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# Parents' understanding and reasons for their preferences for Montessori method: does the method entail the concept of inclusion in South Africa?

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# PARENTS' UNDERSTANDING AND REASONS FOR THEIR PREFERENCES FOR MONTESSORI METHOD: DOES THE METHOD ENTAIL THE CONCEPT OF INCLUSION IN SOUTH AFRICA?

By

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A research report submitted to the Wits School of Education, Faculty of Humanities, University of Witwatersrand, in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTERS OF EDUCATION (M Ed)

Supervisor: Dr Peter Aloka

**February, 2022**

## DECLARATION

I, Rumaanah Hajee, hereby declare that the content of this research report is my own work. I have made the necessary acknowledgements and provided references for all the sources I have engaged with during the compilation of this research report.



_____

Rumaanah Hajee

14 February 2022

## DEDICATION

I dedicate this master's research report to my parents, sisters, and special friends whom extended their help while I was completing this work. Above all, to the Almighty, who continues to shower us with blessings and for constantly providing me with the strength, wisdom, and perseverance, to bring this work to realisation.

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- My friends, for being an endless source of encouragement and comfort.

## ABSTRACT

The study aimed to examine parents' understanding and reasons of preferences for the Montessori Method. Moreover, the study explores if the Montessori Method entails the concept of inclusion. In order to do this, a number of subsidiary questions were addressed, including: What are parents' understanding of the Montessori Method? To what extent does the Montessori Method aid inclusivity? Which reasons make parents prefer the Montessori Method in particular for their children? and What is parents' awareness of their children's need/s when selecting the Montessori Method?

In order to answer these questions, the researcher conducted surveys and interviews from two Montessori schools; one situated in Melville and the other in Sandton, South Africa. The study was anchored on the pragmatic paradigm and within it, the concurrent triangulation design was adopted whereby both quantitative and qualitative data were collected simultaneously to obtain results. For the quantitative phase, a sample size of 30 parents was obtained using the census sampling technique, during which the respondents were selected. For the qualitative phase, 10 parents were selected by means of the purposive sampling technique. The survey data was subjected to suitability tests using the Kaiser-Meyer-Oklin measure of sampling adequacy (KMO Index) and the Bartlett's Test of Sphericity to determine the constructs' internal validity. The internal consistency of the instruments was assessed using the Cronbach's alpha coefficient test. All of the sub-scales met the required level of internal consistency and reliability, according to the findings. The trustworthiness of qualitative data from interviews was also ensured. To summarize the quantitative data, descriptive statistics such as frequencies and percentages were used. The qualitative data analysis comprises of the thematic analysis of data collected.

The study findings reported that parents' understanding of the Montessori Method varied and it can therefore be interpreted as comprising problem-solving skills, independence and a social development method. From the quantitative results, the parents were of the opinion that in most cases, the Montessori Method aided inclusivity. The findings also reported that parents preferred the Montessori Method due to many reasons such as cognitive development, collaborative learning, student inquiry, self-learning, physical development, emotional development and spiritual development. Finally, the findings indicated that parents viewed the

Montessori Method as diverse and inclusive as both abled learners and learners with physical and mental differences were are present in Montessori schools.

From the study results, it can be concluded that most parents indeed understand their respective child/children's need/s when selecting the Montessori Method. The study recommends that the Department of Social services develop programs to enhance varied inclusive practices in Montessori schools for different special needs among learners. This would help Montessori schools accommodate more learners with special needs.

***Key words:*** *parents understanding, reasons, preferences, Montessori Method, inclusivity, Montessori Teachers, Aid Inclusivity*

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# CHAPTER ONE

# INTRODUCTION

## 1.1: Background of the study

Providing a successful, inclusive, experiential and consequential learning environment has been a fundamental global goal for all concerned individuals. A young French philosopher, Edouard Seguin, researched and analyzed mentally challenged learners - the feeble-minded. He improved the Itards sensory-training approach and conducted several experiments trying to find the cause of idiocy until solving the challenge "of teaching idiots, and attaining results entirely without precedent" (Myers, 1930, p.538). Thereafter, Seguin's work became popular and his deduction was deemed a discovery: "his deduction that feeble-mindedness is an arrest of mental development, consequent on the imperfect sense organs and organs of motion with which these children are endowed, occurring at, before, or after birth, induced in a variety of ways, physiological causes, - was a discovery" (Myers, 1930, p.538). Seguin's approach to education was modified by Maria Montessori.

Maria Montessori (1870-1952) was a doctor who worked with children with intellectual disabilities. From this she observed children and gained knowledge about how they learn by an appropriate pedagogy and not medical treatment. During 1900, she had the opportunity to further explore her observations by developing her pedagogy in Rome in an orthophrenic school. During 1907, she began a housing project and worked with children that weren't disabled. 'Casa dei Bambini' ('children's house') was first set up here in a slum district for three to seven-year old's. Through experimentation and observation, she further developed her pedagogy. She argued that "children pass through sensitive periods for learning and several stages of development, and that children's self-construction can be fostered through engaging with self-directed activities in a specially prepared environment" (Marshall, 2017, p.1). International interest for her work and theories grew significantly. Today, many Montessori schools exist around the world for learners aged three to six years, and six to twelve years respectively.

Many parents have a choice when it comes to choosing various types of schools to educate their child. In South Africa, The South African Schools Act (SASA), established two respective systems: public and private schools. Public schools are available globally and controlled by the government through the department of education. Private schools, on the other hand, are governed privately with full control (more than the public schools) over the requirements of curriculum. In South Africa, 175 independently-owned schools are working towards a full membership of the South African Montessori Association (SAMA) (South African Montessori Association, 2019). There are also 335 non-member schools and many programs that implement and supplement the Montessori Method in their classrooms (South African Montessori Association, 2019). Within private schools, the available options include: parochial schools, preparatory schools, Waldorf schools and Montessori schools. The Montessori Method thus contradicts traditional instructional methods in public schools that entail teacher-directed learning and leaves children limited to learn by themselves. Not much research has been done regarding the Montessori Method and why parents select this method rather than ordinary public and private schools. Moreover, scanty literature is available on whether Montessori methods aids inclusivity. This is the research gap that the present study intends to fill. In the present study, the aim was to determine parents' reasoning for choosing this particular method and to find out if they acknowledge the inclusivity aspect within the school in relation to their child.

### 1.2: Problem statement

In South Africa, parents have certain and particular expectations when it comes to the schools they choose for their children. It is imperative that parents are well-informed about the curriculum they choose for their children, as some schools are beneficial for certain learners, depending on each child's unique educational needs.

Parents should be fully aware of public schools and their instructional methods that may hinder learners' needs, which ultimately depends on the learner's disability. It is expected that, with the South African government's support to public schools, parents would find it convenient to take their children to public schools. However, this is not the case, because many parents prefer the Montessori Method for the fact that it is private and fully controlled by the owner. Parents select schools based on their convenience and choices, not always considering the child's actual needs.

In various schools today, learners with disabilities are not receiving the attention which they need. They are not learning as they are placed in schools that do not target their particular needs. In a study, Zigmond (2003) asserts that "research evidence on the relative efficacy of one special education placement over another is scarce, methodologically flawed, and inconclusive" (2003, p.193). Zigmond further argued that new ways of thinking should be implemented to improve results for learners with disabilities. It is imperative that "effectiveness depends not only on the characteristics and needs of a particular student but also on the quality of the program's implementation" (Zigmond, 2003, p.197). Therefore, the setting is not the only key factor when it comes to learners with disabilities, but also the teaching strategies and an effective individualized approach.

Given the scanty literature that exists on whether or not the Montessori Method aids inclusivity amongst learners, this study aimed to determine why parents choose the Montessori Method, if they are actually aware of the inclusivity element, and if this method benefits their child in relation to the learner's disability (if they have one). Another main problem is that there is not much research on parent perspectives with regards to early childhood Montessori education. The aim of this study was to delve deeper and find out reasons as to why parents select the Montessori Method in particular.

### 1.3: Rationale of the study

This study is based on the researcher's interest in learning about a particular method, the Montessori Method, and the reasons why parents choose this particular method over and above other school types like public schools. Determining parents' reasons for their respective choices will help the researchers observe and understand if parents actually understand the needs of their respective child and if they support inclusivity within the classroom. The research findings enabled the researcher to understand the method, how it aids inclusivity within the classroom, the disadvantages of the method, how learner disability is achieved or not achieved, and the reasons as to why parents choose the Montessori Method in relation to their child's needs. During the researcher's teaching experience, many learners with disabilities were observed and their ability to tackle an activity or not within the classroom was especially noted by the researcher. The researcher questioned whether the Montessori Method actually benefitted or disadvantaged the learners. As a result, various methods were researched and

many articles on The Montessori Method in particular were studied. This method interests the researcher especially when it comes to inclusivity and taking learners with disabilities into account. The researcher aspired to research and learn more about this method, and parents' reasons and perceptions for choosing this method. In addition to this, this study will benefit parents when selecting a method of teaching for their respective child/children in various ways. Parents will be able to understand why and how this method is or not helpful to their child/children, how the method includes or does not include all learner types and how this method specifically helps or does not help those with a disability. These factors will aid in their decision for choosing a method.

### 1.4: Aims of the study

The study aimed to analyze parents' understanding of the Montessori Method and the extent to which the Montessori Method aids inclusivity. Moreover, the study examined reasons why parents choose the Montessori Method in particular for their children, and finally their awareness of their respective child's need when selecting the Montessori Method.

### 1.5: Research objectives

The research objectives include to:

- Examine parents' understanding of the Montessori Method.
- Establish the extent to which the Montessori Method aids inclusivity.
- Explore reasons that make parents prefer the Montessori Method in particular for their children.
- Establish parents' awareness of their respective child/children's need/s when selecting the Montessori Method.

### 1.6: Research questions

To answer the research question, a number of subsidiary questions had to be addressed. The sub questions are:

- What are parents' understanding of the Montessori Method?
- To what extent does the Montessori Method aid for inclusivity?

- Which reasons make parents choose the Montessori Method in particular for their children?
- What is parents' awareness of their child/children's need/s when selecting the Montessori Method?

### 1.7: Operational definitions of terms

The following terms are defined, for their use in the study:

**Inclusivity in Montessori classrooms:** To make sure that the Montessori Method accommodates and includes all learner types without any discrimination based on race, disability or other differences.

**Inclusivity:** Providing access to all types of children who are usually marginalized or excluded. This means being fair and equal to both abled and disabled children within the classroom environment.

**Montessori curriculum:** A curriculum that contains goals and content which are applied within the classroom environment to provide children with support and help them develop from birth to adulthood.

**Montessori Method:** Focuses on the concept of being independent and views children as inquisitive beings who seek for knowledge and initiate learning within an environment that is well-structured and equipped.

**Montessori teachers:** These teachers observe children effectively and provide opportunities for children to achieve success. Such teacher does not intervene to a great extent, thus allowing the child to develop. No rewards and punishments are employed, but rather each child gains satisfaction from their own individual experiences within the classroom.

**Parents' understanding:** The focus is on gaining the insight, opinions, views, judgement and reasoning of the parent/s to gain a better understanding of how they think.

In conclusion, providing a learning environment that is inclusive is a fundamental goal Internationally and within South Africa. The researcher selected the Montessori method in

particular and provided a background using Edouard Seguin and Maria Montessori, leading the researcher to this topic. Unfortunately, in South Africa, parents in particular do face arising challenges when it comes to their child/children thus it is crucial that they are well informed and well learned when it comes to selecting a particular institution for their child/children. Therefore, it is important to learn and understand why parents have chosen the Montessori Method in particular

### 1.8: Chapter outline

The structure of this research report consists of five chapters and they are presented as follows:

***Chapter One***

This chapter presents the background of the study, statement of the problem, rationale of the study, aims of the study, research objectives, research questions, and operational definitions of terms.

***Chapter Two***

This chapter presents an overview of the Montessori Method, the Montessori Method in South African classrooms, a literature review on parents' understanding of the Montessori Method, the extent to which the Montessori Method aids classroom inclusivity, factors that make parents prefer the Montessori Method for their children, parents' awareness of their respective child/children's need/s when selecting the Montessori Method, theoretical frameworks, Seguin's principles of education and Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory.

***Chapter Three***

This chapter presents the research paradigm, research design, research site, research sampling, research tools, parents' questionnaire and interview schedule. The validity of questionnaires, reliability of questionnaires, trustworthiness of qualitative data, data analysis, quantitative data analysis, qualitative data analysis and ethical considerations are also set out.

***Chapter Four***

This chapter presents the findings and interpretations of the study. The following are discussed: the questionnaire return rate; respondents' biographical demographic information and profile; interview transcriptions; parents' understanding of the Montessori Method; qualitative and

quantitative results on the extent to which the Montessori Method aids inclusivity; factors that make parents prefer the Montessori Method in particular for their children, and parents' awareness of their respective child/children's need/s when selecting the Montessori Method.

***Chapter Five***

This chapter presents the summary of results, discussion of findings, conclusion, recommendation for practice, limitations of the study and suggestions for future research.

# CHAPTER TWO

# LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

## 2.1: Introduction

This chapter presents the literature review and the theoretical frameworks that were adopted for the study. The literature is reviewed on the basis of parents' understanding of the Montessori Method, in particular the reasons that make parents prefer the Montessori Method for their children. The literature also includes studies on whether the Montessori method accommodates inclusivity. Before examining four respective objectives of this study, the literature review introduces the Montessori Method.

## 2.2: The Montessori Method

The Montessori Method entails the use of didactic objects and an enrichment environment with some important features. According to Moll (2002, p.40), the features of the Montessori Method include a number of sensorial materials. The Montessori-produced tasks that are multisensorial so that different aged groups can enjoy them.

### 2.2.1 Self-corrective materials

These designed sensory materials "control every error". When the children make a mistake, they know immediately that an error has occurred with the apparatus, as the solution will not work. "It is precisely in these errors that the educational importance of the didactic material lies… It is in just this dimension that the psycho-sensory exercise lies" (Montessori, 1912, p.171). It is imperative to know that the notion of 'teaching' a child should not be part of this. Montessori asserts that "instead, it is the work of the child, the autocorrection, the auto education which acts, for the teacher must not interfere in this slightest way" (1912, p.172).

### 2.2.2 Prepared environment

The environment should be the support structure for the learner in order for independent learning to occur. Montessori asserted that the environment should be specially prepared in order to protect the learners from anything dangerous and difficult that can be present in the

adult world. Thus, the social climate, materials and classroom should be included in this safe environment.

### 2.2.3 Ground rules

In order to maintain the respect within the classroom, Montessori operates on the concept of freedom with limits. Three respective rules are emphasized. Firstly, learners have the freedom to engage with activities and materials independently, "everything has a place and must be in its place when not in use". The second rule does not allow any damage or hurt to individuals and the property itself. And the third rule does not allow the disturbance of learners while they are participating in activities or using the materials. These rules portray that each individual is respected.

### 2.2.4 Vertical age and ability groupings

Within the Montessori environment, there are heterogeneous and multi-aged children. According to Rudolph (1993, p40), "in an established center of children between [say] three and six years of age, there should be at least a third who have been at the center for two years. These children are familiar with the rules and are the models for younger children". Therefore, having mixed groupings of different ages creates a community that builds harmonious confidence and provides learners with an opportuning to interact with the environment that is prepared.

The Montessori method entails fundamental pedagogical and methodological principles.
The first principle is respecting the child (Morrison, 2014; Schmidt & Schmidt, 2009). In this case, children work according to their own pace; children choose which materials to play with, thus allowing them to concentrate and focus. This results in self-discipline, having a good self-esteem and learning autonomy. The second principle is providing the absorbent mind with support (Morrison, 2014; Montessori, 1995). The environment to which the children are exposed to, as well as the experiences they encounter, allow children to gain experience and knowledge. This results in learning experience. The third principle is auto-education support (Morrison, 2014). The features of this curriculum entail that children learn by themselves, thus it is self-directed, with rewards externally avoided and preselected courses absent. This enhances children's curiosity and motivation so that they will acquire more knowledge.

The fourth principle is that sensitive period is allowed (Enright, 2010; Seldin & Davies, 2006). Within the environment, children are able to focus on certain aspects while excluding other aspects. This results in mastery, being committed and having passion. The fifth principle is an environment that is prepared (NAMTA, 2014; Schmidt & Schmidt, 2009). Such environment ensures that didactic objects are present within a well-equipped classroom. This results in using sensory functions, leaning independently and stimulating the mind. Finally, the sixth principle is the child's right to learn (Enright, 2010; Montessori, 1995). The teachers carefully observe the child's development, provides it with many learning opportunities and constantly provides it with learning materials suitable for its strength. This results in development and leaning progression. These six principles portray the interdependent and interacting principles within the Montessori Method that informs the classroom structure, the classroom organization, the children's role, the teacher's role and how learning takes place.

### 2.3: Montessori Method in South African classrooms

The Montessori Method spread worldwide especially in the specific continents which Maria visited. The method came to South Africa during 1976 whereby Mrs Strilli Oppenheimer established the first school. In 1980, four years later, the first Montessori school was opened in the Western Cape. The Montessori Society was then founded in 1981 and neighboring countries supported its forward-thinking approach. In 1991, during The Independent Schools Association of Southern Africa (ISASA) conference, it emerged that the Montessori Method had proved to be beneficial to socioeconomic levels within the educational systems and it had continued to flourish all over the world. There are currently 175 independently-owned schools that for part of the South African Montessori association. There are also 335 non-member schools and countless programs that encourage the Montessori Method with their classrooms.

### 2.4: Parents' understanding of the Montessori Method

Literature exists on parents' understanding of Montessori Method, however, studies on inclusivity are scanty. For example, Hiles' (2015) study was designed to "analyze a survey that measured parent understanding of the Montessori principles and classroom practices". The results of the survey revealed that Montessori Method aspects and its beliefs align with the values and thinking of parents. Parents appear to like classroom practices that are opposite to the founding principles, according to the survey. The findings primarily revealed that parents

understood the Montessori method in terms of goal-setting, achievement, and peer competition. Moreover, the findings revealed that teachers' preparation and presentation of lessons directly contrasted with some of Montessori's founding principles and intentions. While the reviewed study above was a survey without qualitative findings to express participants' feelings and experiences, the present study adopted a pragmatic paradigm to fill in this gap.

In another study, Pickard (2019) concluded that based on the survey results; both pre-and post-surveys as well as experiences from parents, the value of Montessori kindergarten year (or the final year in early childhood education) had increased in terms of parents understanding. As a result of their increased knowledge, the participants were able to use information that's customized to make decisions that are knowledgeable regarding their respective child's kindergarten year on whether to allow the child to remain enrolled for the three-year period of the program. The reviewed study was qualitative in nature but did not focus on inclusivity, which is the main element of the present study. Moreover, Momin's (2012) mixed methods study was conducted to address the quality that each child should receive when it comes to education. The results showed that parents choose this method due to its structure and particular curriculum and that children enjoyed learning in this particular environment. The reviewed study was based on parents' understanding of Montessori Method but it did not focus on inclusivity, which was the main thrust of the present study.

Another research study was conducted by Kayili and Ari, (2016), to "analyse the effect of the Montessori Method when supported by a social skills training program on kindergarten children's skills to understand social problem-solving and feelings". Fifty-three (53) children participated in this study and affiliated with data collection. The results of this study displayed that the social skills program which the Montessori supports, had a positive effect on development of skills, the realisation of feelings and problem-solving. The reviewed study was on problem-solving skills and social skills. These two themes are not only relevant to parents' understanding of the Montessori Method, but also relates to the present study. The study by Kayili and Ari however does not entail the concept of inclusivity or parents' perceptions of the Montessori Method. The present study aimed to fill this gap.

A study was conducted by İman, Danişman, Demircan and Yaya (2017) on "the effect of the Montessori Method on pre-school children's social competence-behaviour and emotion regulation skills". From the results, regarding emotion regulation and social behaviour, pre-test

and post-test scores displayed a significant difference. This therefore confirms that the Montessori Method has a positive effect on social competency and behaviour. In the present study, social skills emerges as an important theme and concept which most parents equate with the Montessori Method. The reviewed study encompasses the theme of social skills which is also important in the present study. However, the study by İman, Danişman, Demircan and Yaya (2017) did not include inclusivity, which is the main thrust of the present study. In addition to this, the reviewed study was not qualitative in nature and therefore the results did not display a deeper meaning to the outcome of the study. The present study employed a mixed method approach to fill this gap.

In another study Shivakumara, Dhiksha and Nagaraj (2016) explored "the Montessori effect on children's social development in terms of self-concept in comparison to children in a traditional school". Parametric and descriptive tests were used in the mentioned study. From the results, it was clear that the children attending the Montessori school had a very high self-concept in comparison to the children who attended a traditional school. The reviewed study displayed a quantitative nature and thus lacked a qualitative position which could have provided more in-depth results, an important prerequisite for rendering a deeper meaning to a phenomenon. The present study hence adopted a mixed method to fill this gap.

In another study, Dhiksha and Suresh (2016) examined "self-esteem and academic anxiety of high school learners within both Montessori education and traditional education" among 60 learners from Montessori and 64 learners from a traditional school. According to the findings, the learners from a Montessori school had a much higher self-esteem and lower academic anxiety in comparison to the learners from a traditional school. It can be deduced that if there is less anxiety and good self-esteem in the classroom, learners become confident. As a result, they are encouraged to be independent and improve their social skills. Independence and social skills are two significant themes of the present study. Anxiety limits confidence and socialising while a good self-esteem encourages social interactions, boosts one's confidence and enables one to become independent. This reviewed study did not include the concept of inclusivity or parents' opinions and reasons for selecting the Montessori Method. Furthermore, the reviewed study was purely quantitative in nature and lacked in-depth qualitative findings. As mentioned earlier, the present study adopts a mixed methods approach. This provides both a deeper meaning and understanding to the objectives and towards the purpose of generalisation.

A study conducted by Ahmad and Reba (2018) examined "the social and moral development of learners by comparing Montessori and non-Montessori learners". To investigate the learners regarding their moral and social development in a Montessori and non-Montessori system, a survey questionnaire was conducted whereby 100 participants were selected using the stratified random sampling. From the results, it emerged that learners who revived their early childhood development using the Montessori system were more developed socially and morally. Therefore, the study concluded that Montessori plays a huge role in learners' social development. The reviewed study displayed quantitative elements and therefore lacked a qualitative aspect, which could have assisted with more in-depth results in order to give deeper meaning to a phenomenon. The present study hence adopted a mixed method to fill this gap.

### 2.5: Extent to which the Montessori Method aids inclusivity in classrooms

There has been some research on the Montessori Method (Orem, 1969; Lillard, P., 1972; Lillard, A., 2005; Hughes, 2009; Loeffler, 1992; Hugo, 2013; Moll, 2004) and the concept of inclusive education (Pickering, 2003; Hughes, 2009; Vettiveloo, 2008; Cossentino, 2010; McKenzie & Zascavage, 2012). "Inclusion works best with teachers who understand and demonstrate effective teaching and learning practices" (Loreman, Deppler and Harvey; 2010, p.5).

Inclusivity is considered a fundamental concept in education. Talbert's (2020) study investigated "the efficacy of implementations for assisting in the successful inclusion of special needs students in a Montessori elementary classroom". In order to collect data, surveys of parents were used, student journals, a field journal, an observational tally and notes. Based on the findings, students with special needs will rise to the higher expectations of their teachers because their peers' positive performances inspire them. This study recommended that there should be refreshed focus on inclusion in Montessori elementary classrooms because an enriched classroom entails children with special needs. However, the reviewed study did not gain parents' perspective as to why they choose the Montessori curriculum. This is the research gap that the present study intended to fill.

In another study, Armstrong (2016) reported that the benefits of fully integrating special needs students into the classroom is because special needs students enrich the classroom by adding diversity. Armstrong's study revealed that learners with disabilities have a variety of strengths,

“including high spatial ability for many children with dyslexia, creative thinking in learners with attention deficit disorder (ADHD), and systemic capabilities such as computer expertise (among those on the autism spectrum)” (p.32). While the inclusive element is included in this reviewed study, quantitative data like surveys and qualitative data on parents’ perspectives about the choice of Montessori method was missing. The present research intended to fill the gap.

Similarly, Cossentino (2010) addressed the “developmental challenges of special needs learners and how these special needs learners naturally have their needs met through Montessori”. The findings reported by Cossentino (2010) indicated that at the very least, Montessori educators are cousins to special educators. Children who chose their own activities appeared to be more motivated and focused, according to the study. Moreover, Pickering (2004a) added that special needs students frequently do not reach the same developmental milestones as neurotypical students. Many areas, including fine skills, organization, academics and order experience frequent delays. As a result, the Montessori classroom's multi-age span benefits the special needs student. While the reviewed study entailed the inclusive element as it discusses special need learners within the Montessori curriculum, it did not however include parents’ perspectives on their preference for Montessori Method. This was the research gap that the present study filled.

In the USA, Ireland and the UK (Cossentino, 2010), the Montessori Method is regarded as a model for the inclusive education concept. In some countries, teachers are trained in both Montessori and special education, for example, in Ireland, Montessori training and special education training are noticeably linked (Cossentino, 2010, p.39). Research by Vettiveloo (2008) displayed inclusive methods embedded within the Montessori Method in Malaysia. Within the Montessori classroom, the teacher teaches children of different ages and due to this, Vettiveloo (2008, p. 179) acknowledges that the Montessori Method appreciates the standard of uniqueness of all children. The needs of all children within this classroom are met thus emphasising it as learner-centered. In another study by Akabor, (2015) in Gauteng, South Africa, it was reported that the teaching practices within the classroom can be considered as inclusive, especially the Montessori materials between learners. Similarly, Lillard (2005, p.21) describes the Montessori method as “tightly structured and organized to the core”. From the above reviewed studies, it can be concluded that parents’ perspectives on the Montessori Method in classrooms for inclusivity is scanty and needs attention.

“The early years: Evaluating Montessori education” is the title of a study conducted by Lillard & Else-Quest (2006), to evaluate how effective the Montessori Method is as an education. The social and academic impact of this method was evaluated whereby children were studied on two levels: primary (3-6 year olds) and elementary (6-12-year olds). The school studied was a situated in an urban minority area. Based on the results, by the end of kindergarten, the children displayed a better performance levels on reading, math, standardized tests and social cognition. Toward the end of elementary, children wrote better essays, with more complex sentences. They also showed a better response to social dilemmas. From this study, we can clearly see that the Montessori Method is a constructive education, due to its application and progress within the school. If learners receive an effective education to begin with, they are able to learn and understand the social constructs that are prevalent in the world; one being inclusivity. This study displays a comprehensive outlook of the Montessori Method that leads to the concept of inclusivity. The present study aimed to gain parents’ perception and reasoning when selecting the Montessori Method for their child/children.

Kingsview (2021) examined second and third grade learners’ “writing skills and their attitude towards writing in a hybrid Montessori classroom”. Eighteen (18) learners, aged eight to nine years old, participated in a five-week intervention process, while they were working in groups with three members per group. The findings showed a beneficial effect on the learners’ attitudes toward communication and writing. Furthermore, learners of different ages also showed a positive outcome.

The Montessori education includes learners of mixed ages and teaches writing and communicating with each other as a core and fundamental concept. Receiving a good education from a young age gives learners an opportunity to success. Learners can only learn and understand inclusivity if they are educated and have the opportunity to be exposed to diverse environments. Therefore, incorporating mixed ages in the classroom allows learners to learn and help each other. Promoting collaborative learning equips learners to not differentiate but rather support, acknowledge and respect each other.

### 2.6: Reasons that make parents prefer the Montessori Method for their children

Some of the misconceptions about the Montessori Method include: (a) the method is only for those with special needs or for preschoolers (Lopata et al., 2005; NAMTA, 2014), (b) this method is not believed and acknowledged by many, and (c) learners are not supervised and thus have freedom (Lillard, 1997; NAMTA, 2014). Other mistaken beliefs include that this method is for the rich, that it does not allow learners to be challenged, and that it is religious-orientated (NAMTA, 2014). Due to the lack of knowledge amongst adults on this method, it is unclear as to why parents choose this particular education method. Their respective perceptions about this method is often not clear.

A study conducted by Hiles (2015) in the United States as to why parents choose Montessori schools used three schools where the parents/guardians of each learner partook in the survey conducted. The findings revealed that parents chose Montessori schools in America because of these schools' perceived principles, outcomes. There was an attraction to the school environment and philosophy. Another study conducted in the United States, by Zarybnisky (2010), also asked parents why they chose the Montessori Method.

The study entails four Montessori schools: two public and two private. The findings indicated that parents preferred the Montessori Method because of social needs, academic needs and the Montessori philosophy. The above-mentioned two studies by Hiles (2015) and Zarybnisky (2010), included parents' reasoning as to why they chose the Montessori Method, but not the inclusivity element. The present study filled in this gap in literature by exploring inclusivity within Montessori classrooms from parents' perspectives.

In another study, Lillard and Else-Quest (2006) examined "standardized testing results for Montessori and traditional learners at ages five and 12 years". The results indicated that the Montessori learners at age 5 years improved and displayed better outcomes in maths and word challenges. Practical thinking, conceptualization skills and vocabulary displayed no difference. Moreover, the results indicated that amongst 12-year-olds, Montessori students showed better writing and language skills, as well as a stronger feeling of the community and caring for their peers, but their test scores were not higher. Similarly, Rathunde (2003) studied comparative groups of middle school learners who attended Montessori and traditional middle schools. For seven days, students recorded their moods, energy levels, feelings of importance, sense of enjoyment, and flow eight times a day. Based on the results, the middle school learners overall entailed a higher quality educational experience in comparison to traditional middle school learners. Rathunde (2003) concluded that Montessori learners showed an eagerness to enjoy

learning and working hard, showed interest in their teachers, and they felt a stronger connection amongst their classmates, compared to traditional school learners. The reviewed studies above focused on perspectives on preference to Montessori schools, but the parents were not involved. The present study intended to bring out parents' perspectives to fill in gaps in literature. None of the reviewed studies above had addressed the issue of inclusivity. This is the thrust of the present study.

Lillard and Heise (2016) studied "the effect of using only Montessori materials in a preschool classroom compared to using both Montessori and non-Montessori materials". They discovered that students in classrooms with non-Montessori supplementary materials made more progress on assessed measures over the course of four months than students in classrooms with mixed materials. This study is imperative in comparison to other studies that have reported a significantly low difference in gains for learners from Montessori versus non-Montessori classrooms. This reviewed study above included information about materials in specific, but it did not include any quantitative or qualitative data, which is adopted in the present study. The concept of inclusivity did not feature in this reviewed study but it is one of the main elements that the present study focuses on. Moreover, while parents' perceptions of selecting the Montessori Method was missing in the reviewed study it is a main element of the present study.

A Taiwanese study conducted by ShamAh and Hsin-Hui (2014) about learners' achievement within the Montessori classroom compares test scores in a Montessori classroom with that of a non-Montessori program. The results showed that three grades achieved higher scores in Language arts. First grade learners scored higher in Math and in Social Studies, but Montessori learners did not score higher. Even though the study displayed mixed results between the two methods, three grade levels of learners with Montessori early childhood experience showed advanced learning outcomes in language arts. The first grade learners with Montessori learning experiences also possessed enhanced Math scores. This finding shows that Montessori is beneficial and that parents choose this method on the grounds of their children obtaining higher scores. This reviewed study entailed quantitative analysis but lacked a qualitative component which would have elicited feelings of the participants. Moreover, the reviewed study lacked responses on parents' preferences for Montessori schools, which was the core element of the present study.

A study was conducted by Aybuke, Yurteri, & Tiryaki University (2021) "to determine the effect of Montessori education on self-regulation skills in pre-schoolers". The study entailed a mixed method approach whereby the dependent variable was the self-regulation levels and the independent variable was the Montessori Method. The influence of the Montessori Method on the individual's self-regulation skills were examined. Based on the results, between the groups of children that were part of the experiment as well as the controlled group, there was a significant difference with the test scores for impulse control and self-regulation. Thus, it can be concluded that the Montessori method has a great impact and effect on self-regulation skills for children in a positive way. The reviewed study did not entail the concept of inclusivity as well as parents' perception of selecting the Montessori method, therefore the present study filled this literature gap.

The Montessori Method was evaluated in a study by Ongoren and Turcan (2009) titled: "The effectiveness of Montessori education method in the acquisition of concept of geometrical shapes". The method was evaluated "on the acquisition of geometrical shapes" for children aged four to five-years in preschool. Based on the results, the acquisition of geometric shapes concept of those children who had received a Montessori education were more successful than those who received another education. Critical thinking is an important theme in the present study and it is advocated that learning shapes helps learners to observe and organise visual objects. Within the geometric concept, the critical thinking stages are the recognition of geometric shapes and the establishment of any relationships between different geometric shapes. The reviewed study did not entail the concept of inclusivity or insights of parents' views regarding the Montessori Method. The present study therefore filled this literature gap.

In a study titled, "Educational gymnastics: The effectiveness of Montessori practical life activities in developing fine motor skills in kindergartners", by Bhatia, Davis and Shamas-Brandt (2015), a quasi-experiment was performed to test the Montessori effect on practical life activities on children's fine motor skills over a period of eight months. The participants were 50 children in Montessori school aged five, and 50 children in a kindergarten program, aged five. The results displayed that children in Montessori schools showed higher accuracy, consistence and speed with the use of dominant hand on the post-test. Therefore, the results in the Montessori school were significantly higher on the fine motor skills. Fine motor skills are life skills which is a theme in the present study and imperative in the Montessori Method. Acquiring fine motor skills is one of the reasons for parents' selection of the Montessori

Method for their child/children. In the reviewed study, the concept of inclusivity and parents' perceptions of the Montessori method were not taken into account, therefore the present study aimed to fill this literature gap.

Aucoin (2015) conducted a study titled "Assessing collaboration: How teachers in Montessori public schools incorporate collaborative constructs for learners in inclusion", whereby 10 Montessori teachers and special education teachers participated in interviews in which they were analyzed for identifying patterns. The exercise related to how teachers collaborated in terms of learner inclusion in Montessori schools. The results concluded that even though there was inclusion in Montessori schools, time was a barrier for developing and establishing collaborative relationships and thus a plan to establish more collaboration in Montessori schools is needed.

Inclusion is a main theme in the present study and one of the reasons as to why parents have selected the Montessori Method. The reviewed study shows that there is inclusion in the Montessori environment, but that deeper collaboration is needed for the future. This reviewed study entailed qualitative data whereas the present study adopts a mixed methods approach to provide an in depth understanding and review of the outcome. Furthermore, parents' understanding of selecting the Montessori Method was not included in the reviewed study, while the present study aimed to fill this literature gap.

A study titled: "Communicating Effectively with Parents in the Montessori Environment" by Seril (2015), was conducted to examine effective ways of communication between parents and teachers in the Montessori environment. Children aged two and a half to six years old, and parents were part of the study. A Montessori compass was introduced in the classroom to see the parent-teacher impact on communication. The results displayed that 69% parents preferred the new intervention to communicate and a largely positive result was yielded. Communication is an important theme in the present study and this is also one of the reasons as to why parents select the Montessori method for their child/children. The reviewed study did not include the concept of inclusivity whereas inclusivity was the thrust of the present study.

Bahatheg, (2011) conducted a study on "how Montessori sensorial materials aids pre-school children's problem-solving skills". A quasi-experimental design was used which included 12 girls and 12 boys. From the quantitative analysis, the results displayed big differences between

the experiential and control groups to solve problems. Sensorial materials is an important theme in the present study. It is one of the many reasons why parents choose the Montessori Method. From the study, it is clear that Montessori sensorial materials benefit learners in many ways. It is also an effective way to teach problem-solving skills. The reviewed study was experimental in nature and it might have been affected by several intervening factors, however, the present study adopted a mixed methods design which reduces flows that affect other designs.

A study by Fenech Adami, (2020), titled: "The benefits of learning through sensorial play in two Montessori schools", examined the effectiveness of various sensorial materials. A qualitative method was used and four observations in each school was conducted within a classroom with children aged three to five years olds. Two educators from each school were also interviewed to note their views on sensorial materials. From the results, sensory has a positive impact on learners' development in various ways. The most common impact is the enhancement of fine motor skills. Other positive impacts include mathematical skills, eye-hand coordination, language skills and the ability to differentiate between various objects. Sensorial materials is therefore one of the main reasons as to why parents select the Montessori Method. It is an important theme in the present study considering it is the core of this method. From the study, it is clear that sensory play has a positive impact on learners' development. The reviewed study was a qualitative approach but it lacked quantitative results for generalisation purposes. However, given that the present study entailed a mixed method approach, both results with breadth and depth are reported. Furthermore, the reviewed study did not entail the concept of inclusivity and parents reasoning behind selecting the Montessori Method, which the present study aimed to establish.

A study titled "Beyond executive functions, creativity skills benefit academic outcomes: Insights from Montessori education", was conducted by Denervaud, Knebel, Hagmann, and Gentaz, (2019). Two-hundred-and-one (201) learners participated, of which half represented a Montessori school while the rest were from a traditional school. From the results, learners from a Montessori setting outperformed learners from a traditional school in both academic and creativity skills. Furthermore, in a multiple mediations model, creativity skills showed to have a positive impact on academics. In the present study it will emerge that learners from a Montessori setting have a balanced environment of both academic and creativity, with life skills, inclusion and sensorial materials as important themes. Sensorial materials entail the concept of creativity. It allows learners to think outside the box and explore. Life skills and

inclusion suggest an academic concept. In order to learn life skills, one has to attend school for learning life skills. In order to learn and implement inclusion, one has to attend school to understand and achieve social justice. Parents' responses, views and understanding are one of the main components of the present study. The reviewed study above did not entail parents' perceptions which the researcher aimed to fill.

## 2.7: Parents' awareness of their respective child/children's need/s when selecting the Montessori Method

Literature on parents' awareness of their respective children's needs exists but remains scanty, especially in terms of a regional and South African context. For example, Eunsook Hong and Kit-hung Lee (2003) reported that the degree of correspondence between children's homework preferences and parents' perceptions of their children's homework preferences suggests that Chinese parents are fairly aware of their children's preferred method of homework completion. Generally, parents being aware of the child's homework links to high achievement and a reflection of a positive attitude toward homework from the child. While the reviewed study by Eunsook et al., (2003) was on parents' awareness of the child's homework preferences, the present study examined parents' awareness of their children needs when choosing a Montessori school.

Similarly, Woodgate, et al.'s (2015) study reported that parents that have children with special needs devote more time to them in comparison to parents that have healthy children. This, in turn, has necessitated the provision of additional parental support and resources. Parents of children with complex care needs, on the other hand, continue to face a lack of adequate services and supports to assist them in their role as intense parents. The findings sensitize professionals to the issues confronted by parents caring for children with complex care needs. This study proves that it is imperative to gain parents' insight of the (Montessori) school that they send their child to. This reviewed study by Woodgate, et al., (2015) study failed to account for inclusivity. The present study filled this gap by analyzing inclusivity within the Montessori Method.

In another study, Gowen, et al., (1993) reported that the most pressing need identified was for parents to learn more about how to help their children with special needs develop. In order to deal with the emotional and time demands of parenting, parents expressed a desire for information. They needed to learn about community resources, make plans for their child's

future, and be aware of their child's legal rights. In Saria, et al.'s (2019) study, focusses on "parents' needs, the perceptions of parents and nurses about the needs of parents caring for their hospitalized, critically ill children". This study revealed two themes. According to the qualitative findings of this study, both parents and nurses recognized the importance of providing parents with enough information about the progress of their children, motivating and necessitating them in the care of their children, and allowing visiting hours to be flexible for parents. This study highlights the importance of parents' involvement in their child's life, especially when it comes to selecting a school. The reviewed studies by Gowen, et al., (1993) and Saria, et al., (2019) examined parents' perspectives but did not account for the concept of inclusivity which is a critical element in the present research.

In the study by Ucar and Durualp (2018), 61 parents whose children attended the Montessori school in Turkey/Ankara and 21 parents whose children attended the Montessori school in Seattle were studied respectively. The findings indicated that parents from both Ankara and Seattle shared similar views and reasons for sending their children to the Montessori school. In both places, parents had heard about the Montessori method from the internet, friends and magazines. Parents living in Ankara believed that Montessori schools allowed for self-confidence, self-sufficiency, independence, and supported social development (Ucar & Durualp, 2018) for their children. Parents living in Seattle responded by reporting that the Montessori school allowed for self-esteem, independence, natural love of learning, explorative learning (Ucar & Durualp, 2018). The reviewed study by Ucar and Durualp (2018) focused on parents' perspectives of Montessori schools, but this study failed to account for inclusivity which the present study aimed to achieve, thereby filling in gaps in literature.

A study titled "Montessori and autism: An interpretive description study" by Lane-Barmapov (2016), elaborated on ways in which teachers can adapt the Montessori Method with children who have Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD). A descriptive methodology focused on the modifications which teachers applied to this method when helping these learners. In conclusion, it has been observed that the Montessori method provided a supportive forum for inclusion. Children with ASD can learn effectively in the classroom and can benefit tremendously from engaging in peer modelling and social skills. Disability is an important theme in the present study. It is crucial that parents remain aware of their child/children's need/s when selecting a school for their child/children as their school will determine their growth. From the above it is clear that a Montessori school benefits those with a disability like autism.

Another study by Mushtaq, Afshan, Rehna, Sabih, and Najmussaqib, (2022), was conducted to ascertain if those individuals who are intellectually challenged can improve their abilities through Montessori. Thirty (30) children with mild disabilities participated in this study. Fifteen (15) were allocated for a Montessori sensorial training intervention and the other 15 were allocated to Waitlist control. The results from the intervention group showed cognitive abilities improvement in comparison to the control group. Therefore, Montessori sensorial training, on which all Montessori schools are based, can help intellectually challenged individuals positively.

A study by Cipta, Avianty, and Kurniawati, (2019) applied "a communication board as a Montessori apparatus in teaching mathematics to autism learners". A descriptive qualitative method was used to research how Mathematics can be taught to those with a disability, for example autism. The communication board was applied as Montessori apparatus as a visual learning style for autism individuals. Other Montessori apparatus was also used, for example, visuals within a structure, visual task analysis, visual schedules and a choice board. The Montessori Method therefore helps individuals with autism. The concept of inclusivity is apparent and clear in this study but parents' perceptions and reasoning of selecting the Montessori Method is not mentioned, therefore the present study aimed to fill this gap.

A study titled "Intervention for the ADHD child using the Montessori Method and ICTs" was undertaken by Gkeka, Gougoudi, Mertsioti, and Drigas, (2018). The study addressed strategies for individuals with attention deficit disorder (ADHD) in relation to the Montessori Method and ICTs combined. It has been assessed that the Montessori philosophy, based on new technologies, addresses multi-sensory approaches and behavioural approaches using the senses to ADHD. The principles of the Montessori Method is fundamental as it focuses on personal development, thus helping each learner based on their individual needs.

Another study was conducted by Suryamah (2021) whereby the utilisation of the Montessori was explored to improve motor skills of physically impaired learners. Two eight-year-old learners with psychical impairments formed part of the study. The results showed that the learner had improved in fine motor skills like buttoning up a shirt. Other learning outcomes were also higher percentage increases in terms of activities performed. The Montessori approach therefore has a positive effect on those with physical impairments. The reviewed

study above included only two research participants and this limited the reported findings. The present study involved many participants and has therefore yielded richer and more comprehensive results.

## 2.8 Theoretical framework

The present study was informed by two theories namely, Seguin's principles of education and the ecological systems theory by Bronfenbrenner. The theory of Seguin outlines the concept of inclusion and the theory of Bronfenbrenner speaks to parental perspectives, which are two main elements of the present study.

### 2.8.1: Seguin's principles of education

Seguin believed that development of independent and self-reliant tasks was imperative in education for the disabled, presenting them with both intellectual and physical tasks. Seguin (1812) improved the approach of sensory training and introduced the physiological method. The physiological method emerged from the belief that idiocy was due to a disorder in the nervous system. He further asserted that the cognitive disabilities of the disabled could increase through exercise and the development of senses. This method entails sensory and motor training (Seguin, 1812, p.32). Accordingly, sensory training focuses on the sense of touch and the utilization of materials and motor training. This training included work and play, simple to complex tasks, functional and age-appropriate activities (Seguin, 1812, p.32). Sensory training is linked to the concept of inclusivity as the disabled is taken into consideration when it comes to teaching and learning methods. For sensory and motor training Seguin emphasises training that can benefit special need learners and the disabled (Seguin, 1812, p.33). The physiological method aims to improve and strengthen the nervous system, thus improving the ability of the individual to perform (Seguin, 1812, p.33). Seguin's principles of education are relevant to the present study because the method entails the use of sensorial materials, thus showing that it can benefit both the abled and disabled. The next theory that informed the present study is Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory.

### 2.8.2: Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory

Urie Bronfenbrenner developed the ecological systems theory, which can also be referred to as development relationships within society (Bronfenbrenner, 1992). This theory outlines the

importance of the child's development and how it is affected by social relationships. Bronfenbrenner believed that the development of the individual is affected by everything around them. He asserted that the environment can be divided into five different levels: "the microsystem, the mesosystem, the ecosystem, the macrosystem and the chronosystem" (Bronfenbrenner, 1992).

The microsystem, being the first level, is closest to the individual, thus having direct contact. This includes friends, family or caregivers. The relationships in this level are referred to as bidirectional. This means that your reactions as an individual to others around you will have an effect on your treatment in terms of how they treat you within your microsystem. This level is very influential (Bronfenbrenner, 1992).

The mesosystem entails the interconnections between many areas of the individual's microsystem. The individual's microsystem does not function independently but is interconnected with other systems where one system influences another. The individual has a direct impact on these interactions. The present study focuses on this respective level.

The ecosystem entails both formal and informal structures that does not necessary include the individual but influences the individual indirectly (Bronfenbrenner, 1992). Examples of ecosystems include parents' friends and workplaces, the neighborhood and media. While individuals are not involved but external, they are still affected to a certain extent.

The macrosystem focuses on the cultural element and how it affects the development of the individual such as wealth, ethnicity, socioeconomic status and poverty (Bronfenbrenner, 1992). Culture influences a child's morals, values, views and perceptions that transpire.

Lastly, the chronosystem entails all environmental changes over one's lifetime that influence historical events, development and big transitions (Bronfenbrenner, 1992). The ecological systems theory provides a wholesome approach. It is holistic, in that it is inclusive of all children and family involvement, which reflects the nature and dynamic of the actual relationships between family members (Hayes & O'Toole, 2017, p.13).

The present study is anchored within the mesosystem level in particular, as Bronfenbrenner asserts that the child does not function individually and independently. Instead, the child's but

microsystems are interconnected and influence each other. Parents' reasoning for selecting a particular method for their respective child has an influence on the child's development. This theory therefore relates to the present study as it aims to find out parents' reasoning for selecting the Montessori Method.

The two theories informed the present study because, first, the theory of Edouard Seguin explains the physiological method in which idiocy was caused by a central nervous system disorder. Seguin held the belief that through sensory development, one can develop cognitively. Montessori adopted the work of Seguin and took a new direction to explain 'education of the senses'. Seguin's theory thus includes the inclusivity aspect of the present study. Bronfenbrenner's theory on the mesosystem level refers to relationships and how they affect the child's development. Thus, parents' perspectives of selecting a particular method relates to Bronfenbrenner's theory.

In Conclusion, literature on the Montessori Method, inclusivity, parents' perspectives and awareness is vast. However, there are research gaps in each literature review that the present study aims to fill. In addition to this, two theories inform the present study which is important. Seguin's principles of Education which is vital as this theory emphasizes on sensorial materials which is an important concept in the present study. Bronfenbrenner's theory emphasizes on the importance of parent's perspectives which is also an important concept in the present study.

# CHAPTER THREE

# RESEARCH DESIGN & METHODOLOGY

## 3.1: Introduction

In this study, the research design and methodology is adopted which is presented in this chapter. This includes the research paradigm, research design, research site description, data collection methods, procedure for data collection, validity and reliability of research tools, trustworthiness of qualitative data, data analysis, and finally, the ethical considerations. In addition to this chapter, the participants demographic data is also presented.

## 3.2: Research paradigm

The definition of a research paradigm is: "the set of common beliefs and agreements shared between scientist about how problems should be understood and addressed" (Kuhn, 1970, p.17). It is "philosophical assumptions [and beliefs] about the nature of the world (ontology) and how we can understand it (epistemology), assumptions that tend to be shared by [individuals] working in a specific field or tradition" (Maxwell, 2008, p. 224). Beliefs and assumptions are thus reflected by the research paradigm, supporting the study of inquiry (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). This research has adopted a pragmatic (mixed methods) paradigm.

A pragmatic paradigm focuses on the decision of the individual in relation to the real-world. The process entails identifying the problem and relating this problem to the broader context. Thereafter, research inquiry takes place, allowing for a better understanding of the situation and solutions to solve the problem (Hall, 2013, p. 73).

The pragmatic paradigm was important to the present study because it helped the researcher to ensure detailed findings by combining both quantitative and qualitative results of the study. As a result, the study was more comprehensive in answering why parents choose the Montessori Method for their respective child/children and if this method entails inclusivity.

## 3.3: Research design

The concurrent triangulation design is a single study that involves both quantitative and qualitative data at the same time (Creswell, 2011, p. 211). The focus and purpose of this mixed method design was to validate the results generated by each method through evidence produced by the other. "Quantitative (mainly deductive) methods are ideal for measuring pervasiveness of known phenomena and central patterns of association, including inferences of causality" (Pasick et al., 2009, p. 11). "Qualitative (mainly inductive) methods allowed for identification of previously unknown processes, explanations of why and how phenomena occur, and the range of their effects" (Pasick et al., 2009, p. 11). Thus, it is important to note that mixed methods "involves the intentional collection of both quantitative and qualitative data and the combination of the strengths of each to answer research questions" (Creswell, 2011, p.221).

The concurrent triangulation mixed methods design was relevant to the present study as the researcher used both surveys and interviews at the same time to gather information about why parents choose the Montessori Method and how it aids inclusivity in classrooms.

### 3.4: Research site

The two Montessori Schools that the researcher used for the study were 'Kiddies Montessori Preschool' and 'Mini Montessori Preschool'. The two schools are located in two very different areas. The Sandton area is an affluent municipality of Gauteng and is known as South Africa's richest square mile. Melville is a bohemian suburb of Johannesburg. Both areas have different characteristics that may influence parents' choice of the Montessori Method. Thus, choosing two schools from different areas helped to get varied answers. The two schools were chosen as both districts are different and accommodates different classes of people. The responses from parents were therefore broad and the researcher was able to gain insight from parents with different financial backgrounds. Both schools are successful Montessori schools.

### 3.5: Research sampling

Sampling refers to a number of observations that are predetermined, taken from a large population in statistical analysis. Sample size is the total of research respondents. It is an important feature in studies in which making inferences about a population from samples is the main goal. Research sampling is imperative within qualitative research as it entails "sample size and sampling design considerations" (Omona, 2013, p. 169). This helped the researcher

select strategies, sample sizes and designs that are compatible with the research that is conducted (Omona, 2013). A purposive sampling technique was used. This is a form of sampling in which the researcher uses their own judgement when selecting individuals to participate in the surveys. In this case, in order to gain more insight on the concept of inclusivity, the researcher selected a parent whose child has a disability. Similarly, a simple random sampling method was used, which is a sampling technique in which every individual has a chance of being selected in the sample. In the present research, the researcher selected a sample of parents in relation to the total number of parents within the school. The study was carried out among parents in two selected Montessori Schools, one in Melville and the other in the Sandton area. Each school could have a total number of about 30 parents.

For the quantitative phase, all 30 parents participated in the questionnaire from these schools. The sampling method was appropriate for the quantitative phase as it allowed one to select a case that is specific, in the present research. The researcher selected Montessori parents in particular to gain insight as to why they choose this method. Thus, this sampling type was used from a special situation, which is purposive sampling. For the qualitative phase, the sample of 10 parents, thus five from each school, was obtained with the use of the purposive sampling technique. The purposive sampling technique was appropriate for the qualitative phase as the researcher recruited certain participants to provide detailed information about the concept studied. In the present research, the researcher selected certain parents to interview, in order to gain more insight and in-depth information about why they choose the Montessori Method in particular.

A sample size of 10 parents for the qualitative phase was considered appropriate, as recommended by Mason (2010) who indicated that a large sample size does not lead to more information. This means that only "one occurrence of data, or a code, is all that is necessary to ensure that is becomes part of the analysis framework for understanding of the process behind the topic" (p.1). Mason (2010) further asserts that smaller samples from six (6) to 30 participants are preferred within qualitative research as a large sampling can be both impractical as well as time-consuming.

Mason (2010) asserts that qualitative samples "must be large enough to assure that most or all of the perceptions that might be important are uncovered. At the same time, if the sample is too large, the data becomes repetitive and, eventually, superfluous". Even though saturation at

a conceptual level is helpful, it does not provide enough guidance for the estimation of sample sizes for data collection. Thus, the interviewing skill has a great effect on the quality of the data and "will have a subsequent effect in achieving saturation" (Guest et al., 2006).

### 3.6: Research tools

The research tools for the study comprised of both questionnaires and an interview schedule. Both tools were used to obtain data from parents.

#### 3.6.1: Questionnaire for parents

In research, a questionnaire is used as an instrument that includes a series of questions in order to gain information from respondents (Rowley, 2014, p. 11). Providing questionnaires to parents allowed the researcher to have analyzed and understand why parents choose the Montessori Method for their child/children and whether they are aware of their needs. Moreover, the use of questionnaires for data collection ensured that the results are easily generalizable to the parents. The questionnaire included sections which addressed the research questions of the study. Each section had items on a 5-point Likert scale namely; strongly agree (5); agree (4); neutral (3), agree (2) and strongly agree (1).

#### 3.6.2: Interview schedule for parents

For the qualitative phase of the study, an interview schedule was used to collect data. An interview is meeting a person face to face for various reasons like having a discussion, consulting to obtain and gather information (King, Horrocks & Brooks,p. 23). The researcher chose an interview for the study because it allowed for in-depth understanding of parents' perception of choosing a Montessori Method and how it aids inclusivity (King, Horrocks & Brooks, p.23). Gaining this insight helped the researcher understand if the validity of choosing the Montessori Method advantaged or disadvantaged the respective child on the basis of his or her need. The information that the researcher would like to elicit from interviews is parents' reasoning behind selecting the Montessori Method, and if parents are aware of their respective child's needs and how the school helps their child. Interview schedules are easy to carry out as the questions are already prepared, thus making the facilitation easier. Data-collection is likely to be accurate as the questions have been carefully constructed.

According to Lindlof & Taylor (2017), “interview schedules can increase the reliability and credibility of data gathered” (p.23).

### 3.7: Validity and reliability of the instruments

#### 3.7.1: Validity of questionnaires

Validity can be defined as a concept being measured accurately in a quantitative study. It is the quality of the result being true in relation to the real world. The evidence thus should support the validity of the statement. In order to ensure validity of questionnaires (Brass, 2018, p.180), it is imperative to design the questions carefully to increase effectiveness (Brass, 2018, p.180).

Two concepts; Internal and external validity prove results to be meaningful and trustworthy. Internal validity refers to the structure of the study and how well it is executed. External validity refers to the applicability of the findings in relation to the real world. Internal validity can be defined as: “the extent to which the observed results represent the truth in the population we are studying and, thus, are not due to methodological errors” (Brass, 2018, p.183). Even so, external validity is defined as: “how well the outcome of a study can be expected to apply to other settings” (Brass, 2018, p.183).

Both internal and external validity are imperative when designing a study. The researcher used the principal component analysis (PCA) to ensure the validity of questionnaires (Gruitjters, 2019). This involved testing how much the items in questionnaire were “in agreement with existing validated questionnaires measuring similar constructs” (p.17). While this is known as concurrent validity, a Pearson's correlation coefficient (r) of 0.5 or higher indicates acceptable concurrent validity (Gruijters, 2019).

To determine the internal validity constructs, suitability tests were used in the survey data like the Kaiser-Meyer-Oklin measure of sampling adequacy (KMO Index) and Bartlett's test of sphericity. Tabled 3.1 represents the internal validity tests for each respective sub-scale.

Table 3.1: Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) and Bartlett's tests of internal validity

| **Sections of Questionnaire for parents** | **Chi-square** | **Degrees of freedom** | **p-value** | **KMO** |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Parents understanding of the Montessori Method. | 23.094 | 15 | 0.08 | 0.64 |
| Extent to which the Montessori Method aids inclusivity. | 48.984 | 15 | 0.00 | 0.77 |
| Reasons that make parents prefer the Montessori Method. | 68.960 | 21 | 0.00 | 0.75 |
| Parents' awareness of their respective child/children's need/s. | 50.384 | 15 | 0.00 | 0.56 |

Table 3.1 shows the results for each subscale of the questionnaire of the Kaiser-Meyer-Oklin sampling adequacy index (KMO Index) and the Bartlett's test of sphericity. Kaiser (1974) asserts that the Internal validity is adequate when the Kaiser-Meyer-Oklin sampling adequacy index is greater than 0.6. The Bartlett's test of sphericity, on the other hand, is concerned with the study's significance and the validity of the responses obtained in relation to the problem that the study is attempting to solve.

According to Creswell (2014), the Bartlett's test of sphericity's observed should display statistic that are less than 0.05. In the current study, ($p \leq 0.001$) is the value of Bartlett's test of sphericity for all subscales of the questionnaire, which was significant. Furthermore, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin indexes were all > .6 which can be interpreted as a threshold for the internal validity to be sufficient. Creswell (2014) further mentions that if the Bartlett's test of sphericity shows a significant value, and if the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin displays a measure that is greater than 0.6, then the internal validity condition is up to standard. Based on the results, the validity tests met the requirements which implies that the questionnaires were of required validity levels and data collected in the present study was suitable for inferential analysis.

### 3.7.2: Reliability of questionnaires

Reliability can be defined as: " the ratio of true score variance to observed score variance" Spearman, 1904). "Reliability is usually estimated based on scores from a single test

administration, and is referred to as internal consistency reliability" (Cronbach, 1951). The researcher used internal consistency to ascertain the reliability of questionnaires in the present study. Internal consistency was used. While it is quite popular it also has been defined controversially. Cronbach (1951) used the terms "internal consistency" and "homogeneity" interchangeably and asserted that "an internally consistent or homogeneous test should be independent of test length" (p. 323).

The internal consistency of the instruments was assessed using the Cronbach's alpha coefficient test. The reliability of multi-item opinion items in the parents' questionnaires was calculated separately for each of the five subscales. The coefficient alpha of these variables are reported in Table 3.2:

Table 3.2: Internal Consistency: Cronbach's alpha results for the questionnaire

| **Scale** | **No. Items** | **Cronbach's alpha** | **Cronbach's alpha based on standardised items** |
|---|---|---|---|
| Parents understanding of the Montessori Method. | 6 | .612 | .673 |
| Extent to which the Montessori Method aids inclusivity. | 6 | .772 | .779 |
| Reasons that make parents prefer the Montessori Method. | 6 | .669 | .671 |
| Parents' awareness of their respective child/children's need/s. | 7 | .591 | .598 |

Table 3.2 reveals that with Cronbach's alpha values ranging from 0.591 (parents' awareness of their respective child/children's need/s) to 0.772 (the extent to which the Montessori Method aids inclusivity), all of the sub-scales met the required level of internal consistency and reliability. These findings were in line with the rule of thumb proposed by Frankel & Wallen (2009), "that a coefficient of 0.60 is an average reliability while coefficient of 0.70 and above indicates that the instrument has a high inter-item consistency reliability standard" (p.9). Cronbach's alpha indicates that the instruments were reliable enough for the study for all subscales. It was also noted that all items had a strong correlation with the overall scale. As a

result, the questionnaires were generally appropriate for data collection because they accurately measured the constructs they were designed to measure.

### 3.7.3: Trustworthiness of qualitative data

In order to ensure that the findings of the study were valid and reliable, trustworthiness is imperative as it addresses "credibility, dependability, transferability and conformability" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 185). Credibility is the extent to which the data of the qualitative research is accurate (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 188). In the present study, credibility was established through techniques such as "prolonged engagement, (b) persistent observation, triangulation, peer debriefings, negative case analysis, referential adequacy, and member checks", as recommended by Lincoln & Guba (1985). Data triangulation was used in order to increase trustworthiness and provide an understanding of cases in detail. Researchers use data triangulation to "locate evidence to document a code or theme in different source of data" (Creswell, 2013, p. 251). Therefore, data sources were used from the observations and interviews which will be triangulated to ensure credibility.

Transferability is the extent to which other researchers determine if the research is applicable or other contexts of the research study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In the present study, this was established through "thick description necessary to enable someone interested in making a transfer to reach a conclusion about whether transfer can be contemplated as a possibility" (p. 316), as recommended by Lincoln & Guba, (1985). Transferability is more important than generalizability as the sample is small.

"Dependability is the degree to which an independent auditor can look at the qualitative research process and determine its acceptability". In so doing, such independent auditor can create an audit trail of the process (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To get rid of inconsistency, it is "incumbent on the researcher to document the procedures and demonstrate that coding schemes and categories have been used consistently" (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2006, p. 86). To ensure dependability, an audit trail was used. According to Lincoln & Guba (1985), "with creation of an audit trail in effect creates a data bank of oral and documentary history for future researchers to reanalyse in light of new questions" (p.8). In the present study, the researcher ensured dependability by keeping the research in which the data was collected documented. The researcher's findings were interpreted and reported the results.

Finally, confirmability is using the dependent audit to analyse and examine the evidence in the data to support the findings. These critical thinking skills are imperative to develop in order to achieve an approach that is of quality and delivers outcomes that are useful for the research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Using the audit trail technique established conformability. In the researcher's study, in order to ensure conformability, the data collecting and interpretation results were kept effectively. The researcher noted down all the important aspects from the data that was collected and merged them into important themes.

### 3.8: Data analysis

The definition of Data analysis is: "the process of breaking down, examining, comparing, conceptualizing, and categorizing data" (Corbin & Strauss, 2014, p.57). The reason for using data analysis is for observing the raw data and transforming this data using techniques like "searching, evaluating, recognizing, coding, mapping, exploring and describing patterns, trends, themes and categories in the raw data, in order to interpret them and provide their underlying meanings" (Ngulube, 2015, p.131). A mixed methods analysis was employed, consisting of both questionnaires and interviews, thus, both quantitative and qualitative data analyses methods were discussed respectively.

#### 3.8.1: Quantitative data analysis

Quantitative data entails the use of questionnaires. The researcher used descriptive statistics which are coefficients used to summarize data. In the present study, this analysis allowed the researcher to summarize the features of the data from the questionnaires, providing simple summaries and forming the basis of every quantitative analysis. The descriptive statistics, such as means, frequency counts, and percentages, were used to analyze the quantitative data obtained from the closed-ended items in the questionnaires. This was used since the researcher in the present study collected data about Montessori schools and parents' reasons for selecting the Montessori Method. From the data collected by the researcher, generalizations were made about the population based on the information that was gathered.

### 3.8.2: Qualitative data analysis

The use of thematic analysis was used to analyze data from the interviews. This was carried out in three respective steps. The first step was to "construct codes representing the central/subthemes which were then represented on a matrix" (Bryman, 2016, p.554). The second step followed a number of "careful reading of transcripts, field notes, and documents, which constituted the data". During this step the aforementioned "themes/subthemes were considered as ideas, words, and phrases in the text that recurred and were applied to the data" (Bryman, 2016, p.554). Finally, "the framework was applied to the data, which was organized initially into core themes, and then displayed in terms of subthemes within the matrix and for each case" (Bryman, 2016, p.554). Finally, clear patterns and themes were created from the reduction of data collected.

For the qualitative phase of the study, an interview schedule was used to collect data. An interview suggests meeting a person face to face for various reasons like having a discussion, or consulting to obtain and gather information (King, Horrocks & Brooks,p. 23). The researcher chose an interview in the study because it allowed gaining in-depth understanding of parents' perception of choosing a Montessori Method and how it aids inclusivity (King, Horrocks & Brooks, p.23). Gaining this insight helped to understand if the validity of choosing the Montessori Method advantages or disadvantages a respective child on the basis of the learner's need. The information that the researcher would seek from interviews were the parents reasoning for selecting the Montessori Method, if the parents were aware of their respective child's needs and how the schools helped their child. Interview schedules were easy to carry out as the questions were already prepared. This made the facilitation easier, collecting data was likely to be accurate as the questions have been carefully constructed.

According to Lindlof & Taylor (2017) "interview schedules can increase the reliability and credibility of data gathered" (p.23). ten (10) parents in total were interviewed from two respective Montessori schools based in different areas. Therefore, five (5) interviews were conducted from each school (School 1 and School 2). The process was followed in a challenging manner due to the pandemic. Firstly, most schools as well as parents did not feel comfortable with face- to-face interactions, thus most of the interviews had to be conducted virtually. Secondly, all parents wanted to remain anonymous for privacy reasons which were

respected. And lastly, no parents allowed the researcher to record any interviews, therefore, the researcher was required to write as much as possible during the interview period. However, all interviews were completed successfully, despite the challenges.

### 3.9: Ethical considerations

It is imperative that the observation of ethical protocols was up to standard and applied. Ethical clearance for the present study was applied for at WITS School of Education's research ethics committee, University of the Witwatersrand, as well as permission to conduct research at the two Montessori schools. Permission to conduct surveys and interviews at the school was obtained from the governing bodies within the school. The researcher explained the reason for the research and provided each of the two schools with information regarding the research. Participants of my study has been provided with proof of the researcher's residence as well as an ethical clearance document. Once the research has been completed, the study participants will be provided with the final research, should they have an interest of the project outcome.

Voluntary participation as an ethical procedure was ensured by providing consent forms to the research participants. A second form was provided for the interviews. Due to current circumstances, the consent forms were sent electronically and a signature was sufficient. The researcher's research participation was voluntary, so parents had the freedom to withdraw from the process. The participants were notified that if they were uncomfortable, they would not be obliged to participate further. Pseudonyms were used to ensure and guarantee the anonymity of the parent participants as their names were not indicated on the questionnaires. Moreover, confidentiality was ensured by conducting the interviews remotely.

### 3.10: Demographic information of the respondents

The purpose of the study was to look into the backgrounds of the parents who took part in it. This was deemed necessary in determining whether they were sufficiently representative in terms of demographic characteristics to allow the quantitative results of the study to be generalized. Gender, age, academic qualifications and the duration as parent in Montessori school (in years) is the demographic information which was investigated.

### 3.10.1: Gender of parents

Table 3.4 shows the summary of the gender distribution of parents.

Table 3.3: Gender of parents

| Item | Frequency | Percentage (%) | Cumulative % |
|---|---|---|---|
| Male | 3 | 10.0 | 10.0 |
| Female | 27 | 90.0 | 100.0 |
| **Total** | **30** | **100.0** | |

The results on gender of parents in Table 3.4 shows that 90% of parents were female and 10% of parents who completed the survey were male. The homogenous purposive sampling technique was used to select the participants; this type of sampling is susceptible to being researcher-biased. However, seeing that all schools sampled showed a similar pattern of gender differences in parents of children with disabilities and special needs, the results of this study may be used as generalised information on inclusivity views of parents with disabled children in Montessori schools.

### 3.10.2 : Age of the respondents

In Table 3.5, the age of the parents and the findings are summarized:

Table 3.4: Age of parents in years

| Item | Freq. | Percentage (%) | Cumulative % |
|---|---|---|---|
| Below 30 years | 3 | 10.0 | 10.0 |
| 31- 35 years | 12 | 40.0 | 50.0 |
| 35-40 years | 9 | 30.0 | 80.0 |
| 41-45 years | 5 | 16.0 | 96.6 |
| above 46 years | 1 | 3 | 100.0 |
| **Total** | **30** | **100.0** | |

The results in Table 3.5 show that ages of most parents were between 31-45 years of age, making up 86% of all participants. Those below 30 years made up 10% of the sampled

population, while those above 46 years constituted only 3% of the overall sampled study population.

### 3.10.3: Academic qualifications of parents

In Table 3.6, academic qualifications of the parents' respondents are explored and the findings are presented.

Table 3.5**:** Academic qualifications of parents

| **Item** | **Freq.** | **Percent (%)** | **Cumulative %** |
|---|---|---|---|
| Matric | 7 | 23. | 23.3 |
| Post-matric/degree | 9 | 30.0 | 53.3 |
| Postgraduate | 14 | 46. | 100.0 |
| **Total** | **30** | **100.00** | |

According to the results in Table 3.6, the parents who had post-graduate qualifications made up 46% of the interviewed parents, while 53% of the parents either had matric or post-matric qualifications. These findings show that most parents with disabled children and special needs children who selected the Montessori Method have all completed matric. Almost half of all parents had post-graduate education.

### 3.10.4: Duration as parent in Montessori school

The study also explored the respondents' (parents') duration (in years) in a Montessori school. The findings are summarized in Table 3.7:

Table 3.6: Length of time as parent in Montessori school (in years)

| Item | Freq. | Percentage (%) | Cumulative % |
|---|---|---|---|
| 0-5 years | 21 | 70.0 | 70.0 |
| 6-10 years | 7 | 23.3 | 93.3 |
| 11-14 years | 1 | 3.3 | 96.6 |
| 15 years above | 1 | 3.3 | 100.0 |
| **Total** | **30** | **100.0** | |

To understand how content the parents were with the selected schools for this study, one of the indicators would be duration of the child's stay in the school. This result is depicted in the fourth column. The results in Table 3.7 show that 70% of the respondents had children at the school for five (5) years or less, followed by 23% who had been parents at a school for 6-10 years. A longer stay in the school for a disabled child or a special needs child would correlate with a parent who was satisfied by the school. However, a shorter stay in the school on this data cannot be associated with lack of satisfaction as other factors may influence short recorded years in these schools.

***Profile of parents' participants***

The biographic data for parents in both schools is presented in Table 3.8.

Table 3.7: Profile of parents' participants

| Profile of parents' participants | Description of profiles |
|---|---|
| Parent Participant 1 | 35-year-old female with matric and three (3) years being a parent. |
| Parent Participant 2 | 30-year-old female with an undergraduate education level, as well as an honours and master's degree and five (5) years being a parent. |
| Parent Participant 3 | 35-year-old female with a master's degree and two-and-a-half (2 ½ ) years being a parent. |
| Parent Participant 4 | 35-year-old male with a master's degree and two years being a parent. |
| Parent Participant 5 | 33-year-old female with a diploma and three years being a parent. |
| Parent Participant 6 | 39-year-old female with an honours degree and eight (8) years being a parent. |

| | |
|---|---|
| Parent Participant 7 | 36-year-old female with an honours degree and eight (8) years being a parent. |
| Parent Participant 8 | 41-year-old female with a tertiary degree and eight (8) years being a parent |
| Parent Participant 9 | 33-year-old female with a tertiary degree and two and a half (2 ½) years being a parent. |
| Parent Participant 10 | 32-year-old female with an undergraduate degree and two (2) years being a parent. |

A summary of the themes is presented in Table 3.9.

Table 3.8: Summary of themes

| **Research Objectives** | **Themes** |
|---|---|
| To examine parents' understanding of the Montessori Method. | Problem-solving skills<br>Social skills<br>Independence |
| To establish the extent to which the Montessori Method aids inclusivity. | Education |
| To explore reasons for parents' preference for the Montessori Method for their children. | Inclusion<br>Life skills<br>Sensorial materials<br>Diversity<br>Communication<br>Critical thinking<br>Time management |
| To establish parents' awareness of their respective child/children's need/s when selecting the Montessori Method. | Special needs<br>Disability |

Many components are important in this present study. The Research Paradigm is an approach or framework used to base your research on. In the present study, this component aided the Researcher to achieve detailed findings from the results. The Research Design used in the present study; The Concurrent Triangulation Design was used as the Research used both surveys and Interviews to obtain information. The Research Site entailed two Montessori Schools that the researcher used from two different areas whereby both Questionaries' and Interviews were used for the parents. When using these instruments, it's important to ensure validity and reliability and Trustworthiness which the chapter outlines. And lastly, the Demographic information of the respondents from the quantitative results are displayed.

# CHAPTER FOUR

# FINDINGS AND INTERPRETATION

## 4.1: Introduction

In this chapter, the findings and interpretation of quantitative and qualitative data are presented. Firstly, the quantitative data is presented with descriptive statistics namely frequencies and percentages which helped to ensure generalizations about the larger population. Data was collected about Montessori schools and parents' reasons for selecting the Montessori Method. From the data collected, generalizations were made about the population based on the information that was gathered. The qualitative results generated through thematic analysis are also presented after the quantitative results for each objective.

## 4.2:Questionnaire return rate

Table 3.3 shows the summary of return rate of questionnaires from the respondents reveals that the questionnaires were adequate for the study.

Table 3.9: Questionnaire return rate (n=30)

| Respondents | Questionnaires administered | Questionnaires returned | Return rate (%) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Parents in selected Montessori schools | 30 | 30 | 100% |
| Total | 30 | 30 | 100% |

Table 3.3 shows that all 30 (100%) of questionnaires that were given to participants by the researcher were returned for analysis. The response rate of 100% can be seen in the table above. The questionnaire return rate of 75% and above is acceptable for questionnaires administered personally by the researcher. Since the questionnaires in this study were administered by the researcher to the participants, this high response rate to the instrument administered makes it valid for analysis.

### 4.4: Quantitative results on parents' understanding of the Montessori Method

The study examined parents' understanding of the Montessori Method. Quantitative data from parents was obtained by means of questionnaires which measured this construct. A six-itemed questionnaire interrogated the views of the parents' understanding of the Montessori Method. The surveyed parents rated the level of their agreement with the statement on a scale of 1 to 5, with "1 denoting *strongly disagree*; 2 denoting *disagree*, 3 denoting *neutral (undecided*), 4 Denoting *agree* and finally, 5 denoting *strongly agree".* Their views are summarised in percentage frequencies and means with their standard deviations, as shown in Table 3.10.

Table 3.10: Parents' understanding of the Montessori Method (n=30)

| Item | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | Mean | SD |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| The child has the right to learn, in the Montessori classroom. | 0 (0.0%) | 0 (0.0%) | 1 (3.3%) | 2 (6.7%) | 27 (90%) | 4.86 | 0.43 |
| The environment is well-prepared in the Montessori school. | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 1 (3.3%) | 3 (10%) | 26 (86.7%) | 4.83 | 0.46 |
| In line with the Montessori Method, the children learn by themselves, thus it is self-directed. | 0 (0.0%) | 3 (10.0%) | 0 (0%) | 14 (46.7%) | 13 (43.3%) | 4.23 | 0.89 |
| According to the Montessori Method, children work according to their own pace. | 0 (0.0%) | 0 (0.0%) | 1 (3.3%) | 11 (36.6%) | 18 (60.0%) | 4.56 | 0.56 |
| According to the Montessori method, children choose which materials to play with, thus allowing | 0 (0.0%) | 0 (0.0%) | 2 6.67%) | 15 (50.0%) | 13 (43.3%) | 4.36 | 0.61 |

| | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| them to concentrate and focus. | | | | | | | |
| In the Montessori method, children are able to focus on certain aspects while excluding other aspects. | 1 (3.33%) | 5 (16.6%) | 8 (26.7%) | 5 (16.7%) | 11 (36.7%) | 3.66 | 1.24 |
| **Average understanding of Montessori** | | | | | | **4.42** | **0.94** |

**Key; 5- Strongly agree, 4- agree, 3- neutral, 2- disagree, 1- strongly disagree**

**Source: Survey data (2021)**

For the first item; "The child has the right to learn in the Montessori classroom", one (1) (3,3%) parent responded with a 'neutral' (3) response, two (2) (6.7%) parents responded with an 'agree' (4) response and 27 (90%) parents responded with a 'strongly agree' (5) response. Thus from the responses, it can be concluded that the needs of the learners within the Montessori classroom of learning are met as well as the rights of learners.

For the second item; "The environment is well-prepared in the Montessori school", one (1) (3,3%) parent responded with a 'neutral' (3) response, three (3) (10%) parents responded with a 'agree' (4) response and 26 (86,7%) parents responded with a 'strongly agree' (5) response. From these results, it can be concluded that most parents think that the Montessori environment is well-prepared for their child/children to learn.

For the third item; "In the Montessori method, the children learn by themselves, thus it is self-directed", three (3) (10%) parents responded with 'disagree' (2), 14 (46,7%) parents responded with an 'agree' (4) response, and 13 (43,3%) parents responded with a 'strongly agree' (5) response. Even though 10% of parents disagreed with the Montessori Method being self-directed, 90% of parents agreed and strongly agreed with the Method as being self-directed. It can be concluded that the Montessori Method is self-directed, even though the 10% of parents hold a different opinion. For the fourth item; "In the Montessori Method, children work according to their own pace", one (1) (3,3%) parent responded with a 'neutral' (3) response, 11 (36,6%) parents responded with an 'agree' (4) response, and 18 (60%) parents responded

with a ‘strongly agree’ (5) response. It can thus be concluded that most parents agree that within the Montessori, children work at their own pace. One parent was neutral about it, which means that they did not have an opinion about it.

For the fifth item; “In the Montessori method, children choose which materials to play with, thus allowing them to concentrate and focus”, two (2) (6,67%) parents responded with ‘neutral’ (3), 15 (50%) parents responded with an ‘agree’ (4) response and 13 (43,3%) parents responded with ‘strongly agree’ (5). It can be concluded that most parents think and know that learners can decide which materials they would like to play with, which allows them to concentrate and focus. Two (2) parents were neutral about this item which means that they did not have an opinion about it or perhaps were unsure, but did not disagree with this item.

For the sixth item; “In the Montessori method, children are able to focus on certain aspects while excluding other aspects”, one (1) (3,33%) parents responded with ‘strongly disagree’ (1), five (5) (16,5%) parents responded with ‘disagree’ (2), eight (8) (26,7%) parents responded with ‘neutral’ (3), five (5) (16,7%) parents responded with ‘agree’ (4) and 11 (36,7%) parents responded with ‘strongly agree’ (5). This item entailed a variety of responses. It is however clear that majority of the parents (80,1%) strongly agreed, agreed and were neutral.

The findings in the above table shows that parents’ understanding of Montessori was high. The average mean of 4.42 (SD=0.94) was indicated by parents who participated in the study. Most parents’ knowledge of their children’s rights to play supported this finding. Twenty-nine (29) (96.6%) of the respondents expressed this, while knowledge of the children’s rights to learn was expressed by 29 (96.6%) of the parents. Furthermore, the same number of parents (29) (96.6%) agreed that the school environment was well-prepared for their children and that children worked at their own pace in Montessori schools. In this survey, the lowest mean of 3.66 (SD= 1.24) showed that 80% of the parents knew that their children were able to focus on certain aspects at school, while excluding aspects in Montessori schools.

***Qualitative results***

The interview data findings indicate that parents had varied understandings of the Montessori Method. The qualitative results indicated that most parents understood and interpreted the Montessori Method as a method that includes problem-solving skills, social development, and learner independence. The themes around parents' understanding of the Montessori Method are therefore grouped around problem-solving skills, social skills development and learner independence of learners. These themes are presented below:

***Theme 1: Montessori is about problem-solving skills***

A fundamental component within education is problem solving skills as it is part of a thinking skill, which is a life skill. "A problem is a situation, quantitative or otherwise, that confronts an individual or group of individuals, that requires resolution, and for which the individual sees no apparent or obvious means or path to obtaining a solution" (Krulik, 1987, p.3). Furthermore, Krulik (1987), defines problem-solving skills as "the means by which an individual uses previously acquired knowledge, skills, and understanding to satisfy the demands of an unfamiliar situation. The student must synthesize what he or she has learned, and apply it to a new and different situation." (p. 4) "Most thinking skills programs share the same basic elements: (1) the definition of a problem, (2) the definition of problem-solving, (3) algorithms, (4) heuristics, (5) the relationship between theory and practice, (6) teaching creativity, (7) a knowledge base, and (8) the transfer or the application of conceptual knowledge" (Ellis, 2005, p.13).

From the qualitative results of the present study, most parents reported that one way in which they understood the Montessori Method was that it is focused on problem-solving skills among learners. Parents mentioned that problem-solving skills (which involves repetitive actions) are embedded within the Montessori Method and that it enhanced their children. Furthermore, the participants reported that the Montessori Method was about learners developing fine motor skills. They felt that, considering that the Montessori environment encouraged social interaction, this skill could be achieved successfully.

Some of the verbatim interview excerpts from the parent participants on their understanding of the Montessori Method as an enhancement of problem-solving skills are presented next:

> "*The children can play with an object, a game or participate in an activity more than once, therefore repetitive actions will help my child learn something new with ease*" (Parent participant, 1).

> "*One of the concepts and skills that the Montessori Method entails are fine motor skills. These actions help my child with hand-eye coordination, it improves physical awareness, assists with writing, speaking and drawing and teaches daily life skills*" (Parent participant, 4)

> "*Considering the Montessori is an environment that encourages reading, writing and being creative, this will be more suited for my child to learn and work on these skills. I have noticed slight progress but I know that this will take time*"(Parent participant, 5)

From the interview results above on the Montessori method's problem-solving approach, it can be concluded that in as much as this method is perceived to be a problem-solving one, most learners still need some assistance when it comes to problem-solving during classroom tasks. The researcher argues that, by incorporating activities in the classroom that entail problem-solving skills, learners' thinking skills will be enhanced and they would progress in the classroom. Therefore, the Montessori Method is understood by parents as a practice that involves active learning, thinking and reading, which are fundamental for the development of young learners.

***Theme 2: Montessori is about social skills development***

"Social skills are behaviours that enable individuals to interact influentially and to abstain from undesirable responses. They represent individuals' social and behavioural health success" (Rawles, 2016). "These skills have their roots in cultural and social foundations and include behaviours such as pioneering in the establishment of new communications, requesting help, and making suggestions to help others" (p.13). Slaby and Gaura (2003) define social skills as skills that link to the compatibility of individuals in a social context. In their view, social skills has the potential to create acceptable and valuable interactions with others in a social context

based on societal norms. (p.19). Strayer (1989) contended that social skills include "mutual compatibility between a child, the social environment and peer relationships". The social skills model advocates compatibility, and a child has the "ability and capacity to predict, absorb, and react to signs in a social context" (p.24). These signs include the emotional position of peers behaviours. This process involves "emotional and social growth and specifies the child's or teenager's ability to select appropriate behaviour" (p.27). Likewise, the child would be able to evaluate social relationships, group structures and levels of skill and social ability (p.33).

It is indicated that social skills are developed at childhood but affect an individual's later development in other areas. "A key educational aim of childhood is social skills development, as the level of children's and adults' fulfilment of these skills affects not only their personal and social health, but their educational success too" (Morgan, Hsiao, Dobbins, Brown., & Lyons, 2015; Rawles, 2016). Furthermore, it is argued that, "Many children who have not acquired appropriate social skills develop psychological problems such as unsuccessful communication with peers, inappropriate educational performance, not participating in side activities and isolation, rejection by peers, anxiety, depression, and anger in childhood and throughout life" (Anastasi, 1990, p.27). In turn, Slawmouski and Dann (1996) highlighted that "social knowledge and skill enable children and teenagers to perceive and predict their own and others' behaviours, and set their social interactions" (p.9).

From the qualitative results, most of the parents' participants indicated that the Montessori Method is perceived as one which develops social skills among learners at the early stages of life. From the qualitative results of the present study, most parents mentioned the importance of socialising and how this can enhance effective communication and speech amongst learners. It is clear that social skills can be achieved in the Montessori environment. Some verbatim interview excerpts from the parents' participants on the theme of social skills development, are presented next.

> "*The Montessori teaches a child to be independent, thus my child can learn responsibility, the realization of self-interest is created in the Montessori environment which allows the child to explore and discover various new things and social skills- this helps to encourage my child to step out of a shell and speak freely thus improving communication*." (Parent participant, 2)

"*The teachers encourage learners to talk and engage with other learners and the teachers provide feedback all the time which helps us as parents to keep track and target specific areas*." (Parent participant, 3)

"*The Montessori helps with social skills*." (Parent participant, 5)

"*The Montessori Method entails social interactions and group work activities*." (Parent participant, 7)

"*The dancing class- this helps my child to be free and outgoing thus getting in touch with your physical self*." (Parent participant, 9)

"*The Building blocks help my child the most with cooperation as well as group activities as it encourages communication*." (Parent participant, 6)

"*My child doesn't communicate well thus group work activities help with interacting and communicating*." (Parent participant, 8)

"*Yes. He has developed more of a personality and is more vocal*." (Parent participant, 9)

"*Yes. Playing outside and getting in touch with nature has enabled my child to be less frustrated and to have that 'break' from learning. At home, my child would play outside which has a calming effect*." (Parent participant, 10)

From the qualitative results for this theme of the Montessori Method developing social skill among learners, it is concluded social skills is a fundamental concept in education whereby all learners are required to learn and practice constantly. Being social is all about being vocal, expressing oneself and participating in activities that allow for interaction. Therefore, from the qualitative results, the researcher agrees with the findings that social skills are an important aspect of the Montessori Method.

***Theme 3: Montessori is about independence of learners***

According to Morris, (1993), independence usually is measured according to whether an individual can something on his or her own. We are inclined to evaluate someone's ability to carry out a task without assistance (independence) as a basis "for arranging packages of care and support when someone is unable to undertake these tasks on their own." (p.12). Morris (1993) further contends that "an individual may not be able to do something 'on their own', but they can exercise control over when they do it and who supports them. They may still require support to perform certain actions, but they are able to maintain independence through exerting control over how such support is provided" (p.12).

From the interview with respondents, most parents were of the opinion that independence is exceptionally important for learners to have. The Montessori method thus moulds learners to be independent by giving the learners an opportunity to work independently at their own pace, be patient, become self-directed and explore independently.

The verbatim interview excerpts from parent participants regarding Montessori as a method which is about independence of learners are reported next:

> "*The Montessori environment allows for learners to learn at their own pace therefore my child is able to learn gradually and eventually familiarise herself with a concept. The teachers are also very patient and patience is exactly what my child needs to learn*." (Parent participant, 6)

> "*This method helps my son to be free and choose which materials to play with which is great as he tends to lose focus quite easily when trying to do activities that are long. He constantly changes toys as he gets bored and tired. He is also very active and this environment allows him to explore and try different objects*." (Parent participant, 3)

> "*I was quite impressed by their individual experience as well as progress made. This inspired me to send my child to this school method*." (Parent participant, 1)

> "*I chose this and the Montessori environment as it is less pressurizing and kids can learn at their own pace*." (Parent participant, 2)

"*My child could play around freely and use different objects rapidly considering the attention span of my child is quite low- jumping onto different activities is also quite common with my child*." (Parent participant, 7)

"*It helps my child to feel calm and a bit more relaxed. The environment is structured and tidy thus allowing learners to do various different things which keeps her busy constantly to the point where she forgets about her anxiousness*." (Parent participant, 8)

"*The activities, objects and environment all help him in a positive way and he is able to learn at his own pace with some guidance from teachers*." (Parent participant, 9)

"*The Montessori includes many reading activities and games which will improve reading skills within time. Being creative is a core component that the Montessori promotes, therefore drawing and completing writing tasks will benefit my child within time- becoming more familiar with this will encourage my child to read and write even for a very short while which will improve within time. My child is also quite slow, thus this environment allows all learners to work at their own pace. Slow speech Is also a problem, therefore interacting with bigger kids will help with the development of letters and words*." (Parent participant, 10)

From the qualitative results, it can be concluded from the above responses that the Montessori environment aids learners to be independent as this is a space whereby learners can explore and complete tasks in their own time, however with guidance and some boundaries. The researcher argues that learners should be taught independence from a young age so that they could be moulded into responsible beings.

### 4.5: Quantitative results on extent to which the Montessori Method aids inclusivity (n=30) in both schools

The study examines the extent to which the Montessori Method aids inclusivity.
Quantitative data from parents was obtained through questionnaires which measured this construct. In this regard, a six-itemed- questionnaire interrogated the views of the extent to which this method aids inclusivity. The surveyed parents rated the level of their agreement

with the statement in the scale of 1 to 5, with "1 denoting *strongly disagree*; 2 denoting *disagree*, 3 denoting *neutral (undecided*), 4 denoting *agree* and finally, 5 denoting *strongly agree"*. In table 3.11, percentage frequencies and means with their standard deviations were used to summarise their views.

Table 3.11: Extent to which the Montessori Method aids inclusivity (n=30) in both schools

| Item | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | Mean | SD |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| According to the Montessori Method, the concept of inclusivity is accounted for. | 0 (0.0% | 0 (0.0% | 2 (6.6%) | 13 (43.3%) | 15 (50.0%) | 4.43 | 0.62 |
| According to the Montessori Method, all learner types are included. | 0 (0.0% | 0 (0.0%) | 4 (13.3%) | 5 (16.6%) | 21 (70.0%) | 4.56 | 0.72 |
| According to the Montessori Method, the child benefits from inclusivity. | 0 (0.0%) | 0 (0.0% | 1 (3.3%) | 7 (23.3%) | 22 (73.3%) | 4.7 | 0.53 |
| According to the Montessori Method, information is presented in an inclusive way for all learner types to acquire knowledge. | 0 (0.0%) | 0 (0.0%) | 1 (3.33%) | 8 (26.7%) | 21 (70.0%) | 4.66 | 0.54 |
| According to the Montessori Method, classrooms are structured in an inclusive manner. | 0 (0.0%) | 0 0.0%) | 4 (13.3%) | 10 (33.3%) | 16 (53.3%) | 4.40 | 0.72 |
| According to the Montessori Method, material and objects are inclusive. | 0 (0.0% | 0 (0.0%) | 3 (10.0%) | 9 (30.0%) | 18 (60.0%) | 4.50 | 0.68 |
| **Average extent the school aids inclusivity** | | | | | | **4.5** | **0.64** |

**Key; 5- strongly agree, 4- agree, 3- neutral, 2- disagree, 1- strongly disagree**

**Source: your appendix**

For the first item; "In the Montessori method, the concept of inclusivity is accounted for", two (2) (6,6%) parents responded with 'neutral' (3), 13 (43,3%) parents responded with 'agree' (4) and 15 (50%) parents responded with 'strongly agree' (5). It is thus clear that the concept of inclusivity is taken into account, based on the parents responses despite the two parents who

remained neutral about this item. A ‘neutral’ response is not regarded as a negative answer but it could be positive too.

For the second item; “In the Montessori method, all learner types are included”, four (4) (13,3%) parents responded, ‘neutral’ (3), five (5) (16,6%) parents responded with ‘agree’ (4) and 21 (70%) parents responded with ‘strongly agree’ (5). Most parents agreed that this method entails all learner types.

For the third item, “In the Montessori method, the child benefits from inclusivity”, one (1) (3,33%) parent responded with ‘neutral’ (3), seven (7) (23,3%) parents responded with ‘agree’ (4) and 22 (73,3%) parents responded with ‘strongly agree’ (5). It is thus clear that the concept of inclusivity does benefit children in the classroom.

For the fourth item, “In the Montessori method, information is presented in an inclusive way for all learner types to acquire knowledge”, one (1) (3,33%) parent responded with ‘neutral’ (3), eight (8) (26,7%) parents responded with ‘agree’ (4) and 21 (70%) parents responded with ‘strongly agree’ (5). The Montessori method thus provides information in an inclusive way for all learner types thus all learners can learn and acquire knowledge using this method.

For the fifth item; “In the Montessori method, classrooms are structured in an inclusive manner”, four (4) (13,3%) parents responded with ‘neutral’ (3), 10 (33,3%) parents responded with ‘agree’ (4) and 16 (53,3%) responded with ‘strongly agree’ (5). The structure of the Montessori is thus inclusive as most parents (86,6%) agreed, while 13,3% remained neutral, which is not necessarily a negative answer.

For the sixth item, “In the Montessori method, material and objects are inclusive”, three (3) (10%) parents responded with ‘neutral’ (3), nine (9) (30%) parents responded with ‘agree’ four (4) and 18 (60%) parents responded with ‘strongly agree’ (5). It can be concluded that the materials and objects used are inclusive. The extent to which Montessori method aided inclusivity was very high, at an average mean of 4.5 (SD=0.64). For the Montessori method, parents agreed that; information was presented in an inclusive way for all learner types to acquire knowledge. The mean on this question was 4.66 (SD= 0.54) or n=29 (96.63%). The item of parents’ children benefitting from inclusivity, yielded a mean of 4.7 (0.53) and the item ‘all learner types are included’ yielded a mean of 4.56 (SD=0.72). The survey indicated that

the concept of inclusivity was accounted for n=28 (93.3%) and that the classrooms were structured in an inclusive manner n=26 (86.6%). Moreover, the materials and objects used in Montessori method were inclusive.

**Qualitative results**

The study also explores the extent to which the Montessori Method aids inclusivity. The results indicated that Montessori Method aids inclusivity because of the type of education that it offers learners. Education is an experience whereby the process of giving and receiving instruction takes place systematically. This process occurs in an institution like a school or university. Thanks to the educational system, youth can be integrated into the economic system, via "structural correspondence between its social relations and those of production". In an educational setting, a social relations structure will familiarise the learner to workplace discipline, and also develop their personal behaviour, social class, and self-image, which all are vital components of job requirements.

According to Bowles and Gintis (1976,131), the social relationships of education, the relationships between teachers and learners, learners and learners, and learners and their work, "replicate the hierarchical division of labour" (Bowles and Gintis 1976, p.131).

From the findings, it is clear that all parents possessed an education level. Thus they learnt about the Montessori Method through research, studying or others. In order for them to choose the Montessori method in particular, the concept of inclusion played an important role. In order to know about inclusion and Inclusive practices, having an education and being well learned is vital. The interview excerpts from parents' participants regarding education as theme is reported below:

> "*I self-studied Early Childhood Development (ECD) and the Montessori was a part of my study. Most of my family members have been to a Montessori and I have seen great results and improvements within each family member. I firmly believe in this method as it teaches independence, focuses on Life Skills and teaches daily practical skills which is an integral part.*"(Parent participant, 1)

"*Considering my child was a colic baby, I as a parent was quite frustrated thus I decided to research coping mechanisms to help with a calm and free environment which I could instil within my child. I came across the Montessori Method and incorporated the structure and methods within my home space. I wanted to learn more about this method and so I furthered my studies and completed a Montessori course that entails child development as well as sensory play. I saw how responsive my child was to sensory play as well as the environment and decided to choose this method over and above other traditional schools*." (Parent participant, 2)

"*I have always enjoyed working with and understanding children. I job shadowed at different schools; both Montessori and traditional schools and found the Montessori school to be more attentive*." (Parent participant, 5)

From the qualitative results on the theme of education, it can be concluded from the above responses that Education plays an important role on how people perceive, interpret and observe various situations. The parents' responses is a clear indication that the Montessori Method has been studied, researched about or observed and based on their level of education, they have chosen this method over and above other traditional schools. The concept of Inclusivity has become well-known and discussed in the world today, thus if one is educated, choices will be made around this concept. Therefore, parents have also found that the Montessori method aids for Inclusivity.

### 4.6: Reasons that make parents prefer the Montessori Method in particular for their children

The study examined reasons that make parents prefer the Montessori method in particular for their child/s. Quantitative data from parents was obtained using questionnaires which measured this construct. In this regard, seven-itemed- questionnaire interrogated the reasons that make parents prefer the Montessori Method. The surveyed parents rated the level of their agreement with the statement in the scale of 1 to 5, with "1 denoting *strongly disagree*; 2 denoting *disagree,* 3 denoting *neutral (undecided*), 4 denoting *agree* and finally, 5 *strongly agree"*. Their views were summarised in percentage frequencies and means with their standard deviations, as shown in Table 3.12.

Table 3.12: Reasons that make parents prefer the Montessori Method in particular for their children

| Item | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | Mean | SD |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| The Montessori method helps with cognitive development. | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 6 (20%) | 24 (80%) | 4.8 | 0.4 |
| The Montessori method aids for inclusivity. | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 2 (6.6%) | 8 (26.6%) | 20 (66.6%) | 4.6 | 0.62 |
| The Montessori method have shown results. | 0 (0.0%) | 0 (.0%) | 0 (0.0%) | 6 (20.0%) | 24 (80.0%) | 4.8 | 0.40 |
| The Montessori method promotes collaborative learning. | 0 (0.0%) | 0 (0.0%) | 0 (0.0% | 4 (13.0%) | 26 (86.6%) | 4.86 | 0.34 |
| The Montessori method places emphasis on student inquiry. | 0 (0.0%) | 0 (0.0%) | 0 (0.0%) | 9 (30.0%) | 21 (70.0%) | 4.7 | 0.46 |
| The Montessori method promotes self-paced learning. | 0 (0.0%) | 0 (0.0%) | 0 (0.0%) | 8 (26.7%) | 22 (73.3%) | 4.7 | 0. 44 |
| The Montessori method benefits the learner on all levels; physical, spiritual and emotional development. | 1 (3.3%) | 0 (0%) | 5 (16.7%) | 12 (40.0%) | 12 (40.0%) | 4.1 | 0.91 |
| **Average of parents preferring the Montessori Method** | | | | | | **4.66** | **0.58** |

**Key; 5- strongly agree, 4- agree, 3- neutral, 2- disagree, 1- strongly disagree**

**Source:**

For the first item; “The Montessori method helps with cognitive development”, six (6) (20%) parents responded with ‘agree’, (4) and 24 (80%) parents responded with ‘strongly agree’ (5). This is clear that the Montessori method benefits learners cognitively.

For the second item; “The Montessori method aids for inclusivity”, two (2) (6,6%) parents responded with ‘neutral’ (3), eight (8) (26,6%) parents responded with ‘agree’ (4) and 20

(66,6%) parents responded with ‘strongly agree’ (5). This method does aid for inclusivity and is inclusive.

For the third item, “The Montessori method have shown results”, six (6) (20%) parents responded with ‘agree’ (4) and 24 (80%) parents responded with ‘strongly agree’ (5). Parents have seen results with their children using the Montessori Method.
For the fourth item, “The Montessori method promotes collaborative learning”, four 4 (13%) parents responded with ‘agree’ (4) and 26 (86,6%) parents responded with ‘strongly agree’ (5). Thus parents were well aware that this method promotes collaborative learning.

For the fifth item, “The Montessori method places emphasis on student inquiry”, nine (9) (30%) parents responded with ‘agree’ (4) and 21 (70%) parents responded with ‘strongly agree’ (5). Active learning is thus emphasised on in the Montessori method.

For the sixth item, “The Montessori method promotes self-paced learning”, eight (8) (26,7%) parents responded with ‘agree’ (4) and 22 (73,3%) parents responded with ‘strongly agree’ (5). It can thus be concluded that learners can learn at their own pace in the Montessori environment. For the seventh item, “The Montessori method benefits the learner on all levels; physical, spiritual, and emotional development”, one (1) (3,3%) parent responded with ‘strongly disagree’ (1), five (5) (16,7%) parents responded with ‘neutral’ (3), 12 (40%) parents responded with ‘agree’, four (4) and 12 (40%) parents responded with ‘strongly agree’ (5).

These answers depend on the parents and how they felt their learners benefitted.
Eighty percent (80%) of the parents agreed and strongly agreed that this method, apart for the educational benefit, also advanced their child on all other levels.

Most of the parents preferred the Montessori Method, this is seen by the high average mean of 4.6 (SD=0.58). In this instrument, the reasons for preferring the Montessori Method included that it helped with children’s cognitive development as indicated by n=30 (100%) of the participants. Again, all (100%) of the participants preferred Montessori Method since they saw positive results. They felt that the method promoted collaborative learning, student inquiry, and self-learning. Only 80% of the parents preferred the Montessori Method for the physical, spiritual and emotional development of their children. In terms of children’s holistic

development, about 16% of the parents remained neutral, while three percent (3%) did not perceive it as a driving factor for preferring Montessori Method.

***Qualitative results***

The qualitative interview data findings indicate that parents selected the Montessori Method in particular due to many reasons that will explored next. The qualitative results indicated that parents preferred this method due to its element of life skills, sensorial material, diversity, inclusion, emotional intelligence, communication, critical thinking and time management.

***Theme 1: Montessori Method enhances life skills***

Life skills are defined by The World Health Organization (1994) "as the abilities for adaptive and positive behaviour that enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life" (p.24). "Life skills takes into account psychosocial competencies and interpersonal skills that help learners take right decisions, solve problems, think critically and creatively, communicate effectively, build healthy relationships, empathize with others, and cope with managing their lives in a healthy and productive manner" (WHO, 1994, p.19).

The UNICEF, UNESCO and WHO are world bodies that promote these core life skills: "self-awareness, critical thinking, creative thinking, decision-making, problem-solving, effective communication, interpersonal relationship, empathy, coping with stress and coping with emotion". (WHO, 1994). These life skills are crucial and should be implemented within schools from a young age. Life skills can be classified into three categories: thinking, social and emotional, which are discussed as themes in detail next.

From the findings, most parents commented on the importance of learning and practicing life skills in the school environment as well as outside the environment (at home). The Montessori Method teaches life skills as a core component that should be learnt from a young age.

Interview excerpts from parent participants regarding the Montessori Method which is about Life skills being learnt are reported next:

"*I firmly believe in this method as it teaches independence, focuses on Life Skills and teaches daily practice skills which is an integral part*". (Parent participant, 1)

"*My child also has the opportunity to learn everyday life skills that can be used at home- the repetitive actions aid in a faster learning process*" (Parent participant 6)

"*It teachers learners to think outside the box."* (Parent participant 4)

"*Yes. Life Skills are taught, my child has developed self-confidence and independence and she is a bit more social*." (Parent participant 5)

"*Practical Life Skills like tying shoe laces or using keys to open a door. These are excellent skills to learn at the beginning phase as it initially creates a sense of independence*." (Parent participant 10)

From the qualitative results, it can be concluded that some parents have selected the Montessori Method due to its life skills component that learners acquire in this environment. These skills that are taught also to benefit learners outside the school environment, allowing learners to think outside the box and become responsible. Life skills is one of the core components within the education system. These skills are necessary to perform and participate in everyday life. The responses above can all be regarded as life skills. Life Skills takes effective communication and thinking critically into account. It pays close attention to learners in school and can be regarded as a fundamental life skill. From the results, life skills teaches independence, responsibility, creativity and basic day to day skills that moulds an individual from a young age.

***Theme 2: The Montessori classroom offers sensorial material***

One of the core components within the Montessori Method is the device used to educate the senses known as 'sensorial materials'. St. Nicholas (1970) pointed out that the mind needs to be taught the ability to "discriminate and appreciate". Activity is the solution to this type of education, thus Montessori sensorial materials play a vital role (p.14). The process is described as follows: "the child could see with his hands. By first using materials that gave strongly contrasting sensations and then grading various series, the child learned to contrast,

differentiate, and distinguish different sense impressions, and then to categorise them. The child thus began to become conscious of his environment" (St. Nicholas, 1970). Sensorial materials, that include senses of physical and visual, have been introduced and adapted by Montessori into "specifically formed equipment" (Montessori, 1914).

From the qualitative results from parents, it is clear that the Montessori Method focuses on sensorial materials as the main component of the method. Sensorial materials encourage learners to learn and solve various problems and gain skills at the same time. Verbatim interview excerpts from the parent participants regarding Montessori as a method that includes life skills is reported next.

> "*I saw how responsive my child was to the sensory play as well as the environment and decided to choose this method over and above other traditional schools*." (Parent participant 2)

From the qualitative results, it can be concluded that sensorial materials are the most important concept of the Montessori Method. Sensory play aids learners to learn various skills and gradually improve on these skills. Parents could see how useful sensory play is and how beneficial it is to their child/children's development. Sensorial materials assist with achieving responses from the learner as it attracts learners through curiosity. It also enables learners to venture through exploration and motivates them to solve problems and be creative. There are many advantages of sensory play: It supports development, encourages thinking (thus building new connections within the brain) and involves activities that entail thinking and finding solutions.

***Theme 3: Montessori is a method for diversity***

According to Wellner (2000), diversity refers to "a multitude of individual differences and similarities that exist among people. Diversity can encompass many different human characteristics such as race, age, creed, national origin, religion, ethnicity, sexual orientation" (p.3). Furthermore, Gardenswartz and Rowe (1994) described the concept of diversity as having many layers like an onion and each time layers are peeled off, the core gets revealed. Four layers of diversity are present; "organizational dimensions, external dimensions, internal dimensions, and personality" (p.33)

According to Gardenswartz & Rowe, (1994, p.5), the organisational dimension represents the most external layer and includes features such as "management status, union affiliation, work location, seniority, divisional department, work content/field, and functional level classification". "The diversity characteristics related to this layer are items under the control of the organisation in which one works" (p.5). "The people can influence this layer in a limited capacity, because control rests with the organization in which a person works. The next layer is the external dimensions." (Gardenswartz & Rowe, 1994, p.5).

According to Gardenswartz & Rowe (1994, p.5), "the external dimension is represented by those features that concern the life choices of an individual". The individual maintains a higher level of control over these features than over features within an organisational dimension. "The characteristics in this layer are personal habits, recreational habits, religion, educational background, work experience, appearance, status, marital status, geographic location, and income. Meanwhile, the layer where an individual exercises the least amount of control is the internal dimensions." (Gardenswartz & Rowe, 1994, p.5).

Gardenswartz & Rowe (1994, p.5) further explains that an individual lacks control over these features in the internal dimension of diversity. "These characteristics are assigned at birth, such as age, race, ethnicity, gender, and physical ability. Often these characteristics are the sources of prejudice and discrimination. At the core of the Four Layers of Diversity Model is personality" (Gardenswartz & Rowe, 1994, p.5).

From the qualitative results, the parents reported that the Montessori Method entails diversity. This means that both abled and disabled learners are included in the Montessori environment. Parents also observed that all learners in terms of race and age are included as well. Therefore, diversity is one of the reasons that make parents prefer this method. In a diverse environment learners are allowed to treat everyone equally and to not differentiate. Having this healthy mindset is the way forward. The researcher believes that many reasons like the four layers determines what diversity is. Most importantly, diversity encompasses respect, equality and acceptance. If all individuals can maintain these qualities, then the first three layers would shape their perceptions in a positive way, thus leading to diversity. The next verbatim interview excerpts from parent participants present their views on the Montessori Method and diversity:

> "*I loved the different way and method of teaching and the diversity*" (Parent participant 4)

> "*All children can learn from this environment and method-learners that are struggling and are physically different as well as those that are abled. There is lots of Diversity*." (Parent participant 9)

From the qualitative results, it can be concluded that parents have chosen the Montessori Method due to its diversity element. This theme is important to consider as it prepares a child for the future. Moulding a child with an equal and diverse mindset will allow respect and acceptance between those who are different, be it physically or mentally. Thus based on the parents' responses, it is also clear that parents have observed the diversity aspect in the Montessori Method. The parents have seen that all races are included and that learners of different ages are present in the environment, The parents have commented on those who are abled and disabled being in the same classroom as well as on the structure that accommodates both abled and disabled individuals. Therefore, there is no unequal treatment and differentiation in the Montessori environment.

***Theme 4: Montessori Method aids inclusivity***

According to Peter, 1999, inclusion can be defined as "Including disabled learners with non-disabled learners in every aspect of education, from the same classrooms to the same social activities and support groups. It is a practice with its own jargon, instructional practices and legal requirements." (p.15). Moreover, "disabilities, a phenomenon that encompasses stereotypes, myths, negative attitudes, and inappropriate behaviours, are a major barrier to the successful education and integration of children" (p.15).

According to The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, "Inclusion is seen as a process of addressing and responding to the diversity of needs of all learners through increasing participation in learning, cultures and communities, and reducing exclusion within and from education. It involves changes and modifications in content, approaches, structures and strategies, with a common vision which covers all children of the appropriate age range and a conviction that it is the responsibility of the regular system to educate all children." (UNESCO 2005, p.13)

From the qualitative findings, parents have noticed inclusion in the Montessori Method and observed that the structure of this environment is inclusive. According to the interview

excerpts, parents have chosen the Montessori Method due to the concept of inclusivity. All learner types are included, both abled and disabled learners, learners with different cultures, religions, backgrounds and races, and learners of all ages. The structure of the environment is inclusive. It is thus clear from the responses that all learners are taken into consideration and are accommodated and accounted for. The verbatim interview excerpts from parent participants regarding the Montessori Method and inclusivity are reported next:

"*I chose the Montessori school as it has a playful environment and includes learners of all ages so the younger learners like my child can learn from the elder learners especially with speech*" (Parent participant 3)

"*This particular school and I'm sure all Montessori schools entail diversity in terms of race, religion and culture. The school is also structured in a way that all individuals can gain access to all facilities- the school is flattened like for a wheelchair learner*." (Parent participant 1)

"*Yes most definitely. From my observations done in the past, including this Montessori, all types of learners are included, including those are so called different from others. The Montessori also ensures that every individual is accounted and accommodated for*." (Parent participant 4)

"*Yes. I have seen all learner types- both abled and disabled in various Montessori Schools when I did my job shadowing at Montessori Schools and was so impressed. There are a few learners who are special too and this method accommodated them and target their specific needs*." (Parent participant 5)

"*Definitely. Teachers show empathy to all learner types which is so refreshing. Both abled and learners and special need learners are included as well as those that have a different background*." (Parent participant 6)

"*This method caters for every child. I am so amazed with how the method is adapted and flexible with both learners that have special needs and those that done- the results and improvements speaks for themselves*." (Parent participant 7)

Participant 10 said:

"*Yes, it aids for all individuals which is wonderful. My child isn't like other kids but I have seen a slight improvement which makes me happy. It caters for those that are different and those that have different cultures and religions*." (Parent participant 10)

From the qualitative results, it can be concluded that inclusion is an act of including all individuals, regardless of the special needs or disabilities which they may have. It is about society reuniting as one and standing against any prejudice acts like discrimination. Within the education system, it is imperative to include those with special needs and disabilities into mainstream schools so that a segregated mindset, disrespect of those who are different and discrimination do not continue in future generations.

***Theme 5: Montessori Method enhances emotional intelligence***

Emotions are categorised under life skills while emotional intelligence can be defined as "the capacity to reason about emotions, and of emotions to enhance thinking. It includes the abilities to accurately perceive emotions, to access and generate emotions so as to assist thought, to understand emotions and emotional knowledge, and to reflectively regulate emotions so as to promote emotional and intellectual growth" (Mayer, Salovey & Caruso, 2004, p. 197).

"Emotional intelligence refers to an ability to recognize the meanings of emotion and their relationships, and to reason and problem-solve on the basis of them. Emotional intelligence is involved in the capacity to perceive emotions, assimilate emotion-related feelings, understand the information of those emotions, and manage them" (Mayer, Caruso & Salovey, 1999, p. 267).

According to Mayer and Salovey, 2016, an emotional intelligence model describes different areas of emotional intelligence. EI has the abilities to: "accurately perceive emotions in oneself and others, use emotions to facilitate thinking, understand emotional meanings, and manage emotions" (p.268). Psychological states like emotions happen due to neurophysiological changes that occur. As humans we all have the ability and capacity to have different emotions due to a stimulus. Expressing emotions are exceptionally important and can be beneficial when communicating to others. Emotional intelligence is having the knowledge to understand, perceive, handle and use emotions. It is the capacity to respond to emotions to overcome certain situations and defuse conflict.

According to the qualitative findings, an improvement of learners' emotions and handling emotions has been noted amongst learners. This is due to learners mixing with others, taking responsibility for their actions and having a sense of independency. The verbatim interview excerpts from parent participants regarding the Montessori Method and emotional intelligence are reported next:

> "*Yes, my child has developed great friendships with others and she wasn't quite social before so I am so happy about thus. She has also developed basic skills which can be used as home. I get help with daily chores at home which is a good start. And she handles emotions a bit better*." (Parent participant 6)

> "*Yes, socially and emotionally*." (Parent participant 8)

From the qualitative results, it can be concluded that the Montessori Method plays an important role in the development of emotions, which play a significant role in how a learner behaves in the classroom. It is vital to know how to accept, treat and handle various emotions so that learning can take place actively. It is clear that the Montessori Method entails management of emotions in the correct way.

***Theme 6: Montessori Method enhances Communication***

Communication is a problem-solving skill whereby a problem is stated clearly. Listening to learners' opinions may be helpful and coordinating with others is beneficial. The sender and the receiver are both involved with the communication process. Signals are exchanged between interlocutors. These signals could take place visually, verbally, in a gestural manner or graphically. In essence, communicating entails using the eyes, voice or body movement. "There is always a process in which someone initiates a meaning intent that is passed to the receiver, regardless of how it is done" (Giffin & Patten, 1976. p.1).

Daniel (2016) asserts that "it is when feedback, which involves the receiver responding to the signal by initiating another circle of meaning exchange, has been sent to the sender (source) that the communication process has gone full circle and become complete" (p.77).

Giffin & Patten (1976) further contends "that communication is the process of creating meaning as well as ascribing it. It is the exchange of ideas and interaction among group

members" (p.1). "Communication is also seen as a means of connecting people or places. It is also regarded as an important key function of management because an organization cannot operate without communication between levels, departments and employees" (*Online Business Dictionary*, 2010; Okenimpkpe, 2010). Communication is a fundamental tool used between individuals.

According to the qualitative finding of the present study, it can be concluded that, communication is an effective and progressive tool within the Montessori environment. Parents can clearly see the improvement of learners communicating in and out of school. The verbatim interview excerpts from parents' participants regarding the Montessori Method and communication are reported below:

> "*The counting blocks- this encourages my child to speak when counting*." (Parent participant 3)

> "*Firstly, the Montessori creates less pressure amongst learners and considering my daughters special need, pressure is the last thing which she needs, instead she acquires time, patience and cooperation which she gets from the Montessori teachers, learners and structure. Secondly, the Montessori provides parents with detailed reports regarding their progress based on their individual needs, this helps parents to be observant when at home and try to work on certain areas to improve. The method is very much individual focused which I am so happy about. And lastly, the Montessori provides and teaches techniques and skills which can be done at home like cleaning. These are basic life skills that should be taught at a beginning level*." (Parent participant 10)

From the qualitative results above, it can be concluded that communication plays a powerful role in learners' development. The Montessori Method encourages communication amongst learners by including group work activities and by having learners of different ages in the school, interacting with one another. This encourages speech and communication and learning for the younger individuals.

***Theme 7: Montessori Method enhances critical thinking***

According to Dewey, (1910; 1933), critical thinking is an "active, persistent and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it, and the further conclusions to which it tends" (1910, p. 6 & 1933, p. 9).

Critical thinking within an educational context is a "programmatic definition" (Scheffler 1960: 19). "It expresses a practical program for achieving an educational goal. For this purpose, a one-sentence formulaic definition is much less useful than articulation of a critical thinking process, with criteria and standards for the kinds of thinking that the process may involve. The real educational goal is recognition, adoption and implementation by learners of those criteria and standards. That adoption and implementation in turn consists in acquiring the knowledge, abilities and dispositions of a critical thinker" (p.19). According to Facione (2011), critical thinking is a "purposeful, reflective judgment which manifests itself in reasoned consideration of evidence, context, methods, standards, and conceptualizations in deciding what to believe or what to do" (p.22).

From the interview results, most parents were of the opinion that critical thinking is at the forefront of learning as it allows learners to think and solve problems in a methodical and efficient way. The qualitative findings present the different activities and games that allow for critical thinking to occur. The verbatim interview excerpts from parents' participants regarding the Montessori Method and critical thinking are reported below:

> "*Flash cards helps my child with vocabulary, language skills and communication skills. The memory game helps with focus, concentration and recognition*." (Parent participant 1)

> "*Using letter magnets have helped recognize and visualize. The blocks have helped her with counting*." (Parent participant 6)

> "*Wooden shape puzzles- wooden toys help my child connect with nature thus decreasing anxiety. Classification card also help with anxiety as it takes her mind off things and allows her to concentrate on what is being presented on the card. This game is fantastic for memory*." (Parent participant 8)

"*Pouring and scooping sand- he loves to do this and this helps him focus on the process for a bit. I have noticed that he has been doing this activity for longer periods which is a great improvement*." (Parent participant 9)

"*Flash cards help as these are colourful and contain different words thus making learning fun and exciting*." (Parent participant 10)

From the qualitative results above, it can be concluded that activities, games and lessons that involve critical thinking is imperative in the education system. Wooden blocks or flash cards for an example allow learners to think, comprehend and reach a conclusion. Observation also an important critical thinking concept. This is a common concept in the Montessori classroom and one that is filled with activities, so learners are already interested and encouraged to explore and observe. The researcher believes that critical Thinking is vital in the classroom for learners to self-regulate, interpret, analyse and be open-minded. These reasons are imperative for learners to learn and practice. It is apparent that parents have selected the Montessori Method due to its active element of critical thinking that enhances the classroom environment.

***Theme 8: The Montessori Method enhances time-management***

Time-management can be defined as: "the process of skilfully applying time to finish and perfect a specific activity within time constraint" (Harris, 2008, p.22). According to the qualitative findings, it is clear that time management is an important process whereby the process is planned and control is used on certain activities. Time-management is a fundamental tool to grasp at a young age so that learners can learn responsibility for their actions and be mindful of what needs to be done within a certain time frame.

According to the interview excerpts, parents reported that time-management is crucial in the Montessori environment, as it allows learners to be free (within boundaries) and to work favourably. The method is self-paced and allows them to repeat the actions required to grasp concepts and learn gradually. The verbatim interview excerpts from parent participants regarding the Montessori Method and time management are reported next:

"*The Montessori environment is quite free with boundaries. Children are able to explore and use different objects to play with. I think the repetition of my child playing with a*

*certain toy or completing the same activity until she masters it has helped her completely learn something and grasp as concept. Considering she is a slow learner, repetition helps and improves her memory*." (Parent participant 4)

"*My daughter is very creative therefore the activities help her with being creative. The method is self-paced which allows my child to learn and grasp concepts gradually and the teachers are observant and assist when help is needed*." (Parent participant 5)

From the qualitative results, the conclusion is that parents appreciate time management in the Montessori Method. Learners are free to explore and learn from the environment with guidance and observations by teachers. The Montessori Method also allows learners who are struggling to complete tasks repeatedly until they master it.

### 4.7: Parents' awareness of their child/children's need/s when selecting the Montessori Method

The study examines parents' awareness of their child/children's need/s when selecting the Montessori Method. Quantitative data from parents was obtained through questionnaires which measured this construct. In this regard, a six-itemed questionnaire interrogated whether parents were aware of their child/children's need/s when selecting this method. The surveyed parents rated the their agreement level with the statement on the scale of 1 to 5, with "1 denoting *strongly disagree*; 2 denoting *disagree*, 3 denoting *neutral (undecided*), 4 denoting *agree* and finally, 5 denoting *strongly agree".* The respondents' views were summarised in percentage frequencies and means with their standard deviations, as shown in Table 3.13.

Table 3.13: Parents' awareness of their respective child/children's need/s when selecting the Montessori Method

| Item | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | Mean | SD |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| The Montessori method benefits my child in relation to his/her special needs and/or disabilities. | 0 (0.0%) | 0 (0.0%) | 4 (13.3%) | 6 (20.0%) | 20 (66.6%) | 4.5 | 0 .73 |

| | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| The Montessori Method emphasises on the senses that helps my child. | 0 (0.0%) | 0 (0.0%) | 1 (3.3%) | 4 (13.3% | 25 (83.3%) | 4.8 | 0.48 |
| The Montessori Method is more beneficial in comparison to other traditional schools. | 0 (0.0%) | 0 (0.0%) | 2 (6.6%) | 6 (20.0%) | 22 (73.3%) | 4.67 | 0.60 |
| The Montessori Method is my first choice for my child. | 0 (0.0% | 0 (0.0%) | 2 (6.6%) | 4 (13.3%) | 24 (80.0%) | 4.73 | 0.58 |
| The Montessori Method is my second choice for my child. | 11 (36.7%) | 8 (26.6%) | 7 23.3%) | 2 (6.6%) | 2 (6.6%) | 2.2 | 1.48 |
| The Montessori Method has improved my child's grades. | 2 (6.6%) | 0 (0.0%) | 9 (30.0%) | 8 (26.6%) | 11 (36.7%) | 3.86 | 1.10 |
| **Average understanding of child's needs when selecting school** | | | | | | **3.54** | **1.87** |

**Key; 5- strongly agree, 4- agree, 3- neutral, 2- disagree, 1- strongly disagree**

**Source:**

For the first item; "The Montessori method benefits my child in relation to his/her special needs and/or disabilities", four (4) (13,3%) parents responded with 'neutral' (3), six (6) (20%) parents responded with 'agree' (4) and 20 (66,6%) parents responded with 'strongly agree' (5). Even though 13,3% parents indicated a neutral answer, 86,6% parents agreed and strong agreed that the Montessori Method benefitted their child/children in relation to their special needs and/or disabilities.

For the second item; "The Montessori method emphasizes on the senses that helps my child", one (1) (3,3%) parent responded with 'neutral' (3), four (4) (13,3%) parents responded with 'agree' (4) and 25 (83,3%) parents responded with 'strongly agree' (5). This clearly indicates that the Montessori Method focuses on sensorial materials, which are helpful to learners.

For the third item, "The Montessori method is more beneficial in comparison to other traditional schools", two (2) (6,6%) parents responded with 'neutral' (3), six (6) (20%) parents

responded with ‘agree’ (4), and 22 (73,3%) parents responded with ‘strongly agree’ (5). Thus it can be concluded that parents felt that the Montessori Method benefitted their child/children in a better way than any traditional school would.

For the fourth item, “The Montessori method is my first choice for my child”, two (2) (6,6%) parents responded with ‘neutral’ (3), while four (4) (13,3%) parents responded with ‘agree’ (4) and 24 (80%) parents responded with ‘strongly agree’ (5). Thus, 93,3% would select the Montessori method over and above other schools.

For the fifth item, “The Montessori method is my second choice for my child”, 11 (36,7%) parents responded with ‘strongly disagree’ (1), while eight (8) (26,6%) parents responded with ‘disagree’ (2), seven (7) (23,3%) parents responded with ‘neutral’ (3), two (2) (6,6%) parents responded with ‘agree’ (4) and two (2) (6,6%) parents responded with ‘strongly agree’ (5). This item entailed a variety of answers from parents. Sixty-three percent (63,6%) strongly disagreed that they would select the Montessori Method as their second choice. This means that they would choose the Montessori Method first, over and above any other traditional schools.

For the sixth item, “The Montessori Method has improved my child’s grades”, two (2) (6,6%) parents responded with ‘strongly disagree’ (1), nine (9) (30%) parents responded with ‘neutral’ (3), 8 (26,6%) parents responded with ‘agree’ (4) and 11 (36,7%) parents responded with ‘strongly agree’ (5). Sixty-three percent (63,3%) parents strongly agreed that their child/children’s grades have improved with this method. However, 30% parents remained neutral about seeing an improvement with their child’s grades.

Most parents were aware of their children’s needs when selecting the Montessori Method, as indicated by high mean average of 3.54 (SD=1.87). This wide standard deviation shows that the mean had a wide range.

In this instrument, most parents 28 (93.3%) were aware of their children’s needs and had selected the Montessori Method as their first choice. However, 19 (63%) of those parents who were aware of their children’s’ needs would not have selected the Montessori Method as their second choice. It is thus clear that 63% of those parents would select Montessori as their first

choice immediately. The findings display a clear representation of the Montessori Method as the only choice for the child. There is thus no competitive method for their child. The reliability test or internal consistency of this instrument was 0.59, which is acceptable.

Twenty-nine parents (29) (96.6%) (n=29) stated that they were aware of their children's special needs. They selected the Montessori Method as it emphasises sensorial learning that helped their children. Twenty-eight parents (28) (93.3%) selected the Montessori Method as it was more beneficial to children's needs than other schools, 26 parents (86.6%) selected the Montessori method as it benefitted their children in relation to their special needs and/or disabilities. From the participants, (63%) n=19 parents noted that Montessori method has improved their children's grades, while 30% of the parents did not notice any difference in their children's grades, and 6% strongly disagreed that there was any improvement in children's grades when using the Montessori Method. Perhaps for these parents other benefits were offered in Montessori that were more important to their special needs children than grades, for an example; social skills, reading and writing.

***Qualitative results***

Finally, the study explored the parents' awareness of their respective child/children need/s when selecting the Montessori Method. From qualitative results, it was reported that the themes on parents' awareness included special needs and disability. The themes are discussed and presented as follows:

***Theme 1: Special Needs***

Within special education, the term 'special', "refers to an individual's undesirable characteristic or way of functioning in relation to an end considered as crucial (Wilson, 2002, p. 62–3)". Thus, within the context of special education 'special needs' is the "ability or activity that is viewed as important or even necessary for people. For example, learners are considered to have a need to learn to read and write. Thus, if an individual learner does not learn to read and write with the help of ordinary teaching methods, in an ordinary manner and pace, he or she is seen to have a *special* need to learn to read and write. And when someone is said to have a *special* need, it is implied that his or her need is unusual and involves an aim of special importance." (Wilson, 2002, 63–4). Therefore, in this study, the term "special needs learners" refers to individuals who are special, and who needs attention to help them improve their

targeted needs. It is important to not isolate or exclude them but rather work on their 'need' so that they can become better versions of themselves. From the qualitative findings, it is clear that parents are aware of their child/s need/s when selecting the Montessori Method. The verbatim interview excerpts from parents' participants regarding the Montessori Method and special needs are reported next:

"*My child takes long to grasp and learn new concepts*." (Parent participant, 1)

"*My child's special need is frustration and the difficulty to communicate*" (Parent participant, 2)

"*My child has a speech problem-slow with speaking*" (Parent participant, 3)

"*My daughter is special as she is a slow learner and struggles to learn*" (Parent participant, 6)

Participant 7 stated:

"*My child has early signs of Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD)"* (Parent participant, 7)

"*My child suffers from anxiety*" (Parent participant, 8)

"*My son does have some learning barriers. He lacks the ability to focus*" (Parent participant, 9)

From these responses, it is clear that in School One and School Two, learners within Montessori have special needs and that parents have an awareness of the special needs of their children. Thus, special importance is needed for these learners. This is also a clear indication that learners with special needs are included in the Montessori Method.

***Theme 2: Disability***

The World Health Organization as well as the World Bank, assert that "Disability is part of the human condition. Everyone is likely to experience it, either permanently or temporarily, at some point in their life" (WHO & World Bank, 2011, p.3). "People with disabilities are diverse and not defined by their disability" (AL Ju'beh, 2015, p.14; WHO & World Bank, 2011, p.7).

While there are many definitions for the concept disability (Mitra, 2006, p.236), it appears in different forms, either visible or invisible. “Its onset may be at birth, during childhood, or during adult years” (p.3). Defining this concept is challenging because it is “complex, dynamic, multidimensional and contested” (WHO & World Bank, 2011, p.3).

According to the ‘UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities’ (UNCRPD), “disability is an evolving concept” (UNCRPD, 2006, p.1). The UNCRPD defines disability as “persons with disabilities include those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others” (UNCRPD, 2006, P.4).

This definition displays a different understanding of the concept (Schulze, 2010, p.27). However, “by defining disability as an interaction, makes clear that disability is not an attribute of the person” (WHO & World Bank, 2011, p.5). “An impairment on its own would not lead to disability should there be a completely inclusive and comprehensively accessible environment” (Al Ju’beh, 2015, p.13), which entails and includes the importance of addressing certain barriers like prejudices, stereotypes as well as other “paternalistic and patronising treatment” (Schulze, 2010, p.27).

From the qualitative findings, it is reported that most parents were aware of disability of their children when selecting the Montessori Method. The verbatim interview excerpts from parent participants regarding the Montessori Method and disability are reported next:

> “*An Intellectual Disability- My child struggles with learning new concepts and It takes a long time to learn something new*” (Parent participant, 4)

> “*My child is dyslexic*” (Parent participant, 10)

Disability is a fundamental concept to consider when sending your child to school. From the parents’ responses above, it is clear that the Montessori Method benefits learners with a disability. Parents are thus aware of their respective child/children’s need/s when selecting the Montessori Method. It is important for parents to select a method that is inclusive if their child has a disability. All learners, both abled and disabled, should be allowed to learn in the same

environment and treated equally. There should not be any differentiation, in order to determine the child's growth and mindset for the future.

In conclusion, the findings and interpretations of quantitative and qualitative data are presented; questionnaires and the response rate of 100%. The results have been categorized according to the objectives outlined in the study. The Quantitative Results from the first objective; 'Parents understanding of the Montessori Method', displays that parents have a good understanding of the Montessori Method. The qualitative Results from the first objective displays that parents showed various understandings of the Montessori Method such as: problem -solving skills, social development and Independence. Therefore, parents do understand this particular method but in different ways.

The Quantitative Results from the second objective; 'Extent to which the Montessori Method aids Inclusivity', displays that parents do take the concept of Inclusivity into account, most parents agree that the Montessori entails all learner types, the concept of Inclusivity does positively impact the children in the classroom, all learner types can acquire knowledge using this method, the structure of this method is inclusive and materials and objects used are inclusive. The Qualitative Results from the second objective displays that all parents have a certain level of education thus they have some knowledge of the Montessori Method and could therefore agree that the concept of Inclusion is taken into account in this method.

The Quantitative Results from the third objective; 'Reasons that make parents prefer the Montessori Method in particular for their children', displays that most parents do prefer this method. The Qualitative results display the parents reasoning for the preferable method such as: Life skills enhancement, sensorial material, diversity, inclusion, emotional intelligence, communication, critical thinking and time management. Therefore, parents display positivity with their reasons.

The Quantitative Results from the fourth objective; 'Parents awareness of their child/ children's need/s when selecting the Montessori Method', displays that most parents are in fact well-aware of their child/children's needs when selecting this method. The Qualitative Results from the fourth objective displays that parents are aware of both special needs and disability regarding their child/children. Therefore, parents are actively involved with their respective child/children's needs.

The quantitative and qualitative results display a positive outlook towards both the Montessori Method and Inclusion.

# CHAPTER FIVE

# DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

## 5.1: Introduction

In this chapter, the discussion, conclusion and recommendations from the findings are presented below. The findings are discussed on the basis of the literature review and the theoretical framework of the study, in line with the study aims. The chapter begins with a brief summary of results for quantitative and qualitative data per objective. Thereafter, the limitations of the study, recommendations and suggestions for future research are presented.

## 5.2: Summary of results

### 5.2.1: Parents understanding of the Montessori Method

The study examined parents' understanding of the Montessori Method. From the quantitative findings, it was reported that parents' understanding of the Montessori method was generally positive and high. Furthermore, this was supported and expressed by parents who agreed that their child/children have the right to learn in a Montessori environment. These parents understand that the Montessori Method is well-prepared, self-directed learning, where learners learn independently, and choose the materials they play with. Some parents understand that children can focus on certain objects/aspects while excluding other objects/aspects. Therefore, from the quantitative results, parents have a good comprehension of the Montessori Method.

For the qualitative findings, parents' understanding of the Montessori Method varied and they therefore interpreted it as comprising of problem-solving skills, independence and a social development method. This is a clear indication that parents' knowledge about the Montessori method is vast enough to allow then to make decisions about their child's schooling career and its benefits. Problem-solving skills, independence and social development are core reasons for these parents to send their child/children to a school that covers these important skills.

### 5.2.2: Extent to which the Montessori Method aids inclusivity

The study also examined the extent to which the Montessori Method aids inclusivity. From the quantitative results, the parents felt that in most cases, the Montessori method does aid inclusivity. This was expressed by most parents agreeing that inclusivity is accounted for in this method: all learner types are included and benefit from inclusivity, information is presented in an inclusive manner so that all learners can acquire knowledge easily and effectively. The classrooms are structured in an inclusive manner so that all learners can access the facilities. In addition, the materials used are inclusive.

For the qualitative findings, the results indicated that the type of education which the Montessori Method offers influences the inclusivity element. Being educated is fundamental as it affects the choices you make, like choosing a school for your child. Knowing what inclusivity is and how it can affect an individual is vital. Parents all had a certain level of education and could therefore select a school based on whether or not it is inclusive.

### 5.2.3: Reasons that make parents prefer the Montessori Method in particular for their children

The study explored the reasons for parents' preference for the Montessori Method in particular for their children. From the quantitative results, it was reported that parents preferred this method due to reasons such as: cognitive development, collaborative learning, student inquiry, self-learning, physical development, emotional development and spiritual development. This is a clear indication of the Montessori Method's benefits.

The qualitative findings also reported that parents preferred the Montessori Method for reasons such as: the enhancement of life skills, the sensorial materials incorporated in the classrooms, the diversity of the environment, the method being inclusive, the enhancement of emotional intelligence, active communication, the enhancement of critical thinking and the implementation of time management. All these reasons support the crucial skills and concepts for all learners to acquire in order to grow and attain excellent results. It is clear that the Montessori Method is an excellent method for success.

### 5.2.4: Parents' awareness of their child/children's need/s when selecting the Montessori Method

Finally, the study examined parents' awareness of their respective child/children's need/s when selecting the Montessori Method. The quantitative results indicated that most parents were actually aware of their child/children's need/s when selecting the Montessori Method. This was supported by most parents agreeing that this method indeed supports their child/children in relation their special needs and/or disability. They felt that the sensorial aspects helped their child, and that the Montessori Method was more beneficial in comparison to other traditional schools. This method was selected as a first choice and not a second choice and the aim was to improve the child/children's grades. Therefore, parents were aware of their child/children's need/s based on their special need and /or disability. Selecting the Montessori as the particular method thus positively impacts on their child/children.

The qualitative findings comprised of a leaner with a disability and a learner with a special need. Both learners have been helped and have made progress through the Montessori Method. Firstly, parents are aware of their child/children's need/s when they select the Montessori Method. These parents have carefully chosen this method in relation to their child's/children's disability and special need. Secondly, the findings show that the Montessori Method is diverse and inclusive as both abled learners and learners that are physically and mentally different, form part of the Montessori Method.

## 5.3: Discussion of findings

### 5.3.1: Parents understanding of the Montessori Method

The study sought to explore parents understanding of the Montessori Method. The findings indicated that most parents understood that the Montessori method is well-prepared and follows a self-directed method where children learn at their own pace. Children can choose what materials they play with. However, some parents understood that children can focus on certain objects/aspects while excluding other objects/aspects. This finding agrees with Hiles' (2015) research, which indicated that parents view and understand this method based on achievement, competition, goal-orientation and lessons in accordance with Montessori principles. Therefore, the researcher argues that majority of parents' thinking and values lined up with the Montessori Method and philosophy.

Momin (2012) and (2019) both agree that parents' understanding and selection of this method is based on an increase in parent knowledge, whereby effective decisions are made about the Montessori method. Moreover, Kayili and Ari (2016); Iman, Danisman, Demrican and Yaya (2017) all concluded that "the Montessori Method has a great impact on social competence behavior and emotion regulation skills" (p.17).

Shivakumara, Dhiksha and Nagaraj (2016) also concurred that learners in a Montessori school have a high self-concept, compared to learners in traditional schools. Finally, Ahmad and Reba (2018) agreed that learners in the Montessori method are socially and morally developed. The implication of this finding is that, in as much as the Montessori method is perceived to be very efficient and has numerous strengths (as compared to other models), not all children are enrolled in Montessori schools.

### 5.3.2: Extent to which the Montessori method aids inclusivity

The study also explored the extent to which the Montessori Method aids for inclusivity. The findings indicated that most parents felt that inclusivity was accounted for in the Montessori method and that most learner types were included and benefitted from inclusivity. In agreement, Talbert (2020) indicated that while special needs learners displayed positive performances and inspired other learners to achieve greatly, a renewed focus was needed. Similarly, Armstrong (2016) and Cossentino (2010) both asserted that children with special needs have their needs met through the Montessori Method. In addition, Pickering (2004a) also agreed that special needs children learn gradually, due to frequent delays, therefore the multi-age span within the Montessori supports these individuals tremendously.

Akabor (2015) also concurs that Montessori is inclusive especially because of the materials employed. Apart from the materials within the Montessori Method, the present study asserts that the Montessori Method does help individuals with special needs in many different ways. This method focuses on time management which enables individuals with special needs to learn gradually, as Pickering (2004a) concluded. The method allows for repetitive actions by means of sensorial materials to enable learners to acquire knowledge. As such, the method is also inclusive in nature, as Akabor (2015) asserts. These results thus align with that of the present study. Kingsview (2021) also agreed that learners' communication and writing has

improved within the Montessori method. The implication of this finding is that, since the Montessori Method does aid inclusivity, learners will have the opportunity to learn about inclusion. They will therefore have a positive mindset about equality, and start to implement inclusion in their life, leading toward a positive and equal future. However, the researcher argues that a renewed focus is needed to improve inclusion.

### 5.3.3: Reasons that make parents prefer the Montessori Method in particular for their children

The study also explored the reasons that make parents prefer the Montessori Method in particular for their children. The findings indicate that most parents preferred the Montessori method because it enhances life skills, has sensorial materials incorporated in the classrooms, the method being inclusive, enhances emotional intelligence, active communication, and critical thinking. This finding aligns with Hiles (2015), who concluded in the study that parents select Montessori due to principles, great outcomes, the school's philosophy and the attractive environment. Similarly, Zarybnisky (2010) is also of the opinion that parents choose this method due to academic needs and social needs being met and the philosophy of the Montessori. Moreover, ShamAh and Hsin-Hui (2014) concluded that learners who had the opportunity to acquire early childhood Montessori experience displayed great outcomes in Language, Math and Art.

In the present study, some reasons that made parents prefer the Montessori Method were due to academics. Most learners showed an improvement in results, skills and creativity. Some parents also asserted that their respective child/children communicated better and therefore became more social. The theories agree with the present study. In addition, Bhatia, Davis and Shamas-Brandt (2015) conclude that the Montessori Method displayed a higher accuracy and speed using the dominant hand. Finally, Gentaz (2019) also agreed that learners in Montessori schools outperformed learners in other schools in terms of creative skills and therefore academics. On the contrary, Aucoin (2015) reported that even though the Montessori Method does entail inclusion, there is an underlying barrier to develop deeper collaborative relationships. Therefore more collaboration is needed within the Montessori environment. The implication of this finding is that even though the Montessori is perceived to be beneficial to learners, there is still need for greater improvement in terms of classroom practice.

### 5.3.4: Parents' awareness of their respective child/children's need/s when selecting the Montessori Method

Finally, the study examined the parents' awareness of their respective child/children's need/s when selecting the Montessori Method. The findings indicated that parents viewed the Montessori Method as diverse and inclusive, as both abled learners and learners that are physically and mentally different form part of Montessori. In agreement, Kit-hung Lee (2003) reported that parents' perception of homework that their child/children receive enhanced high achievement and a more positive attitude to homework. However, Gowen et al. (1993) asserted that for children to progress, parents should be involved and encourage support. Learners with a disability like autism have proved to benefit and thrive within the Montessori environment. Similarly, Lane-Barmapov (2016) argued that the Montessori method is a forum for inclusion whereby learners with autistic spectrum disorder learn effectively in this environment from constantly engaging socially and peer modelling.

In addition, Cipta, Avianty and Kurniawati (2019) pointed out that communication boards in Montessori classrooms assisted these learners with visual learning which is a feature of autistic children. Learners with attention deficit disorder (ADHD) has also helped using the Montessori Method.

In the present study, a special need learner and a learner with a disability attended the Montessori schools under study, and their parents agreed that this method had helped their child tremendously. One learner has shown early signs of attention deficit disorder (ADHD) which Cipta, Avainty and Kurniawate (2019) emphasises on. Thus, the theories presented relate and concur with the present study as the Montessori Method does have a positive impact on learners with special needs or a disability.

Moreover, Mushtaq, Afshan, Rehna, Sabih and Najmussaqib (2022) asserted that learners who are intellectually challenged showed improvement in terms of their cognitive abilities. Finally, Surayamah (2021), argued that physically impaired individuals have shown results in this environment by displaying the use of fine motor skills, like buttoning up a shirt.

The implication of this finding is that even though most parents were of the opinion that the Montessori Method aids for inclusivity, there is need for enhancement of inclusive practices in Montessori schools, for the varied needs of special learners.

### 5.4: Conclusion

The study concludes that most parents do indeed have a positive understanding of the Montessori Method. The Montessori schools implement and emphasise the importance of problem-solving skills.

In addition to this, the Montessori schools focus on social skills by integrating many group work activities and encouraging communication amongst different age groups. The Montessori encourage learners to tackle tasks on their own and complete certain activities independently.

Based on the learners' independent behavior, sharing of knowledge in the home environment and better communication, parents are impressed by their improvement through the use of the Method.

The study concludes that the Montessori Method ensures that learner types in terms of race, culture and religion are included in this school, thus proving that there is diversity. Parents observe and acknowledge this aspect and conclude that inclusivity exists. The Montessori schools implement an inclusive structure whereby all learner types can access facilities within the environment. Parents when viewing the school observe this aspect and realise that it caters for every learner type.

Montessori teachers plan activities and implement inclusive objects and materials. Therefore, when a child goes home and attempts to repeat those activities, parents would be impressed by the inclusivity element. In addition, teachers communicate carefully in an inclusive manner, so that if learners mimic the teachers at home, parents would be pleased with how they are taught in an inclusive manner. Based on these actions, parents realise that the Montessori Method aids inclusivity.

The study concludes that the Montessori Method ensures that teachers allow learners to take control of their space (with boundaries), so that they can complete a task and/or repeat actions.

The learners are thus taught time management. When children play at home, parents observe how they play and if they are indeed owning their space. At times, children may ask parents for help, which is encouraged in the Montessori environment. This concept and manner of child behavior is recognised by parents.

Individuals within the Montessori environment are free and physical development is constantly improved. This method ensures a balance between academics and play. Parents observe how sporty or active their child is and realise that it is good for both their physical and mental health.

The Montessori schools focus on the importance of learners achieving academic success, thus they focus on learners' progress. Parents see the positive growth and results. Due to these observations, and the progress and realisation of actions within the child/children, parents select the Montessori Method.

The study finally concludes that the Montessori Method ensures that this method benefits all learner types by introducing and emphasising senses that help learners, on the basis of their special needs and/or disability. Considering that parents play an active role in their child/children lives, they notice the improvement, progress and tactic that the Montessori method uses. Montessori teachers plan lessons accordingly to help all learner types especially those that have needs and those with disabilities. Parents then see the improvement of results due to these carefully planned lessons. They observe the effect of the environment on their child/children and conclude that through the Montessori Method, success can be achieved.

Selecting this method creates more awareness of the child/children's need/s and parents can actively understand what benefits their child/children. The Montessori Method thus strategically plans the method to ensure that parents are content with the level of education and support that their child is achieving.

### 5.5: Recommendations for practice

The recommendation for practice are provided below:

Firstly, the Department of Social Services should develop programs for the enhancement of varied inclusive practices in Montessori schools for the different special needs among learners.

This would help Montessori schools to accommodate more learners with special needs. The present study reports that the Montessori method aids for inclusivity to a great extent.

Secondly, the managers of Montessori schools should ensure that the school structure and inclusivity practices are constantly updated, revised and implemented successfully within the school. Managers should continuously integrate inclusivity within the school's core value system as changes occur frequently. It is imperative to note that everything starts from great leadership, therefore the managers should set an example for teachers and learners to follow. The Montessori Method does implement inclusion, however there is room for improvement. Due to continuous change in the school, revised inclusivity practices should be implemented.

Thirdly, the teachers in Montessori Schools should model inclusive language. This can be done by creating a powerful agent in terms of professional communication and inclusive language. It is crucial to use the correct language when communicating. This is achieved by treating everyone respectfully and equally. Building trust between the learner and the teacher is a fundamental key for open dialogue and communication. Creating a feedback culture will allow all learners to feel inclusive. It is imperative for teachers to constantly strive to make the environment a space of diversity. Teachers should be passionate about inclusivity. This should be a reflection of their energy toward the concept.

Finally, teachers should try and focus on the strengths-based approach whereby teachers focus on learners' weaknesses to encourage progress. This would enable those with special needs and disabilities to continuously work and create improvement. This study reported that even though both the environment and teachers in the Montessori Method are inclusive and implement inclusion, there are always new innovations and strategies to implement and create a better inclusive Montessori.

### 5.6: Limitations of the study

The present study limitations entailed a small sample of results which does not necessarily represent a larger population of Montessori schools and Montessori parents in South Africa. However, this issue was addressed since the study contains both quantitative and qualitative results (complementing each other).

In addition, the geographical location of each Montessori school may have affected the results of this study. The first school is situated in Melville and the second school in Sandton. Therefore, issues like income and accessibility may have affected the results of the study. However, this has been mediated because the Montessori schools in the present study were all independent in type.

Lastly, most parents were exceptionally busy. It was challenging to find a suitable time for complete the survey and taking part in the interview was challenging. To mitigate this, the researcher made appointments to conduct interviews in cases where parents had commitments on certain days.

### 5.7: Suggestions for future research

Presented below are the areas suggested for research in the future:

Firstly, it is imperative to remember that the present study entailed two Montessori Schools with 30 parents participating in surveys and 10 parents participating in interviews. There is need for further research on inclusive practices in Montessori schools.

Secondly, even though, based on the results, the Montessori does aid inclusivity, more in-depth research is needed to remove discrimination and unequal treatment. There are still areas that do not entail inclusivity. In order to remove this segregated mindset that people have, further research is required to better inclusivity practices.

Thirdly, another area of research entails structure as the core of Montessori Schools. While the present study does prove that the structure in the two schools is inclusive, it should be continuously researched and improved so that all learner types could benefit. Another suggestion for further research would be introducing higher grades within the Montessori Method. The Montessori Method stops at a certain age and grade, however, considering the improvements, recognition and outcome for both abled and disabled learners, introducing higher grades would be promising for their future.

Finally, more research should be done on issues of discipline of learners in Montessori schools. In the present study, parents preferred their children in this environment of freedom with the

implementation of some rules and regulations. Research on strategically creating a balance between freedom and rules and regulations might be sufficient, to rule out many misconceptions that Montessori is a free environment without boundaries.

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## APPENDIX I: QUESTIONNAIRE FOR PARENTS

This questionnaire seeks to assess the reasons as to why parents choose the Montessori Method for their child/s and if the concept of inclusivity is taken into account. The aim of the study is to understand parents reasoning for selecting this particular method over and above other traditional schools and to assess if they are fully aware of the inclusivity method within the Montessori Method. The study is part of the researcher's Masters of Education in Inclusion Degree at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. All data and information generated from this study will be treated as strictly private and confidential. You are therefore kindly requested to complete the questionnaire as honestly as possible. Thank you in advance for accepting to participate in this study.

### SECTION A: BIOGRAPHIC DATA

Kindly indicate your response to each of the following aspects of biographic information below:

**Age:**
**Gender:**
**Number of years as parent:**
**Level of education:**

**Section B:** Parents understanding of the Montessori Method

Please, indicate the extent to which you agree with the following statements. The response format is in a 5-point Likert scale: SA-Strongly Agree, A-agree, N-neutral, D-disagree and SD-strongly disagree.

| | SA | A | N | D | SD |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| In the Montessori method, the child's right is to learn. | | | | | |
| In the Montessori method, the environment is prepared. | | | | | |
| In the Montessori method, children learn by themselves, and learning is thus self-directed. | | | | | |
| In the Montessori method, children work according to their own pace. | | | | | |
| In the Montessori method, children choose which materials to play with, thus allowing them to concentrate and focus. | | | | | |
| In the Montessori method, children are able to focus on certain aspects while excluding other aspects. | | | | | |

### SECTION C: The extent to which the Montessori Method aids inclusivity

Please, indicate the extent to which you agree with the following statements. The response format is in a 5-point Likert scale: SA-strongly agree, a-agree, n-neutral, d-disagree and sd-strongly disagree.

| In the Montessori method, the concept of inclusivity is accounted for. | SA | A | N | D | SD |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| In the Montessori method, all learner types are included. | | | | | |
| In the Montessori method, the child benefits from inclusivity. | | | | | |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| In the Montessori method, information is presented in an inclusive way for all learner types to acquire knowledge. | | | | | |
| In the Montessori method, classrooms are structured in an inclusive manner. | | | | | |
| In the Montessori method, material and objects are inclusive. | | | | | |

**SECTION D: Reasons that make parents prefer the Montessori Method in particular for their children**

Please, indicate the extent to which you agree with the following statements. The response format is in a 5-point Likert scale: SA-strongly agree, a-agree, n-neutral, d-disagree and sd-strongly disagree.

| | SA | A | N | D | SD |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| The Montessori method helps with cognitive development. | | | | | |
| The Montessori method aids for inclusivity. | | | | | |
| The Montessori method have shown results. | | | | | |
| The Montessori method promotes collaborative learning. | | | | | |
| The Montessori method places emphasis on student inquiry. | | | | | |
| The Montessori method promotes self-paced learning. | | | | | |
| The Montessori method benefits the learner on all levels; physical, spiritual and emotional development. | | | | | |

SECTION E: **Parents' awareness of their child/children's need/s when selecting the Montessori Method**

Please, indicate the extent to which you agree with the following statements. The response format is in a 5-point Likert scale: SA-strongly agree, A-agree, N-neutral, D-disagree and SD-strongly disagree.

| The Montessori method benefits my child in relation to his/her special needs and/or disabilities. | SA | A | N | D | SD |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| The Montessori Method emphasises on the senses that helps my child. | | | | | |
| The Montessori Method is more beneficial in comparison to other traditional schools. | | | | | |
| The Montessori Method is my first choice for my child. | | | | | |
| The Montessori Method is my second choice for my child. | | | | | |
| The Montessori Method has improved my child's grades. | | | | | |

## APPENDIX II: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR PARENTS

This interview seeks to assess the reasons as to why parents choose the Montessori Method for their child/s and if the concept of inclusivity is taken into account. The aim of my study is to understand parents reasons for selecting this particular method over and above other traditional schools and to assess if they are fully aware of the inclusivity method within the Montessori Method. The study is part of the researcher's Masters of Education in Inclusion Degree at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. All data and information generated from this study will be treated as strictly private and confidential. You are therefore kindly requested to complete the interview as honestly as possible. Thank you in advance for accepting to participate in this study.

### SECTION A: BIOGRAPHIC DATA

Kindly indicate your response to each of the following aspects of biographic information below:

**Age:**
**Gender:**
**Number of years as parent:**
**Level of education:**

**Section B:** Parents understanding, views and reasons for selecting the Montessori Method.

1. Does your child have any disabilities or special needs?

_____

_____

2. If so, how do you think the Montessori Method helps your child?

_____

_____

3. How did you learn about the Montessori Method and why did you choose the Montessori Method over and above other traditional schools?

_____

_____

4. Are you aware of your child's educational needs?

5. If so, how does the Montessori Method help these needs?

6. Are you aware of the concept of inclusivity?

7. If so, do you feel that the Montessori Method takes the concept of inclusivity into account?

8. Does the Montessori Method benefit your child in other ways apart from educationally?

9. Are you aware that the Montessori Method focuses on sensorial materials?

10. Which didactic objects used/activities help your child the most and why?

Thank you for participating in this interview.

## APPENDIX III: Letter to School One




**The topic of my study**: Directing the Social/Cultural Politics of School Choice: Why do parents choose Montessori in South Africa and does Inclusivity feature in the method?

**Institution**: University of Witwatersrand. School of Education
27 St Andrews Rd, Parktown, Johannesburg, 2193

September 2021

Dear Sir/Madam,

**Re: Permission to conduct research at Melville Pre-primary school.**

My name is Rumaanah Hajee. I am studying for a Master's Degree in Education at the Education campus at the University of the Witwatersrand. I am seeking permission to do research at the Melville Pre-Primary school.

I am conducting research on parents' perceptions of the Montessori Method. The study aims to analyze the extent to which the Montessori Method aids for Inclusivity. Moreover, the study examines why parents choose the Montessori Method in particular for their children, and finally their awareness of their respective children's need when selecting the Montessori Method.

The research will entail collecting data from 30 parents. I will invite these parents from your organization to participate in this study through surveys and interviews using online platforms like Microsoft teams, Zoom or email. Participants will be asked to give their written or verbal consent before the research begins. Their responses will be treated confidentially, and identities will be anonymous unless otherwise expressly indicated. Individual privacy will be maintained in all published and written data resulting from the study.

The results will be communicated in terms of a dissertation. The research participants will not be advantaged or disadvantaged in any way. They will be reassured that they can withdraw their permission at any time during the project without any penalty. There are no foreseeable risks in participating in this study. The participants will not be paid for this study.All research data will be stored on a password protected computer.

I therefore kindly request permission in writing to conduct my research at your organization. The permission letter should be on your organization's headed paper, signed and dated, and specifically referring to myself by name and the title of my study.

Please let me know if you require any further information. I look forward to your response as soon as it is convenient.

Your sincerely.

Rumaanah Hajee (1437458)
074 601 5464
rhajee3@gmail.com

Supervisor
Dr Peter Aloka

## APPENDIX IV: Permission from School One

— MELVILLE —
MONTESSORI

22 September 2021

University of the Witwatersrand - School of Education

To whom it may concern

This letter serves to advise that Ms Rumaanah Hajee (ID:- 9705100416085) will be conducting her research for her Master's Degree programme at Melville Montessori Pre-Primary School cc.

Should you need any further information, please do not hesitate to contact me on the number below.

Yours sincerely

Jacqueline Oosthuizen-Sinner
083 6061082

T 011 482 5540 • jacqui@melvillemontessori.co.za
— Emergencies 083 606 1082 —
WWW.MELVILLEMONTESSORI.CO.ZA
Melville Montessori Pre-Primary School CC CK 9738497/23 • 15/17 Tolip Street, Westdene, Johannesburg, 2092 • PO Box 930, Melville, 2109

# APPENDIX V: Letter to School Two

**The topic of my study**: Directing the Social/Cultural Politics of School Choice: Why do parents choose Montessori in South Africa and does Inclusivity feature in the method?

**Institution**: University of Witwatersrand. School of Education
27 St Andrews Rd, Parktown, Johannesburg, 2193

September 2021

Dear Sir/Madam,

**Re: Permission to conduct research at Kids Town Montessori Pre-Primary School.**

My name is Rumaanah Hajee. I am studying for a Master's Degree in Education at the Education campus at the University of the Witwatersrand. I am seeking permission to do research at Kids Town Pre-Primary School.

I am conducting research on parents' perceptions of the Montessori Method. The study aims to analyze the extent to which the Montessori Method aids for Inclusivity. Moreover, the study examines why parents choose the Montessori Method in particular for their children, and finally their awareness of their respective children's need when selecting the Montessori Method.

The research will entail collecting data from 30 parents. I will invite these parents from your organization to participate in this study through surveys and interviews using online platforms like Microsoft teams, Zoom or email. Participants will be asked to give their written or verbal consent before the research begins. Their responses will be treated confidentially, and identities will be anonymous unless otherwise expressly indicated. Individual privacy will be maintained in all published and written data resulting from the study.

The results will be communicated in terms of a dissertation. The research participants will not be advantaged or disadvantaged in any way. They will be reassured that they can withdraw their permission at any time during the project without any penalty. There are no foreseeable risks in participating in this study. The participants will not be paid for this study.All research data will be stored on a password protected computer.

I therefore kindly request permission in writing to conduct my research at your organization. The permission letter should be on your organization's headed paper, signed and dated, and specifically referring to myself by name and the title of my study.

Please let me know if you require any further information. I look forward to your response as soon as it is convenient.

Your sincerely.

Rumaanah Hajee (1437458)
074 601 5464
rhajee3@gmail.com

Supervisor
Dr Peter Aloka

## APPENDIX VI: Permission from School Two

Kids Town Pre-Primary (PTY) LTD®
Kids Reg number. 2014/033893/07

Ernest Ullmann Park Recreation Centre
Alma Road, Morningside Manor

Telephone: 082 498 8507
info@kidstown.co.za
www.kidstown.co.za

To whom it may concern 22.09.2022

This letter is to confirm that Rumaanah Hajee has been given permission to conduct her research study at our school. Topic of the study: Directing the Social/Cultural Politics of School Choice: *Why do parents choose Montessori in South Africa and does Inclusivity feature in the method?*

For any further details or confirmation please do not hesitate to contact me.

***Jenna Beulich***
***Director Kids Town Pre-Primary***
***Ernest Ullmann Park Recreation Centre, Alma Road Morningside Manor***
***Sandton, South Africa***
***082 498 8507***
***info@kidstown.co.za***

# APPENDIX VII: Ethics Approval

UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND, JOHANNESBURG | WSoE Wits School of Education

**SCHOOL OF EDUCATION ETHICS COMMITTEE**

**CONSTITUTED UNDER THE UNIVERSITY HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (NON-MEDICAL)**

| | |
|---|---|
| **CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE** | **PROTOCOL NUMBER: 2021ECE103M** |
| **PROJECT TITLE** | Directing the Social/Cultural Politics of School Choice: Why do parents choose Montessori in South Africa and does inclusivity feature in the method? |
| **INVESTIGATOR** | **RUMAANAH HAJEE** |
| **SCHOOL/DEPARTMENT OF INVESTIGATOR** | |
| **DATE CONSIDERED** | 15 November 2021 |
| **DECISION OF THE COMMITTEE** | Approved unconditionally |
| **RISK LEVEL** | |
| **EXPIRY DATE** | Date of submission of the Research Report |

**ISSUE DATE OF CERTIFICATE** 22 November 2021 **CHAIRPERSON** _____
Dr. Paul Goldschagg

cc: Dr Peter Aloka

**DECLARATION OF INVESTIGATOR**

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

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

_____ _____/_____/_____
**Signature** **Date**