

GRADE R GOVERNMENT SCHOOL EDUCATORS' PERCEPTIONS OF SCHOOL
READINESS

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Abstract

Although school readiness assessment has proven to be useful, it is surrounded by controversy especially within the South African context (Amod & Hatfield, in press). To determine if a learner is ready for school of pivotal importance as it affects his or her performance in later years (Mazjub & Rashid, 2012). Faber (2005, p.4) affirmed that “school readiness is not a condition that is easily measured or defined”. Since Grade R educators are the ones who are amongst the first to help determine if learners are in fact ready for Grade One, this research study explored Grade R educators’ perceptions of school readiness in four inner city public schools in the Johannesburg East region. Eight educators were interviewed using a semi-structured interview schedule which included exploring educators’ views on the understanding of school readiness, the factors which they saw as playing a role in school readiness and their perceptions of the assessment of school readiness. Parental perceptions of school readiness were also explored from the educators’ viewpoint. Thematic content analysis was used to analyse the results. Seven themes were identified, namely understanding of school readiness, factors that contribute or hinder school readiness, assessment of school readiness, retention, degree of parental participation, the role of the government and challenges faced by educators in relation to school readiness assessment. From the results, it was evident that school readiness needs a more contextually appropriate definition in South Africa in order for educators to appropriately understand this concept and to assess learners. Furthermore, educators require more training in order for them to effectively prepare learners for Grade One. It was also evident from the results that educators require more support from parents and the government.

Keywords: school readiness, assessment, reception year, pre-school education, Grade R, retention, early childhood education, educator perceptions

Declaration

This is a research project submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Masters in Education (Educational Psychology) in the Faculty of Humanities, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, July 2013.

“I declare that this research project is my own, unaided work. It has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination at this or any other university”.

Zaakirah

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03 Day of July 2013

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Chapter One: Introduction

1.1 Research Aims

The research study explored Grade R educators' perceptions of school readiness. Specifically, the researcher examined how the educators define school readiness, what approaches they use to assess if a child is ready to enter school and what factors they think promote and hinder the learners' readiness to enter Grade One. The participants' perceptions on possible challenges that they face with regard to facilitating school readiness was further explored.

1.2. Research Rationale

While many studies have been conducted on school readiness abroad, studies in this area in South Africa are extremely limited (see Goldblatt, 2004; Sundelowitz, 2001). The Department of Education has not developed specific guidelines or documents on the criteria for school readiness or the assessment thereof. An understanding of school readiness is important because if schools are unaware of the degree of readiness of the learner, they will not be able to adapt their curricula to suit the needs of those learners (Marjanovic Umek, Kranjc, Fekonja, & Bajc, 2008). Furthermore, researching school readiness in South Africa is crucial as many learners find Grade One challenging. In South Africa, the *Progress Report* developed by the Minister of Education (as it was then) stated that there is a high rate of retention in Grade One and this can be attributed to “inadequate school readiness programmes, serious problems with learners' learning abilities, or significantly high enrolments which have not been accompanied by appropriate levels of provisioning” (Ministerial Committee on Learner Retention in South African Schooling System, 2007).

An investigation of Grade R educators' perceptions on school readiness would assist in gaining insight on the factors that enhance and those that hamper learners' readiness for formal schooling. This would guide the development of intervention programmes. Practitioners in the field, and the literature, place much emphasis on pre-schooling as being vital for the preparation of the learner for Grade One (Unicef, 2011; Fram, Kim & Sinha, 2011). Indeed, the South African Department of Education's (DoE) objective is “to extend

quality integrated early childhood development services, including the reception year (Grade R), to the most marginalised communities” (Motala, Dielteins, Carrim, Kgobe, Moyo, & Rembe, 2007, p.19). According to the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) (2011, p.5), the number of learners attending Grade R in sub-Saharan Africa has increased from 15 % in 1999 to 60 % in 2009. Despite this improvement, it was found in 2009 that there were three thousand two hundred and twenty three government funded primary schools in South Africa that did not have Grade R classes (DoE, 2011). Furthermore, difficulties also arose in those schools that did have Grade R due to lack of financial aid from government. Based on the a foregoing results, the Minister of Education (as it was then) had stated that “much of the quality focus must be on assessing the appropriateness of the existing 2008 Grade R funding policy, in particular insofar as it impacts on class size and the level of qualification of educators” (Motshekga, 2010, p.3). The above factors added impetus to the relevance of the current study which looks at the perception of Grade R educators from government funded primary schools in respect of school readiness.

1.3. Overall context of Grade R education in South Africa

School readiness has, like so many other aspects of education in South Africa, been affected by the effects of the apartheid regime. Historically, pre-school education was not seen as important and was only factored in by the De Lange Commission in 1981 which was set up to investigate South Africa’s education system (Excell, 2011). This Commission’s findings indicate that school readiness is important and a pre-readiness grade should be implemented prior to learners entering Grade One (Reilly & Hofmeyr, 1983 cited by Excell, 2011). However, these recommendations were not taken immediately into account by the South African government. In 1995, the Education White Paper 1 stipulated the intention of making Grade R compulsory and to make it available in all public schools. Grade R has been regarded as the grade where learners can be assessed for school readiness.

This reception year or Grade R is placed between Early Childhood Education and the Foundation Phase of primary schooling (Excell, 2011). South African Institute for Distance Education (SAIDE) (2010) argued that since the inception of Education White Paper 5, no work has been done by the government to integrate Grade R within the formal schooling system. This affirms that “in large parts, however, these efforts have not been informed by a common national vision” (SAIDE, 2010, p.10). The author submits that the Early Childhood

Directorate aims for Grade R to be a part of the Foundation Phase of primary schooling rather than to be seen as a separate entity. Government is determined to make the integration possible and it aims for this view to be understood by all of the relevant stakeholders; especially the educators. However, SAIDE (2010, p.10) postulated that it may be difficult for certain stakeholders to change their perceptions as they had for years viewed Grade R as a separate entity from the Foundation Phase in formal schooling.

According to the government's policy in Education White Paper 5, Grade R was to have been implemented by 2010. However this objective has not yet been reached. The Department of Education (2011) lists the programme requirements for Grade R wherein a learner must be offered the following subjects: one official language, mathematics, and life skills. SAIDE (2010) argues that the Grade R curriculum should be planned with an importance placed on play. This is in accordance with the National Qualification Framework (Nzimande, 2011, p.40) which states that: "the focus of this grade is on learning through play and developing physical coordination, as well as developing spoken language competence and fundamental ideas that will form a basis for the further development of number sense and literacy". Grade R educators find that the curriculum is vague and they do not always understand what is expected of them (SAIDE, 2010).

Since 1995, the democratic government has been developing policy documents and legislation reflecting the values of equity, respect, non-discrimination, liberty, and social justice; all of which have provided the framework for the development and implementation of Grade R in formal schooling. The White Paper 5 (DoE, 2001) and the National Norms for the Standards for Grade R funding (DoE, 2009) were fundamental in implementing Grade R into practice in South Africa (SAIDE, 2010). Although government has all of their policies in relation to the implementation of Grade R, SAIDE (2010) reported it does not provide the psychological support at the district level; especially in aiding with the implementation of the curriculum and this may be due to the insufficient employment of staff by the district office. Another obstacle in the implementation of Grade R is the "delays in infrastructure projects, procurement procedures and organisational challenges" (SAIDE, 2010, p. 25).

In addition, Grade R educator qualifications are of concern; as reflected by the HSRC Teacher Qualifications Survey (DoE, 2009b) which was conducted to determine if educators

were appropriately qualified. This survey was conducted on a sample of educators nationally and was done at the Department of Education's request. The findings of this survey indicated that only forty two percent of Grade R educators are qualified and only twelve percent of these educators are trained to teach Grade R specifically. This is a major challenge as the National Qualifications Framework (Nzimande, 2011) stated that Grade R educators are expected to either have a Diploma in Grade R Teaching or a Bachelor of Education in Foundation Phase.

As noted above Grade R educators face many challenges and this may impact on a learner's school readiness. Educators play a vital role in facilitating learning and preparing a learner for Grade One. The next chapter will review literature pertaining to school readiness such as the theoretical underpinning of school readiness and how it relates to the definition, the assessment of school readiness, the factors that play a role in school readiness, educators' perceptions of school readiness and the role parents play with regards to school readiness. Chapter Three will entail how the participants were recruited, what methods were used to obtain data, how the data was analysed and what were the ethical considerations when obtaining the data. Chapter Four will discuss the results of the data which was collected, more specifically describing the themes that emerged. Finally, Chapter Five will consider the results in relation to the research aims and research questions. It will also link the results to the literature that was reviewed. In addition, Chapter Five will explore the limitations of this study. The implications of these limitations will be discussed and suggestions for future research will be expressed.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Researching school readiness is vital as it has consequences for future child development and scholastic achievement (Cooper, Osborne, Beck & McLanahan, 2011). According to Dhlomo (2012), planning transitions into Grade One is vital as learners will be able to adjust more easily and their development will not be interrupted. Despite its importance the term 'readiness for school' has been the cause of much debate as it is poorly defined (Kagan & Rigby, 2003; Dockett & Perry, 2009; Snow, 2010). However, it is also a term that many educators and parents constantly struggle to grasp. Is a learner ready for school or not? Grade R educators play a pivotal role in aiding the decision of whether a learner enters or does not enter Grade One.

In light of the above, this literature review focuses on the theoretical models underlying school readiness and its definition. Factors that impact on school readiness such as health, preschool and socio economic status will be discussed. In addition, the assessment of school readiness, with particular reference to the South African educators' perceptions of school readiness, will be reviewed critically. In addition to this, the issue of parental involvement in relation to school readiness will be examined.

2.1 Theoretical Views and Definitions of School Readiness

The definition of school readiness has been constantly debated and there is no universal definition to date. This term has increased in complexity as the years go by (Kagan, 2003). It differs in meaning for each person and "it implies a sort-and-classify mentality" (Powell, 2010, p.26). Hence, it often means something which certain learners possess and other do not. Kagan and Rigby (2003) endeavoured to explain the argument around the term 'school readiness' as it is often confused with 'readiness to learn' and 'readiness for school'. The two latter concepts differ in many ways, namely: 'readiness to learn' applies to all learners, whereas 'readiness for school' applies to those learners who are in pre-school or entering pre-school. In the former, readiness can be developed with time whilst in the latter the child needs to be school ready to start school. Maturational readiness is another construct which is developed from 'readiness to learn' and 'readiness for school' (Kagan & Rigby, 2003). Maturational readiness examines a learner's individual development rather than looking at a learner's chronological age.

School readiness was initially viewed from the maturational framework. This approach stems from Gessell's theory of development (Gesell, 1968). This theory asserts that learners will enter school when they have reached a certain age whereby they attained the appropriate level of maturity (Snow, 2006), and is consistent with the Department of Education's policy which states that the progression to Grade One is dependent on age unless "a learner displays a lack of competence to cope with the following grade's work" (DoE, 2011, p.7). According to United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (2006), all learners need to commence Grade One in the year that they attain seven years of age. Motala et al., (2007) assert that age norms are in place so that fewer learners would start school when they are too young or too old (as the case may be). However, Lewit and Baker (1995) and Dockett and Perry (2009) argued that using age as a criterion for school entry can be problematic as learners develop at different rates. In addition, it should be noted that the difference between the youngest learner in Grade One and that of an older learner could be as much as seventeen months (Powell, 2010). In the premises, he argued that the better option would be comparing the child to themselves and their respective growth curve (Powell, 2010).

However, the Education White Paper 6 (DoE, 2001) stated that all learners have a right to equal education. The Education White Paper 6 thus implies that even if learners are not yet 'ready' for school, they are not to be held back if their parents or guardians deem them ready, as long as they are of an appropriate age. The aforementioned role of the parents occurred after the legal challenge by the Independent Schools Association, which led to "the legislation being amended by a clause placing the onus on parents to show that younger learners are ready to be admitted to school" (Motala et al., 2007, p.16). It must be noted that parents can decide to allow their child to enter Grade One a year later than the norm provided by the government (Motala et al., 2007). Despite the aforementioned policy by the Department of Education (DoE, 2011), South Africa has no specific definition for school readiness.

Some theorists subscribe to genetics being an important factor in the development of school readiness. Schoen and Nagle (1994) stated that: "school readiness is associated with infants' temperamental features, such as persistence, adaptability and activity" (cited by Lemelin, Boivin, Forget-Dubios, Dionne, Seguin, Brendgen, Vitaro, Tremblay & Perusse, 2007, p.1856). Previously in South Africa, school readiness was determined by the

intelligence quotient (Pieterse, 2007). It was also assumed that the intelligent quotient was hereditary and therefore school readiness has its origins in genetics (Pieterse, 2007). However, this ideology has changed as research has indicated that the environment is crucial in the development of school readiness (Pieterse, 2007).

The social constructionist approach views school readiness in terms of a learner being socially ready (Goldblatt, 2004). Many researchers place emphasis on social readiness and hold the view that if learners are socially ready, the transition into school will be a much easier process (Raver, 2002; Bagdi & Vacca, 2005; Bustin, 2007). If learners are not socially ready when entering school, they are unable to participate in group work, or to follow instructions, and this will lead to negative consequences such as peer rejection and grade retention (Parker & Asher, 1987; Walker, Colvin, & Ramsey, 1995; Eisenberg, Valiente & Eggum, 2010).

Vygotsky was a key socio-culturist theorist and he perceived school readiness as being determined by the quality of interaction a child has with educators, parents and capable peers. According to Vygotsky, learners develop cognitively through interaction with people who are more advanced than them (Woolfolk, 2010). He emphasised that educators need to know how to facilitate appropriate activities for learners in order for the zone of proximal development concept to work (Goodman & Goodman, 1990). Vygotsky (1978, p.86) defined the zone of proximal development (ZPD) as “the distance between actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined under adult guidance or collaboration with more capable peers”. The quality of interaction between educators and learners would thus affect the learners’ cognitive development (Vygotsky, 1993).

The transactional or ecological model views school readiness as comprising of a more holistic definition and it involves the concept of ‘ready’ for school (Snow, 2006). In this model, age is seen as irrelevant and the early environment and adjustment is seen as important for school readiness (Busting, 2007). Therefore, the importance of home, pre-schools, peers and neighbours are seen as equally important.

Rimm-Kaufmann and Pianta (2000) describe four models which make up the ecological and dynamic model of transition into school. Model one, which is referred to as the maturational model, looks at the child's characteristics. Model two, which is referred to as the direct effects model; it incorporates model one and looks at the effects that home, school, peers, and neighbours have on the school adjustment. Model three, which is referred to as indirect effects model; it examines both "direct and indirect effects of contexts on the child's competencies and measures the bi-directional interactions that exists between the child and the child's social network (Rimm-Kaufmann & Pianta, 2000, p.7). Model four combines all three models and it incorporates the relationships that develop over time.

The ecosystemic model looks at the child holistically within his or her unique socio-environmental context (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). According to Bronfenbrenner (1979), a child's personal interactions, which are called proximal interactions, will have consequences on their development. When looking at proximal interactions, both the individual and the social context need to be taken into account (Donald, Lazarus & Lolwana, 2010). This will help us to grasp and conceptualise the reasons behind the manner in which a learner has developed. Donald et al., (2010) affirmed that the ecosystem may help us determine change, growth, and intervention if needed. Bronfenbrenner (1979) maintained that development happens within the microsystem, the mesosystem, the exosystem and the macrosystem. All of these systems are affected by developmental time, which is called the chronosystem (Donald et al., 2010). The diagram that follows (Figure 1.1) demonstrates these systems and will be described in more detail below.

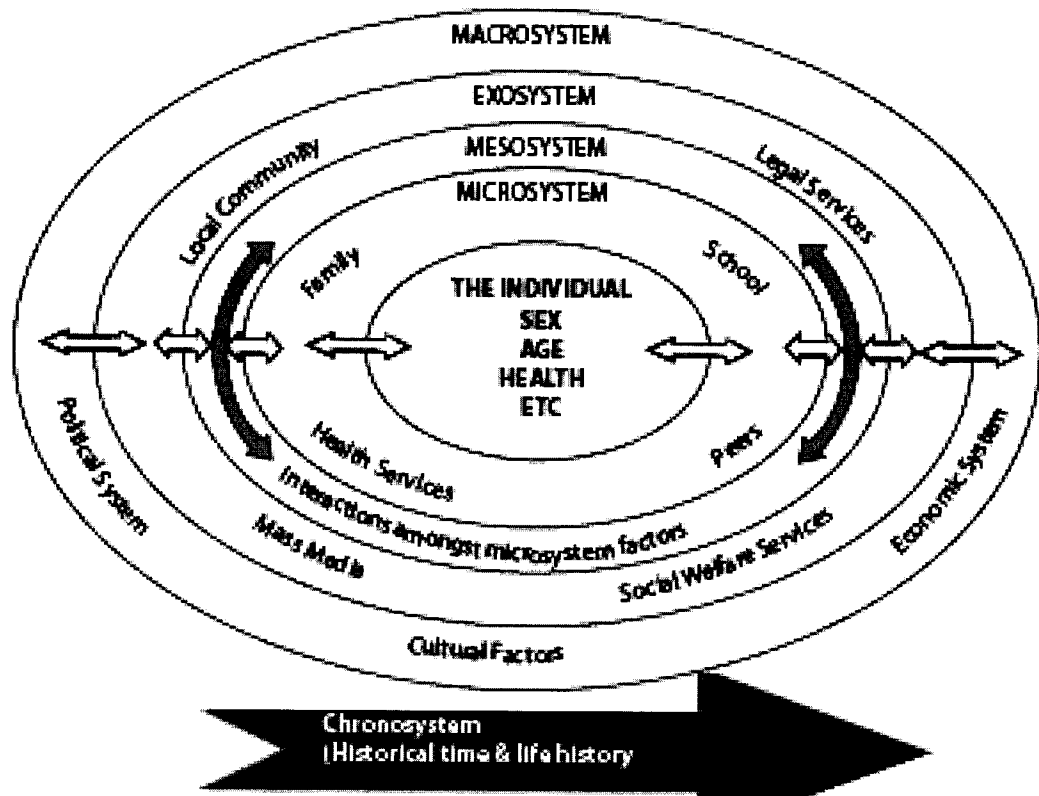


Figure 1.1. Bronfenbrenner's systems theory (Sanson & Stanley, 2011)

The microsystem involves the individuals who are part of the proximal interactions (Donald et al., 2010). These interactions shape the many aspects of development of the child. The mesosystem looks at how the factors in the microsystems relate to each other. (Donald et al., 2010). These authors state that the mesosystem refers to the people who make up the community and how they interact. The exosystem includes the systems which are indirectly related to the child but may still influence the child's development (Hook, Watts & Cockcroft, 2002). The development of the child is influenced as an aspect in the microsystem is affected (Donald et al., 2010). The macrosystems "involves dominant social and economic structures as well as values, beliefs, and practices that influence all other systems" (Donald et al., 2006, p.41). All the extrinsic factors that are prevalent in South Africa fall into this system. These are: "nature and capacity of the education system itself, economic and social issues such as: poverty, violence, crime, substance abuse, the prevalence and spread of HIV-Aids, and community attitudes to both learning and disability" (Green, 2001, p.13). Lastly, the chronosystem refers to how time has affected all the other systems and the child (Donald et al., 2010).

This multi-dimensional view of child development and how it functions provides a holistic understanding of the child's cognitive, motor, language, and academic skills as well

as general knowledge, social competence and emotional development, and process skills. The researcher will use this framework for defining school readiness in this research study as this is consistent with Lemelin et al's. (2007, p.1855) definition, which is; "school readiness involves cognitive, emotional, and social qualities that reflect the child's ability to function successfully in a school context". Cohen (2001) affirms that learners emotional well being will affect their cognitive functioning.

Lewit and Baker (1995) concluded that there is no specific definition of what school readiness consists of that is universal. This can be problematic as an unclear definition can impact negatively on learners. Xiangkui, Len and Xiaosong (2008) state some of the reasons why an agreed upon definition between parents and Grade R and primary school educators is a necessity. These reasons are as follows: if there is no agreement on the definition, learners may be retained or grouped wrongly; which will in turn have negative effects on the learners' self confidence and motivation (Xiangkui et al., 2008). Parents will also not be able to help their children to be ready for school if they are unsure what school readiness means and entails (Cuskelly, Monika & Micole, 2003 cited in Xiangkui et al., 2008).

2.2. Factors Impacting on School Readiness

According to Mashburn and Pianta (2006, p.151), classifications of school readiness seem to centre on how well learners are doing in school, and how sociable they are, in order for them to cope with formal schooling. However, they argue that these definitions do not include how learners achieve the aforementioned competencies, and what support structures or opportunities exist in aiding learners to develop these competencies. Furthermore, it is argued that school readiness, unlike school maturity, can be promoted and thus the learner's home and school environment is crucial (De Witt, 2012). Internal as well as external factors affect school readiness. Some of the factors that promote or hinder school readiness are: "interest, motivation, experience, personal development and intelligence, and external factors such as family and environmental factors" (De Wit, 2012, p.12). Many studies have been conducted abroad on factors that impact on school readiness. Some of these studies will be briefly described and implications for the South African context will be discussed.

Genetics and school readiness

Lemelin et al., (2007) conducted a study investigating the role of genetics and the environment on school readiness. The sample consisted of 840 monozygotic and dizygotic twins. Cognitive school readiness was measured quantitatively by using the Lollipop test, which is an assessment tool. The aforementioned test assessed: 1) identification of colour and shapes, 2) picture description and special recognition, 3) identification of numbers and counting, 4) identification of letters and writing (Lemelin et al., 2007, p.1857). General cognitive school readiness was measured by adding all the scores of the subtests. In addition, school achievement was measured using educator ratings which consisted of a five point Likert scale. These authors measured general cognitive ability by using the Block Design subtest of the Wechsler Preschool and Primary Scale of Intelligence. The results indicated that the fact that twins lived together was a significant factor. They concluded that, although genetics played a role for the primary skills which underlie school readiness rather than the skills which they presumed one needed, shared environment was more important. However, the findings indicated that genetics were responsible for the relationship between school readiness and school achievement. It should be noted that these findings cannot be generalized to all populations and that the spatial recognition scores were not reliable, hence this could have affected the scores.

Home environment and school readiness

Farkas and Hibel (2008) aimed to determine the factors that can delay school readiness. These researchers sourced data from the *Early Childhood Longitudinal Survey, Kindergarten Cohort* (ECLS-K) that was conducted in 1998 in the United States. This survey was done on a national sample of kindergarten children and it measured cognitive and behavioural measures. Data for the study was analysed quantitatively using statistical techniques. They found that parent levels of education and home language played a role in school readiness. Poverty, immigration status, race, family structure and number of siblings were also found to have an effect on school readiness (Farkas & Hibel, 2008). Furthermore, the findings indicated that if one or more of the above factors were present, the level of the child being unready for school could increase by fifty percent or more. The limitations of their study was that there was no indication of any of the encouraging outcomes of readiness, and more in depth data is needed to show what parenting activities have a direct effect on school readiness and what is correlated to school readiness.

The effects of factors such as parent levels of education and home language on school readiness are of particular relevance to South Africa. In 2008, “8.7 % of the adult population were found to be totally illiterate and 13, 7 % of the adult population were functionally illiterate” (DoE, 2010, p.22). In addition, South Africa has eleven official languages and the majority of schools do not accommodate for learners whose medium of instruction is not English. The Department of Education (1997) drew up the Language in Education Policy (LiEP) which stated that all learners will be offered at least one official language in Grade One and Grade Two and from Grade 3 the learners will be offered their language of learning and teaching (LOLT) and one additional language as a subject. LOLT is chosen by the school governing body. The Annual School Survey was conducted by the government, showing the changes in LOLT from 1998 to 2007 (DoE, 2010). The survey indicated that twenty three percent of Grade One learners were taught in the medium of isiZulu, followed by twenty two percent taught in English, seventeen percent LOLT in Xhosa and ten percent of learners in Afrikaans (DoE, 2010). This demonstrates an increase in learners being taught through the medium of their first language as was advocated by the Department of Education (2009c) which stated that if a learner is taught in his first language in his/her first few years of learning, then that will give a good grounding for future learning.

Despite the statistics given by the Department of Education on LOLT, there are many learners who are not schooled in the medium of their first language. The main reason for this is that English is considered to be the universal language which rules the political and economical fronts (Wright, 2002) and thus many parents ensure that their children are taught in English by sending them to English medium schools (Probyn, Murray, Botha, Botya, Brooks, & Westphal, 2002). In addition, many African schools chose to teach in English, despite the recommendations made by the South African Schools Act of 1996, as they are placed under pressure by parents, school governing bodies, and communities. Furthermore, educators stated that some of the terminology in subject teaching cannot be easily transferred to an African language (Probyn, 2009). Many educators resort to code switching as they are caught between pleasing parents and the fact that second language teaching and learning can create academic difficulties (Probyn, 2009). The latter is supportive of Farkas and Hibel’s (2008) study which stated that learners who are not taught in their home language are disadvantaged and this may affect school readiness.

In addition, research suggests that socio-economic status is instrumental in determining how learners would cope at school (Richter & Green, 1991; Fleisch, 2008). Zere and McIntyre (2003) conducted a study in which they aimed to explore how much of the inequalities of malnutrition can be blamed on socio-economic status. The data comprised three thousand seven hundred and sixty five children under five years of age in South Africa. Quantitative methods were used to analyse the Living Standards and Development Survey. Zere and McIntyre (2003) found that malnutrition can be blamed on socio-economic status and it damages a child intellectually. In addition, Doyle McEntee and McNamara (2011) studied the link between socio-economic status and school readiness in an urban community in Ireland. Data was retrieved from all of the primary schools in the community. School readiness was measured using the Short Early Developmental Instrument (SEDI) and descriptive statistics were used to analyse the data. The findings indicated that learners from low SES backgrounds were emotionally immature and this affected their school readiness. However, neighbourhood effects such as social stability cannot be disregarded and could have influenced the data. It should be also noted that the sample was heterogeneous and thus there was not much variability. Nevertheless, interventions are necessary in disadvantaged communities for these learners to achieve school readiness (Doyle et al., 2011).

The aforementioned study has implications for South Africa where eleven million nine hundred thousand children live in poverty (UNICEF, 2011). Engle and Black (2006) studied the link between poverty and academic performance in the United States and in developing countries. The literature they reviewed indicated that lack of stimulation and home experience are contributory factors in relation to the delay in school readiness. Similar findings were found in developing countries (Engle & Black, 2006). However, they point out that there are studies which show success rates of school readiness in children of low income families. The authors thereof highlighted the fact that good pre-schooling, as well as parental involvement, could improve school readiness. This has an implication for intervention programmes in the local South African context.

Preschool and school readiness

Drennan (2011) conducted a qualitative study in South Africa on the importance of reading in pre-school learners. Data was collected from twenty five learners from five different schools in the Bloemfontein region. He found that learners, who have little or no exposure to reading material, are in a disadvantaged position in Grade R as opposed to those learners who have

those resources, those that attend early childhood schooling or those whose parents read to them. Another detriment of poverty in South Africa is parents' lack of education. Anderson, Case and Lam (2000) found a relationship between the frequency of grade repetition and number of years parents spent at school by using empirical evidence of a household survey. The more years of schooling a parent has, the less grade repetition. They also found that children who did not live with their parents were at a greater disadvantage regarding educational attainment. However, "pension benefits paid to resident grandparents may help offset this" (Anderson, Case & Lam, 2000, p.56). Many of the parents are unable to provide for their children the necessary linguistic and literacy codes to enable them to cope in school (Fleisch, 2008, p.75). Many of the children in South Africa report very little leisure reading, and only five percent of children from townships have experienced their parents reading to them (Fleisch, 2008, p.62). This is of concern as it has implications for learners' readiness to enter Grade One, as the level of stimulation parents provide to their children have an influence on child's development (Marjanovi Umek, Podlesek, & Fekonja, 2005c).

In addition, studies have indicated that many African learners in South Africa have difficulty with entering Grade One. (Herbst, 1989, Huysamen,1993, Van Rooyen, 1997). The poor prognosis for low socio economic status groups as noted above has been researched. To offset the disadvantages mentioned previously, Bajc (2008) and Currie (2011) supported the view that pre-schooling is essential to school readiness. This is supported by Bruner's (1977) theory which emphasised that a child can learn at any age if taught effectively. Bruner (1977) believed that if each child were helped, and taught in the way that he or she viewed a certain subject, then they would reach their full potential. Thus, he believed in the quality of education, providing that it prepared a learner for school.

The above theory can be seen in the Fram, Kim and Sinha. (2011) research on early childhood care and its effects on school readiness. This study was carried out in the United States and the data was obtained from the various sources such as the *Early Childhood Longitudinal Study-Kindergarten Cohort*, parent interviews and direct child assessment. Early childhood care was examined in relation to its influences on learners' social and cognitive development. The said study found that although placing learners into early childhood care, such as nursery schools, resulted in having a positive influence on maths and reading scores, it had a negative effect on socio-emotional scores. The findings indicated that learners had difficulty in self-control and externalising behaviours at school entry level. The

limitations of this study were that there were no measures of child care quality and hours, and only a broad perspective was given on early childcare related to later child care enrolment. In addition, a small percentage of the sample was excluded due to data which had been omitted.

However, another study was conducted by Marjanovic Umek et al., (2008) in which they tested two hundred and nineteen learners from the first year of primary school using various psychometric assessments. These learners were clustered into two groups: those who attended pre-school and those who did not. They found that the level of education of the parent determined whether or not pre-school programmes boost a learner's school readiness. They also found that pre-school programmes had a positive effect only on those learners whose parents did not have a higher education. No significant difference was found for those learners whose parents were highly educated.

In the circumstances, as many parents in South Africa do not have a higher education, the above research would suggest that the attendance of a reception year before Grade One would be beneficial to their children in developing school readiness. According to Education White Paper 5 (2001), the Department of Education aimed to have Grade R classes fully implemented in 2010, with eighty five percent of the provision catering for public primary schools and fifteen percent allocated to community sites. However, many of the government funded primary schools do not have a reception year as yet. Some children attend Grade R classes which are attached to nursery schools, while others proceed from nursery schools to Grade One (Education White Paper 5, 2001). According to Statistics South Africa (2007), about nineteen point one percent of five-year olds are not attending an educational institution. The Department of Education has admitted that this goal has not been attained and therefore extended the target date to 2014 (DoE, 2010). Furthermore, the Education White Paper 5 (2001, p.6) states that if learners are provided with quality early childhood education, then this will eradicate the 'under-preparedness' learners face when entering schools. The Department of Education has acknowledged that not only is pre-school education important for school readiness, but that the quality of pre-school education is also important. Therefore, the learners who are not attending Grade R are potentially at risk of being 'under-prepared' for formal schooling.

Health and school readiness

Currie (2011) maintains that health problems, whether experienced directly or indirectly, can also affect school readiness. She states that chronic illnesses affect school readiness as these learners are absent from school often. The medication used to treat these illnesses may have side effects which interfere with learning. Children may be treated differently because of their illness and this may potentially harm their development. Furthermore, an illness may change the chemistry of the body and therefore make it harder to learn. Some health problems may affect learners' cognition as well as behaviour (Currie, 2011). Learners' health status may lead to others treating them differently. Two of these health problems are attention deficit hyperactivity disorder and chronic earache. These conditions affect a learner's ability to listen to and follow instructions. Poor nutrition, resulting in iron deficiency, affects a learners' cognitive development. Studies have shown that maternal depression can decrease test scores by a third of a standard deviation in young learners (Currie, 2011). Currie (2011) is uncertain of the reasons behind this but she hypothesises that genetic and shared environment could account for these scores.

HIV/Aids is an epidemic which affects children directly or indirectly in South Africa (Unicef, 2011). According to UNICEF (2011), children in South Africa are affected by the aids epidemic as they or their parents may be infected. If their parents are infected then they have to be caregivers, and this would mean that they would not able to attend school. Their financial status may have become more unsettling and they may be victimised and stigmatized by the community because of their relationship to an HIV infected individual. Therefore, these children are unable to dedicate time towards their schooling career and this would imply that this epidemic does have an effect on school readiness. In addition, a child with HIV is affected as it impacts the child's development: it delays their physical and cognitive development (Dobrova-Krol, Van IJzendoorn, Bakersmans-Kranenburg & Juffer, 2010).

Unrealistic expectations

Dhlomo (2012) conducted a study in Zimbabwe using qualitative methods, namely; case studies of learners who were entering Grade One in a high density school. She did not state the sample size or describe the sample population which is a limitation of the study as one does not know how valid the study was and if the findings can be generalised. Her aim was to

identify school readiness gaps; skills that the learners lacked which would aid them when entering Grade One. From her observations of these learners she concluded that the learners did not possess the following skills which the educators, parents and the school expected them to have: knowledge of their own names, writing skills, being able to go to the toilet on their own, and knowledge of laterality (Dhlomo, 2012). She, however, noted that some of the expectations were unrealistic as the educators did not have sufficient information, abilities, and outlook to develop an appropriate environment for learners who are entering Grade One. The recommendations made by Dhlomo (2012) were that more collaboration is needed between parents, school, and educators and each should understand their role. All of the members involved should be educated on school readiness and educators need to be trained effectively with regards to school readiness.

There are many factors which play a role in aiding or hindering school readiness. As noted above, pre-school education seems to be important in counteracting the negative effects which are detrimental to school readiness. Amod and Hatfield (2012) state that educators need to provide learners with stimulating activities that would enable learners to cope in Grade One. However, many learners are not enrolled in pre-school because of poverty or the pre-school which they attend is more geared towards day care rather than educational purposes (Amod & Hatfield, 2012). In order to address some of these concerns which are relevant in South African context, the Department of Education has informally halted school readiness testing in government funded schools (Amod & Hatfield, 2012).

2.3. Assessment of School Readiness

For the purpose of this research, school readiness assessment refers to assessment of a learner to determine if he or she is ready for entry into Grade One. According to Maxwell and Clifford (2004), the assessment tool should match the definition of school readiness. Powell (2010,) asserts that educators of learners in pre-school and Grade R should be skilful in assessing the requirement of those learners, and be able to fulfil the requirement when learners are not at their expected developmental level. However, Davin (2005) stated that assessment in Grade R is one of the most difficult tasks and many educators conduct it inefficiently although it is an integral component of effective teaching no matter the type of setting.

There are two types of school readiness assessments, namely naturalistic assessments, and standardized normed assessments (Maxwell & Clifford, 2004). These two types of assessments can be done together and can be conducted by educators, learning support specialists, speech and occupational therapists, and psychologists. Naturalistic assessments consist of observations, work samples, parent rating scales and educator checklists (Maxwell & Clifford, 2004).

On the other hand, standardised normed assessment refers to the use of formal tests such as the Metropolitan School Readiness test (MRT), School Readiness Evaluation by Trained Testers (SETT), and the Aptitude test for School Beginners (ASB); all of which are used in South Africa. The Aptitude Test for School Beginners (ASB) is a South African test used for learners of approximately school entry age (five to six years). It can be used as a group test or for individual children. The behaviour during the testing is observed and recorded closely by the tester. The ASB provides a standardised score profile based, on South African norms, which identifies the key elements of school readiness. It tests language, attention, fine-motor coordination, and cognitive skills via formal subtests. Qualitatively, the ASB tests social skills, independent thinking and application, and emotional maturity.

The Metropolitan School Readiness test (MRT), the Wechsler Pre-school and Primary Scale of Intelligence (WPPSI), and the Griffiths Mental Development Scales are measures which are employed as part of the school readiness battery of tests used abroad, as well as by some practitioners in South Africa. The MRT test assesses emerging and developing literacy concepts as well as mathematical concepts (Nurss, 1994). The WPPSI measures the cognitive ability of children aged two-and-a-half to seven-and-a-half years of age. More specifically, it assesses working memory, processing speed, and inhibitory control which is optional (Weschler, 2012). The Wechsler Pre-school and Primary Scale of Intelligence (WPPSI) measures the cognitive skills, language skills, motor skills, and social trends in young children. Educational psychologists often assess for school readiness using a combination of the above procedures, a battery of projective tests and a cognitive assessment measure (Rock & Stenner, 2005; Jansen & Greenop, 2008; Busting, 2007).

In South Africa the Curriculum Assessment Policy Statements (CAPS) have been implemented from January 2012 for Grade R (DoE, 2011). According to CAPS, Grade R in

the foundation phase must offer one official home language, mathematics and life skills (DoE, 2011). These three subjects are assessed by the requirements that are stipulated by the *National Protocol for Assessment Grades R-12*. This document states that Grade R assessment comprises of School-Based Assessments and Practical Assessment tasks. These are designed to address how well learners know their work and how motivated they are and they serve as an evaluation which educators and parents can use to understand what level the learners are at during the assessment (DoE, 2011). Pieterse (2001) wrote that school readiness should be regularly assessed in order to identify problem areas. The DoE (2011) stated that if learners are retained then the assessments will provide information to determine what interventions and support structures are required. Hence, if a child is not ready, early identification is vital in developing interventions (Amod, Cockcroft & Soellaart, 2007).

Davin (2005) asserted that it is important for educators to understand the reason for conducting an assessment. This is reiterated by Kagan (2003) as he stated that the purpose of conducting a school readiness assessment is to determine if the interventions conducted are effective, to determine if instructions need to be altered and to identify any difficulties be they physical, emotional and mental. It further assisted with trend assessments. Furthermore, school psychologists could help educators and parents by providing information on the development rates of learners and how this matches the skills needed for school readiness (Hojnoski and Misnal, 2006). They also stated that a psychologist could collaborate with educators in developing a curriculum that will suit the needs of the learners. However, given the South African context where poverty is rife, many parents and educators are unable to consult with psychologists and thus the teachers and parents are left to decide if a child should start Grade One (Amod & Hatfield, 2012)

As noted above, conducting assessments can be useful but there are limitations in relation to psychological assessment in South Africa and these must be taken into account. For most South Africans, psychological assessment is a foreign concept and many who are not familiar with it view it negatively due to its misuse in the past, when tests were used to indicate white superiority (Foxcroft & Roodt, 2001). One of the major concerns is that many of the assessments being used are not meeting the needs of the population. Given the diversity of the South African population, many of the tests do not cater for every culture, very few tests are normed in South Africa, and many of these assessment tools are outdated

(Foxcroft, Paterson, le Roux & Herbst, 2004). Therefore, the use of a more holistic assessment would be more appropriate. Davin (2005) affirmed that the whole child needs to be assessed and many methods in different situations should be used. One could use parent and educator reports, as well as projective tests such as the 'Draw a Person' test, to achieve a more comprehensive assessment of school readiness.

It can be safely said that there are many issues regarding psychological assessment which need to be taken into account given South Africa's unique context in terms of its socio-political history and multilingual society. The researcher proposes that an assessment model should include the eco-systemic approach, with a central involvement of the parents/caregivers and educators in the assessment process.

2.4. Educators' Perceptions of School Readiness

Educators' perceptions of school readiness are important, as educators' attitudes and expectations influence their own behaviour (Brophy, 1985 cited in Campbell, Grant, & Woolfson, 2007). This is further extended by Lin, Lawrence and Gorrell (2003) who stated that pre-school educators' perceptions are affected by a number of factors; their own experience of being a learner as well as currently being an educator, the nature of the school's resources, their expectations and the expectations of the community, where the learner comes from and the communities perceptions towards the pre-school. In addition, Jenkins (2012) asserts that if the educators' perceptions are not aligned to each other, then this will have an impact on the children's development. It should be noted that there is a paucity of documented South African research on the perceptions of school readiness by educators.

In one of the few studies conducted in South Africa, Goldblatt (2004) administered an open-ended questionnaire to pre-primary school educators at Muslim, Jewish and multicultural schools, as well as to five parents (randomly selected by the principals) from each school. Her study investigated whether parents' and educators' perceptions of school readiness differed. She found that Muslim educators were more inclined towards pre-school education as they believed that it helped toward school readiness. Goldblatt (2004) found that both parents and educators defined school readiness similarly. However, educators were not satisfied with the parents' ability in diagnosing school readiness. Furthermore, Goldblatt's

findings indicated that educators placed more emphasis on socio-emotional skills as indicators of school readiness, whereas parents placed more emphasis on academic competence. It is important to discuss the limitation of her study being that her participants were from a middle class socio economic group and this could have influenced their responses.

Lara-Cinisomo, Fuligni, Ritchie, Howes and Karoly (2008) investigated pre-school educators' perceptions of school readiness. The eighty one participants were from different ethnic groups and from private, public, and family centre based programmes in Utah. The data was analyzed qualitatively. They found some subtle differences in the data from the participants from the three different programmes (private, public, and family centre based) in which they taught (Lara-Cinisimo et al., 2008). Participants from the family-based programmes placed more emphasis on impulse control than the participants from the other two programmes. Participants from the public based programmes placed more emphasis on parents preparing a learner for school, and the learner's home environment, than participants from the other two programmes. All the participants placed equal emphasis on educator-parent communication. However, centre-based programmes placed more emphasis on a mutual partnership between parents and educators to achieve learners' readiness than the family-based programmes. Their findings indicated that all of the educators believed that the school, family, and educator played a pivotal role in preparing learners for school (Lara-Cinisomo, 2008). The educators felt that, in order for the learners to make the transition to school successfully, the learners needed to be self-confident and needed to want to learn, to know their alphabet and numbers and to be able to solve problems. Additionally, the learners should be physically developed and be able to work with their peers. They also felt that a stimulating home environment was needed to assist school readiness. The partnership between educators and parents was found to be a vital factor in achieving school readiness. The study, however, was limited as there was no random sampling and thus limited the variability of responses. In addition, the findings cannot be generalised to other educators as all of the participants were recruited centre administrators and informal network educators, and the researcher stated that there are other early childhood centres besides the three programmes that were investigated.

Another American study that also investigated pre-primary educators' perceptions of school readiness, was conducted by Espinosa, Thornburg and Mathews (1997). This study compared the perceptions of rural educators in Missouri to those of the national Carnegie study, where seven thousand pre-school educators' perceptions of school readiness were investigated. Espinosa et al., (1997) found that the rural educators perceived learners as 'more ready' compared to those in the Carnegie study. The educators in the Carnegie study attributed the learners' lack of readiness to poor language skills and emotional and social problems. The intervention that was suggested by the aforementioned educators was parental education. The rural educators also mentioned that in comparison to previous years, more parents were unavailable to prepare their children for school, which in turn impacted negatively on their children's school readiness (Espinosa et al., 1997). The rural educators stated that this could be counteracted by effective pre-school programmes. The researchers concluded that urban and rural educators defined school readiness differently and that this accounted for the difference in perception of these educators (Espinosa et al., 1997). However, they noted that they could have retrieved richer demographic information from the participants in both groups to determine if it had any underlying effect on their perceptions. This has implications for South Africa as UNICEF (2011) stated that in South Africa only forty three percent of learners under five years old attend an early childhood development programme, either at a centre or at home. Children who are not adequately stimulated at pre-school level on a cognitive and an emotional level may be at risk when they enter formal schooling (Fleisch, 2008).

Lin, Lawrence and Gorrell (2003) assert that pre-school educators' perceptions are critical as they impact on the way they teach, and ultimately on the progress on the learner. They conducted a study in America whereby they investigated the perceptions of three thousand three and five pre-school educators from different contexts and with different qualifications. All the data was analysed quantitatively using descriptive analyses, factor analysis, and statistical analysis. The consensus amongst these educators was that they placed more emphasis on social rather than academic readiness. They also believed that learners need to possess self-regulation before entering formal schooling. In addition, they saw the relationship between social readiness and academic readiness as linked. The participants highlighted social and individual aspects as a requirement for consistent performance in school (Lin et al., 2003). The results also indicated that older educators placed even less

emphasis on academic readiness than younger educators. The authors thereof stated that this may be an indication that educators perceptions are changing with time.

From the above studies, it can be seen that educators place more emphasis on social readiness rather than academic competence. Furthermore, the studies indicated that educators placed emphasis on stimulation in the home environment which they believed will aid school readiness. In addition to viewing educators' perceptions of school readiness as fundamental, parental perceptions are important to discuss. Brent and Pelletier (2002) stated that not only do learners have to be ready for school, but parents also have to be ready; even if it is not a conscious readiness. They conducted a qualitative study whereby they investigated parents' involvement in a readiness programme and its influences on their children's school readiness and education. This study was conducted in Canada, and the sample consisted of one hundred and twenty three families who were part of a larger group of three hundred and thirteen families which participated in a longitudinal study. Brent and Pelletier (2002) found that readiness programmes promote parental self-efficacy, which includes their belief in their own teaching and control of their child's education, how much motivation they provide, and how much influence they have on their child both academically and socially. In addition, Brent and Pelletier (2002) found that if parents have high self-efficacy and work together with educators, then a child's readiness for school is increased.

2.5. The Role of the Parent in School Readiness

Boyer (1991, p.34) postulates that a supportive environment builds "emotional maturity and social confidence, keys to readiness, but such an environment is also especially consequential to language development". In order for a learner child to succeed academically, the language used at home is crucial (Boyer, 1991; Lemelin et al., 2007). Therefore, parents play a pivotal role in facilitating learners 'school readiness. According to Dockett and Perry (2009) there needs to be an encouraging movement from home to school, and both school and home must have a knowledge and respect of what transpires in each environment. The Department of Education (2010) advocates the partnership between the parents, communities, non-governmental organisations and the department for the optimal development of the learner. Kagan and Rigby (2003) have argued that parents and caregivers should be given the necessary support to help their children to meet their needs. In addition, studies have shown

the importance of an alignment between parents' and educators' perceptions of school readiness (Glickman, Gordon & Ross-Gordon, 1995 cited in Goldblatt, 2004). Goldblatt (2004) stated that if educators and parents perceptions are aligned, then there is a better chance that the skills that parents encourage before entering school match the skills educators identify as components of school readiness.

Orkin (2008) conducted a study in Boston in which she investigated whether parents' perceptions of school readiness differed from those of the school. She also investigated whether or not the parents' behaviours supported their attitudes. The data was captured using both qualitative and quantitative methods (interviews and questionnaires) and 37 parents participated in this study. She found that although schools saw formal education as an integral component towards the development school readiness, parents believed that the home environment was more important than the professional environment. Her findings indicated that parents saw their role in aiding school readiness as more important than the role of educators. Furthermore, they viewed academic and behavioural skills as vital to school readiness whilst educators' emphasised social skills.

The researcher agrees with Noel (2010) who believed that parental behaviours are important, because not only is the onus on the child to demonstrate whether he or she is ready for school, but it is also on the parents, who are largely responsible for school readiness. According to Brent and Pelletier (2002), not only do learners have to be ready for school but parents also have to be ready; even if it is not a conscious readiness. They conducted a study whereby they investigated parents' involvement in a readiness programme and its influences on their children's school readiness and education. These researchers found that readiness programmes promote parental self-efficacy, which includes their belief in their own teaching and control of their child's education, how much motivation they provide, and how much influence they have on their child both academically and socially. Additionally, Brent and Pelletier (2002) found that if parents have high self-efficacy, and work together with educators, then a child's readiness for school is increased.

Furthermore, Dockett and Perry (2003) stated that parents are anxious when their children have to make the transition to school and this may impact on their perception of school readiness. Parents show concern about safety, hygiene, and socialising and also worry

about how their child will eat, and how they will adapt to being separated from them. Parents often determine whether a child is ready for school by the attitude the child has towards going to school (Dockett & Perry, 2003).

According to Ermond (2008), learners are at times held back from entering school because their parents hope that, if they are held back, they will mature physically, emotionally, socially and scholastically. However, contrary to the aforementioned statement, Ermond (2008) stated that there is no research which proves that there is long-term benefits which arise from retaining learners. The author thereof thus addressed these discrepancies by conducting a study whereby she investigated whether parent training programmes which addressed social and academic concerns, would change their perceptions of school readiness and delayed entry. Parents were assigned to either school readiness or behaviour training groups. Their perceptions on school readiness were assessed before and after the training. Ermond (2008) found that the parents who attended the training group changed their perceptions from supporting delayed entry, to thinking that their child was ready for school. However, those parents against delayed entry, both in the behaviour training and school readiness groups, did not change their perceptions of school readiness. Furthermore, Powell (2010) stated that often learners are held back from Grade One because parents, educators, and the community are unclear of what is expected at that age.

Furthermore, the parents can be an important source of support for the learner and educators should utilise this support base. Parents can aid educators by elucidating to their children what is expected in school, such as the rules and regulations, teaching them how to be independent, bringing their child in earlier so that they can get to know the environment and meet the educator (Garrett, 2001 cited in Dhlomo, 2012). In addition, parents know what is best for their own child and they are best suited to provide useful information to the educators (Engelbrecht, Green, Naicker & Engelbrecht., 1999). Swart and Phasha (2005) stated that in South Africa, learners could benefit more from a mutual relationship between parents and educator focussing on ways to help the learner.

2.6. Conclusion

There is an ongoing controversy on the definition of school readiness and to date there is no universal definition, which has implications for its assessment. There are many factors such as genetics, home environment, preschool education, health and unrealistic expectations which affect school readiness and therefore when assessing such readiness, one needs to take these factors into account; thus a holistic approach is suggested.. This approach is underpinned by Bronfenbrenner's theory which views the child in relation to its context and the people the learner interacts with directly and indirectly. This is not in accordance with the policy provided by the Department of Education, who determines school readiness by age. Educators' perceptions of school readiness are important as they have an influence on a child's development. In light of very limited local literature and research in this area, the current study is designed to explore the perceptions of eight South African Grade R educators, who ply their trade in government funded schools, on school readiness.

Chapter Three: Methodology

This chapter will outline the methods used in this research study. It will examine the research design and describe the type of participants that were used. It will further explain the research questions that aided the development of the interview questions. The instrument that was used will be discussed in relation to how it was developed. The procedure of the research study and any ethical considerations will be outlined. In addition the researcher's biases will be examined.

3.1. Research Design

The proposed study is an exploratory qualitative study on Grade R educators' perceptions of school readiness. Qualitative research is aimed at addressing "questions concerned with developing an understanding of the meaning and experience dimensions of humans' lives and social worlds" (Fossey, Harvey, McDermott & Davidson, 2002, p.717). Hence, the questions that were used in the measurement were based on the literature. Deductions were drawn from the data collected, and therefore it is appropriate to use a qualitative design (Newman, 2007).

3.2. Participants

The participants consisted of eight Grade R educators from four government primary schools in the Johannesburg East region. The researcher chose these participants as there are not many Grade R classes per school and, furthermore, not all government funded schools have Grade R classes nor do very low socio-economic schools. These government funded schools were middle to high socio-economic schools (SES). These schools had been chosen primarily for convenience. Convenience sampling, which is a type of non-probability sampling, was used as there was no random selection of participants but rather participants who were easily accessible were selected (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006). More specifically, a purposive sampling strategy was used and according to Fossey et al., (2002, p.726), this form of sampling is designed to "maximize representation of a range of perspectives on an issue which will help to challenge the researchers own views". The first two participants who volunteered from each of the schools were selected to participate in the research.

The demographics of these volunteers were as follows: all eight participants were female educators, five of the educators were white, one was Indian, one was coloured and one was black. Two of the participants had over ten years experience, three had over five years experience, and three participants had been teaching for under five years. One of the participants had a BPrimEd qualification, another had a Bachelor of Education specialising in intermediate phase, two had a Diploma in Education, one had an Early Childhood Diploma and two participants each had a Bachelor of Arts specialising in Psychology. In addition, there was one participant who did not have any qualifications. All of these participants had experiences in dealing with school readiness.

3.3. Research Questions

In relation to the overall aim of the study, which was to explore Grade R government funded school educators' perceptions of school readiness, the following research questions were asked:

- 3.3.1. How do the participants define school readiness?
- 3.3.2. What are the factors in their view that promote school readiness?
- 3.3.3. What are the factors they see as impeding a child's readiness for school?
- 3.3.4. What assessment approaches, if any, are currently being used to determine if a child is ready for school?
- 3.3.5. What intervention strategies, if any, are used by educators if a child is not ready for entry into Grade One?

3.4. Instruments

Rabionet (2011) stated that the qualitative interview is an ideal tool for capturing the perceptions formed by people. The researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with the educators. Semi-structured interviews helped the researcher to focus the questions on specific areas (Rabionet, 2011). Semi-structured interviews use an interview schedule. The interview schedule consists of questions that can be open or closed ended, and can be asked in no specific order. Open-ended questions permit more depth than closed-ended questions (Dearnley, 2005).

The interview schedule was developed from the literature that was reviewed and it consisted of twenty three questions. The researcher used the first two interviews as a piloting process. This guided any changes that needed to be made to the interview schedule. According to Teijelingen and Hundley (2001, p.1), a pilot study is beneficial because “it might give advance warning about where the main research project could fail, where research protocols may not be followed, or whether proposed methods or instruments are inappropriate or too complicated”. No changes were made to the interview schedule since the participants had no difficulties providing the information that was necessary.

3.5. Procedure

The Gauteng Department of Education’s district supervisor was approached for permission to conduct the study in Gauteng government funded schools (see Appendix A). Permission was also requested from the principals of the schools (see Appendix B) and an information sheet was made available to the educators regarding the details pertaining to the study (Appendix C). The researcher personally contacted all the volunteer educators to arrange a convenient time for them to be interviewed. Teaching time was not disrupted as the interviews took place during breaks or after school. Each interview lasted approximately forty five to sixty minutes. All of the interviews were recorded. The data was then transcribed for analysis. The raw data is presently kept safely in a locked cupboard at the University of the Witwatersrand.

3.6. Data Analysis

The data was analysed using thematic content analysis. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), thematic content analysis is the foundation of qualitative analysis as it is the basis for conducting any research- “Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) in data” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.79). Braun and Clark (2006, p.86) specified that analysis involves “a constant moving back and forward between the entire data set, the coded extracts of data that you are analysing and the data that you are producing”.

The recorded interviews were transcribed. The researcher familiarised herself with the data by reading and re-reading. Initial codes were generated from the data. The codes were then combined to form themes. The themes were then refined, defined and named. The themes were then interpreted to answer the research questions.

3.7. Ethical Considerations

Ethical clearance was received from the University of the Witwatersrand (see Appendix E). The Gauteng Department of Education (GDE) was approached for permission to conduct interviews at the government funded schools. All the necessary documentation requested by the district supervisor such as the proposal and the forms for clearance, was submitted. GDE clearance to conduct the study had been granted (see Appendix F).

The principals of the four schools were approached. The principals were given an information sheet stating the reasons for the research and how the data would be collected. A consent form was given to the principal in order to obtain permission to interview educators at the school (see Appendix B). Educators in Grade R were approached individually or at a staff meeting. Educators who volunteered to participate were contacted personally to arrange a convenient time and place for the interview. Educators were given subject information sheets which consisted of information regarding the aims of the study as well as the requirements of the participants. In addition, the educators were given two consent forms to sign; one consent form was for the interview and the other for the recording of the interview (see Appendix C).

The information sheet informed participants of the aims of the research and how data would be collected. The information sheet also informed the educators that their responses would be kept confidential and that no information that could identify them or the schools would be included in the research report (educators are referred to by the use of a pseudonym in the subsequent chapters of this research report). The educators were told that they could refrain from answering any questions they preferred not to answer and that they could choose to withdraw from the study at any point. The information sheet stated that only the researcher and her supervisor would have access to the interview material (tapes and transcripts), and that the raw data would be kept safely in a locked cupboard at the University of Witwatersrand. It informed the participants that the data would be retained for the duration of two years should the research not be published and for six years if published. Thereafter it would be destroyed. The information sheet stated that feedback would be made available to the participants and the school, in the form of a summary of the study and its results, approximately six months after the interview.

Pseudonyms were used in the research report in order to protect the confidentiality of the participants. Confidentiality was achieved by assigning code names to each educator. The names of the learners and the schools, as well as any other information identifying the educators, the learners or the schools, were omitted and the interviews were sanitized.

3.8. Self-Reflexivity

Reflexivity is a vital part of qualitative research. “Reflexivity thus is often understood as involving an on-going self-awareness during the research process which aids in making visible the practice and construction of knowledge within research in order to produce more accurate analyses of our research” (Pillow, 2003, p.178). Thus, self-reflexivity allowed the researcher to examine what biases she may have had and how they may have affected the research process. This is further explored by Dearnley (2005) who stated that self-reflexivity allows for the researcher to use it as an opportunity to better understand the perceptions of the participants.

As regards to self-reflexivity, the researcher acknowledges that this research is a study of Grade R educators’ perceptions of school readiness conducted by a foundation phase educator. The researcher has had experience in educating Grade R as well as Grade One learners, and thus may have had her own subjective perceptions on school readiness. The researcher is also a mother whose child has entered Grade R during the period that she conducted the current research study. Thus, the researcher acknowledged that she had a personal interest in the study. However, the researcher’s need to broaden her knowledge about school readiness was seen as equally significant to the study. The researcher kept note of her biases by using a self reflexive journal and an audit trail whereby she recorded all the steps taken to complete this study.

3.9. Conclusion

This research study was prompted by the limited research on school readiness in the South African context, for which this study would be relevant. A qualitative method approach in the form of semi structured interviews was used to collect data from eight Grade R educators. The demographics of the participants were diverse but all of them were from government funded primary schools in the Johannesburg East region. Data was analysed using the Braun and Clarke method of thematic content analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Ethical procedures

were followed and possible biases related to conducting this study have been noted. The results obtained will be discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter Four: Results

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the results obtained from the eight interviews conducted with Grade R educators from four schools in the Johannesburg East region. To ensure that anonymity is upheld, the educators are referred to by pseudonyms. Seven themes emerged from coding the data using thematic content analysis as described by Braun and Clarke (2006). These themes were found using the inductive approach to qualitative research. Thomas (2006) defined an inductive approach as retrieving themes from raw data without looking at prior aims, hypotheses or theories. This approach allowed for meaning to emerge from the transcripts in the form of themes (Thomas, 2006). The themes that emerged from this study were: understanding of school readiness, factors that contribute or hinder school readiness, assessment of school readiness, retention, degree of parental participation, the role of the government, and challenges experienced by the educators. The aforementioned themes are presented below.

4.2 Understanding of School Readiness

This theme consists of two subthemes namely, definition and identification of school readiness and purpose of school readiness. These subthemes will be discussed below.

4.2.1. Definition and identification of school readiness.

Five educators stressed the importance of being emotionally ready. Educator L stated that “they might be ready academically, but they might not be ready emotionally”. Educator X defined school readiness as “I would say that emotionally they need to be ready to go to Grade One, and then of course they need to attain the correct skills to cope”. Educator O understood it as “I would define school readiness when a child is specifically, cognitively and emotionally ready to start at a primary school, that being grade one and on an emotional level that socially they are capable of interacting in classes...”

Two educators mentioned that the learners need to have a certain level of maturity and independence. Educator C identified school readiness as “certain amount of independence,

organizational skills, emotional readiness, physical, fine motor readiness. They are just ready to get more involved”. Educator O felt the same way as Educator C.

One educator emphasised the importance of social readiness. Educator M defined school readiness as “to be able to communicate, to socialize and not hang onto their parents. You know to be able to adapt in the classroom situation and to be able to concentrate, that’s quite an important factor.” Educator M mentioned the importance of being able to concentrate and this was also stated by Educator Y. Educator Y’s definition of school readiness included the following; “Perceptions, number concepts, contracts and abstract levels, lacerated things, is very important, left and right, crossing the midline extremely important, orientation, language, memory, correct pencil control, pencil grip, concentrate, listen, follow instructions, all the physical needs like dressing themselves, meeting, feeding”.

In addition to the above, half of the participants felt that school readiness needs to be seen from a cognitive, emotional, and physical stance. Educator C reported, “certain amount of independence, organizational skills, emotional readiness, physical, fine motor readiness. They are just ready to get more involved”. Educator F states, “Like they have to be ready holistically. The mind, the feelings, the marks. Everything”.

4.2.2. Purpose of school readiness.

Three quarters of the educators felt that school readiness is important for a child to be ready for Grade One and it will help in preventing retention in Grade One. Educator F felt “it’s appropriate, some of the stuff it’s too much in Grade One and Grade R prevents the delay.” Educator O stated that “there would be less retentions in Grade One, if there were more school readiness done”. Educator Y stated, “I definitely think it is important, if your educators, your Grade 1 educators and the children are where they should be for their formal year in Grade One it does help so much more”. Educator L reported, “Yes. Children in Grade One can actually destroy them, without them already can actually destroy them mentally, emotionally and academically if they are not prepared, if they are not ready, if they are not of the same standard that everybody else. All they do is fall behind. The gap is bigger and bigger as the years go on. If you don’t have the gap now, you are never going to close that gap unfortunately. School readiness is essential”.

Thirty percent (n=8) of the educators specified that school readiness helps both parents and educators identify any difficulties that a child is facing. Educator M said that “It’s a guideline, not only for the parents but for the educator that are helping them. So those that need extra help could work on a specific aspect that are struggling”.

4.3. Factors that Hinder or Promote School Readiness

All of the educators stated that the home environment affects school readiness. Educator C felt that “they must be in an environment where they are stimulated”. Educator M reported that if they “lack that stimulation of course they lose out”. The educators stated that parental involvement is crucial. Educator L stated, “We give homework. It’s not homework, it’s things that the parents can do with these children. Blow bubbles, drink through a straw, put peanut butter on the top of their mouths. Parents come back and say they don’t have the time.” Educator O and Educator L mentioned that parents’ lack of education may hinder school readiness. Educator O stated the following: “even a negative perception can develop because the parents don’t read and write the child can even develop a negative attitude, my mom doesn’t read and write, so why must I learn” All of the educators relate the lack of stimulation and the lack of parental involvement to the parents’ socio economic status, and they imply that socio-economic status plays a role in school readiness. Educator C felt that “economically maybe the parents are just working such long hours, they just are not at home, or they will come home, exhausted, feed the kids, go to bed. They don’t have the quality time to actually spend with their children.”

Educator O was the only educator who mentioned the role of nursery schools, as well as the intellectual level of a child, in facilitating or hindering school readiness. She reported that “You have to look at children holistically... What is the background, what home are they going home to. Is there parental involvement. Is the child on an IQ level? What is their IQ? What is their emotional status? How are they physically developed?”

4.4. Assessment of School Readiness

Three subthemes emerged: namely, entry into Grade One, assessments in South Africa, and referrals. These subthemes will be discussed below.

4.4.1. Entry into Grade One.

Two of the educators stated that there is no assessment tool which all educators use and they felt that there is uncertainty surrounding these assessments. Educator L argued that “because it keeps chopping and changing and this is an assessment criteria and then this is an assessment criteria, and we’ve just changed from NCS to CAPS and nobody knows what they’re doing. People need to sit down and figure out what it is and fix it. Stop chopping and changing”.

Half of the educators stated that observation is an important part of assessment and the whole class needs to be taken into account. Educator X felt that “you need to be awake and know what’s going on in your class room and see at what level they at and see if they understand, if they can apply, what they’ve learned after the morning.” Educator Y stated that “it needs to be brought on by what we learned, concrete first, concrete level. There’s obviously three levels of learning. A concrete level and a semi concrete and then after”.

In addition to observation, four of the educators felt that the Curriculum Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) is an important tool of assessment. Educator O reported, “it was certain things in CAPS but also a lot of, observation like I said to you.” Educator C stated “I’ve got a copy of the school readiness as a basic thing. Can a child forward it, can it repeat it, can they this, can they that. Can they carry things on the story and there are overlaps so I work with that. Then we’ve got the assessments that we have to do for CAPS at the moment”.

Educator S perceived assessments as “they should meet all the milestones of Grade R.” In addition, Educator F was the only participant who mentioned that assessments should be continuous and conducted regularly: “We assess all the time, always. We do it. Properly, we do it tomorrow – we see they are in progress. The progress is continual. We have to keep them going.”

4.4.2. Assessments in South Africa.

Five of the eight educators felt that assessments have value in South Africa. Educator M reported that “I think they’re very good because it does give you a guideline, and then there again you can assist and help and also advise the parents, they also work if the child needs OT or any therapy, and those that are able to afford it and show interest will follow through with it”. Educator O gave her reasoning as “I think a lot of nursery schools have used the assessment, not talking about external school readiness assessments but internally to keep the child back for the wrong reasons, for reasons that maybe would not be completely beneficial to the child.” Although Educator Y agreed with the usefulness, she stated that “it’s very important because we able to see where a child is at and intervene where necessary but there is no one set assessment used in South Africa”.

Educator L could not comment on assessments in South Africa as she had “found nothing has been given”. Educator C felt that “proper guidelines” are needed for it to be more useful. Educator X reported that she thinks “it should be applied more, what they’ve done in previous and saw where they lacked”.

4.4.3. Referrals.

All of the educators stated that they refer their learners to other professionals for assessments. Educator O stated that “It’s often the government institutions that we refer to. Because a lot of the parents actually can’t afford, they can’t afford to go to places, we do have some other psychologists that we refer to”. Educator Y reported, “if there are problems we do send them to the appropriate people- occupational, speech therapy, play therapy”. Educator X stated, “Yes we do. We have an OT at the school, so we refer our learners to her and then we also refer to speech therapist etc”. Educator M felt that assessments should be left to the professionals such as “psychologist and OT and there was a speech therapist that would come and assess the learners with the parents’ consent”

4.5. Retention

Two subthemes were identified: the impact on learners, and the support systems for learners retained in Grade R. These subthemes will be discussed further.

4.5.1. The impact on the learners.

There were mixed reviews on how learners are impacted if retained in Grade R. Five of the educators felt that although it is hard initially, children adapt and become accustomed to being in the same grade. They also state that it is beneficial for them. Educator S stated that, “Learners in Grade R are small, they adapt and get over it. So rather keep them behind when they smaller I feel”. Educator O felt that there are positive and negatives; “Positive impact that I’ve seen is that academically there is an improvement and it’s not it does change so it’s not that they, repeating the same works and doing that. The negative impact I would say has sometimes been behavior. Sometimes they do have the attitude even if they are persistent, I’ve been there done that, let me just play around or talk”.

Educator L reported that,

“It’s hard because they are stuck, all those friends have moved on and for the first of the week, they tend to latch onto their friends and they don’t let them go. But as the months’ pass, they almost find that they forget about them and they quite happily slide in with the new friends that they’ve got in place. I think it’s more an upset for the parents if you think that. Resilience and they adapt very quickly. It is, it’s confusing for them at the beginning like I said, but I’ve got a little one, he was in Educator Z’s class last year and he’s in my class now and for the first couple of weeks he really struggled but he settled in so nicely. There’s a huge difference in him emotionally. It’s just far more mature. You can see as opposed to last year, it was all uninterested in any sort of responsibility and she is loving the responsibility this year”.

Educator C felt that there was no negative impact and only advantages existed. “I must say the little ones who stay back it doesn’t have a negative impact. They know they’re going to a new class and educator. The class does pick up, I say they’re too young, they can have another chance in Grade R... Academically there is an improvement.”

4.5.2. Support systems.

Some educators felt that there is limited support for those retained in Grade R, and others elaborated on the supportive approaches that they utilized for learners who are retained in Grade R. Three educators believed that no support systems are in place for those who are

retained in Grade R. Educator C stated that “think we should have a support system in, I suggested one. I suggested one afternoon remedial but it hasn’t been done”. Educator S reported, “Nothing has been done they just repeat”.

Five of the educators felt that they do whatever is needed to support the learners. Educator X explained her strategy as “well what we do here, is I feel that the child cannot benefit from me, the child is placed in another class – it depends on how the child is functioning, sometimes they excel better, other environment and spaces. It depends on the child, it really does.” Educator M responded as follows: “so we as the educators try and stimulate them and encourage them and sort of maybe put them in groups with the more, more outgoing child, perhaps, just to sort of help them and encourage them. It seems to help in a way”.

In addition to helping the learners individually, two of the educators refer the learners who are held back to other professionals, such as OT. Educator L stated, “We do the OT, like I say and we do put them break time, but other than that – there isn’t any sort of support. We do remedial or keep them back at the same time and do extra work and send the work home”.

4.6. Degree of Parental Participation

There were two subthemes that emerged which included the role of parents and parental perceptions of school readiness. These subthemes will be discussed below.

4.6.1. The role of parents.

The consensus throughout the interviews was that parental involvement is crucial to developing schooling readiness. Educator X felt that “as long as you’ve got your parents that sit with the children and their work it would make a difference. The role is very important”. Educator F reported that “they have to assist, especially with the homework. They have to be there, they are working, they have to provide for the child and they have to be loving”. Educator O believed that they need to be “actively involved in the school process as well so that they could know and see”.

4.6.2. Parents' perceptions of school readiness.

Five of the educators expressed the view that parents perceive school readiness differently from the way they do. Educator C said that she could not understand the viewpoint of one of the parents and reported, "The father said to me I would rather she failed Grade One than repeat Grade R. How can they possibly think that would be a better idea". Educator F stated that "parents don't believe Grade Rs go to school to learn, they just think they go to school to play". Educator S reported, "No ways! All parents think that their kids are ready. They don't look beyond their child".

Two of the educators had mixed views; they felt that some parents have similar perceptions of school readiness to them while other parents differ. Educator X believed that some parents share educators perceptions of school readiness but there are others who have different views-"I don't think that some parents see Grade R as learning environment, I think that they think that they child is here to play and then there are other parents who expect too much from their children".

Educator M was the only educator who believed parents are receptive to teacher's suggestions. She stated that "if you explain to them, they showed great interest, they really do".

4.7. The Role of the Government

Four subthemes emerged: age norms, the curriculum, support, and delayed implementation for Grade R. These subthemes will be discussed further.

4.7.1. Age norms.

Five of the educators disagreed with the age norms given by the government on when a learner should enter Grade One. Educator C felt that "you get the odd young child who is ready for school and you definitely get the few, a portion who are really not ready even though they're six years old". Educator M believed that "some of them are a little bit immature because they develop differently". Educator L's reasons for disagreeing with the

age norms as determined by the government were “Because they say that we can have children between four and a half and five June 30th and children between five and a half and six years, before the 31st of December. I have children in my class who are not even five years and I have children in my class who are also not even five coping beautifully. And the same with the others. Those who are six, copes well unlike others who are six who can’t even hold a pencil. So it has nothing to do with age”.

A quarter of the educators were in favour of the age norms that government has set out. Educator X felt that “it is the correct age. I don’t think it’s too old, I feel that Grade R definitely helps them coping. I think any earlier or any later wouldn’t work.” Educator Y felt that she could not comment much as “there are pros and cons to both”.

4.7.2. The curriculum.

Most of the educators (n=6) felt that the CAPS curriculum was not appropriate and most of these educators seemed to know the NCS better than the CAPS. Educator M stated that, “I suppose with the new syllabus the CAPS, the Grade R educators are a little bit up in the air as to what it exactly requires of them because with the NCS it was so thorough and really very good. With the CAPs it’s slightly different. We are working on the previous system”. Educator O sentiments were that she felt “that what they’ve done with CAPS on certain levels is that it’s a bare minimum”. Educator L argued, “With the CAPS, they just seem to place emphasis on the wrong, they do have places but they place less emphasis on the important stuff and I think it’s causing a problem. They don’t know where they stand and what they’re supposed to be doing”. Two of the educators felt that CAPS is appropriate for developing school readiness. Educator F felt that ‘CAPS has everything’.

4.7.3. Support.

One educator was uncertain and could not comment on the level of support government provided. Two of the educators felt that government gave them no support at all. Educator X said that “they took us in Grade Zero, you do work here, there’s no references, there’s no help. No support”. Four educators felt that government only provides resources but not psychological support. Educator C stated that “they sent us a lot of support material... Our

opinion is not asked. We're just given stuff .Do it. So I would say we are not really looked after, we are not treated with the respect we should be treated". Educator Y reported, "Sometimes we get a little resources and things like that. I don't feel there's a lot of support from the government I must be honest".

Educator O stated that she sometimes felt like "Grade R is privately run...but it depends on who you get. We fill out our support forms and there is a lot of paperwork. I think there at a lot of other schools it is not done properly".

Only one educator was totally happy with the support given by the government. She said that they are "involved in helping you with the classroom work, not only with the resources, but as well as helping with getting the learners ready for school".

4.7.4. Delayed implementation of Grade R.

Half of the participants felt that government has not implemented Grade R due to a lack of resources stemming from financial difficulties. Educator O's response was "it is certainly the lack of resources. I think that although they planned to have Grade R implemented they lack the finances as well as qualified educators to help get it off ground". Educator C stated, "Financial. I think they don't have the money. They are saying we will pay you by 2019". Educator S postulated that "I would only think it's got to do with money. Educators and education are taken for granted and expected for peanuts." Two of the educators first stated that they were unsure why all government schools do not have Grade R classes, but then later stated that it has to do with the lack of resources. Educator X stated, "I have no idea. It will benefit everyone at the end of the day. But then not all Grade R educators are qualified and it's another problem that we're sitting with today. There is also no basic resources".

One educator said that it is due to incompetence, as she stated that "it's a bunch of bureaucrats, sitting behind a desk never taught in their lives, who are trying to figure out what to do". Another educator believed that Grade R will be implemented in all government schools. Educator M felt that "it's just going to take a bit of time. I think it will be eventually, it will become, you know a voluntary thing for each primary school to have a Grade R".

4.8. Challenges Experienced by the Educators

Within this theme, two subthemes were identified and these were educator training, and the pressures that educators face. These subthemes will be explored below.

4.8.1. Educator training.

Five educators felt that their training did not equip them to deal with school readiness. Educator S stated that she “was not trained for such a thing”. Educator M felt that “it would be wonderful if we could have more training”. Educator X reported, “no I did not have much training. I think that the university should implement more about school readiness in there courses. I think that educators are not given much training.” On the other hand, three of the educators felt that their training was sufficient. Educator Y stated that her training “was very detailed”. Educator F felt that “Training prepared me like if, I can’t exactly how to deal with the child. What you must do”.

4.8.2. Educator’s stress.

Three educators felt unappreciated as Grade R educators. Educator L felt that “unfortunately, we are at the bottom of the heap, people keep telling us on how important we are and yet we really are the bottom of the food chain”.

Educator S stated the changes to the curriculum place her under undue stress. She stated, “well the fact that I'm not sure when the government will pass a new curriculum and it's always Grade R that implements. So I'm basically laying the foundation. Not easy”.

One participant found that the lack of parental and government support places educators under undue pressure. Educator Y reported, “Definitely parents’ expectations and their demands and things like that. Children not getting the grounding that they need from their preschools that are coming up here. We are finding that very difficult. You know the home is to, obviously some children have difficulty, experiences that they obviously – and obviously not the support that we need from government. It would be easier if we got some support all round to help them”.

A quarter of the participants found the lack of parental support as being the main challenge. Educator M stated, “Maybe just parent support, mainly. Because that’s what I feel is lacking mainly”. Educator F felt the lack of resources creates strain. Educator O just felt that educators were uninterested. She stated, “you have the educators that are interested in the children themselves, not just doing their job for the sake of doing their job”.

4.9. Conclusion

From the aforementioned themes, it is evident that educators place greater emphasis on emotional maturity and differ in relation to the importance placed on other aspects, such as the importance of a learner to be able to make the social transition into Grade One. It is also evident that the educators view assessments as beneficial, but they state that there is no universal school readiness assessment tool. In addition, they felt that retention of learners who are not yet ready can be positive for these learners. Furthermore, the lack of support and lack of training contributes to the challenges which they face. These themes will be discussed in relation to the aims and the literature in the chapter that follows.

Chapter Five: Discussion, Limitations, Implications and Future Recommendations

5.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the results (see chapter four) in relation to the aims of the study. The researcher aimed to examine how the educators define school readiness, what approaches they use to assess if a child is ready to enter school, and what factors they think promote and hinder learners' readiness to enter Grade One. The participants' perceptions on possible challenges that they face with regards to facilitating school readiness was further explored. Although it was not the aim of the researcher to focus on retention of learners, degree of parental participation and the role of the government, these themes emerged as significant to this study and thus will be discussed. Furthermore, the limitations, implications and the recommendations for future research will be discussed.

5.2. Educators' Definition of School Readiness

Two of the themes that arose from the data was understanding of school readiness, and purpose of school readiness. These themes encapsulated the manner in which educators' defined school readiness, which was the aim of the study.

Understanding of school readiness.

Most of the participants find that emotional readiness is important. This is consistent with Cohen's (2001) statement that emotional readiness will affect a learner's academic readiness. In addition, Raver (2003) stated that studies have proven that a learner who has emotionally adjusted is more likely to succeed in school. He adds that the learners' ability to interact with others in a school environment can be attributed to their ability to control emotions. Raver (2002, p.2) affirms that "in order to promote literacy, early educational programs have to attend to the whole child, attending also to the promotion of emotional development and health".

A third of the participants felt that maturity determines school readiness. This is in agreement with De Jongh (1987 cited in De Witt, 2012) who stated that school readiness includes a certain level of maturity. In addition, it is in line with the maturational framework which is based on Gesell's (1968) theory of development. According to De Witt (2012),

school readiness is gained when the learner is at a stage where he or she will be able to cope with the requirements which formal schooling places on him or her. These participants agree with the Department of Education, as they stipulate that all the learners need to reach a certain age for them to enter Grade One, thus when they are able to reach a certain level of maturity.

Rimm-Kaufman, Pianta and Cox (2000) conducted a survey with three thousand five hundred and ninety five pre-school educators to investigate the problems faced by learners in a school. They found that educators dealt with many learners who found the social transition difficult. Thus, from an educator's perspective, social maturity plays an important role in contributing to the learner's success in formal schooling. However, in this study only one participant mentioned the importance of social readiness in line with the socio-constructivist perspective.

A third of the participants emphasised the importance of a learner being able to pay attention. This is in accordance with Blaustein (2005) who saw school readiness as being dependent on a learner's ability to pay attention, take in information, and to sit down and do work when instructed by educators. De Witt (2012) expanded on this notion and said that if a child is not ready for school, then he/she would not listen to the educators' instructions. This would also lead to strain between the parent and child, and educator and child, as they would get frustrated at the child's inability to grasp concepts. In addition, one educator mentioned that the intelligence level of a child will determine if a child is ready for school. This understanding of school readiness stems from a genetic perspective and is in line with what Pieterse (2007) stated; that previously school readiness was viewed in terms of a learners' level of intellectual functioning.

Almost half of the participants stated that school readiness should be viewed from all three perspectives: namely, the cognitive, emotional and physical aspects. This is not in accordance with Brofenbenner's (1979) theory that was used for the development of this paper as it lacks the social aspect. According to Brofenbenner (1979) the whole child needs to be taken into account and this includes his or her relationship with others, as well as the community that the learner comes.

Purpose of school readiness.

A majority of the educators felt that school readiness is important in order to prevent retention in Grade One. This is coherent with the *Progress Report* developed by the Minister of Education which affirms that one of the reasons there is a high rate of retention in Grade One is because of inadequate school readiness programs (Ministerial Committee on Learner Retention in South African Schooling System, 2007).

A small number of participants specified that school readiness helps determine if there are any difficulties. These educators are in agreement with Pieterse (2001) who stated that children should be assessed regularly to determine if there are any difficulties. Amod et al., (2007) asserted that early identification is necessary for early intervention, and this is in agreement with the Education White Paper six on special education needs (2001, p.55) which also stated that, “learners who require education support through, for example, the tailoring of curriculum, instruction and assessment should be identified early, and for this purpose the Foundation Phase (Grades R-3) should be prioritised”.

5.3. Factors that Hinder or Promote School Readiness

All of the participants' views are consistent with De Wit (2012) who stated that the home environment plays a role in school readiness. According to Lemelin et al., (2009, p.736) “the home environment quality is a well known predictor of school readiness, although the underlying processes are little known”. This is also researched by Engle and Black (2006) who found that the lack of stimulation delays school readiness. The links between features of the home environment and school readiness have been documented. Parental practices, such as the amount of time a parent spends reading to the child, affect school readiness (Dreinan, 2011). A quarter of the participants were in agreement with Farkas and Hibel's (2008) view that the level of education of parents has an impact on school readiness. The authors thereof stated that parents with a low level of education have children who are less likely to be ready for school.

All of the educators were in agreement that low socio-economic status can have a detrimental effect on school readiness. This is in agreement with research conducted by

Richter and Green (1991), Fleisch (2008) and Doyle McEntee and McNamara (2011). The latter authors' findings indicated that learners from low SES backgrounds were emotionally immature and this affected their school readiness. This was reiterated by Ramey and Ramey (2004) who affirmed that the knowledge of learners from the different socio-economic groups leads to significant disparities in abilities and comprehension as assessed by psychological tools.

One educator stated the importance of early childhood education. This is in alignment with the Education White Paper 5 (2001, p.6) which stated that the quality of nursery schools will remove the 'under-preparedness' learners encounter when entering Grade One. De Wit (2012) expanded on this and said that pre-schools can help promote school readiness by providing children with activities that develop their physical, cognitive, social, affective, and verbal communication abilities. Therefore, if learners went to a pre-school which provided stimulation in the above areas, then the learners should be ready for school (De Wit, 2012).

5.4. Assessment of School Readiness

Three of the subthemes that emerged fall under the aims of investigating what approaches educators use to assess if a child is ready to enter school. However, this was expanded to a broader outlook on assessment and its value in the South African context which also relates to the question of 'whether professionals assess school readiness in government schools'.

Entry into Grade One.

Two of the educators reported that there is no universal assessment tool, which leads to confusion amongst educators as they do not know how to assess for school readiness. This is in accordance with Maxwell and Clifford (2004) who stated that there is no specific assessment tool which is used to assess school readiness. They stated that one cannot have just one tool as one would need to choose a tool that would match the purpose for assessing. Since there is no universal definition, it follows that there is no universal assessment tool as the authors thereof stated that the assessment tool should match the definition.

Almost half of the participants reported that learners should be tested holistically and observations should be part of the assessment process. This is coherent with the *National Protocol for Assessment Grades R-12* which stated that Grade R assessment should comprise School-Based Assessments and Practical Assessment tasks (DoE, 2011). Maxwell and Clifford (2004) stated that by conducting a holistic assessment which comprises gathering collaborative information, results in a valuable understanding of the learners' capabilities in different contexts.

One of the educators highlighted that a learner should meet all the requirements of Grade R. Pieterse (2001, p.130) lists some of the requirements that South African schools look for in a learner to determine school readiness. The requirements are as follows: the learners should have good vision and hearing, be physically developed and healthy, and should be able to work on their own. They should have a good self-image and be able to differentiate between left and right. In addition they need to have a concept of time and their language skills should be at an appropriate level. Furthermore, they should be able to pay attention, participate in group work, and be able to trace figures, alphabets and basic objects.

Assessments in South Africa.

Most of the participants agreed that assessments can be beneficial in South Africa. As noted in the literature review, Kagan (2003) listed a few benefits of school readiness assessments. These were to determine if the interventions conducted were effective, determine if instructions need to be altered, identify any difficulties be it physical, emotional or mental and lastly, they helped with trend assessments. In addition, the Department of Education (2011) argued that assessments are useful for determining what support the learners need.

One of the educators stated that assessments were used inappropriately in South Africa. Foxcroft and Roodt (2001) reported that many South Africans view assessments negatively due to their misuse in the past whereby tests were used to indicate white superiority. One of the educators added that proper guidelines need to be given for school readiness assessments to be useful, and this is coherent with Maxwell and Clifford (2004) who argued that all assessment tools require the appropriate training before they can be administered. The authors postulated that if conducted inefficiently, then the data retrieved

may not provide the correct information and this could lead to negative consequences such as learners being retained in Grade R.

An educator reported that assessments should be conducted more often to determine what adjustments should be made to the curriculum and teaching approaches. Her view is consistent with Kagan (2003) who stated that continual assessments will determine if there is anything that needs to be altered. One of the changes that were made within the education policy was that the assessment process needs to be continuous (Department of Education, 2011). The policy stated that it is important to determine how well the learner is coping in the classroom setting and this determination should be seen as an important procedure that occurs naturally in the classroom. According to Morrow (2007), educators are pressurized to keep up with completing assessments and this leaves less time to focus on teaching. The workload of educators has increased tremendously and this places undue strain on them (Morrow, 2007). However, this participant does not agree with Morrow (2007) and finds the process of continually assessing to be beneficial rather than detrimental.

Referrals.

All of the participants felt that they would refer the learners to professionals for a school readiness assessment. This is consistent with Hojnoski and Misnal (2006) which stated that professionals could help parents and educators by providing them with useful information on the learners' development and how to aid the learners. In addition, Pillay and Terlizzi (2009, p.493) stated that "there is an advantage of having available practitioners on site (such as speech therapist, occupational therapist and psychologists) to meet learners' needs as part of the school fee structure without the pressure for parents to transport learners to and from therapy when many parents are at work".

5.5. Retention

Impact on learners.

Most of the educators felt that, although it is difficult for the learners to be retained, they adapt and retention can be beneficial academically and emotionally. Their data is representative of the research that shows that parents and educators believe that if learners are retained at a Grade R level there would be less problems in the later years (Alexander,

Entwisle, & Dauber, 2003; Silberglitt, Jimerson, Burns, & Appleton, 2006). However, Ermond (2008) stated that there is no research which confirms that there are benefits of retentions after the third or fourth grade. Alexandra et al., (2003) stated that, although parents and educators have the perception that retention is beneficial to the learners, research has shown that retention leads to increased problems in later years such as drop outs.

Only one educator believed that there was no negative impact and only benefits could be reaped from retaining the learners. This is inconsistent with the Bronfenbrenner theory as Hong and Yu stated (2007, p.240) that, if one wished to retain a child in Grade R in order to benefit them cognitively and socially in the later years, then retaining them would “perhaps constitute a less conducive setting for many children than engaging them in age-relevant social relationships and learning activities at the next grade level”. However Hong and Yu (2007) stated that many theorists have different views on retention and that if a learner repeats a year, he or she may gain self confidence when comparing themselves to their classmates as he or she had already learned some of the work, and that this will help boost their academic achievements as emotional, academic, and social functioning are linked.

Support systems.

A third of the participants felt that there was inadequate support for the learners that had been retained in Grade R. This is detrimental as Mathison and Ross (2007) stated that if learners are retained, and if no strategies of support are in place, then the retention would be ineffective. These authors postulate that rather than retaining, intervention strategies should be put in place to enable the learner to be promoted.

More than half of the participants felt that they do provide support for the learners who are held back, and two of these five participants said that in addition to them providing the learners' with the support, professional support would be required. Their data is consistent with Maxwell and Clifford's (2004) recommendation which stated that all the necessary stakeholders should provide support for the learner and a professional should be consulted if necessary in order to detect any difficulties. These authors (Maxwell & Clifford, 2004, p.8) gave an example of what support can be given to those learners who are retained in Grade R; they stated that the educator can create ways in which the learner can receive superior, personalised, and expected levels of instruction that attend to the emotional,

physical, social, academic, and behavioural aspects of development. As seen by the data the participants do strive to attain these objectives.

5.6. Degree of Parental Participation

The role of parents.

All of the educators felt that parental involvement is vital for school readiness. This is consistent with the literature which was reviewed (Boyer, 1991; Lemelin et al., 2007; Noel, 2010) which stated that parental participation has been proven to help with school readiness. The participants expressed the view that they would like to see parents being more actively involved in the education of their children and this is coherent with the aims of the Department of Education (2010). Garret (2001) asserted that parents can be an aid to educators by teaching their children what is needed at school. SAIDE (2010) stated that since learners in Grade One are trying to understand who they are from their parents, it is therefore important for parents to be involved with their schooling. Swart and Phasha (2005) also emphasised that learners can benefit from the collaboration between the educators and parents.

Parents' perceptions of school readiness.

More than half of the participants believed that parents' perceptions of school readiness differ from that of educators. This data is inconsistent with Goldblatt's (2004) findings but consistent with Orkin's (2008) findings. Orkin (2008) found differences between parents' and educators' perceptions, such as parents placing more emphasis on their role than on educators' role in facilitating school readiness and believing that academic and behavioural skills are crucial to school readiness whereas educators' viewed social skills as more important. One educator felt that parents do not respect the opinion of educators. In the past in South Africa, parents did not have a say in the education of their children. However, since 1994 parents have a right in the education of their child (Eloff et al., 2007). This has proven particularly challenging for many educators, since although parents' rights are now recognised; parents do not always acknowledge the difficulties their child experiences. Subsequently, some parents tend to "criticize or blame the educator" in the presence of the child which further reinforces the child's disrespect toward the educator (Mwamwenda, 2004). Mwamwenda (2004) postulated that parents must have a say in the education of their

child, but it is in the learners' best interest if parents have faith in the capabilities of educators and thus they should avoid questioning the work of the teachers unless their child is being harmed. This is in line with Dockett and Perry (2009) who emphasises mutual respect between home and school.

One of the educators thought that parents' perceptions are aligned with educators' perceptions of school readiness. This is in line with Goldblatt (2004) who found that parents and educators perceptions were similar. For example both teachers and educators felt that preschool education is important in developing school readiness.

5.7. The Role of the Government

Age Norms

Most of the participants disagreed with the age norms given by government regarding school readiness. Their reasoning is the same as Lewit and Baker (1995) and Dockett and Perry (2009) who stated that using age as a criterion for school entry can be problematic as learners develop at different rates. De Witt (2012, p.170) stated that age norms are not a dependable measure for school readiness, however they can be used as a as a hazy framework. One educators' viewpoint is consistent with Powell's (2010) argument that the age difference in a Grade One class could be as much as seventeen months. In South Africa, many learners enter Grade One before they are ready (De Wit, 2012) and this may be due to the unreliable age norms.

The Curriculum

Two thirds of the participants do not find CAPS as being appropriate for developing and assessing school readiness and seemed to know more about the National Curriculum Statement (NCS). NCS was modified and became the 'Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement' (CAPS) document (Mokhele, 2011). This was done by modifying subject statements, learning programme guidelines, and assessment criteria. According to Maythree (2010, p.7) "educators are battling with the new curricula, which require them to have new knowledge and applied competencies, including using new technologies". This data is coherent with SAIDE (2010) findings which states that educators find the curriculum unclear. This is problematic as the Minister of Education (2012) stated that the educators' knowledge

of the curriculum will ensure educational transformation. In addition, Jay (2010) stated that experienced educators find it harder to adapt to a new curriculum as they are accustomed to what they were using previously. This is consistent with the views of the participants who seemed to favour NCS; a curriculum they were accustomed to.

Two of the educators felt that CAPS was comprehensive as it includes everything that was needed to prepare learners for Grade One. CAPS consist of what subjects the Grade R learners need to be taught, but the assessments that are required are stipulated in the *National Protocol for Assessment Grades R-12* (DoE, 2011).

Support

Half of the educators felt that there was no support at all from the government that will make them better prepared to deal with school readiness. None of the educators reported support at the district level which is consistent with the findings of SAIDE (2010). Two educators said that the only support that they received from government was resources. Only one educator felt comfortable with just having resources. This correlates with the budget speech given by the MEC for Education and Training, Honourable Mandla Makupula (2012/2013, p.11) in which he stated that it is important to note that an achievement by the government is the “implementation for the first time of the Norms and Standards for the funding of Grade R in the province which is enabling the schools to purchase suitable resources to adequately stimulate these learners and enhance their cognitive development”.

Delayed implementation for Grade R.

Participants were aware that Grade R has not been implemented in all of the schools due to a lack of resources. According to SAIDE (2010) poor infrastructure is one of the causes of delayed implementation of Grade R classes in government schools. The participants agreed with Motshekga (2010) who stated that the lack of funding is an issue in South Africa. Motala et al., (2007, p.20) postulates that much needed structures still need to be put in place as Grade R “provision depends on fee payments, many practitioners are poorly paid and have no professional training and the quality of provision has not reached the desired standard”.

One of the educators reasoned that Grade R classes are not part of all government funded schools due to the incompetence of the government. This is consistent with one of the reasons that SAIDE (2010) gave for the delayed implementation of Grade R in public schools. SAIDE (2010) called it 'organisational challenges'. In addition, Porteus (2004) stated that there appears to be a lack of political and educational will to make certain that the learners receive the optimal beginning of their schooling career.

Another participant strongly believed that Grade R classes should be implemented in all schools over a period of time. Her opinion is consistent with the Department of Education's view that all government funded schools will have Grade R classes by the year 2014. Their initial deadline was 2010 but was extended due to lack of resources, but they are confident that it will be reached despite the obstacles (DoE, 2011)

5.8. Challenges Experienced by Educators

Educator training.

Several of the participants felt that they were inadequately trained for identifying and assessing if a learner is ready for school. This is in accordance with the research conducted by the Witwatersrand School of Education (2009). Their findings indicated that as the majority of the Grade R educators were not adequately trained, these educators felt inferior and that they lacked support from the school and the school management teams. The insufficient support that Grade R educators received can be attributed to the notion that Grade R is not important (Excell & Linington, 2010).

A small number of participants felt that they were sufficiently trained in identifying and assessing school readiness. These educators could be part of the twelve percent of Grade R educators in South Africa who do have the appropriate qualifications for a specialization in school readiness (DoE, 2009d). As noted in the introduction, the National Qualifications Framework is a document which the Department of Education produced stipulating what qualification Grade R educators must have in South Africa; which is a Diploma in Grade R Teaching or a Bachelor of Education in Foundation Phase.

Educator stress.

Two of the Grade R educators felt demotivated as they felt unappreciated. This is could be related to the DoE (2006a), statement that “the professionalization and recognition of ECD practitioners and educators is still one of the department’s major challenges, because there is no clear legislation that supports the inclusion of the current cohort of ECD practitioners as educators”. The aforementioned raises problems as Grade R educators should be treated as equal to other grade educators with regards to professional development programmes and curriculum support materials (The National Review of Education, 2008). In addition, Jay (2010) mentioned that in South Africa all educators are paid minimal wages and they are not appreciated. Another important factor is the low opinion that society has of teaching since teaching is “considered a low-status career and well-qualified educators increasingly seek alternative employment opportunities in other sectors of the economy” (DoE, 2005, p. 54).

The other challenges which contribute to the stress experienced by the Grade R educators are the lack of parental and governmental support, curriculum changes, and the lack of resources. These were discussed under the other themes and thus only their effects will be discussed. All of the aforementioned factors contribute to the high levels of stress experienced by the educator. According to Jay (2010, p.15), “high levels of educator stress may have destructive effects on the educators themselves, their personal lives and inhibits classroom teaching and learning”. Gardiner (2004) found that teaching is found to be the most stressful occupation.

One participant commented that educators have low job satisfaction which negatively impacts on their teaching. This is in line with the Department of Education’s findings in terms of the negative effects experienced by South African educators, which have further influenced the country’s educator attrition rate. It was reported by the DoE (2005), that fifty four percent of educators were contemplating not teaching anymore. Furthermore, the predictors for leaving the teaching profession are categorized as high, medium and low. The high predictors included “low job satisfaction (in particular: lack of career advancement and recognition, teaching conditions in terms of working hours/load/policies, and lack of discipline and respect), a changed career choice after three years of teaching, high job stress

(in particular: problems with teaching methods and administration and problems with the educational system) and the urban location of the school” (DoE, 2005, p. 54).

Overall, the views of the educators were consistent with the literature that was reviewed which stated that home environment plays an important role in aiding or hindering school readiness. The majority of the participants expressed the view that the assessment of school readiness needs to take a holistic approach which takes into account the social, emotional, cognitive, and physical aspects of the learners. In addition, learners should be assessed using methods such as observation and standardised tests. Although these findings are important, it is vital to note that every piece of research has a number of limitations and this is no exception. These limitations may have implications on the findings of the study and thus should be noted. In addition, future recommendations will be discussed in order to see how this study can be expanded and improved.

5.9. Limitations and Implications

5.9.1 Limitation of the research studies reviewed on school readiness and its implications.

A consensus regarding the definition of school readiness has still not been reached in the literature. There are still numerous definitions of school readiness. Therefore, a definition is needed and it is problematic that there is no universal definition because the different stakeholders may not share the same viewpoints. In addition, South Africa has no documentation on school readiness itself but rather on the implementation of Grade R classes in formal schooling. There is also very limited documented research conducted on educators’ perception on school readiness in South Africa and thus very few studies conducted in South Africa had been reviewed for the literature.

5.9.2. Limitations of the sample and its implications.

The researcher acknowledges that the sample size of eight is limited and this limits the generalizability of the results. Non-probability sampling was used and therefore one cannot rule out extraneous variables as there was no random selection of subjects. All the educators

were from the Johannesburg East region and thus these findings cannot be generalised to other regions of South Africa. All the educators were from previously termed 'Model C' schools' and therefore these finding cannot be applied to private or other types of schools.

As the researcher conducted the interviews, total confidentiality was not attained. However, anonymity is ensured by utilizing pseudonyms in the report. Furthermore, because these participants knew that they were the subjects of a study, the Hawthorne effect could have occurred, which is the distortion in behaviour. In the circumstances, these subjects could be giving socially desired responses and therefore may not have been very honest.

The educators' perceptions may also be due to the halo effect, which is a "tendency to judge specific traits on the basis of a general impression" (Kaplan & Saccuzzo, 2009, p. 223). These educators' responses may be influenced by other educators' impressions of school readiness. As these are perceptions of participants, they are likely to vary in time. Therefore, these perceptions possibly may represent a feeling on that day. Furthermore, semi-structured interviews elicit different data from the various participants and therefore the reliability of the results are thus restricted (Kaplan & Saccuzzo, 2009).

5.9.3. Limitations of the instrument and its implications.

The tool of structured interviews for obtaining data, has the advantage of the richness of information provided. However, it "may have dubious value without the support of more standardized procedures" (Kaplan & Saccuzzo, 2009, p.225) and therefore one should be tentative when reviewing the data. Furthermore, Whitley (2002) stated that non-standardised questions increase the risk of the same traps that occur in unstructured interviews. Some of these traps are: "feeding the answer you want [to the interviewee], negotiating agreement about what is the truth, and arguing with the respondent to try and persuade them to adopt a more sensible position" (Stratton, 1997, p.123).

5.9.4. Trustworthiness of the research study

There are four categories of trustworthiness within qualitative research, namely credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. Credibility refers other readers being able to

recognize the same results and interpretations as the researcher. This can be improved by stakeholder checks, whereby participants can comment on the results and discussions of the research study (Thomas 2006). This is a limitation of this research as the participants were not involved with the results and discussion of the research study. However, the researcher has kept a journal was kept noting all the observations and her biases during the collection of the data. Her biases have not affected the process or the results of the research study. The third approach to trustworthiness which is dependability measures how reliable the research study is and it can be improved by an inquiry audit (Goalafshani, 2003). Although the research study was audited by the researchers' supervisor, it could have been audited by other professionals who are knowledgeable in the field. Transferability refers to whether or not the study can be transferred to other context other than that of this research study. (Koch, 2006) In addition, it examines whether the readers find the research study meaningful in relation to their own experience. The researcher had made the context of the research study explicit in order for readers to make judgements of transferability however, she acknowledges that she did not provide information on the quantile of the schools that were used for this research study and this could have provided richer information. Confirmability refers to the manner in which interpretations are deduced (Koch, 2006). This is only achieved once credibility, transferability and dependability have been accomplished (Guba & Lincoln, 1989 cited in Koch, 2006).

5.10. Recommendations for Future Research

The objective of this study was to explore educators' perception of school readiness. This study found that a clearer definition needs to be established to enable educators to correctly identify if a learner is ready for school. Furthermore, a definition that is more applicable to the South African context needs to be first investigated.

This study must be considered as a preliminary investigation. Future research needs to be undertaken using a more demographically representative sample. It is recommended that the research study of educators' perceptions of school readiness should be conducted on a larger, more heterogeneous sample across provinces in South Africa to make a more definitive conclusion. This can be done by using a variety of methods, such as focus groups, questionnaires, and observations.

In addition, all of the educators need to have an assessment tool which meets the norms of their population and on which they are trained. This will lead to all learners assessed in the same way and thus it would not disadvantage nor advantage any of the learners. This being said one cannot ignore the context which the learners come from and thus there should be various methods of assessing such as observation, in addition to using a standardized tool.

The study has also found that most of the educators have not been adequately trained in relation to school readiness and this can adversely affect early childhood education. It is submitted that the Department of Education arrange workshop training these educators in order to equip them to deal with school readiness. These educators also require additional support from parents and the government. It is recommended that both parties work in collaboration with the educators in aiding the educators to overcome their challenges.

Finally, parents' and learners' perceptions of school readiness can be explored in more detail and as the assessment of school readiness in the South African context could be explored in more depth. Further research could be conducted on policy levels and on the initiatives carried out by the government on school readiness.

5.11. Conclusion

As there is limited research in the area of educators' perception of school readiness within the South African context, this research contribution can be seen as valuable in furthering the knowledge on school readiness and it paves the way for future research. However, in order to provide a richer study where more generalizations can be made, a bigger sample size is needed and participants should be recruited from across the South African context. In addition the researcher should find additional methods to enhance the trustworthiness of the research study. Furthermore, ongoing research by educational psychologists on school readiness, as applied specifically to the South African context, could contribute to further knowledge in this field. In turn, this can assist educators to better meet the needs of Grade R learners and thereby laying the foundation for their future growth and development.

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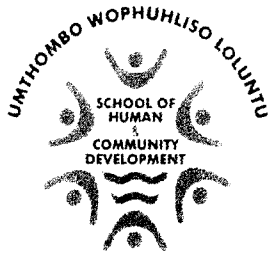
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Appendix A: District Supervisor Information Sheet



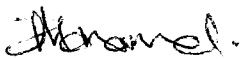
Dear: Nomvula

Hello. My name is Zaakirah Mohamed, and I am conducting research for the purposes of obtaining a Masters degree in Psychology at the University of the Witwatersrand. My area of focus is Grade R educators' perceptions of school readiness. I would like to request your permission to conduct my research in schools around the Linksfield/Kensington region.

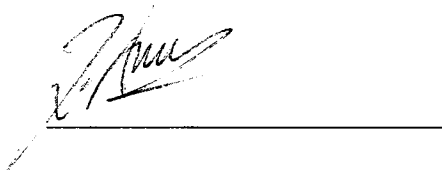
Participation in this research will entail being interviewed by me. The interviews will take place outside of teaching time at a time convenient for the educators who volunteer to participate in my study. The interview will last for approximately 45 to 60 minutes. I will ask questions about how the educators' define school readiness, what are the factors in their view that promote or hinder school readiness, what assessment approaches they currently use to determine if a child is ready for school and what intervention strategies they use if a child is not ready for entry into Grade One? With the educators' permission this interview will be recorded in order to ensure accuracy. No person will be advantaged or disadvantaged in any way for choosing to participate or not participate in the study. The educators may refrain from answering any questions they would prefer not to, and they may choose to withdraw from the study at any point. All of the educators' responses will be kept confidential and no information that could identify them or the school will be included in the research report. The educators will be referred to by a pseudonym (e.g. Educator X, Educator Y) in the research. Only my supervisor and I will have access to the interview material (tapes and transcripts). The raw data will be safely kept in a locked cupboard at the University of Witwatersrand. The data will be retained for the duration of two years should the research not be published and for six years if it is published. All the recordings and transcripts will be destroyed thereafter.

I have completed the relevant form and attached it to this letter. If you have any queries about the research I may be contacted telephonically at 0837755166 or via email at zaakirahmohamed@gmail.com. Alternatively you can contact my supervisor, Dr Zaytoon Amod at 011 7178326 or email her at zaytoonisha.amod@wits.ac.za. Feedback will be made available to the participants and the school in the form of a summary of the study, approximately six months after the interview. Your permission to conduct this study would be greatly appreciated.

Kind Regards

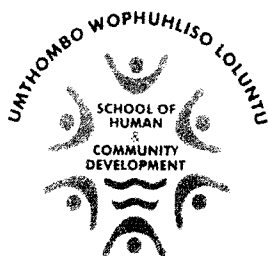


Zaakirah Mohamed



Dr. Zaytoon Amod

Appendix B: Principal information sheet



Dear: Principal

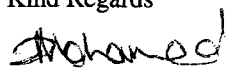
Hello. My name is Zaakirah Mohamed, and I am conducting research for the purposes of obtaining a Masters degree in Educational Psychology at the University of the Witwatersrand. My area of focus is Grade R educators' perceptions of school readiness. I would like to invite your school to participate in this study.

Participation in this research will entail Grade R educators being interviewed by me. The interview will be conducted outside of teaching time at a time and place that is convenient for the educators who volunteer to participate in my study. The interview will last for approximately 45 to 60 minutes and I will ask questions about how the educators' define school readiness, what are the factors in their view that promote or hinder school readiness, what assessment approaches they currently use to determine if a child is ready for school and what intervention strategies they use if a child is not ready for entry into Grade One. With the educator's permission this interview will be recorded in order to ensure accuracy. No person will be advantaged or disadvantaged in any way for choosing to participate or not participate in the study. The educators may refrain from answering any questions they would prefer not to, and they may choose to withdraw from the study at any point. All of the educators responses will be kept confidential and no information that could identify them or the school will be included in the research report. The educators will be referred to by a pseudonym (e.g. Educator X, Educator Y) in the research. Only my supervisor and I will have access to the interview material (tapes and transcripts). The raw data will be safely kept in a locked cupboard at the University of Witwatersrand. The data will be retained for the duration of two years should the research not be published and for six years if it is published. All the recordings and transcripts will be destroyed thereafter.

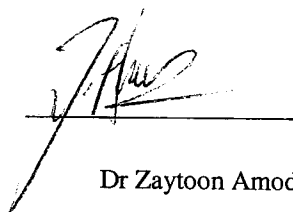
If your school chooses to participate in the study, please complete the form below. If you have any queries about the research I can be contacted telephonically at 0837755166 or via email at zaakirahmohamed@gmail.com. Alternatively you can contact my supervisor, Dr. Zaytoon Amod at 011 7178326 or email her at zaytoonisha.amod@wits.ac.za. Feedback will be made available to the participants and the school the form of a summary of the study and its results, approximately six to nine months after the interview.

Your permission to conduct this study in the school would be greatly appreciated.

Kind Regards

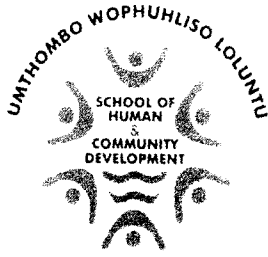


Zaakirah Mohamed



Dr Zaytoon Amod

Appendix B: Consent Form (Principal)



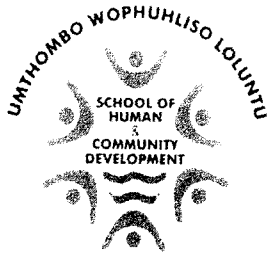
I _____ consent to Zaakirah Mohamed interviewing educators from my school for her study on Grade R educators' perceptions of school readiness. I understand that:

- The participation of the educators will be voluntary.
- There will be no risks or benefits from choosing to participate in this study
- The educators may refrain from answering questions they do not prefer to.
- The educators may withdraw from the study at any time
- No information that may identify the school, the educators or the learners will be included in the research report, and all the educators' responses will remain confidential.
- I am informed as fully as possible as to the aims of the research and possible implications of the research.

Signed: _____

Date: _____

Appendix C: Participant Information Sheet



Dear: Sir/Madam

Hello. My name is Zaakirah Mohamed, and I am conducting research for the purposes of obtaining a Masters degree in Educational Psychology at the University of the Witwatersrand. My area of focus is Grade R educators' perceptions of school readiness. I would like to invite you to participate in this study.

Participation in this study will involve taking part in an interview with myself outside of teaching time at a time and place that is convenient for you if you do volunteer to participate in this study. The interview will last for approximately 45 to 60 minutes and will ask questions about how you define school readiness, what the factors are in your view that promote or hinder school readiness, what assessment approaches you currently use to determine if a child is ready for school and what intervention strategies you use if a child is not ready for entry into Grade One? With your permission, this interview will be recorded in order to ensure accuracy. You will not be advantaged or disadvantaged in any way for choosing to participate or not participate in the study. You may refrain from answering any questions you would prefer not to, and you may choose to withdraw from the study at any point. All of your responses will be kept confidential, and no information that could identify you will be included in the research report. You will be referred to by a pseudonym (e.g. Educator X, Educator Y) in the research. Only my supervisor and I will have access to the interview material (tapes and transcripts). The raw data will be safely kept in a locked cupboard at the University of Witwatersrand. The data will be retained for the duration of two years should the research not be published and for six years if it is published. All the recordings and transcripts will be destroyed thereafter.

If you choose to participate in the study, please complete the form below. If you have any queries about the research or you require feedback on the results, I can be contacted telephonically at 0837755166 or via email at zaakirahmohamed@gmail.com. Alternatively you can contact my supervisor, Dr Zaytoon Amod at 011 7178326 or email her at zaytoonisha.amod@wits.ac.za. Feedback will be available in the form of a summary of the study and its results and that it will be available approximately six to nine months after the interview. This will be placed on the school's notice boards.

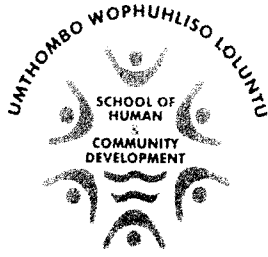
Your participation in this study would be greatly appreciated.

Kind Regards

Zaakirah Mohamed

Dr Zaytoon Amod

Appendix C: Participants consent form (interview)



I _____ consent to being interviewed by Zaakirah Mohamed for her study on Grade R educators' perceptions of school readiness. I understand that:

- My participation in this interview is voluntary.
- There are no foreseeable risks or benefits in choosing to participate in this study
- I may refuse to answer any questions I would prefer not to.
- I may withdraw from the study at any time.
- No information that may identify me will be included in the research report, and my responses will remain strictly confidential.

Signed _____

Date: _____

Appendix C: Consent Form (recording)



I _____ consent to my interview with Zaakirah Mohamed for her study on Grade R educators' perceptions of school readiness being tape-recorded. I understand that:

- Only the researcher and her supervisor will have access to the tapes and transcripts.
- All tape recordings will be destroyed after two years if the research should not be published and after six years if the research is published.
- No identifying information will be used in the transcripts or the research report. I will be referred to by a pseudonym throughout the research project.
- The researcher may use direct quotations in the research report provided that there is no identifying information.

Signed _____

Date: _____

Appendix D: Interview Schedule

Introduction

Hello. I am Zaakirah. I want to thank you for volunteering to participate in my study. Before beginning, I would like to assure you that whatever you say will be kept confidential, and only my supervisor and I will have access to the tapes. The tapes and transcripts will be destroyed as soon as the data has been analysed. No information identifying you will be used in the report. Anonymity will be kept by assigning a pseudonym to your information in the report, for example, Educator X or Y. Any information that may reveal the school will also be kept confidential.

I would like to remind you that you have the right to withdraw from the study at any time during the interview. You also have the right to refrain from answering any question should you wish to do so. A feedback sheet in the form of a summary of the study and its findings will be provided to the school approximately 6 months to nine months after the collection of the data.

Before beginning the interview, I will need you to read through and sign these two consent forms (See Appendix C).

Thank you. If you are ready, we can begin the interview.

Questions:

1. How long have you been teaching?
2. Have you taught Grade R only? If not-please elaborate
3. What qualifications do you have?
4. How would you define school readiness?
5. Do you think that age norms given by the government is the correct way of determining school readiness? Elaborate
6. What are the factors that you think play a role in determining a learner's readiness for school?
7. Do you think that cultural and economic factors play a role in relation to a child's readiness for school? Please elaborate.
8. What purpose, if any, do you think there is in school readiness?

9. Do you think that the Grade R curriculum is appropriate with regards to developing school readiness? Please elaborate
10. In your experience, how are learners assessed to determine if they are ready for Grade One?
11. How do you assess school readiness?
12. What are your views on the use of school readiness assessments in South Africa?
13. Do you refer learners for formal school readiness assessments to other professionals such as remedial educators/learning support specialists, occupational, speech therapists and psychologists? Please elaborate
14. What are your views on the parents' role in school readiness?
15. Do you think parents perceptions' of school readiness are aligned with educators' perceptions? Please elaborate
16. If the educator did not mention this in response above, elaborate with "have you and a parent ever clashed over whether or not a child is ready or not?" Please elaborate
17. If learners are not yet ready for school and if they are held back, how does this impact on a learner?
18. What support systems are there in place for those learners who are not yet ready for school?
19. What is the level of government support for Grade R?
20. Why do you think government has not implemented Grade R in all of their schools?
21. How did your training adequately prepare you in relation to school readiness? Please elaborate.
22. What challenges do you as a Grade R educator face?
23. Do you have any further information you would like to share, anything you feel that we have not discussed?

Thank you for your time and co-operation

University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg

Faculty of Humanities - Postgraduate Office

Private Bag 3, Wits 2050, South Africa • Tel: +27 11 717 8202 • Fax: +27 11 717 4037



Ms. Zaakirah Mohamed
P O Box 28837
Kensington
Johannesburg
2101

Student Number: 0100760D

Dear Ms. Mohamed

12 June 2012

APPROVAL OF PROPOSAL FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF EDUCATION IN EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY

I am pleased to be able to advise you that the readers of the Graduate Studies Committee have approved your proposal entitled "*Grade R government school teachers' perceptions of school readiness?*" I confirm that Dr. Zaytoonisha Amod has been appointed as your supervisor in the Psychology department.

The research report is normally submitted to the Faculty Office by 15 February, if you have started the beginning of the year, and for mid-year the deadline is 31 July. All students are required to RE-REGISTER at the beginning of each year.

You are required to submit 2 bound copies and one unbound copy plus 1 CD in pdf (Adobe) format of your research report to the Faculty Office. The 2 bound copies go to the examiners and are retained by them and the unbound copy is retained by the Faculty Office as back up.

Please note that should you miss the deadline of 15 February or 31 July you will be required to submit an application for extension of time and register for the research report extension. Any candidate who misses the deadline of 15 February will be charged fees for the research report extension.

Kindly keep us informed of any changes of address during the year.

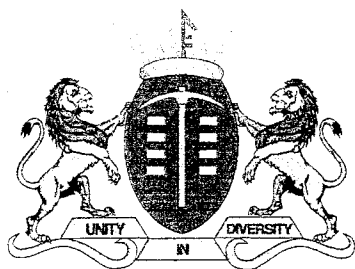
Note: All MA and PhD candidates who intend graduating shortly must meet your ETD requirements at least 6 weeks after your supervisor has received the examiners reports. **A student must remain registered at the Faculty Office until graduation.**

Yours sincerely

MR NTSEARE

Mpho Ntseare
Postgraduate Division
Faculty of Humanities
Private Bag X3
Wits, 2050
Tel: +27 11 717 4007
Fax: +27 86 211 7362

2012-06-12



education

Department: Education

GAUTENG PROVINCE

Enquiries: Nomvula Ubisi (011)3550488

Date:	09 November 2011
Name of Researcher:	Mohamed Zaakirah
Address of Researcher:	21 Gladys street
	Cyrildene
	2198
Telephone Number:	0116151006/0837755166
Fax Number:	0116164852
Research Topic:	Grade R Teachers' Perceptions of School Readiness
Number and type of schools:	4 Primary Schools and 1 ECD Sites
District/s/HO	Any District

Re: Approval in Respect of Request to Conduct Research

This letter serves to indicate that approval is hereby granted to the above-mentioned researcher to proceed with research in respect of the study indicated above. The onus rests with the researcher to negotiate appropriate and relevant time schedules with the school/s and/or offices involved to conduct the research. A separate copy of this letter must be presented to both the School (both Principal and SGB) and the District/Head Office Senior Manager confirming that permission has been granted for the research to be conducted.

Permission has been granted to proceed with the above study subject to the conditions listed below being met, and may be withdrawn should any of these conditions be flouted:

- 1. The District/Head Office Senior Manager/s concerned must be presented with a copy of this letter that would indicate that the said researcher/s has/have been granted permission from the Gauteng Department of Education to conduct the research study.*
- 2. The District/Head Office Senior Manager/s must be approached separately, and in writing, for permission to involve District/Head Office Officials in the project.*
- 3. A copy of this letter must be forwarded to the school principal and the chairperson of the School Governing Body (SGB) that would indicate that the researcher/s have been granted permission from the Gauteng Department of Education to conduct the research study.*

Office of the Chief Director: Information and Knowledge Management

Room 501, 111 Commissioner Street, Johannesburg, 2000 P.O.Box 7710, Johannesburg, 2000

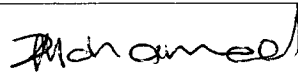
Tel: (011) 355-0809 Fax: (011) 355-0734

4. *A letter / document that outlines the purpose of the research and the anticipated outcomes of such research must be made available to the principals, SGBs and District/Head Office Senior Managers of the schools and districts/offices concerned, respectively.*
5. *The Researcher will make every effort obtain the goodwill and co-operation of all the GDE officials, principals, and chairpersons of the SGBs, teachers and learners involved. Persons who offer their co-operation will not receive additional remuneration from the Department while those that opt not to participate will not be penalised in any way.*
6. *Research may only be conducted after school hours so that the normal school programme is not interrupted. The Principal (if at a school) and/or Director (if at a district/head office) must be consulted about an appropriate time when the researcher/s may carry out their research at the sites that they manage.*
7. *Research may only commence from the second week of February and must be concluded before the beginning of the last quarter of the academic year.*
8. *Items 6 and 7 will not apply to any research effort being undertaken on behalf of the GDE. Such research will have been commissioned and be paid for by the Gauteng Department of Education.*
9. *It is the researcher's responsibility to obtain written parental consent of all learners that are expected to participate in the study.*
10. *The researcher is responsible for supplying and utilising his/her own research resources, such as stationery, photocopies, transport, faxes and telephones and should not depend on the goodwill of the institutions and/or the offices visited for supplying such resources.*
11. *The names of the GDE officials, schools, principals, parents, teachers and learners that participate in the study may not appear in the research report without the written consent of each of these individuals and/or organisations.*
12. *On completion of the study the researcher must supply the Director: Knowledge Management & Research with one Hard Cover bound and one Ring bound copy of the final, approved research report. The researcher would also provide the said manager with an electronic copy of the research abstract/summary and/or annotation.*
13. *The researcher may be expected to provide short presentations on the purpose, findings and recommendations of his/her research to both GDE officials and the schools concerned.*
14. *Should the researcher have been involved with research at a school and/or a district/head office level, the Director concerned must also be supplied with a brief summary of the purpose, findings and recommendations of the research study.*

The Gauteng Department of Education wishes you well in this important undertaking and looks forward to examining the findings of your research study.

Kind regards

Nomvula Ubisi
DEPUTY CHIEF EDUCATION SPECIALIST: RESEARCH

The contents of this letter has been read and understood by the researcher.	
Signature of Researcher:	
Date:	12-03-2012