of the protocol to the Committee.



Signature

Date

29 / 05 / 2023

Appendix B: Participant Information Sheet (PIS)



Dear Sir / Madam

My name is Ntokozo Sabelo Dladla. I am a master's student in Psychology Department at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. My supervisor is Dr Simangele Mayisela. I am conducting a research study from a historical and cultural perspective on how child-rearing practices in marginalised communities express the principles of the NCF to reach a sustainable development of their children.

The study title is: **Exploring the Expression of NCF Principles in the Child-rearing Practices of Marginalised Communities in South Africa: A Case Study**

I am inviting you to take part in an interview. If you decide to take part, your participation in this research study will last about 50-60 minutes. The interview will take place at the participants' home and at Ububele ECD centre. The study will include an observation aspect, where the environment will be observed for its suitability to support a healthy and sustainable environment for child development and growth – that is both the home environment and the ECD centre environment. For the parent's interview, these interviews can take place at the parent's home to facilitate the observation aspect to in those 60 minutes.

With your permission, I would like to audio record the interview. This data will be stored safely in a google drive which will require a password to access for 5 years. Only the researcher, Ntokozo Sabelo Dladla, and my supervisor, Dr Simangele Mayisela, will have access to the data.

During the research activity, I will need to ask for some personal information about you, including a biographical questionnaire-interview.

The interview will be confidential but not anonymous. However, as the researcher I will keep your identity anonymous when drafting the research report. When I share the results of the research study, I will not include your name or anything else that could identify you – pseudonyms will be used. With your permission, other researchers may use the data collected from this research study, but your name and any personal information will not be used or passed on.

If you decide to take part in the research study, it should be because you want to volunteer. You do not have to take part. You can stop being in the study at any time. You do not have to answer any questions if you do not want to. You will not get any direct benefits if you choose to join the research study. You will not lose any services, benefits or rights you would normally have if you decided not to join. Taking part in the research study will not cost you anything. You will not be paid for being in this research study.

The risks for this research study are no more than what happens in everyday life. OR Some of the questions asked may make you feel sad or upset. If this happens, I will stop the interview and continue another time. If you need some support or counselling services following the interview, these are available free of charge at Lifeline and the contact details for the counselling services are 011 715 2000, info@lifeline.org.za.

This research study will be written up as a research report. The report will be available on the university library website. If you would like to receive a summary of this report, I will be happy to send it to you.

If you have any questions during or afterwards about this research study, feel free to contact me or in the details listed below. If you have any concerns or complaints about the ethical procedures of this research study, you are welcome to contact the University Human Research Ethics Committee (Non-Medical), telephone +27(0) 11 717 1408, email hrecnon-medical@wits.ac.za.

Yours sincerely,
Ntokozo Sabelo Dladla

Researcher:

Ntokozo Sabelo Dladla, email address: 1973141@students.wits.ac.za, Cell No: 067 134 6635

Supervisor:

Dr Simangele Mayisela, email address: Simangele.mayisela@wits.ac.za, Contact No: 012 717 4529

Appendix C: Consent Form



Title of project: Exploring the Expression of NCF in the Child-rearing Practices of Marginalised Communities in South Africa: A Case Study

Name of researcher: Ntokozo Sabelo Dladla

I,, agree to participate in this research project.

I agree to the following:

(Please circle the relevant options below)

The research study was explained to me. I understand what this study is about. YES/NO

I understand that I can volunteer to take part in the study. YES/NO

I agree that the interview activity may be audio-recorded. YES/NO

I agree that direct quotations from my interview may be used by the researcher in their research report. YES/NO

I agree that my participation will remain anonymous (my name will not be used by the researcher in their research report). YES/NO

I agree that other researchers may use the information I provide in my interview (depending on their own ethics clearance being obtained) but my name and any personal information will not be used or passed on. YES/NO

Signature of Participant: _____ Date: _____

Signature of Researcher: _____ Date: _____

Appendix D: Observation Checklist



1. Good Health

- Cleanliness and hygiene practices in the environment, including handwashing stations, availability of clean water and proper waste disposal.
- Availability of basic health supplies, such as first aid kits and medications, in the home or ECD centre.
- Nutritious food options provided for children, including appropriate portion sizes, variety and quality of food items.

2. Adequate Nutrition

- Availability of nutritious food options, such as fruits, vegetables, protein sources, and grains, in the home or ECD centre.
- Mealtime routines and practices, including regular meal schedules, appropriate feeding techniques and use of age-appropriate utensils and dishware.
- Inclusion of cultural or traditional foods that align with the concept of adequate nutrition as per the NCF.

3. Safety and Security

- Safety measures in the home or ECD centre, such as childproofing measures, secure and age-appropriate furniture and equipment, and functioning smoke detectors.
- Supervision and monitoring of children to ensure their safety, including appropriate caregiver-to-child ratios and active supervision during playtime or activities.
- Emergency preparedness, including availability of emergency contact information, evacuation plans and first aid resources.

4. Responsive Caregiving

- Caregiver-child interactions, such as verbal and non-verbal communication, positive guidance techniques and emotional responsiveness.
- Opportunities for bonding and nurturing, such as physical affection, eye contact and responsive play.
- Encouragement of autonomy and independence in children, such as allowing them to make choices and express their opinions.

5. Opportunities for Learning

- Availability of age-appropriate toys, books and learning materials that promote cognitive, emotional and social development.
- Opportunities for structured and unstructured play, exploration and experimentation.

- Inclusion of activities that promote early literacy, numeracy, creativity and problem-solving skills.

Appendix E: Biographical Questionnaire – Participants



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1. Name: _____ Age: _____ Gender: _____
2. Contact Information:
 - Phone Number: _____ Email: _____
 - Address: _____
3. Occupation: _____ Highest Education Level: _____
4. Relationship to ECD Centre/Child: _____
5. ECD Centre Information (for ECD centre staff):
 - Name of ECD Centre: _____
 - Position/Role at ECD Centre: _____
 - Years of Experience in ECD field: _____
6. Child Information (for parents of ECD children):
 - Child's Name: _____ Age: _____
 - Gender: _____ Date of Birth: _____
 - Current Grade/Class in ECD Centre: _____
7. Household Information (for parents of ECD children):
 - Number of Children in Household: _____
 - Family Monthly Income: _____
 - Primary Language Spoken at Home: _____
 - Housing Type: _____
 - Parental Education Level: _____
 - Parental Occupation: _____

Appendix F: Interview Schedule: Teachers



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Section 1: Introduction and Background

1. Overview of the study
 - Overview of the research study and its focus on understanding child-rearing practices and the impact of historical factors on ECD centres.
2. Consent and confidentiality
 - Obtain consent for the interview and explain the confidentiality of the information shared.

Section 2: Understanding Child-Rearing Practices

3. Daily routines and activities
 - Discuss the daily routines and activities at the ECD centre and their alignment with nurturing care principles and child development tenets.
4. Opportunities for early learning
 - Explore the opportunities for early learning provided to children and how these activities contribute to holistic development.
5. Responsive caregiving
 - Inquire about the teachers' approach to responsive caregiving and their ability to address children's needs in a timely and appropriate manner.
6. Safety and security
 - Discuss measures taken to ensure the safety and security of children at the ECD centre, considering the community's historical and cultural context.
7. Adequate nutrition
 - Explore the efforts made to provide adequate nutrition for the children and mothers, and the alignment with government initiatives to address poverty and poor nutrition.
8. Good health
 - Inquire about the measures in place to promote good health for both children and mothers, including access to healthcare services and immunisation.

Section 3: Historical and Cultural Context

9. Impact of Apartheid
 - Discuss the aftermath of Apartheid and its potential influence on child-rearing practices, caregiver perceptions and community dynamics.
10. Cultural heritage and practices
 - Explore the preservation and adaptation of cultural heritage and practices within child-rearing activities, considering the historical and cultural context.

Section 4: Challenges and Adaptations

11. Challenges in child-rearing practices
 - Identify and discuss the challenges faced by ECD teachers in implementing nurturing care practices, considering historical, cultural and socioeconomic factors.
12. Adaptations to community dynamics
 - Inquire about the strategies employed to adapt child-rearing practices to the evolving dynamics of the community, focusing on resilience, creativity and collaborative efforts.

Section 5: Conclusion and Future Outlook

13. Reflection and feedback

- Provide an opportunity for teachers to reflect on the interview and share any additional insights or feedback.

Appendix G: Interview Schedule: Parents



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JOHANNESBURG

Section 1: Introduction and Background

1. **Introduction and Rapport-Building**
2. **Overview of the Study**
3. **Consent and Confidentiality**
 - Obtain consent for the interview and explain the confidentiality of the information shared.

Section 2: Understanding Child-Rearing Practices

4. **Daily Routines and Activities**
 - Discuss the daily routines and activities at home related to child-rearing.
 - Explore how these routines align with nurturing care principles and child development tenets.
5. **Opportunities for Early Learning**
 - Explore the opportunities for early learning within the home environment.
 - Discuss the activities that parents engage in with their children to promote holistic development.
6. **Responsive Caregiving**
 - Inquire about the parents' approach to responsive caregiving.
 - Discuss how they address their children's needs in a timely and appropriate manner, particularly considering their individual circumstances.
7. **Safety and Security**
 - Discuss the measures taken to ensure the safety and security of children at home.
 - Consider the community's historical and cultural context in these discussions.
8. **Adequate Nutrition**
 - Explore the efforts made by parents to provide adequate nutrition for their children.
 - Discuss any alignment with government initiatives to address poverty and poor nutrition and any challenges faced in this regard.
9. **Good Health**
 - Inquire about the measures in place to promote good health for both children and parents.
 - Discuss access to healthcare services, immunisation and other health-related practices within the family.

Section 3: Historical and Cultural Context

10. **Impact of Apartheid**
 - Discuss the aftermath of Apartheid and its potential influence on current child-rearing practices and family dynamics.
 - Explore how historical factors may have shaped their perceptions and approaches to raising children.
11. **Cultural Heritage and Practices**
 - Explore the preservation and adaptation of cultural heritage and practices within child-rearing activities.
 - Discuss how these practices are integrated into daily routines and the importance of maintaining cultural identity.

Section 4: Challenges and Adaptations

12. **Challenges in Child-Rearing Practices**
 - Identify and discuss the challenges faced by parents in implementing nurturing care practices.

- Consider historical, cultural and socioeconomic factors that may impact their ability to provide optimal care.

13. Adaptations to Community Dynamics

- Inquire about the strategies employed by parents to adapt child-rearing practices to the evolving dynamics of the community.
- Focus on resilience, creativity and collaborative efforts they have found effective.

Section 5: Conclusion and Future Outlook

14. Reflection and Feedback

- Provide an opportunity for parents to reflect on the interview and share any additional insights or feedback.
- Encourage them to discuss anything that might not have been covered but is relevant to their experience.

15. Closing Remarks

- Express gratitude for their participation and the valuable insights they have provided.
- Provide contact information for follow-up or additional questions, ensuring they feel part of the ongoing research process.

Appendix H: Turnitin Report

Ntokozi Full Chapters (Thesis) EDITED.docx

ORIGINALITY REPORT

3 %	2 %	2 %	%
SIMILARITY INDEX	INTERNET SOURCES	PUBLICATIONS	STUDENT PAPERS

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5	Susan Levy, Uzoma Odera Okoye, Pius T. Tanga, Richard Ingram. "Routledge Handbook of African Social Work Education", Routledge, 2024 Publication	<1 %

Appendix I: Confirmation of Professional Editing



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01 October 2024

Declaration of editing

**The Expression of the Nurturing Care Framework in Child-rearing Practices of Marginalised
Communities in South Africa: A Case Study**

by

NTOKOZO SABELO DLADLA

I declare that I have edited and proofread this thesis. My involvement was restricted to language usage and spelling, completeness and consistency. I did no structural re-writing of the content.

I am qualified to have done such editing, being in possession of a Bachelor's degree with a major in English, having taught English to matriculation, and having a Certificate in Copy Editing from the University of Cape Town. I have edited more than 500 Masters and Doctoral theses, as well as articles, books and reports.

As the copy editor,

- I am not responsible for detecting, or removing, passages in the document that closely resemble other texts and could thus be viewed as plagiarism.
- I am not responsible for editing AI generated text.
- I am not accountable for any changes made to this document by the author or any other party subsequent to the date of this declaration.

Sincerely,

Dr J Baumgardt

UNISA: D. Ed. Education Management

University of Cape Town: Certificate in Copy Editing

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