DEPARTMENT OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

Research focus areas of the Department (2025-2026)

- Curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment in early childhood care and education
- Early learning (birth to five)
- Teacher education in early childhood education
- Policy in early childhood
- Transitions in the early years
- Leadership and management in early childhood education
- Language development in the Foundation Phase
- The influence of culture on language development in the Foundation Phase
- The language policy and its implementation in early childhood education
- Teaching a first additional language in early childhood education
- Training Foundation Phase teachers
- Mathematics teaching in early childhood education
- Management in early childhood education
- Life skills teaching in early childhood education
- Inclusive education in the Foundation Phase
- Health education in the Foundation Phase
- Movement and physical development in the Foundation Phase
- Music in the Foundation Phase
- The Foundation Phase curriculum
- Classroom assessment practices
- Teaching practice in the Foundation Phase

Research projects that postgraduate students can participate in

Name of project	Brief description of the project	Project leader	No of available positions for MEd students for 2026	No of available positions for PhD students for 2026
Early childhood policy, practice and workforce/teacher development	This is an ongoing project in my niche area under the banner of ECD at the margins.	Prof HB Ebrahim	5	5

Academic Support B.Ed Foundation Phase students: teaching reading and mathematics in the Foundation Phase.	Exploring the mathematics and literacy performance of learners in three provinces (NW, Limpopo and KZN).	Dr Dyosini	2	2
Mathew Goniwe E-tutor	Student support.	Dr TAL Phala	2	1

Focused M & D programmes

Name of programme	Qualification code	Course work degree/Full research
PhD in Education (Stream: Early Childhood Development	90019	Research proposal module plus full research thesis

IMPORTANT INFORMATION:

Unisa does not offer an MEd degree in Early Childhood Education (ECE). Students who would like to specialise in any aspect of Early Childhood Education when doing a Master's of Education should enrol for one of the following degrees:

- MEd in Curriculum Studies (Early Childhood Education curriculum)
- MEd in Education Management (Management in Early Childhood Education)
- MEd in Inclusive Education (Learners with Special Needs in Early Childhood Education) (take note of admission requirements for this degree)
- MEd in Socio-Education (Early Childhood Education in Social Context)
- MEd in Psychology of Education (Development of Learners in Early Childhood)

Students should clearly explain in their research outline that they intend to focus on Early Childhood Education. It is therefore imperative that the first heading of the research outline should read*: MEd in Curriculum Studies, focusing on Early Childhood Education.*

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Details of individual supervisors and their research interests or fields of expertise

Name of supervisor	Research interest/field of expertise	No of positions for master's students still available for 2026	No of positions for doctoral students still available for 2026
Prof HB Ebrahim	• Curriculum, pedagogy and assessment in early childhood care and education • Early learning (birth to five) • Teacher education and leadership in early childhood education • Policy in early childhood	5	5
Prof NC Phatudi	• Language learning and teaching in the early years • Transitions in the early years • Policy in the early years • Teacher education in the early years	2	2
Prof C Meier	• Diversity & multicultural education in ECE • Teaching strategies in Foundation Phase classrooms • Curriculum development in Foundation Phase classrooms • Management in ECE/ Foundation Phase classrooms • Resource development in ECE/Foundation Phase classrooms.	1	1
Prof S Krog	• Movement in ECE • Sport psychology • Sports coaching	2	1
Prof MR Modise	• Leadership and Management in early years • Curriculum pedagogy and assessment in early years	1	1

	• Teacher Professional Development and Support in early years • Policy in the early years			
Prof V Msiza	• Boys, Men and masculinities in the early years. • Professional learnings and identities of teachers and teacher educators. • Social Justice education	2	2	
Dr DM Hannaway	• Technology for teaching and learning in the early years • Curriculum and assessment in early childhood education • Early childhood teacher education	2	2	
Dr PON Moshaba	• Early childhood teaching and learning	1	0	
Dr TAL Phala	• Early reading development and Reading support in the early years • Professional Teacher development and support in the early years • Language teaching and support in the Foundation Phase • Transitioning from mother tongue to English in the early years • Inclusive education in early childhood	2	1	
Prof N Ndou	• Leadership in the early years	1	0	
Dr M Ngema	• Language teaching in the Foundation Phase • The language policy and its implementation in early childhood education • Classroom assessment practices • Professional development of teachers	2	2	
Dr Dagada	• Foundation phase literacy (Reading, writing and speaking) • Assessment in language • New digital in teaching literacy. • Teacher education development in foundation phase • Learners with learning difficulties.	1	1	
Dr Manyaka	• Life skills teaching in early childhood education • Inclusive education in the Foundation Phase • Health education in the Foundation Phase • Leadership and management in ECE	0	0	
Dr Rubbi Nunan	• Teacher Education in the Foundation Phase • Curriculum, pedagogy and assessment in the Foundation Phase (Reading & language teaching & development) • Inclusive Education in primary school (including mild to moderate intellectual & behavioural challenges)	3	2	
Dr Maloka	• Leadership and management in ECE • Early learning (Birth to five)	1	0	
Dr S Mahan	• Early learning (birth to five) • Language development in the Foundation Phase	1	1	

	• The language policy and its implementation in early childhood education		
Dr M Mncanca	• Sociological and psychosocial issues in ECD • Centre and Community-based ECD interventions • Parental involvement • Men in ECD • Father involvement in ECD • Skills capacitation of ECD practitioners • Mixed methods research	3	3
Dr T Dyosini	• Teacher education in early childhood education • Language development in the Foundation Phase • Leadership and management in early childhood education • Early learning (birth to five) • Inclusive education in the Foundation Phase	1	1
Dr T Mampane	• Policy in early childhood • Early learning (birth to five) • Teacher education in early childhood education • Curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment in early childhood care and education	1	1
Dr A Carrim	• Curriculum, pedagogy and assessment in early childhood care and education • Early learning (birth to five) • Teacher education in early childhood education • Leadership and management in early childhood education • Inclusive education in the Foundation Phase • Classroom assessment practices • Teaching practice in the Foundation Phase	1	1
Mrs Z Malimela	• Curriculum, pedagogy and assessment in early childhood care and education • Training Foundation Phase teachers • Teaching practice in the Foundation Phase • Life skills teaching in early childhood education • Music in the Foundation Phase • Early learning (birth to five)	0	0
Dr B Ndlovu	• Teaching mathematics and literacy in early years • Teaching practice in the Foundation Phase • Indigenous teaching and learning approaches in early years • Play-based approaches in teaching literacy • Technology in teaching literacy in early years	2	1

	• Assessment practices in early learning		
Dr T Matjokana	• Policy in early childhood • Transitions in the early years • Early learning (birth to five) • Teacher education in early childhood education	2	1
Mrs M L Maisela	• Early learning (birth to five) • Inclusive education in the foundation phase • Teacher education • Literacy in the foundation	0	0
Dr T Sambo	• Mathematics teaching in early childhood education • Inclusive education in the Foundation Phase • Indigenous languages in teaching mathematics in diverse Foundation Phase classrooms • Play-based teaching mathematics in early years • Technology in teaching mathematics in early years	2	1
Dr M Selepe	• Mathematics teaching in early childhood education and foundation phase • Play-based pedagogies in teaching mathematics in early childhood education and foundation phase • Digital technology and African culture in mathematics teaching • Coding and robotics in early childhood	3	2
Dr M Khumalo	• Early language learning (birth to nine) • Language and literacy learning and teaching in the early years • The language policy and its implementation in early childhood education • Curriculum, pedagogy and assessment in early childhood care and education • Teacher education in the early years • Early reading development and support in the early years (zero to 9)	1	0
Mr Mazibuko	• Inclusive Education in the Foundation Phase • Mathematics Teaching in the Foundation Phase • Teacher Education in the Early years • Language teaching in the Foundation Phase • Early learning (birth to five)	0	0
Dr N Mahetlane	• Learner support in Grade R	2	0

Models of supervision

The individual and co-supervision models are used. Co-supervision is mostly done for mentoring purposes and multi-, inter- and trans-disciplinary (MIT) research. Some supervisors in the College supervise across departments. Students are therefore advised to study the lecturer profiles of other departments in the College when trying to identify a suitable supervisor.

Opportunities regarding external supervision

External supervisors may be considered if a suitable supervisor is not available in the Department. However, this will depend on the financial viability of the Department.

Contact details of the department

Dr M Ngema: Nkoana Simon Radipere Building, 7-55; tel: 012 429 4472; e-mail: engemam@unisa.ac.za
Dr TAL Phala: Nkoana Simon Radipere Building, 7-61; tel: 012 429 4612; e-mail: phalatal@unisa.ac.za (CoD)

Admission requirements, documents required, selection criteria and selection information relevant for prospective master's and doctoral students

Minimum admission requirements for master's and doctoral studies in the College of Education

Masters of Education
An appropriate Honours Degree in Education, or a postgraduate diploma, or a 480 credit Bachelor of Education Degree with a minimum of 96 credits at NQF level 8 in Mathematics Education. The average mark obtained for the degree shall be 60%. All students should have completed a module in research methods and methodologies as part of their previous level 8 qualification. Students who do not meet these requirements may follow an alternative pathway (e.g. RPL, submitting a portfolio or working through a prescribed reading list – refer to **Possible alternative pathways**). The application should accord with the various research focus areas/areas of specialisation of the Department, the Department's capacity to provide expert supervision and the requisite qualifications listed above.

Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) in Education
A Master of Education in Mathematics Education. The average mark obtained for the degree shall be 60%. Students who do not meet this requirement may follow an alternative pathway (e.g. RPL or submit a portfolio – refer to **Possible alternative pathways**). The application should accord

with the various research focus areas/areas of specialisation of the Department, the Department's capacity to provide expert supervision and the requisite qualification listed above.

Supporting documentation to be submitted with application

For a master's degree:
All relevant documentation as specified by the Department for Master's and Doctoral Administration Support.

Students should submit a short research outline of 600 to 750 words which sketches the intended research project, the research approach, problem statement, a short literature review and a working title. In addition, a list of five scholarly articles and two books that have been consulted to compile the research outline should be provided. These sources should be predominantly recent, with the exception of (classical) theories which can only be found in old sources. The Harvard referencing method should be used. Students should provide a declaration that they have consulted the relevant department's website prior to submitting their application and should propose the name of his/her preferred supervisor. Any form of plagiarism in the research outline is unacceptable.

For a doctorate degree:
All relevant documentation as specified by the Department for Master's and Doctoral Administration Support.

Students should submit a short research outline of 800 to 900 words which sketches the intended research project, problem statement, the research approach, a short literature review and a working title for the project. In addition, a list of ten scholarly articles and four books that have been consulted to compile the research outline should be provided. These sources should be predominantly recent, with the exception of (classical) theories which can only be found in old sources. The Harvard referencing method should be used. Students should provide a declaration that they have consulted the relevant department's website prior to submitting their application and should propose the name of his/her preferred supervisor. Please note that any form of plagiarism in the research outline is unacceptable.

PLEASE NOTE: Students planning to focus on Early Childhood Education in their PhD studies should clearly indicate this in their research outline. It is therefore imperative that the first heading of the research outline should read: *PhD in Education focusing on Early Childhood Education.*

Selection procedures followed in the selection of candidates for postgraduate studies

All applications will be considered simultaneously by the Departmental Higher Degrees Committee, the chair of the Department, the director of the School and the head of the Office of Graduate Studies and Research for purposes of fairness and transparency. Only candidates who meet the minimum eligibility criteria will be considered.

The Department's supervision capacity and availability of external supervisors will be the first and most important selection criterion. No applicant will be admitted without a supervisor being allocated to the student. If a student requests to be supervised by a particular supervisor, but the supervisor is not available because of his/her existing supervision load, it is the Department's prerogative to allocate an alternative supervisor (internal or external). Further selection will be done based on the following selection criteria (the weight attached to each criteria is indicated between brackets as a percentage of the overall evaluation): the student's academic record and experience in research (30%); understanding of research methods as displayed in the research outline (30%); academic writing skills (30%); and addressing of past inequalities by taking race, gender and disability status into consideration (10%).

The Department will keep record of all the applications and reasons will be provided for unsuccessful applications.

Possible alternative pathways

The following alternative pathways exist for applicants who do not meet the admission requirements:

- Applicants with degrees that have different structures from normal South African honours or master's degrees, applicants whose degrees do not clearly correspond to the Department's admission requirements (e.g. no mark awarded for previous dissertations, no clear evidence of having completed a research-related module as part of the previous qualification, etc) or applicants who do not meet the admission requirements but who possess applicable experience in research or working experience relevant to the field of interest, that may qualify them for admission to a master's or doctoral degree will be req d to apply for recognition of prior learning (RPL). Prior academic and research activities by the applicant will be evaluated in accordance with formal Unisa RPL procedures and the outcome of the RPL process will be submitted to and approved by the chair of the Department. If the approved outcome of the RPL process is positive, the applicant will be allowed to proceed with an application for admission, subject to all terms and conditions governing the admission process.
- Applicants who apply for a master's degree on the strength of a postgraduate diploma or a 480 credit bachelor's degree with a minimum of 96 credits at level 8 and who have not completed a module in research methodology, will be required to obtain knowledge about research methods and methodology by working through a prescribed reading list which will be forwarded to them by the chair of the Departmental Higher Degrees Committee upon request from the student. The student will have to complete and pass a number of assignments related to research methodology. The student may reapply in subsequent years.
- Applicants who do not meet the minimum requirement of 60%, may apply for an alternative pathway by submitting a portfolio containing a motivation letter indicating reasons for wanting to do the qualification and for selecting the specific area he/she is applying for, a CV highlighting experience relevant to the field of interest and evidence of engagement

with research which could include one or more of the following: a written report of a scholarly nature, a literature survey, a paper presented at a conference, a published article.

The following alternative pathways exist for applicants whose applications were unsuccessful:

- Students who have been refused admission because of limited capacity within the Department or because their topic was not viable may reapply in subsequent years. It should be clearly indicated that it is a reapplication. The normal selection process will apply in case of reapplications.
- Students who were unsuccessful because of an inadequate research outline may revise their research outline and may reapply in subsequent years.
- A student whose application was unsuccessful because of inadequate academic writing skills may reapply in subsequent years provided that he/she can provide proof of measures put in place to improve his/her academic writing skills (e.g. enrolled for and passed a course in academic writing skills).

Application procedures and when to apply

The Department of Early Childhood Education will not make use of differentiated registration dates. Applications for admission and registration will take place in accordance with the dates set by the Department for Master's and Doctoral Administration Support for bulk applications and registrations.
Students should

- apply for a student number, following the steps outlined in
  https://www.unisa.ac.za/sites/corporate/default/Apply-for-admission/Master%27s-&-doctoral-degrees/Apply-for-a-student-number-and-apply-for-admission
  http://www.unisa.ac.za/sites/corporate/default/Apply-for-admission/Master's-&-doctoral-degrees/Apply-for-a-student-number-and-apply-for-admission
- apply for a space in one of the focus areas using the online application process

Once acceptance in the research focus area and the allocation of a supervisor have been confirmed, they may register for the research proposal module.