

Teachers' perceptions of the implementation of school readiness assessment instruments

by

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DECLARATION

I, Melanie Yzel, student number 10132202 hereby declare that this dissertation,

**“Teachers’ perceptions of the implementation
of school readiness assessment instruments”,**

is submitted in accordance with the requirements for the Magister Educationis degree at University of Pretoria, is my own original work and has not previously been submitted to any other institution of higher learning.

All sources cited or quoted in this research paper are indicated and acknowledged with a comprehensive list of references.

.....

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July 2017



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LETTER FROM LANGUAGE EDITOR

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

I hereby declare that I substantively language edited the draft chapters of the Master's dissertation of Ms Melanie Yzel. Recommendations and comments concerning the use of English grammar and spelling, and clarity of expression without changing the meaning, were made electronically using MSWord Track changes. The title of the dissertation is *'Teachers' perceptions of the implementation of school readiness assessment'*.

U J Fairhurst (not signed, sent electronically)

UJ Fairhurst (Prof Emeritus UP)
Full member Professional Editors' Guild
Member South African Translators Institute

9 March 2017

DEDICATION

I dedicate this research to God who has given me the opportunity to complete my studies and who blessed me with wonderful parents who made my studies possible.

I dedicate this research to teachers who work with learners who are not ready for school but try their best to assist learners in developing the necessary school readiness skills.

I dedicate this research to Grade 1 teachers who would like to know more about school readiness and the instruments that are used to assess their learners.

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- Last, but not the least my parents for always being there to motivate and support me to complete my studies.

ABSTRACT

Many learners enter formal schooling without having mastered the necessary school readiness skills. Academically, those who are not equipped with the necessary school readiness skills often experience certain difficulties, a situation that can even lead to failure at the end of their first year at school. Had these learners been assessed for school readiness earlier, and their teachers informed of the interpreted results, they could have been helped to improve their literacy level earlier. With their knowledge, teachers are able to provide appropriate additional support to meet identified school readiness needs.

A concern amongst educators is that many school readiness assessment instruments are available but they do not test the same skills. A further issue is that scientifically proven criteria for evaluating school readiness assessment instruments are not known to be available. Using information about the skills being assessed according to helpful and insightful criteria, would enable educators to know how best to assist learners. Learners do progress and learn differently. Focusing on the skills needed to succeed at school is essential for learners' development. Hence the reason for engaging in this research was to explore school readiness assessment.

From semi-structured interviews conducted, Grade 1 teachers did not have detailed knowledge of school readiness assessment and the instruments used. It is therefore recommended that awareness of the criteria for successful school readiness assessment becomes an integral part of the preparation for formal schooling. Irrespective of their age, applying such instruments could help learners who are not yet ready for school to be better prepared pre-schoolers.

Key Terms:

School readiness, school beginners, academic performance, school readiness assessment instruments, criteria.

OPSOMMING

Onderwyserpersepsies van die implementering van skoolgereedheidsassesseringsinstrumente

'n Groot aantal leerders begin hulle skoolloopbane sonder die nodige skoolgereedheidsvaardighede. Leerders wat nie die nodige skoolgereedheidsvaardighede bemeester het nie, ervaar verskeie akademiese struikelblokke wat kan veroorsaak dat die leerder die eerste akademiese jaar moet herhaal. Hierdie leerders ervaar struikelblokke indien hulle nie van die begin van hulle Graad 1 jaar ondersteuning ontvang nie. Wanneer leerders geassesseer word vir skoolgereedheid, verskaf dit belangrike inligting aan die onderwysers in terme van die vaardighede wat die leerders nog moet bemeester om gereed te wees vir formele leer.

Daar is verskeie skoolgereedheidsinstrumente beskikbaar wat leerders se vlak van skoolgereedheid kan bepaal. Die feit dat daar soveel verskillende skoolgereedheidsinstrumente beskikbaar is en nie noodwendig dieselfde vaardighede assesser nie, maak dit vir onderwysers moeilik om 'n keuse uit te oefen wanneer hulle leerders vir skoolgereedheid wil assesser. Daar is geen wetenskaplike kriteria vir die evaluering van skoolgereedheidsassesseringsinstrumente wat onderwysers in hierdie opsig kan gebruik nie. Die doel van hierdie studie was om die gebruik van skoolgereedheidsassesseringsinstrumente in die Suid-Afrikaanse konteks te ondersoek en onderwysers te help met wat gebruik kan word wanneer 'n geskikte instrument vir hulle behoeftes gekies moet word.

Volgens die navorsingsbevindinge van hierdie studie, het Graad 1 onderwysers selde insae in die assesseringsinstrument wat gebruik word om hulle leerders vir skoolgereedheid te assesser. As gevolg hiervan is hulle nie bewus van watter vaardighede geassesseer word nie en ook nie watter wyse dit geassesseer word nie. Verder blyk dit ook dat die Graad 1 onderwysers dikwels nie insae het in die uitslae van die assesserings nie. Gevolglik kan hulle nie die resultate gebruik om vroeë intervensiestrategieë te implementeer ten einde hulle leerders te ondersteun in die bemeesting van vaardighede wat ontbreek nie.

Sleuteltermes:

Skoolgereedheid, skoolbeginner, akademiese vordering, skoolgereedheidsassesseringsinstrument, kriteria.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AEDI	Australian Early Development Index
ASB	Aptitude Test for School Beginners
CAPS	Curriculum Assessment Policy Statement
CCCH	Centre for Community Child Health
DECA	Devereux Early Childhood Assessment
ECLS	Early Childhood Longitudinal Study
ECLS-B	Early Childhood Longitudinal Study Birth Cohort
EDI	Early Development Instrument
HL	Home Language
KSEP	Kindergarten Student Entrance Profile
LAP-D	Learning Accomplishment Profile-Diagnostic
LL2	Second Language Learners
MEC	Member of the Executive Council
NAEYC	National Association for the Education of Young Children
NAECS/SDE	National Association for the Early Childhood Specialist in State Departments of the United States in Early Childhood
NEGP	National Education Goals Panel
OT	Occupational Therapist
PreBERS	Preschool Behavioural and Emotional Rating Scale
SACE	South African Council for Education
SEL	Social-emotional Learning
SETT	School Readiness Evaluation by Trained Testers

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CHAPTER 1:

GENERAL ORIENTATION

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Throughout the world, school readiness is regarded as a high priority (Hatcher, Nuner & Paulsel 2012:0; Ngwaru 2012:12). School readiness ensures a smooth transition to the formal learning environment in Grade 1, which is a very important milestone for a school beginner to achieve (Theron 2013). School readiness is the term used to indicate that a learner has mastered the necessary skills to start formal schooling. Should a learner not have the necessary school readiness skills by the time they enter Grade 1, they are at risk of failure at school (ibid.). Learners need to master a certain level of cognitive, perceptual, physical, social and emotional development in order to be ready for formal learning (ibid.). If learners do not master the necessary school readiness skills by the time they enter Grade 1, they are at risk of school failure (Theron 2013). In order to assess school readiness, school readiness assessment instruments can be used.

There are various school readiness assessment instruments available for schools to use in order to determine whether a learner is ready for formal learning. Examples of some of these international accepted instruments are the Early Longitudinal Study, Birth Cohort (ECLS-B) (Goldstein & McCoach 2011), Learning Accomplishment Profile-Diagnostic (LAP-D), the Devereux Early Childhood Assessment (DECA) (De Feyter & Winsler 2009:1) and the Australian Early Development Index (AEDI) (Taylor 2011:150). In South Africa there are also different school readiness assessment instruments including the Aptitude Test for School Beginners (ASB) (Van Zyl 2004:156) and the School Readiness Evaluation by Trained Testers (SETT) (Lessing & De Witt 2005:242).

A school readiness assessment instrument is a useful tool to implement to determine a learner's level of readiness for formal learning. Through using school readiness assessment instruments, schools can identify which of the essential school readiness skills their new Grade 1 learners have not mastered yet. This

enables the Grade 1 teachers to plan for and implement intervention strategies early on in the new school year for a learner starting school.

1.2 RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY

In the South African context school readiness assessment is not done by the Department of Basic Education before or during admissions to Grade 1. Schools that choose to assess their Grade 1 learners for school readiness, select an instrument from those that are available. In many cases parents pay for the benefit of school readiness assessment by using private assessors. As a result, consistency amongst schools on this issue is not practised. In addition there is no standardised screening instrument used in schools at this particular stage, neither is there a set of criteria for the South African context which can be used to make an evaluation of school readiness assessment instruments available. Schools, as well as the Department of Basic Education, could find the research I have conducted useful, especially if it becomes policy to assess learners for school readiness when they start formal schooling. In this study, the necessary school readiness skills will be established for determining what school readiness assessment instrument would suit the needs of a particular school.

1.3 PROBLEM STATEMENT

Many learners in the South African context lack the necessary school readiness skills at formal school entry level. To successfully support these learners and provide early intervention, Grade 1 teachers should assess these learners as soon as possible. However, teachers neither know which school readiness assessment instruments are available, nor do they always have the knowledge to use the results obtained from administering the instruments. Results from a reliable school readiness assessment, especially if designed specifically for the South African context could be of great value.

1.3.1 Main research question

What are teachers' perceptions of the implementation of school readiness assessment instruments?

1.3.2 Secondary research questions

- i. What does school readiness entail?
- ii. What does school readiness assessment entail?
- iii. What are the general features of school readiness assessment instruments currently used in the South African context?
- iv. How do teachers use the results from school readiness assessment instruments in Grade 1?
- v. What criteria should be featured in a school readiness assessment instruments?

1.4 PURPOSE STATEMENT

The purpose of my study was to investigate the criteria of a school readiness assessment instrument in the South African context that would be helpful when choosing a reliable school readiness assessment instrument. Furthermore I wanted to determine the value of school readiness assessment results in assisting teachers to support learners who lack school readiness skills.

1.5 CONCEPT OF CLARIFICATION

1.5.1 School readiness

School readiness can be seen as having the skills needed to make satisfactory academic progress to benefit from formal schooling (De Witt 2009). Van der Byl, Readhead, James, Thorn, Kleyn, Maree, Faure, Hittler, and Van Oordt (2012) pointing out that school readiness implies numerous aspects that have to be well developed for a learner to be ready for school. School readiness aspects include social, emotional, physical, cognitive, normative and cultural readiness. In addition Theron (2013) states that school readiness is the extent to which learners can interact with their peers and educators, as well as their willingness to participate in school activities.

For this study, the concept of school readiness refers to the learner's ability to perform academically in Grade 1. A learner who is ready for formal learning will be

able to perform academically without experiencing too many difficulties or receiving intervention from educators and remedial staff.

1.5.2 School beginners

In South Africa Grade 1 is the first year of compulsory formal schooling and Grade R is the year prior to Grade 1. According to the Department of Basic Education Grade R is not compulsory for a learner to attend, but it is compulsory for a learner to enrol for Grade 1 in the year the learner turns seven years old. Internationally Grade R is often referred to as Kindergarten and Grade 1 is referred to as the first year of elementary school or primary school education.

1.5.3 Academic performance

Academic performance in Grade 1 is measured by assessing the learners' progress in Language (LoLt) and Mathematics. There are four aspects to consider in terms of English home language. These include listening and speaking, reading and phonics, handwriting and writing. These aspects consist of phonics, comprehension strategies, recognising words, vocabulary skills, visual discrimination and hand-eye coordination. Mathematics is divided into four aspects for the purpose of assessment, including numbers, operations and relationships, patterns, functions and algebra, space and shape and measurement. Learners need to master mental maths, number concept, problem solving, recognising patterns, basic mathematic skills, recognising two (2D)- and three (3D)-dimensional objects, positional vocabulary and the following of directions (Department of Basic Education 2011).

1.5.4 School readiness assessment

School readiness assessment is either an informal or formal procedure where an instrument is used to determine a learner's readiness for school entry. The results will predict whether a learner has the necessary skills to enter Grade 1 and cope with the demands thereof or whether the learner might need extra support and stimulation (Amod & Heafield 2013). A school readiness assessment instrument or test is used to determine whether a learner is ready for school or not. In my study I refer to school readiness assessment tests as instruments.

1.5.5 Baseline assessment

The purpose of baseline assessment is to gather information about the development of a learner's knowledge, skills and attitudes. Baseline assessment can be done by observing and questioning learners to determine their level of development (Charlesworth & Lind 2010). Baseline assessment is used for different age groups, for instance a baseline assessment can be used for Grade 1 learners to see whether they have mastered all the skills taught in Grade R. Baseline assessment is thus used for whenever a school readiness assessment instrument is applied to determine whether a learner has the necessary school readiness skills for Grade 1.

1.6 LITERATURE REVIEW

1.6.1 The concept of school readiness

School readiness is the overall readiness a learner needs to master in order to benefit from formal schooling. According to De Witt (2009) school readiness includes emotional, intellectual, social and physical readiness. School readiness also refers to the learner's ability to cope with the academic pressure of the formal learning environment (De Witt 2009). Sherry and Draper (2012) as well as Gotch and French (2011) stress the importance of early childhood development. The support that learners receive during this phase, will benefit their development. Inappropriate stimulation or a lack of stimulation might prevent the learner from developing the necessary school readiness abilities (Sherry & Draper 2012).

Van der Byl *et al.* (2012) agree that emotional, physical, social and intellectual readiness are all vital skills a learner should master to be ready for formal learning. These aspects of readiness need to be well developed according to the learner's age. The development of school readiness skills is influenced by a learner's parents and their involvement, as well as the learner's environment and how the learner perceives it (Miclea & Mihalca 2007). If parents are involved and the environmental influence is positive, the learner should be ready for school at the appropriate age and able to perform well academically (Van der Byl *et al.* 2012).

School readiness commences from birth and progresses over time through the involvement of parents and the stimulation learners receive from their environment

and how they explore and interpret their context. Learners receive information continually from very early on which helps them to construct knowledge through their experiences. Parents are the first educators in a child's life. The amount of effort they put into this and the learning opportunities they provide will be reflected in the learner's readiness for school at an appropriate time (De Witt 2009).

Learners ought to master physical, cognitive, affective, normative, social, cultural, literacy and situational skills. Van Zyl (2004) claims that there is more to school readiness than just these skills. Perceptual and conceptual skills such as visual, memory, auditory discrimination and problem solving techniques are also essential for school readiness.

Theron (2013) asserts that school readiness includes the learner's readiness to interact and participate in activities with their peers and educators. A learner's ability to connect emotionally and socially with their peers and educators will determine their level of achievement and success later in life (Miclea & Mihalca 2007:85). It is also imperative that educators determine a learner's social skills and lack thereof to determine whether this will put the child at risk of poor academic development and an inability to cope at school (Theron 2013).

The concept of school readiness thus comprises numerous aspects that need to be considered to fully understand it. Learners have to master the necessary skills before entering formal schooling to develop to the best of their ability and achieve academically.

1.6.2 Criteria for school readiness

From the literature six criteria for school readiness emerge namely, emotional, social, physical, cognitive, normative and cultural readiness (Van Zyl 2004). Each of these has to be met for a learner to be ready for school. These school readiness criteria will subsequently be described in more detail. Although these six criteria define school readiness, criteria for a school readiness assessment instrument to use in the South African schools have not been spelt out.

The first criterion to consider is emotional readiness. Emotional readiness embraces learners' ability to be independent and willing to take part in activities or go to places independently. De Witt (2009) adds seeing it as their level of independence, self-

confidence, emotional expression and anxiousness. According to Janus, Duku & Stat (2005:5) emotional readiness includes a learner's willingness to assist and motivate their peers, controlling own emotions and own behaviour.

Social readiness is described as the willingness to socialise with peers and to take part in social activities. Learners need a positive self-image and self-confidence to participate in social activities and not withdraw from it (Miclea & Mihalca 2007). Social readiness also involves a learner's ability to interact socially without being dependent on their parents (De Witt 2009:181). During social activities learners should find their own place in a group and contribute to the group (Goldstein & McCoach 2011). Social skills are vital for a learner to master to be ready for formal schooling (Goldstein & McCoach 2011). Language development and cultural influences play an important role in the learner's ability to be socially competent. Insufficient language acquisition can prevent a learner from achieving success academically. Language development is, in turn influenced by culture especially when a learner's home language differs from the language of learning and teaching (Van Zyl 2004:151).

Physical readiness involves skills such as gross motor development, fine motor development and perceptual development. According to De Witt (2009:181) physical readiness also includes fluency of movement, eye-hand coordination and balancing skills. It is critical for learners to develop physically according to their age otherwise the learner might not adapt well to formal schooling or to the demands of formal schooling. Physical readiness also concerns sensory development which is important for mastering the necessary skills to read and write (Van Zyl 2004:149). Personal hygiene and the learner's ability to adapt independently to the school environment, as well as active participation in school activities are part of physical readiness (Janus, Duku & Stat 2005:4).

Learners need to acquire a certain level of cognitive readiness to be able to benefit from the formal school environment. The knowledge the learner gains in Grade 1 includes an understanding of number concepts and symbols, one to one correspondence, cause and effect, addition and subtraction, distinguishing foreground from background, estimation and problem solving skills (De Witt 2009:181). Cognitive readiness depends on perceptual development in the same

way that perceptual development depends on cognitive readiness. Good observation skills, appropriate attention span, abstract thoughts, good memory skills and appropriate language development are important skills to master for school readiness (Van Zyl 2009). Literacy skills such as reading and writing and the learner's ability to participate in literacy activities too form part of cognitive readiness (Janus, Duku & Stat 2005:5).

Normative readiness is the learner's way of interacting with others in their environment. Learners must know that they have to adhere to authority including parents, educators and any other people of authority (Van Zyl 2004). Having good manners and adhering to rules form part of normative readiness. By keeping to rules learners will learn to respect other learners' rights, which is very important and part of adapting to formal schooling. Routine is an important part of formal schooling and learners have to be able to adapt to routine (De Witt 2009). Normative readiness also includes the learner's ability and willingness to accept tasks and to complete the tasks within a reasonable time. Moreover, it is necessary for learners to understand the concept of responsibility (Van Zyl 2004). Communication is part of social readiness as well as normative readiness. Communication in normative readiness is the learner's ability to communicate with respect as well as to communicate clearly and with self-control. Normative readiness mainly defines the learner's ability to reflect and display good manners and respect (Van Zyl 2004).

Learners come from different contexts and situations that include the learners' culture and the experiences to which they are exposed in their different environments. Different cultures use different languages and approach situations differently. Cultural readiness depends on parental involvement and the extent to which the learner receives academic support and exposure to learning experiences. When learners are adequately exposed in this way, especially in their exposure to the language of teaching and learning as Van Zyl (2004:151) notes, their ability to experience success academically will increase. The mentioned criteria are all integrated and depend on each other. If one of these aspects is not well developed, the school readiness of the learner is affected negatively.

1.6.3 Policies and legislation regarding admission to Grade 1

In the South African context learners enrol for Grade 1 when they are six years old, turning seven. According to the Department of Basic Education (2016) it is compulsory for a learner to enrol for Grade 1 in the year that the learner turns seven. If the parents want to enrol a learner for Grade 1 at the age of five, it is compulsory for the learner to turn six before or on 30 June of that specific year.

Parents may decide to enrol a learner in Grade 1 when the learner is still under aged. Under aged learners are learners who do not turn seven years old before the end of June when entering Grade 1. There are specific procedures to follow before an under aged learner can be admitted. Parents need to complete an application form which must be accompanied by the results of a school readiness test from a psychologist, another professional person or a report from a qualified educator who is registered with SACE (South African Council for Educators) or another educational institution. Thereafter the principal decides whether the under aged learner will be accepted or not. If the principal denies this request, parents must be given a valid reason in writing. Parents will have the opportunity to appeal to the Member of the Executive Council (MEC) at the Department of Basic Education (Department of Basic Education 2016).

It is my experience that many young learners in South Africa are not assessed for school readiness prior to being admitted to Grade 1. Schools should admit learners to Grade 1 in the year in which they turn seven, whether they have been assessed for school readiness or not. Furthermore a learner cannot be refused entering Grade 1 on the grounds of poor performance in a school readiness assessment (Department of Basic Education 2016). In my experience as a teacher, numerous learners start their school career without having reached the required and essential level of school readiness. This often leads to academic failure.

1.6.4 Assessment of school readiness

To benefit from school readiness assessment, educators need to realise the importance and value of school readiness assessments (Miclea & Mihalca 2007:84). The results from such a procedure can be used to determine whether a learner needs intervention or support during the transition phase prior to entering the formal

learning environment. School readiness assessment can determine whether the learner is ready for the formal school environment or could benefit from another year in Grade R to support their mastering necessary skills. The results from school readiness assessment can further be used to determine the effectiveness of an educational programme into enhancing school readiness skills in young learners (Miclea & Mihalca 2007:84).

According to Goldstein and McCoach (2011) there are numerous ways to determine a learner's knowledge on school entry. In most cases, it is not possible to do one assessment to determine a learner's knowledge and level of development. Several choices of school readiness assessment instruments are available. The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) and the National Association of Early Childhood Specialists in State Departments of the United States in Early Childhood (NAECS/SDE) established guidelines on how to assess young learners. The NAEYC and the NAECS/SDE developed these guidelines to inform teaching and learning, identify learners who struggle, improve education programmes and develop intervention strategies (Goldstein & McCoach 2011).

Appropriate psychometric instruments should be developed to measure and assess educational programmes that reflect whether or not learners have really mastered the necessary school readiness skills. According to Goldstein and McCoach (2011) the results of their research show that there is very little assistance is available for teachers to assess learners' emotional, cognitive and physical school readiness. These authors concluded that school readiness assessment is not only necessary to assess learners' school readiness skills but also for determining whether the education system is providing appropriate learning opportunities or not (Goldstein & McCoach 2011). For the South African context it is therefore recommended that a list of criteria be developed to assist teachers in choosing the correct school readiness assessment instrument in order to identify their learners' needs.

The United States Department of Education's National Centre for Education Statistics (NCES) developed the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, Birth Cohort (ECLS-B) to evaluate learners' health and their exposure to education during their first few years until they enter kindergarten. This school readiness assessment instrument evaluates five aspects of school readiness, namely physical and motor

skills, social and emotional skills, approaches to education, language development and cognitive skills and general knowledge (Goldstein & McCoach 2011).

According to De Feyter and Winsler (2009:1) they used two different school readiness assessment instruments during their study in the United States. The Learning Accomplishment Profile-Diagnostic (LAP-D) was used to assess learners' cognitive and language development. The Devereux Early Childhood Assessment (DECA) was used to evaluate socio-emotional abilities and a learner's behaviour problems (De Feyter & Winsler 2009:1).

In Australia the Australian Early Development Index (AEDI) instrument was used to evaluate the development and readiness of learners in a study conducted by the Centre for Community Child Health (CCCH) (Taylor 2011:149). The AEDI investigated the educator's evaluation of a learner's physical development, emotional development, language skills, cognitive abilities, communication skills and general knowledge (Taylor 2011:150). These school readiness assessment instruments will be used to compare South African school readiness assessment instruments to ascertain the strength of their validity and relevancy.

The school where I teach uses the Brainline school readiness assessment instrument that was developed by Dr H. Cronje (Cronje 2003). This school readiness assessment instrument was developed in 2003 for Cronje's school called Brainline. This instrument assesses the non-verbal and verbal skills of learners. The non-verbal aspects covered the following: general development, emotional development, social development, the ability to analyse, the ability to make associations, balance, discrimination, dominance, figure-ground, fine motor development, gross motor development, short-term memory, laterality and directionality, body image, lateral midline, eye movements, position in space, the ability to synthesise, closure, sequence, form constancy and numeracy. During verbal evaluation, the evaluator assesses the learner's language development (Cronje 2003).

Another school readiness assessment instrument used in South Africa is the School Readiness Evaluation by Trained Testers (SETT). This instrument can be used to assess to what extent Grade R learners grasped various literacy skills as second-language learners (L2) (Lessing & De Witt 2005:242).

The Aptitude Test for School Beginners (ASB) is used in some South African primary schools to evaluate a learner's perception abilities, spatial relations, reasoning skills, number operations, coordination abilities as well as memory and verbal comprehension skills. The reason the ASB was used during a study conducted by Van Zyl (2004:156) was because of the test's statistical reliability and validity.

School readiness assessment is vital for educators to use in assisting learners with learning therefore they should choose the best instrument by using criteria suitable for their context. Educators can use the results from a learners' school readiness assessment to determine which skills the learner lacks, and how to assist them to overcome their barriers. The educator can determine which intervention is best suited to meet that learner's need and to set appropriate goals for mastering the identified skills that require attention. In more serious cases, educators can determine whether the parents should be advised to rather keep the learner in Grade R for another year or enrol them for Grade R before admission to Grade 1. This can also be done in cases where the learner had not yet reached the compulsory age for school entry (Miclea & Mihalca 2007:84).

1.7 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

McAfee and Leong (2007) explain the process of school readiness assessment in their model on school readiness assessment (see Figure 1.1). The process includes follows a sequence that begins the purpose of the assessment then considers, then gives the items to be assessed, when the assessment should take place and how the data will be collected. Summarising this data, interpreting it and finally using it as feedback for parents and teachers. Since I planned to investigate the current use of school readiness assessment instruments used in South Africa, following this procedure was a suitable theoretical framework for my study.

McAfee and Leong (2007) also explored the criteria to which school readiness assessment processes and instruments should adhere, to maintain ethical, legal and valid research (see Figure 1.2). These were useful for my interest in investigating criteria that should be assessed in school readiness assessment instruments available to use in South African schools.

These frameworks assisted me in exploring the need for criteria to choose the most reliable instrument for their context of school readiness assessment instruments in South African schools (McAfee & Leong 2007).

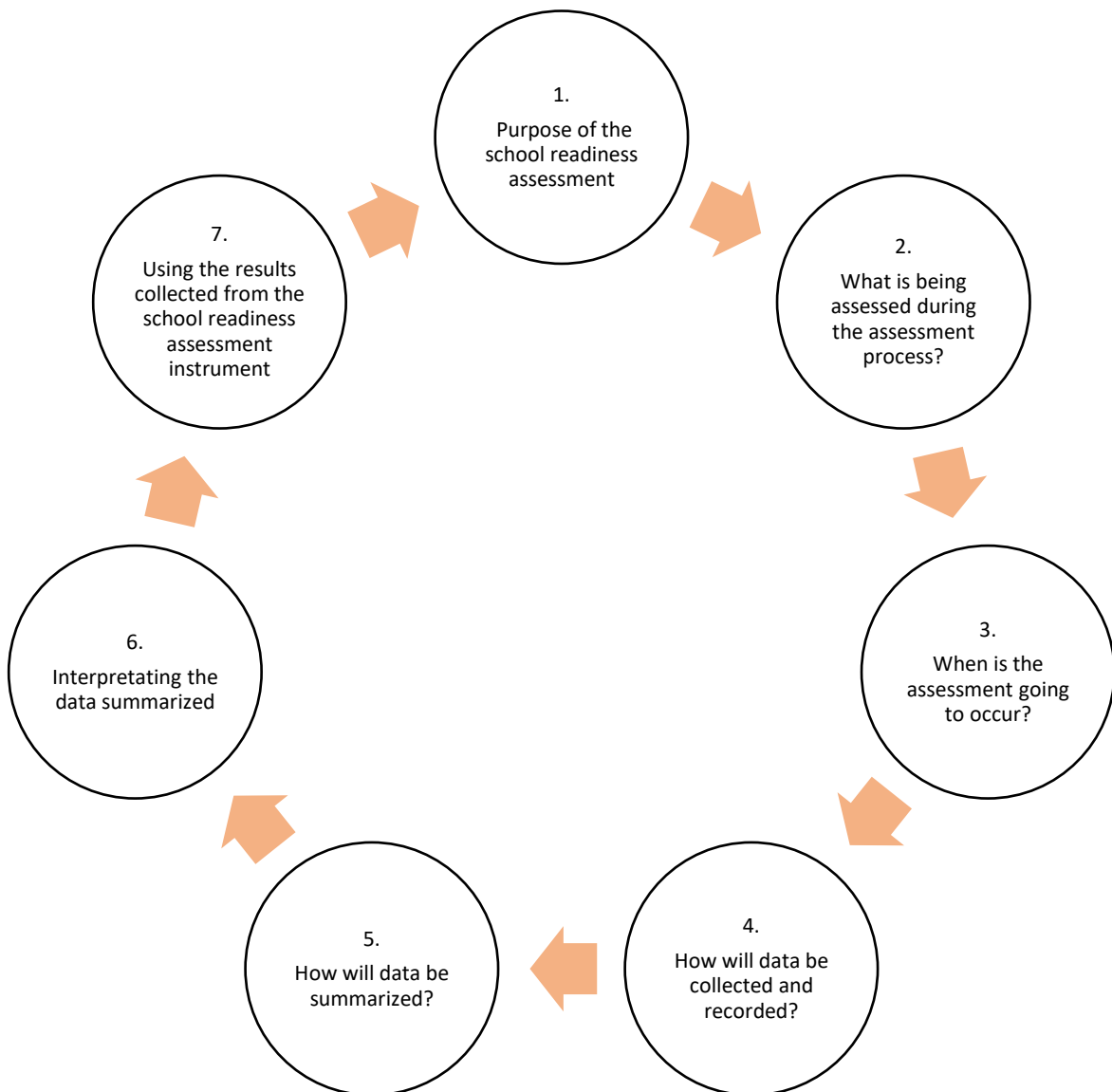


Figure 1.1: The process of school readiness assessment (McAfee & Leong 2007)

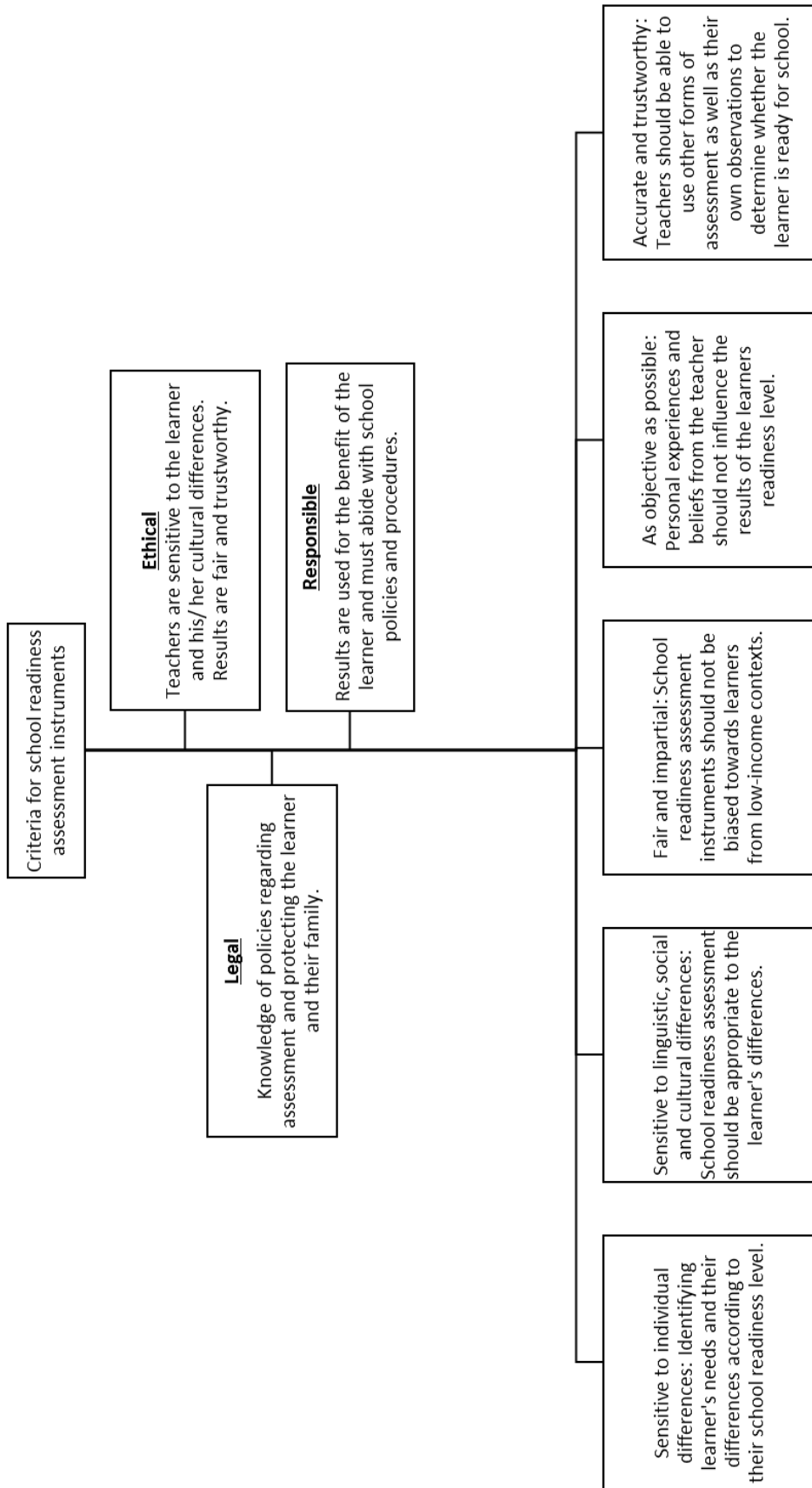


Figure 1.2: Criteria for school readiness assessment instruments (adapted from McAfee & Leong 2007)

1.8 RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

1.8.1 Research paradigm

A paradigm is a set of beliefs and views which form a worldview that a certain individual believes in (Hamilton & Corbett-Whittier 2013). The interpretivist paradigm focuses on an individual's experiences and how the individual perceives their own social context. To understand the individual's behaviour it is necessary to place the individual in their own social context and then investigate how meaning is attributed to a specific phenomenon (Nieuwenhuis 2007).

To gain understanding of an individual's perception of a specific phenomenon and to comprehend their beliefs regarding the phenomenon under investigation, it is necessary to explore the individual's context. The interpretivist paradigm has allowed me to gain insight into teachers' beliefs regarding school readiness assessment and the use of its results (Hamilton & Corbett-Whittier 2013). I also found it assisted me in gaining insight into school readiness assessments and how these assessments can assist teachers who wish to use the results of these assessments to support learners (Nieuwenhuis 2007).

1.8.2 Research approach

A qualitative approach was followed for this study. According to Creswell (2013), qualitative research starts with assumptions the researcher develops for a specific phenomenon for which data is collected in its natural setting. According to Drew, Hardman and Hosp (2008) there are four reasons why qualitative research is used: to explore events that are happening at that given moment; to examine a context and analyse everything it includes; to examine behaviour and the reasons for the behaviour; and to explore, explain and describe certain aspects of a phenomenon (Drew, Hardman & Hosp 2008).

The qualitative research approach suited my study well since I studied the implementation of school readiness assessment instruments to determine how teachers could be assisted when choosing an appropriate school readiness assessment instrument to meet their needs.

1.8.3 Research methods

1.8.3.1 Case study

A case study involves the study of a subject in the real world. During case study research the researcher examines the subject in its own context over a period. An in-depth study is done by collecting data through interviews and document analysis as well as using other data collection strategies (Creswell 2013). The reason why I decided to conduct a case study was because I could assess three schools from similar contexts that would take part in the study.

Creswell (2013) suggests that a case study is set up in seven characteristic steps. The first step is that the case needs to be identified and described according to the place and time where it is situated and that set times are given for the investigation. Second, the case needs to be continuous and on-going for the stated time. The third step is to describe the case study needs in detail to recognise the specific problem or phenomenon under investigation. Fourthly, the case is examined in-depth by using various data collection strategies such as interviews or document analysis. Identifying themes is the next step followed by organizing them either in chronological order or by looking for similarities and differences. Seventh and lastly a conclusion is drafted (Creswell 2013).

1.8.3.2 Participants and research sites

The participants in the study includes Grade 1 teachers and other teachers familiar with the school readiness concept and school readiness assessment instruments. Focus group interviews were conducted with the participants from three different schools who took part in the study.

1.8.3.3 Data collection

According to Nieuwenhuis (2007) qualitative research is an on-going process where data is collected, reflection is done on collected data, limitations of collected data are identified and further data is collected if necessary. In this study, I used focus group interviews to collect the data I needed to answer my research questions.

1.8.3.3.1 Interviews

A research interview is a conversation between the researcher and the participant. The researcher asks the participant questions to gain insight into the research problem. Through conducting interviews the researcher can see the phenomenon under investigation through the eyes of the participant (Nieuwenhuis 2007).

I also used semi-structured interviews for focus group interviews during my study. Predetermined questions were set prior to the interviews and the participants were allowed to clarify answers to the questions when necessary. By using semi-structured focus group interviews the participants could add information which they regarded as helpful for the study. New themes emerged during the interviews which shed light on other important aspects of the phenomenon.

As researcher, I needed to be aware of the fact that the participants could get side-tracked easily and provide irrelevant information. When this occurred, I redirected the interview conversation in an appropriate way to get the data that I needed from the participants.

1.8.3.4 Data analysis

Qualitative data analysis is a process of gaining an in-depth understanding of the data collected. The collected data is analysed to look for emerging themes or patterns from the raw data (Nieuwenhuis 2007). Thematic analysis was used to understand the data. The interviews were recorded and transcribed for analysis.

1.8.3.5 The role of the researcher

Following Maree and Van der Westhuizen (2007), I saw my role as the researcher as an active observer and interpreter during the interview process. I had designed the semi-structured interview questions first, then conducted the interviews, taken notes during the interviews and analysed the data after it had been collected. As the interviewer, it was necessary to recognise and deal with any evident bias being shown that reflected the participants' value system, beliefs and interests regarding the research theme and process, as Maree and Van der Westhuizen (2007:41) recommends. My role as researcher was to abide by all ethical guidelines and requirements of the Faculty of Education at the University of Pretoria.

1.8.4 Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness refers to two aspects, reliability and validity in particular. Research should be reliable and valid to be regarded as trustworthy (Nieuwenhuis 2007). For research to be trustworthy dependability, conformability, credibility and transferability must be considered (Creswell 2013). According to Henning, Van Rensburg and Smit (2013) credibility involves the real value of the findings derived from the data analysis. Conformability depends on the objectivity of the researcher throughout the research process. The research findings should be derived from the participants' point of view and not from the researcher's opinion (Henning, Van Rensburg & Smit 2013). Dependability suggests whether the data is reliable even when the results change (Creswell 2013). Transferability refers to the possibility of conducting the study in similar contexts that would result in similar findings, or their findings could be applied in similar contexts. For this reason, it was necessary to provide rich descriptions of the research sites and the research process that was followed.

To ensure that the data was credible and conformable, the findings were confirmed by someone outside the study. After the data had been analysed the findings were sent to participants for member checking to ensure that they were consistent with the participants' perceptions.

1.8.5 Ethical considerations

Letters of informed consent were given to all participants who agreed to participate in the study. Participation was voluntary and participants could withdraw from the study at any time. Participants were not exposed to any form of physical or psychological harm. As researcher, I strived to be as honest as possible, respectful towards all participants and sympathetic. The findings from the study are presented anonymously to protect the identities of the participants, as Maree and Van der Westhuizen (2007) suggests. The research was conducted according to the Ethics and Research Statement provided by the Faculty of Education at the University of Pretoria.

1.9 OUTLINE OF THE STUDY

Chapter 1: General Orientation

Chapter 1 is an introduction and orientation to the study, background, rationale and research questions that guided the study. A preliminary literature review is presented and the theoretical framework that underpinned the interpretation of the research findings is introduced. The research methodology is explained as well as the ethical issues are briefly discussed.

Chapter 2: Literature Study and Theoretical Framework

In Chapter 2 the recent literature on the concept of school readiness, the importance of school readiness assessment, and the criteria for a valid and trustworthy school readiness assessment instruments is presented. The skills that are currently assessed in school readiness assessment instruments and the importance thereof is represented.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology

The research process and methodology which guided my study is discussed in Chapter 3. The research approach, design and data collection methods are presented. The method used for data analysis is explained, as well as measures taken to ensure credibility and trustworthiness. Ethical considerations are presented.

Chapter 4: Data Analysis and Research Findings

In Chapter 4 the research sites are described to give more information with regard to the phenomenon under investigation. The research findings are presented according to the themes and subthemes that emerged during data analysis.

Chapter 5: Interpretation of Research Findings

The empirical research findings are discussed with reference to recent literature on school readiness assessment instruments to compare the findings of this study to previous studies on school readiness assessment instruments. The research findings are also presented through the theoretical framework of McAfee and Leong's theory on the school readiness assessment process.

Chapter 6: Summary, Conclusion and Recommendations

In Chapter 6 I conclude the study by presenting a brief summary of the literature on school readiness assessment instruments and the empirical research findings of this study. Similarities and possible contradictions between the literature and the empirical research findings of this study are stated. Conclusions are drawn by first answering the secondary research questions and finally the main research question. Recommendations are made for policy makers, practitioners and further research.

1.10 CONCLUSION

In Chapter 1 the orientation of the study is presented, indicating the rationale for the study and the research questions that guided the study. A preliminary review is presented and the theoretical framework is introduced. The research methodology is explained and ethical considerations are discussed. Chapter 1 served as a guideline for the research process in order to gain an in-depth understanding of school readiness assessment and the instruments.

In Chapter 2 an in-depth literature study is presented on school readiness assessment instruments and the theoretical framework is discussed and adapted for the purpose of this study.

CHAPTER 2:

LITERATURE STUDY AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 INTRODUCTION

In Chapter 2, I discuss the concept of school readiness, the importance of school readiness assessment, and the criteria for valid and trustworthy school readiness assessment instruments. From the literature, I determined which school readiness skills are predominantly assessed in currently used assessment instruments and which skills are important to assess to determine the extent to which a learner is ready for formal learning. This enabled me to investigate the skills that should be assessed in a school readiness assessment instrument.

Rimm-Kaufman, Pianta and Cox (2000) in Konold and Planto (2005) state that there are various kindergarten teachers who use school readiness assessment instruments to screen learners when they enter formal schooling. It is very important for learners to be assessed for school readiness skills to determine their levels of development and the skills they still need to master (Brandt & Grace 2005). Furthermore, it is important to determine whether a learner needs extra intervention opportunities (Goldstein & McCoach 2011) or not, and to assess the educational programme to be used to determine its appropriateness (Aiona 2005).

When a learner turns five years old, parents and teachers often deliberate about the learner being ready for formal schooling and the learning tasks that lie ahead (Quirk, Furlong, Lilles, Felix & Chin 2011). The concept of school readiness has emerged over the years and numerous studies have shown its importance for future academic success (Chen, Masur & McNamee 2011; Hindmand, Skibbe, Miller, Zimmerman 2010). All teachers of young learners should regard this as a priority concern (Chen, Masur & McNamee 2011). It is important for learners to master the necessary school readiness skills to succeed in formal schooling (Hindmand, Skibbe, Miller & Zimmerman 2010).

Meisels (1999) in Brown (2015;184) says “one child’s readiness may be another child’s long ago accomplishment or another child’s yet-to-be-achieved success”.

This quote states that not all learners are on the same level of development at the time of school entry. Some learners still need to master the skills that other learners have already mastered. I believe that teachers, parents and schools should regard school readiness and school readiness assessment as a high priority concern. Learners need to be assessed for school readiness before they start formal schooling to assist teachers in determining the learners' levels of development and to provide early intervention for learners should be regarded who are not yet on the appropriate developmental level for formal learning.

2.2 TAKING A CLOSER LOOK AT THE CONCEPT OF SCHOOL READINESS

The concept of school readiness cannot be defined in one single definition. Many authors have their own definitions of school readiness, but what most of them agree on, is that school readiness can be defined as the skills necessary for formal learning when a learner enters school.

According to Brown (2015) cognitive, linguistic, academic, and social emotional skills or abilities are necessary for a learner to master before entering school. These skills serve as a foundation for the learner to succeed in school. When learners have mastered these skills, they are prepared for the challenges experienced at school level. Brown (2015) also states that school readiness is multi-dimensional as it includes the developmental skills of the learner, their environmental context, behavioural and cognitive abilities, adaptation to the school environment, and the educational contexts available to their family (ibid.).

Thus, school readiness describes the ideal developmental level at which the learner should enter school to be ready to learn (Quirk *et al.* 2011). In the South African context learners who turn seven years should enter Grade 1 to start formal schooling. Their developmental preparedness determines whether they are ready for the formal schooling process or not. School readiness assessment is essential to enable Grade 1 teachers to support learners who might not be ready for formal schooling. The learner's home environment determines their level of school readiness. School readiness is the result of the learner's development during their preschool years and the learning experiences available in their home environment (Janus & Offord 2007).

Kagan (1994), in Duncan and Rafter (2005), defines school readiness as the readiness to learn and the readiness for school. Readiness to learn consists of a set of skills needed before a learner can start formal schooling. School readiness is a multi-dimensional approach that reflects the readiness level of a learner that ought to be considered before a learner enters school. Kiernan, Axford, Little, Murphy, Greene and Gormley (2008) suggest that school readiness should be viewed holistically, integrating physical and motor development, cognitive skills, language, knowledge, and social-emotional abilities.

Umek, Kranjc, Fekonja and Bajc (2008) define school readiness as the physical, motor, cognitive and social development necessary for a learner to be ready for school. It is important that learners master these skills to adapt to the curriculum and all the challenges they experience when developing academic skills. Umek *et al.* (2008) claim that schools cannot adapt to the various developmental characteristics of each learner which is why school readiness is essential so that all learners can start on the same level in a group. This point of view however, can be seen to contradict the policy of inclusive education. Its aim is that all learners should have the opportunity to participate in formal schooling although they might not be on the same level of development (Florian 2008).

In the United States, numerous schools use age as a criterion for school entry, since learners' physical, social, emotional and cognitive development varies widely (Brown 2015). In this regard, Bowman, Donovan and Burns (2001) claim that a learner should not progress according to specific stages of physical, social, emotional, and cognitive development. They suggest that a learner must first reach a specific age or level of maturity before they are able to learn in a formal setting. Overall readiness for kindergarten in the United States of America is reached at the age of four or five years old when learners are usually competent enough to enter formal schooling and progress adequately (*ibid.*).

Brown (2015) documents that the National Education Goals Panel (NEGP) (1991) in the United States agrees that school readiness is defined by both the learner's readiness for school, and the school's readiness to accommodate them at their various levels of readiness. In addition support from families and the community too required for mastering these school readiness skills. Brandt and Grace (2005) acknowledge that success in the learning opportunities offered in formal schooling

depends on the school, the learner's family and the learners collaborating socially and culturally.

The Early Childhood Longitudinal Study (ECLS) examined the perceptions of kindergarten teachers' of school readiness (Goldstein & McCoach 2011) that put more emphasis on the learners' social behaviour than their academic abilities. The social behaviour of a learner included abilities to express their thoughts without displaying disruptive behaviour, to following instructions and to take turns. Other abilities teachers mentioned in the study, that also played an important role in the learner's readiness to learn were sitting still, completing projects, solving problems and being sensitive to other learners. According to the findings, teachers did not emphasise academic abilities like counting skills, knowledge of the alphabet, colours and shapes, or using physical materials as strongly (ibid.). Rimm-Kaufman, Pianta and Cox (2000) cited in Denham (2006) concur that teachers view positive emotional expressiveness, enthusiasm, and the ability to control emotions and behaviours as essential for school readiness.

De Lemos (2008) gives an in-depth description of the meaning of school readiness. Around the age of six years the child is capable of being responsible and completing tasks for formal learning. It is very important for a learner to be able to cope with learning tasks to succeed in the formal learning environment. White (1996) mentioned in De Lemos (2008), says that learners are ready for the formal learning process and able to cope when they can think more rationally, logically and start to reason. This is known as the age of reason, where the learner which that is based on the conceptualisation of beliefs and thoughts. Learners need to be able to think logically and reason when completing tasks in school. Furthermore, concepts can be generalised and applied to various other contexts.

Kagan, Moore and Bredekamp (1995) in Brown (2015) describe five criteria learners need to be ready for school: health and physical development, emotional and social skills, communication skills, approaches to learning, and cognitive skills. Health and physical development concern the learner's physical well-being, growth rate and fine and gross motor abilities. Emotional and social skills incorporate self-concept, self-efficacy, healthy relationships, expression of feelings, and empathy skills. Approaches to learning describe the learner's eagerness to learn, persistence, concentration skills, and learning style. Communication are verbal and evolving

literacy abilities. Cognitive skills apply to the properties of objects, relationship between objects, and basic general knowledge such as knowing one's own name and surname (ibid.). In the next section the necessary school readiness skills will be discussed in-depth.

2.2.1 Health and physical development

According to Janus and Offord (2007), a learner's health and physical development is part of school readiness. If not well developed it can have a negative long-term effect on the learner. The physical readiness of a learner refers to the learner's health status, development, physical abilities, and gross and fine motor skills (Emig 2000). Emig (2000) agrees that a learner's health development affects their level of school readiness.

2.2.2 Social and emotional development

Social-emotional learning (SEL) is a very important aspect of school readiness and therefore it has become a very important part of early childhood (Denham & Brown 2010). To adapt to the formal schooling context and succeed academically, it is important for the learner to be socially and emotionally well-developed (ibid.). Coping with the social demands of the formal learning environment, means the learner needs to respond emotionally appropriate, pay attention during learning activities, behave appropriately, make good decisions, and behave well in social activities. They also state that learners who are socially and emotionally well-developed interact more in classroom activities, receive more positive feedback from teachers, and are easily accepted by their peers and the teacher.

According to Denham and Brown (2010), there are five aspects of SEL: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, responsible decision making, and relationship skills. Self-awareness entails the learner's own emotions and ability to identify them. Self-awareness includes the learner's interests, values and strengths. Self-management includes the learner's ability to acknowledge own emotions and the ability to regulate emotions and feelings to help them through different situations. Self-management includes the learner's ability to cope with stressful situations and overcome difficult tasks. All of these self-management factors enable the learner to behave socially appropriate. Social awareness includes the learner's ability to

understand other people's emotions and to take their emotions into account. Responsible decision making includes the learner's ability to solve problems, understand consequences, and take responsibility. Relationship skills include the learner's ability to develop positive relationship skills such as playing appropriately with peers, good conversation skills, interaction skills, listening skills, and interacting with friends.

2.2.3 Communication skills

The learners' language development includes their ability to communicate verbally, as well as their emerging literacy level. Verbal communication consists of the learners' listening skills, communication skills, and vocabulary. Emergent literacy consists of the learners' letter-sound connection, understanding of stories, and writing skills (Emig 2000). These are determined by the learners' prior exposure to reading and writing. Learners are interested in letters and writing from a young age and with sufficient stimulation it helps them to succeed in formal schooling. Well-developed emergent literacy can predict a learner's reading development in formal schooling (ibid.).

Communication skills are often connected with a learner's home environment. Learners who were exposed to rich conversations and reading material from an early age at home tend to make better academic progress than learners who were not exposed to emergent literacy (ibid.). Learners who attended preschool before entering formal schooling were also exposed more to emergent literacy because they had the opportunity to handle books and engage in age appropriate writing activities. In preschools, learners are already exposed to sounds and letters which will help them to communicate clearly and succeed in reading (ibid.).

2.2.4 Approaches to learning

Chen *et al.* (2011) explain that it is not only what the learner learns at school but it is also how the learner learns. It is therefore essential for teachers to identify factors that can influence learners' approaches to learning in planning their teaching strategies. How a learner participates in the learning process and the attitude adopted to it are considered very important as what the learner is going to achieve

in the formal learning environment depends on their response. A learner can either be motivated or discouraged to learn.

Kagan *et al.* (1995) agree that approaches to learning involve the way learners interact and participate during the learning process and how they react to what is learned. The Early Learning and Development Benchmarks in Washington State, US based a list of approaches to learning on the study of Kagan *et al.* (1995), namely: the initiative the learner takes to learn, the learner's interest in learning and their persistence and attentiveness, creativity, and interpretation of what is learned. Learners also acquire knowledge about how to learn through planning tasks and keeping focused to complete tasks (Chen *et al.* 2011).

Teachers play an important role in developing a learner's approaches to learning. Teachers design their classrooms, their daily programmes, and their teaching strategies which influence a learner's way of learning (Chen *et al.* 2011). The teacher's way of doing this determines whether the learner will benefit or not from the learning opportunities created in the classroom.

2.2.5 Cognitive development

Cognitive development consists of executive functions which can be defined as the learner's working memory, inhibitory discipline and the learner's ability to be cognitively adaptable. Working memory works when the learners recall knowledge from their long term memory to incorporate with new knowledge to use in current new situations. If the learner's working memory is well developed the learner should be able to solve problems. Inhibitory discipline refers to a learner's ability to focus as required on tasks and to behave appropriately. Cognitive adaptability is the learner's ability to look at problems in various ways even when the situation changes. Therefore, cognitive development and its content will enable a learner to achieve successfully at a specific level academically (Bruwer 2014). In order to understand school readiness skills more clearly, it is necessary to explore various theories on the stages of development.

2.3 LEARNER DEVELOPMENT THEORIES

Numerous theories about learner's stages of development have been developed by theorists over the years. Theories that stand out include Urie Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, Sigmund Freud's psychosexual theory, Erik Erikson's psychosocial developmental theory, Jean Piaget's cognitive development theory and Lawrence Kohlberg's moral developmental theory. To develop a better understanding of the stages of development, it is necessary to investigate each theory and how the stages of development are described.

2.3.1 Ecological systems theory

Urie Bronfenbrenner developed a model which portrays the developing learner as situated in complex and interactive systems (Louw & Kail 2007). The ecological theory states that a learner's development is greatly influenced by the learner's surroundings (Gordon & Browne 2014), which can be divided into four levels: microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem and the macrosystem (Louw & Kail 2007). The first level, with the learner at the centre, is where learners spend most of their time. Each level will be described in table 2.1.

Table 2.1: Bronfenbrenner's ecological system

Ecological system	Description
Microsystem	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People and objects in the learner's direct environment • This system can have a very direct influence on the learner's development • With the learner at the centre, the learner is surrounded by their family, the school environment, peers and their religious setting
Mesosystem	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The mesosystem represents the influence between microsystems • The mesosystem and microsystem are emotionally linked
Exosystem	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The exosystem represents the social environments that won't influence the learner at first hand but can still influence their development • The exosystem might influence the learner indirectly but can still have a strong effect on the learner • This level includes family friends, social and legal systems and the community the learner lives in
Macrosystem	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The macrosystem includes cultures and subcultures and their identities and values • This level includes economic conditions, political philosophies and social conditions

(Louw & Kail 2007; Gordon & Browne 2014)

2.3.2 Psychosexual stages of development

Sigmund Freud developed the psychosexual theory, which states what a learner experiences at a very young age can stay with them for the rest of their life (Louw & Kail 2007). Freud states that each characteristic is associated with sensual satisfaction and is closely linked to challenges the learner will face at certain ages (Gordon & Browne 2014). This theory includes four stages which have an impact on the learner's formal learning environment experience. Table 2.2 describes each stage and how it affects the learner.

Table 2.2: Psychosexual stages of development

Psychosexual stage	Age	Description
Oral	Birth to one year	Sexual energy is centred on the learner's mouth (Louw & Kail 2007). The learner starts to receive pleasure from eating (Gordon & Browne 2014). If the learner's oral needs are not met the learner can develop habits such as thumb sucking or nail biting in early years, or binge eating and smoking in later years (Louw & Kail 2007).
Anal	One to three years	Sexual energy is centred on the anal area when learners start to be in control of their bowel and bladder (Louw & Kail 2007; Gordon & Browne 2014). If parents put too much pressure on the learner during this phase, it can cause the learner to be extremely neat and organised, or the opposite where the learner is untidy and disorganized (Louw & Kail 2007).
Phallic	Three to six years	Sexual energy is focused on the genitals and the learner receives stimulation around genitals (Louw & Kail 2007; Gordon & Browne 2014). The learner tends to interact more with the parent from the opposite sex and because of the anxiety that is produced the learner identifies more with the parent from the same sex with regard to characteristics and values (Louw & Kail 2007). The learner becomes more conscious of gender (Gordon & Browne 2014).
Latency	Six to eleven years	Sexual instincts are suppressed and new values are learned through interaction with peers and other adults (Louw & Kail 2007). The learner puts more effort and work into schoolwork and other school-related activities (Gordon & Browne 2014).

2.3.3 Psychosocial development

Erik Erikson developed the psychosocial developmental theory, which is based on the psychological and social aspects of a learner's development (Louw & Kail 2007). Erikson states that there are various stages that a learner needs to pass through during life, each building and growing on one another (Gordon & Browne 2014). The psychosocial development theory is based on eight stages of development. Each

developing a critical strength and characterised by an emotional barrier (ibid.). Table 2.3 describes four stages which have an impact on children’s early developmental years of formal learning (Louw & Kail 2007).

Table 2.3: Psychosocial theory

Stage	Age	Description
Trust versus mistrust	Birth to one year	Learners develop to trust that the world is a safe and good place (Louw & Kail 2007). The learner also learns to trust the people in their lives which develop the critical strength of hope (Gordon & Browne 2014).
Autonomy versus shame and doubt	One to three years	Learners realise that they are independent and can make their own decisions (Louw & Kail 2007). They learn to control their instincts and to fully use their gross and fine motor skills as well as their mental skills. The critical strength the learner needs to develop is willpower (Gordon & Browne 2014).
Initiative versus guilt	Three to six years	Learners become willing to develop and experience new things and how to deal with failure (Louw & Kail 2007). The goal of this stage is to develop a purpose. The learner will learn to take initiative when trying to complete tasks, which will develop a conscience to ensure that tasks get completed (Gordon & Browne 2014).
Industry versus inferiority	Six years to adolescence	The major purpose of this stage is for the learner to master competency (Gordon & Browne 2014). The learner learns new skills and to work well with others by adapting to rules and the physical world (Louw & Kail 2007; Gordon & Browne 2014).

2.3.4 Cognitive development theory

The cognitive theory was developed by Jean Piaget and explains the development of the learner’s thought process and how it affects the way the learner understands and perceives the world (Gordon & Browne 2014). Jean Piaget states that learners naturally try to make sense of the world they live in. Learners act as scientists by developing theories about their worlds and test their theories by experiencing the world. The learners’ theory either becomes stronger when experiencing life according to their theory or they change and develop their theories when their expectations aren’t met. According to Piaget, there are four stages of cognitive development according to Piaget (Louw & Kail 2007). Table 2.4 provides an explanation of three of the stages which form part of the learner’s early years.

Table 2.4: Cognitive development theory

Age	Stage	Description
Birth to two years	Sensorimotor	Learners comprehend the world through their senses and movement. Learners learn that objects still exist even though they aren't seen (Louw & Kail 2007). This stage is vital to ensure that the learner understands the world they live in (Gordon & Browne 2014).
Two to six years	Preoperational	Learners begin to use language and symbols to represent ideas and objects. Learners realise that lifeless objects have emotions (Gordon & Browne 2014). The learner's thinking is still egocentric and the learner is unable to view the world from other people's viewpoints (Louw & Kail 2007).
Seven to eleven years	Concrete operational	The key concept of this stage is reasoning (Gordon & Browne 2014). Logical thinking develops on real life concrete objects. Abstract thinking is still mostly absent (Louw & Kail 2007).

2.3.5 Moral development theory

The moral development theory was developed by Lawrence Kohlberg. Kohlberg's theory involves social growth and intellectual reasoning. The moral development theory states that learners move from one stage to another by reasoning and realising whether their beliefs are true or not. There are two stages in the moral developmental theory that relate to early childhood development (Gordon & Browne 2014).

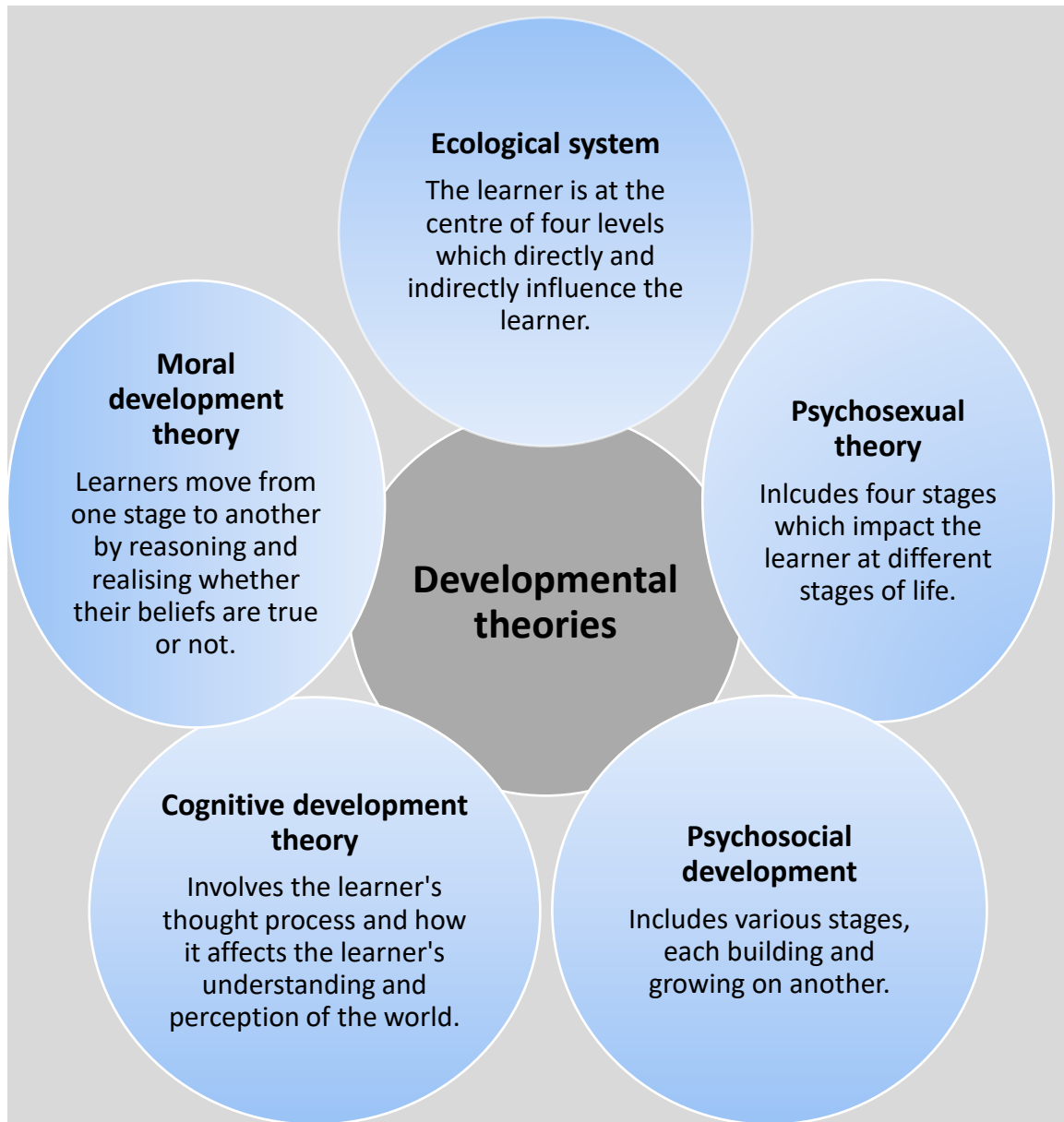
Table 2.5: Moral development theory

Preconventional morality
<p>Stage 1: Obedience and punishment</p> <p>Learners learn to obey authority and that by obeying authority, they avoid punishment.</p>
<p>Stage 2: Relativist and individualism</p> <p>Learners learn to look out for peers because if they are nice to others, others will be nice in return.</p>

(Gordon & Browne 2014)

In conclusion, the developmental theories offer valuable information on the stages of development. Figure 2.1 highlights the developmental theories and the important aspects of each theory.

Figure 2.1: Developmental theories



After investigating the developmental theories, the next step is to explore the development of learners aged from three to seven years, which is the period during which the necessary school readiness skills are developed, before a learner enters the formal learning environment at the age of six turning seven.

2.4 STAGES OF DEVELOPMENT FROM AGE THREE TO AGE SEVEN YEARS

According to Van Staden (2005) educators should take into account all the different aspects of a learner's development. Learners are active, social, emotional,

intellectual and creative beings, and development of the whole learner should be considered. All of these aspects have an influence on the learner’s progress in the first year of formal learning. Gordon and Browne (2014) state that in order for the learner to develop holistically, it is vital for all developmental domains to develop together, because they are all integrated and part of personal growth. Van Staden (2005) developed a list of gross and fine motor, social, emotional, language development and intellectual skills a learner should be able to meet by a certain age. Gordon and Browne (2014) concur with Van Staden (2005) by defining holistic development as a learner’s social-emotional, physical-motor, cognitive and language development. To understand the development of a learner from birth to seven years old, it is necessary to explore and investigate all the developmental skills according to age. It is vital to understand that the skills a learner learns before entering the formal learning environment are part of school readiness skills and prepare the learner for formal learning.

Table 2.6: Stages of development from age three to age seven years

Three-year-old learner	
<p>Social-emotional</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Begins to share and take turns • Talkative • Interacts with peers • Takes part in group play • Becoming more independent 	<p>Physical-motor</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Able to walk up right • Able to gallop in wide spaces • Able to stop and start suddenly • Jumps with ease • Able to use the toilet alone • Able to ride a tricycle • Able to control small objects with hands • Able to balance on one foot • Able to imitate lines • Able to string beads • Able to build a tower with seven or eight blocks • Balancing skills are improving • Able to walk forward and backward • Able to crawl under and climb over obstacles
<p>Language</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Very talkative with or without someone listening • Able to listen while learning • Begins to use “s” for plural words • Begins to use “ed” for past tense • Uses sentences with three or more words • Able to talk and move at the same time • Uses 300 to 1000 words 	<p>Cognitive</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Able to estimate • Finds pleasure in making choices • Finds pleasure in guessing games and riddles • Plays imaginative games • Able to carry out two to four instructions in a sequence • Able to name and match simple colours • Number concept of one and two • Able to distinguish between day and night • Able to compare shape and size

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Four-year-old learner	
<p>Social-emotional</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dominant behaviour • Assertive • Able to fight own battles • Easily over-stimulated • Cooperates and takes part in group activities, but can be impatient • Resistant and often tests limits • Can often exaggerate • Socialises with peers and able to make new friends 	<p>Physical-motor</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developed body • Very active • Able to jump and land upright • Enjoys hopping and skipping • Able to throw ball • Able to kick accurately • Balancing improves by standing and hopping on one foot • Able to jump over obstacles • Able to walk on a line • Able to copy shapes such as a cross and a square • Able to hold a paintbrush in the correct manner, but holds a pencil in a fist • Able to tie shoelaces and get dressed independently • Able to move body parts as instructed • Able to cut more complex patterns with a scissor • Able to push and pull objects • Able to kick a ball towards an object • Able to swing on a swing
<p>Language</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uses more words • Enjoys questioning • Able to respond to directions • Enjoys sing-a-long songs • Able to join sentences together • Enjoys story reading time • More complex sentences are used • Vocabulary increases to 2500 words 	<p>Cognitive</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adds personal value to art work • Enjoys questioning • Interested in how objects work • Attention span extends • Able to do more than one thing at a time • Compares objects according to size • Sense of time develops • Starts to recognise printed words • Able to write own name
Five-year-old learner	
<p>Social-emotional</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-confidence develops • Persistent • Self-identity develops • Finds pleasure in riddles and jokes • Enjoys group play • Aware of rules • Able to socialize and choose own friends • Gets more involved during group discussions • Respects authority • Able to ask permission • Enjoys adult companionship • Prefers friends of the same gender • Able to recognise success and takes pride in their work • Self-discipline improves • Able to take risks and go into new situations • Learner is able to leave the safety of school and home 	<p>Physical-motor</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coordination develops • Finds pleasure in fine motor skills • Accuracy develops • Able to draw a person • Able to dress independently • Able to cut on a line • Able to catch a ball more accurately • Able to skip • Enjoys physical activities such as jumping and running • Able to ride a two-wheeler • Able to keep balance on a balancing beam • Able to jump rope • Enjoys dance activities • Able to march, skip, gallop, hop and bend • Able to throw and catch a ball • Able to trace around objects • Folds paper into halves and quarters • Cuts out simple shapes • Colours within the lines

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<p>Language</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uses more complex words and complete sentences • Able to spell simple words • Able to take turns in conversations • Enjoys making up songs • Able to tell a familiar story • Learners understand up to 6000 words 	<p>Cognitive</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Curiosity develops • Enjoys showing new knowledge and skills learned • Knows tomorrow and yesterday • Able to count ten objects • Able to sort objects by one characteristic • Knows own name • Able to make a plan and follow through • Able to sort objects by colour and shape • Concepts regarding size increase
Six-to-seven-year-old	
<p>Social-emotional</p> <p>Six year old:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enjoys working • Persistence still needs improvement • Voices opinions and advice • Makes friends with ease • Very active and outgoing • Shows pride in own accomplishments <p>Seven year old:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learner is more serious • Learner is eager to complete responsibilities at home • Can often be impatient • Complains easily when treated unfairly • Self-conscious 	<p>Physical-motor</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Basic skills need improvement • Enjoys to test own body's limits • Learns to ride other vehicles • Uses physical skills to socialize
<p>Language</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Finds pleasure in reflecting their language skills on paper • Very talkative • Often dominates discussions • Learner learns to write • Able to learn new language • Learners use seven and more words in a sentence 	<p>Cognitive</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work is not done persistently • Learns to read • Learner begins to develop mathematical skills • Able to consider other points of view • Able to make plans ahead • Finds pleasure in sorting and classifying objects • Able to sequence events and retell stories • Able to use symbols and interpret graphs

(Gordon & Browne 2014; Davin, Van Staden & Janse van Rensburg 2013; Van Staden 2005; Mayesky 2009)

After exploring and investigating the stages of development with regard to the learner's age, it has become clearer what skills learners develop before they enter the formal learning environment. It is clear that development starts very early in a learner's life and that learners need to master a large number of skills before entering the formal learning environment and that assessing their school readiness is quite important.

2.5 THE NEED FOR SCHOOL READINESS

School readiness is an important milestone for learners to achieve to succeed academically (Quirk *et al.* 2011). The members of a community have responsibility to contribute to the school readiness skills of the community's learners to ensure that they will succeed in the formal schooling environment (*ibid.*). It is crucial for parents and teachers to support learners with the tasks they face. If school readiness is seen as a fundamental requirement, then the questions arise as to why it is important and what affects school readiness.

Learners' school readiness development is associated with their home environment as well as their early learning experiences (Jeon, Peterson, Wall, Carta, Luze, Eshbaugh & Swanson 2011). Kagan *et al.* (1995) in Brown (2015) acknowledges that the learner's early learning experiences are crucial to their development, and affected by the learner's cultural and contextual surroundings. Learners from low-income families often lack adequate school readiness skills because their home environments do not provide them with opportunities to gain the skills needed to succeed academically (Farver, Xu, Eppe & Lonigan 2008). Opportunities to learn in their early years, benefit a learner in formal schooling experiences. According to Farver *et al.* (2008), learners entering Grade 1 for the first time will have certain skills, but these might not be at the standard the Grade 1 teacher expects of them.

Often learners from disadvantaged communities are at risk of academic failure due to poor academic achievement (Kiernan, Peterson, Wall, Carta, Luze, Eshbaugh & Swanson 2011). According to Duncan and Brooks-Gunn (2000) in Jeon *et al.* (2011), at the age of two or three, learners from disadvantaged communities already experience developmental delays. Such delays are most likely to persist throughout their school careers. Unfortunately, when poverty is experienced during their preschool years, the developmental delays are most severe (Jeon *et al.* 2011). Learners who live in poverty tend to be less ready for school when they are at the age of entering formal schooling. Similarly, Hindmand *et al.* (2010) state that learners from low-income families might already experience developmental delays from as early as preschool attendance. By the time they enter Grade 1, they will already have a significant backlog when compared to their peers from a more advantaged background.

Lee and Burkam (2002) in Jeon *et al.* (2011), assessed learners from disadvantaged communities and found that their performance was 60% lower than learners from higher socio-economic status families. Votruba-Drazil, Levine and Chase-Lansdale (2004) in Umek *et al.* (2008) studied the effect of high quality preschools instructions with learners from disadvantaged communities and found that attending high quality preschools had a positive effect on disadvantaged learners. Therefore learners from disadvantaged areas should have the opportunity to attend high quality preschools to ensure that the developmental delays they experience can be reduced or eliminated.

Umek *et al.* (2008) confirm that a learner's language, cognitive and social development on entering formal schooling is linked to future academic success. Learners who lack school readiness skills might struggle to overcome these limitations in later academic years. Quirk *et al.* (2011) support the fact that school readiness is a good indicator of academic success and thus schools and communities should put more effort into promoting school readiness and assessing learners' levels of school readiness before entering formal schooling.

According to the empiricist perspective, school readiness includes specific behaviour, skills, and characteristics that are necessary for a learner to achieve at school level (Janus & Offord 2007). These aspects of school readiness should be measured on school entry to determine each learner's readiness for formal schooling.

2.5.1 Choosing a School Readiness Assessment Tool

School readiness entails a description of a learner's levels of development that Goldstein and McCoach (2011) itemise as physical and motor development, social and emotional development, approaches to learning, language development, as well as cognitive development and general knowledge. For a school readiness assessment instrument to be valid and useful it should assess these specific aspects. School readiness assessment instruments should be developed for a specific purpose, which should be clear to everyone who uses the instrument. The limitations and risks of the school readiness assessment instrument should also be clear (Goldstein & McCoach 2011).

Denham (2006) states that there is no single assessment instrument that can assess all the necessary school readiness skills and suggests that several instruments should be used to do this. Similarly Goldstein and McCoach (2011) agree that for results to reflect the true level of a learner's school readiness, applying multiple assessment instruments is advisable. They recommend that assessment should be conducted over a reasonable length of time to get an accurate result of the learner's school readiness skills. Results can also be compared to determine whether a learner has made some progress and which skills should still be worked on.

According to the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) (1995), three factors are important in school readiness assessment (Aiona 2005). In the first place, the learner's early developmental experiences ought to be considered. Second, levels of development within a particular group vary and this has to be examined. Third, schools should consider the expectations the learners have when starting formal schooling. These expectations should accommodate learners with diverse needs and subsequent decisions should focus on the development of each learner as an individual (Aiona 2005).

School readiness assessment instruments have limitations and risks that teachers and policy makers should be aware of (Aiona 2005). An important first task is to identify and acknowledge what they are and then ensure that they are reduced as far as is possible (Keating 2007). School readiness assessment instruments are designed for a specific purpose therefore they should be used appropriately. Moreover, the purpose of the instrument and its evaluation should be clear to whoever implements it. Important too, is the fact that the person conducting it has the required knowledge (Aiona 2005). Not all school readiness assessment instruments however, require prior training for administering the assessment instrument.

One of the risks of school readiness assessment instruments is that too many learners are diagnosed as not being ready for formal schooling. Janus and Offord (2007) attributes this frequent occurrence to the fact that several of these tests only focus on certain specific goals and are also too strict. Hence a number of learners are inappropriately classified as not being ready to start formal schooling. If schools

use these results to keep learners back for a year, then too many learners will be held back (Janus & Offord 2007).

2.6 CHOOSING A SCHOOL READINESS ASSESSMENT INSTRUMENT

School readiness assessment instruments should incorporate education policies and infrastructural systems (Quirk *et al.* 2011; Keating 2007) such as the school and the family supporting the learner without the learner making progress. Another consideration is that the school's chosen readiness assessment instrument should be aligned to the educational policies and the curriculum the school follows. The school readiness assessment instruments mostly used in the South African context should be closely linked to the country's Curriculum Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) to ensure that what is learned during the academic year in Grade R can be correctly assessed.

Janus and Offord (2007) suggest that there are three factors to consider about school readiness assessment instruments: when the assessment will be administered, who will be responsible for administering it and what should be included in the assessment instrument. All the criteria for school readiness should be part of a school readiness assessment instrument, namely physical, emotional and social development, approaches to learning, cognitive, and communication skills.

From the literature read, specific criteria for inclusion in a school readiness assessment instrument were not found. Various school readiness assessment instruments will be described in the sub-sections that follow to identify criteria used in school readiness assessment instruments in different contexts.

2.6.1 Early Development Instrument (EDI)

The first school readiness assessment instrument which will be discussed is the Early Development Instrument (EDI). The EDI was developed by educators, in particular kindergarten teachers in the North York and Toronto District School Boards. The instrument is used internationally. The EDI covers five different aspects that are part of school readiness: physical health and well-being, social competence, emotional maturity, language and cognitive development, communication skills and general knowledge; a section with additional questions is also included (Janus *et al.* 2005).

The physical health and well-being of the learner covers fine and gross motor development, energy level, and the learner's ability to be physically independent of others. This section of the assessment instrument consists of thirteen questions using point intervals and scales including coordination and hand choice which form part of the learner's physical health readiness. The section which is used to assess the learner's social competence consists of twenty six factors including the learner's interaction with the people around him/her, following of instructions, curiosity, and problem solving skills. The section on emotional maturity consists of a total of twenty eight factors which are used to assess the learner's social behaviour, aggressive behaviour, and attention skills. The section on language and cognitive development assesses the learner's language usage and determines whether the learner uses it appropriately in areas such as Mathematics, the learner's interests, as well as other literacy areas. This section consists of 26 factors. The section on communication skills and general knowledge consists of eight questions and is used to assess the learner's ability to communicate appropriately, express him/herself clearly so that others can understand, understand the way others communicate, and general knowledge. The section with additional questions comprises three sub-sections to identify the learner's extra skills, barriers they might face, and the learner's educational history (Janus *et al.* 2007). See Table 2.7 for an extract from the EDI.

Table 2.7: An extract from the Early Development Instrument (EDI) (Adapted from Janus & Offord 2007:6)

Physical health and well-being	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How often has the child arrived at school too tired to do school work? • How would you rate this child's ability to manipulate objects? • How would you rate this child's level of energy throughout the school day?
Social competence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How would you rate this child's ability to get along with peers? • Would you say that this child accepts responsibility for actions? • Would you say that this child is able to solve day-to-day problems by himself?
Emotional maturity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Would you say that this child will try to help someone who has been hurt? • Would you say that this child gets into physical fights? • Would you say that this child can't sit still, is restless?
Language and cognitive development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Would you say that this child is generally interested in books? • Would you say that this child is showing awareness of rhyming words? • Would you say that this child is interested in games involving numbers?
Communication skills and general knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How would you rate this child's ability to communicate own needs in an understandable way? • How would you rate this child's ability to tell a story? • How would you rate this child's ability to take part in imaginative play?

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Additional questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are seven areas where the learner can show their extra skills: numeracy, literacy, art, music, athletics, problem solving and other. • The issues that learners can face: physical, visual, hearing, speech, learning, emotional, behavioural issues, home context, and more. • Teachers need to look at the learners' educational history which includes their absentees, language, religion and the learners' participation in activities.
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2.6.2 Kindergarten Student Entrance Profile (KSEP) developed by Santa Maria-Bonita School District

The Kindergarten Student Entrance Profile (KSEP) was developed over a period of six years by Dr M. Quirk, Dr M. Furlong and Dr E. Furlong with the Santa Maria-Bonita School District, First 5 of Santa Barbara County and the Gevirtz Graduate School of Education being involved. The KSEP uses data for physical and health readiness, social-emotional readiness, and school readiness knowledge which is indicated in the NAEYC as an important part of a learner's school readiness level (Quirk, Furlong & Felix 2010).

The KSEP is divided into three sections. Section 1 covers physical and health readiness: and Sections 2 and 3 social-emotional and cognitive readiness. Physical and health readiness includes the health of the learner as well as the physical environment the learner to which has been exposed as it effects the learner's physical health readiness. According to the KSEP (Quirk *et al.* 2010) the learner's health influences the learner's cognitive, social-emotional and behavioural aspects. This is a very important factor to take into account because of the learner's prior exposure to formal preschool experiences. Sections 2 and 3 deal with the learner's social-emotional and cognitive readiness that promotes the transition to formal schooling that is needed for successful learning. A well developed social-emotional level is connected to the learner's cognitive readiness. Cognitive readiness will determine a learner's academic achievement (Quirk *et al.* 2010).

Furthermore, the KSEP has two supplements, Supplement A and Supplement B. Supplement A is assessed directly to determine the learner's knowledge of numbers and the learner's phonemic awareness. This assessment is completed by observing the learner over a three month period. Each observation lasts ten minutes. Supplement A can be used to decide whether the learner needs additional assistance and can be completed by teachers or support staff (Quirk *et al.* 2010).

Supplement B is for learners who did not show improvement with the skills that were assessed in supplement A. Supplement B consists of measures that are used to give more information about a learner’s literacy and numeracy development as well as their behavioural development. This supplement is completed by support staff but it can include teacher and parent input (Quirk *et al.* 2010).

Section 1 of the KSEP consists of physical and health readiness related questions for the teacher to complete. Some of these questions ask whether the learner attended preschool: whether the learner’s speech development is on an appropriate level; whether the learner is independent; about overall health; fine and gross motor skills; and the learner’s sense of their own body.

Sections 2 and 3 form a report of the teacher’s observation of the learner’s social-emotional readiness and school ready knowledge. The teachers answer questions about the learner where 1 represents not yet mastered and 4 is mastered. Table 2.8 is taken from the KSEP.

Table 2.8: An extraction from the Kindergarten Student Entrance Profile (KSEP) (Quirk *et al.* 2010:6)

	KSEP Social-Emotional Readiness	Not Yet Mastered	Emerging	Almost Mastered	Mastered
1	Learner asks for assistance when appropriate	1	2	3	4
2	Interacts in cooperative play activities with other learners	1	2	3	4
3	Impulse control and self-regulation skills shown	1	2	3	4
4	Attention given during tasks	1	2	3	4
5	Enthusiastic and curious about the school environment	1	2	3	4
6	Completes a task after experiencing difficulty	1	2	3	4
	KSEP School Ready Knowledge	Not Yet Mastered	Emerging	Almost Mastered	Mastered
7	Learner is able to recognise own name	1	2	3	4
8	Shows expressive verbal skills	1	2	3	4
9	Knowledge of a number showing a specific quantity	1	2	3	4
10	Able to write own name	1	2	3	4
11	Recognises colours	1	2	3	4
12	Recognises shapes	1	2	3	4
	Total score (count the score but number 6 should not be included)				

The scores are described as follows: 11-22 should be followed up immediately because extra assistance is needed; 23-32 the learner should be monitored monthly; 33-39 learner should be monitored quarterly; and 40-44 the learner is ready to learn (Quirk *et al.* 2010).

The KSEP developed a rubric that will help teachers complete Sections 2 and 3 and guide teachers to choose the right level of mastery (see Table 2.9).

Table 2.9: An extract from the Kindergarten Student Entrance Profile (KSEP)

KSEP Item	Not Yet (1)	Emerging (2)	Almost Mastered (3)	Mastered (4)
1. Learner asks for assistance when appropriate	When struggling with a task the learner does not ask or accept help.	Does not seek assistance but the learner will accept assistance.	Asks for assistance but unable to express the specific need for assistance.	Seeks assistance and the learner is able to express their need.
2. Interacts in cooperative play activities with other learners	Seldom interacts with peers and/or may be aggressive towards peers.	Plays next to peers but does not interact.	Plays next to peers and may have a conversation but they will not play together.	Interacts with peers in shared activities.
3. Impulse control and self-regulation skills shown	Wants their needs to be attended to immediately.	Distracted but can be redirected to get needs met.	Distracted but redirects self to get needs met.	Delay needs until the appropriate time.
4. Attention given during tasks	Gets easily distracted by external factors.	Concentrates for a short time but can be easily distracted.	Distracted but can redirect themselves.	Completes task without being distracted.
5. Enthusiastic and curious about the school environment	Learner is not enthusiastic towards school and barely responds.	Learner participates when encouraged otherwise learner will not participate.	Expresses some interest in activities but not for all activities.	Show excitement and interest and interacts in activities.
6. Completes a task after experiencing difficulty	Becomes easily frustrated and doesn't complete tasks when experiencing difficulties.	Tries to complete tasks but doesn't complete when experiencing difficulties and doesn't keep on trying even when teacher tries to assist.	Tries to complete the task but reacts to teacher's assistance but stops with activity when experiencing difficulty.	Completes task even when experiencing a difficulty with no assistance from the teacher.
7. Learner is able to recognise own name	Learner cannot read own name or recognise name.	Learner can recognise name after attempting a few times by recognising the first letter.	Learner can recognise own name in familiar context.	Learner can recognise own name in unfamiliar contexts.
8. Shows expressive verbal skills	Communicates in a nonverbal manner or by saying one word phrases.	Express self in three to four word phrases.	Express self in five to six word phrases	Learner can communicate clearly using more complex phrases.

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KSEP Item	Not Yet (1)	Emerging (2)	Almost Mastered (3)	Mastered (4)
9. Knowledge of a number showing a specific quantity	Learner has no knowledge of numbers.	Knows numbers but the learner can't connect them to objects.	Able to show number-object correlation.	Learner is able to select an amount of objects when asked.
10. Able to write own name	Unable to write own name.	Write name with scribbles but some letter-like formation.	Able to write first name.	Learner is able to write first and last name.
11. Recognises colours	Identifies zero to four colours correctly.	Identifies five to eight colours correctly.	Identifies nine to ten colours correctly.	Learner can identify 11 colours correctly.
12. Recognises shapes	Identifies zero to one primary shapes.	Identifies two of the primary shapes.	Identifies three primary shapes.	Identifies four primary shapes (circle, square, triangle, rectangle).

These rubrics are very helpful for teachers to make sure they assess learners correctly. The rubrics are well developed and very clear and have been proven to assess learners for school readiness successfully (Quirk *et al.* 2010).

2.6.3 The Preschool Behavioural and Emotional Rating Scale (PreBERS)

The Preschool Behavioural and Emotional Rating Scale (PreBERS) is a standardised instrument that can be used to assess a learner's emotional and behavioural development which includes the learner's emotional control, school readiness development, social confidence, and the involvement from family members (Cress, Synhorst, Epstein 2012). Cress *et al.* (2012) state that learners should be assessed not only to see which school readiness skills they lack, but also which skills they have that will help them to overcome their lack of school readiness skills.

The PreBERS consists of 42 elements and can be administered by the teacher as well as other adults who are familiar to the learner. The PreBERS is divided into four areas, namely emotional control, the learner's school readiness development, social confidence, and involvement from family members. The emotional control aspect has thirteen elements where the learner's ability to control own emotions in various situations are assessed (e.g. sharing). The section on the learner's school readiness development consists of thirteen elements which assesses the learner's language development. The section on social confidence consists of nine elements which assess the learner's interaction and reaction skills in social situations. The section

on the involvement from family member consists of seven elements which assess whether the learner reflects characteristics that will support their behavioural and emotional development such as the learner’s relationship with family members (Cress *et al.* 2012). Table 2.10 describes the PreBERS instrument and factors that are assessed.

Table 2.10: An extract from the Preschool Behavioural and Emotional Rating Scale (PreBERS)

Emotional control	
Item 10:	Manages anger towards others
Item 12:	Expresses compassion to hurtful behaviour
Item 13:	Expresses concern for other’s feelings
Item 16:	Reacts to disappointment appropriately
Item 19:	Controls frustration with difficult projects
Item 21:	Takes turns
Item 28:	Accepts responsibility for actions
Item 30:	Reacts appropriately when losing a game
Item 37:	Accepts “no” as an answer
Item 43:	Respects the rights of other people
Item 44:	Sharing
Item 46:	Apologizes when wrong
Item 49:	Being kind to others
School readiness	
Item 4:	Understands words’ meaning
Item 11:	Interacts in conversations
Item 17:	Endures tasks until complete
Item 20:	Shows appropriate hygiene
Item 32:	Understands more complex sentences
Item 33:	Listens to conversations
Item 39:	Pays attention to projects
Item 40:	Listens discreetly to stories
Item 41:	Follows more complex instructions
Item 47:	Retells stories
Item 50:	Uses details when talking to other learners
Item 54:	Learner can work independently
Item 55:	Uses number and colour words appropriately
Social confidence	
Item 5:	Learner is self-confident
Item 6:	Learner acknowledges hurtful feelings
Item 9:	Asks for assistance when struggling
Item 18:	Learner can stand up for him/herself
Item 25:	Accepts nearness from others
Item 26:	Learner can identify own feelings
Item 27:	Is able to make friends
Item 31:	Asks other learners to play with
Item 42:	Enthusiastic about life

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Involvement from family	
Item 1:	Learner shows a sense of belonging with family
Item 2:	Trusts important family members
Item 7:	Learner has positive relationships with family members
Item 15:	Learner interacts positively with parents
Item 23:	Learner is involved with family discussions
Item 29:	Learner interacts positively with siblings
Item 36:	Learner is able to participate in activities with family

2.6.4 Comparing the Early Development Instrument, Kindergarten Student Entrance Profile and the Preschool Behavioural and Emotional Rating Scale

When comparing the three school readiness assessment instruments I compiled a table (see Table 2.11) to show the school readiness aspects that each instrument consists of. This table also shows the similarities and differences between the EDI, KSEP and PreBERS.

Table 2.11: Similarities and differences between three different school readiness assessment instruments

School Readiness Assessment Instrument			
School Readiness Aspects	Educational Development Instrument (EDI)	Kindergarten Student Entrance Profile (KSEP)	Preschool Behavioural and Emotional Rating Scale (PreBERS)
Physical and Health development	Physical Health and well-being		
Social and Emotional development	Social competence Emotional maturity	Social-emotional readiness	Emotional control Social confidence
Communication skills	Communication skills and general knowledge Language development	Expressive verbal skills	
Approaches to learning	Interaction Participation Interest towards learning	Interaction Pays attention Enthusiastic towards learning Focused to complete task	Focused to complete task Interaction Enthusiastic towards learning
Cognitive development	Cognitive development		
Other	Extra skills the learner might have The learner's educational history		School readiness Involvement from family

When comparing all three school readiness assessment instruments it becomes clear that the EDI assesses more than the KSEP and PreBERS. The KSEP and PreBERS do not assess physical and health development and cognitive development. The PreBERS also lacks the assessment of communication skills where the EDI and the KSEP do assess communication skills.

2.7 CHOOSING A SUITABLE SCHOOL READINESS ASSESSMENT INSTRUMENT

Quirk *et al.* (2011) and Chen *et al.* (2011) state the interest in school readiness is starting to grow all around the world and therefore there is a demand for accurate and appropriate school readiness assessment instruments. There are numerous assessment instruments for assessing a learner's developmental level available, but there are not many school readiness assessment instruments available (Quirk *et al.* 2011). It is important for schools to gain information about the various school readiness assessment instruments that are available and to ensure that the one they choose is reliable.

Apart from the criteria for the personal school readiness of the learner which need to be assessed (as indicated in the comparison of the three school readiness assessment instruments in Section 2.4), there are other aspects which need to be considered when choosing a suitable school readiness assessment instrument. One important aspect to consider is the context of the instrument. It is important to acknowledge the strengths and weaknesses of the instrument and whether it is suitable for the context where it will be used (Quirk *et al.* 2011). Snow (2006) in Quirk *et al.* (2011) states that there are certain procedures, methods and strategies necessary to administer a school readiness assessment instrument when assessing a learner. For instance the duration of the assessment, the person who will assess the learner, training needed to administer the assessment, how the assessment instrument needs to be administered and whether it should be completed as a group assessment or individually.

Some school districts in the South African context use provincial school readiness assessment instruments to assess learners and educational programmes. Unfortunately these instruments are not always valid and reliable (Brown, Scott-Little, Amwake & Wynn 2007 in Quirk *et al.* 2011). Often school readiness

assessment instruments lack the necessary psychometric precision to make conclusions about learners' development and whether they will need intervention from the teacher (Quirk *et al.* 2011).

After searching the literature for criteria on the choice of a school readiness assessment instrument for the South African context, it became clear that there are no criteria for the South African context available to choose a suitable school readiness assessment instrument. I attempted to fill this gap by investigating criteria that is used in school readiness assessment instruments to implement in a school readiness assessment instrument in the South African context.

2.8 THE USE OF SCHOOL READINESS ASSESSMENT RESULTS IN GRADE 1

Through the literature it has been established that school readiness assessment is important to determine the school readiness levels of learners and to promote their success in formal schooling. Although it is seen that it is important to use school readiness assessment instruments, how to use of them effectively has not been established. There are many ways in which the results of school readiness assessment can contribute to a learner's success in Grade 1 and beyond in the higher grades.

The NAEYC states that teachers and schools should regard the ethical, relevant, accurate, and trustworthy assessment of school readiness levels as fundamental for early learning (Aiona 2005). This organisation indicates four aspects that are influenced by the results from school readiness assessment instruments. The results can be used to make choices about learners' teaching and learning opportunities, to determine the appropriate intervention strategies needed for the individual learner, to determine whether the learners master the necessary skills and whether school readiness assessment instrument developers should adapt their educational programme (Aiona 2005).

According to Denham (2006) the results from school readiness assessment instruments should not be used to determine whether a learner should enter into kindergarten or not. Previously school readiness assessment instruments were used to determine whether learners could be admitted to Grade 1 (Janus *et al.* 2007). Similarly Sheppard (1997) in Aiona (2005) states that learners who were not

ready for school were not allowed to enter formal schooling. Parents were advised to wait a year until the learners were ready for school and could succeed academically.

The results from school readiness assessment instruments should rather be used to improve instruction and to examine the efficiency of the educational programme which is being used. Denham (2006) further suggests that careful consideration is needed when deciding which assessment instrument to use, as well as when and how to use it. The efficiency of an educational programme and learners' development can be determined by using the results from school readiness assessment instruments (Aiona 2005).

Brandt and Grace (2005) conducted a study about the feasibility and helpfulness of school readiness assessment instruments in Hawaii. With regard to the feasibility of school readiness assessment instruments they found that teachers provided more data which could be used to track a learner's progress easily. The school readiness assessment instrument could be helpful to evaluate the school programme and the learners' progress. Janus *et al.* (2007) state that learners should be assessed for school readiness to determine whether the educational programme which is being followed, is providing them with a good start to their school careers.

Freeman and Brown (2008) also conducted a study on school readiness assessment instruments to determine teachers' perceptions on the use and importance of school readiness assessment instruments. The results of the study indicated that early childhood teachers refused to make use of the school readiness assessment instruments. Apparently, the teachers who took part in the study believed that school readiness assessment instruments don't measure the holistic social, emotional, cognitive, and physical abilities that a learner needs to succeed academically in school. According to the study however, the results from the school readiness assessment reflect the skills the learner can bring forth to the academic programme.

Aiona (2005) suggests that results from school readiness assessment should be used by teachers to inform their planning and in doing so, improve teaching and learning. Regrettably, school readiness assessment results are often not used for the purpose of improving educational programmes but rather to identify learners

with special needs and place them in remedial classrooms. Denham (2006) states that school readiness assessment results should rather be used to enrich the curriculum to promote learning and developmental activities.

The NAEYC provided guidance for the use of school readiness assessment results. According to these guidelines the results are necessary to improve teaching and learning opportunities, to determine whether a learner needs intervention, to strengthen educational programmes and to develop intervention strategies (Goldstein & McCoach 2011). Furthermore the NAEYC states that learners at the age of entering school are not equipped to take tests and therefore the results should not be used to prevent learners from entering formal schooling.

Brandt and Grace (2005) stress that a school readiness assessment instrument should be used for its specific purpose. It is important that individuals should understand the purpose of a specific school readiness assessment instrument before they use it, to prevent it from being used for the wrong purpose. Brandt and Grace (2005) further warn that results from school readiness assessments should not be used to label a learner as not ready for school, because teachers might not put as much effort into teaching that specific learner as they do with other learners.

In 1988, Gnezda and Bolig conducted a survey to investigate the use of school readiness assessment instruments. They found that many states implemented school readiness assessment instruments even though it was not administered by state departments. Furthermore they found that school readiness assessment instruments were not used for the designed purpose, but to identify learners with special needs. Before teachers can use school readiness assessment instruments they should make sure that the instrument will provide them with the necessary information that they need (Aiona 2005).

2.9 GUIDELINES FOR SUCCESSFUL ASSESSMENT

To ensure that school readiness is assessed comprehensively and to the benefit of the learner, Deiner (2013) suggests the following guidelines:

- **Assessment should be based on a holistic developmental model**
Learning areas should not be seen as a series of isolated areas, but must take into account what the learner is able to do as well as their context and

behaviour. The assessment should also be completed in the learner's natural context.

- **Assessment should involve multiple sources of information over an extended period of time**

To get a clear perspective of the learner, it is necessary to gain information from the family to see various perspectives and to comprehend the learner's development.

- **Assessment requires cooperation from the learner and their families**

It is necessary for educators to develop a good relationship with the learner's family as well as with the learner. Families and educators should collaborate to understand assessments, assessment instruments and how they are used.

- **The learner's relationship with their caregivers forms the basis of assessment**

The parent-learner relationship forms the foundation for other relationships in a learner's life. If the relationship is negative, then educators should intervene by educating families.

- **Assessment must be appropriate to the learner's age**

Assessment should be linked to learning standards and based on their age, abilities, home language and characteristics.

- **Assessment should reflect the learner's strengths and abilities**

The focus is on what the learner is able to do and to increase educators' knowledge of the learner, improve the educational programme and identify support.

- **Assessment should be seen as a service**

Assessment should not only be used as an intervention strategy, but also an ongoing intervention process to see whether a learner has improved over a period of time.

- **Assessment should be used for their intended purpose**

Educators should have adequate knowledge of school readiness and school readiness assessment.

2.10 THE IMPLEMENTATION OF SCHOOL READINESS ASSESSMENT

McAfee and Leong (2007) propose a process which can be followed to assess school readiness. When choosing the appropriate school readiness assessment instrument, schools and teachers need to decide why they are assessing school readiness. After choosing an instrument they need to decide what should be assessed during school readiness assessment. Schools and teachers need to decide when the assessment should take place. There are different ways of collecting school readiness assessment data such as observing and using a school readiness assessment instrument. After observing teachers need to summarise data collected and interpret the data. The most important part of a school readiness assessment is how the results will be used. Schools and teachers need to use the results from school readiness assessment to assist learners. Figure 2.2 explains the process of school readiness assessment which can assist teachers to choose the appropriate school readiness assessment instrument.

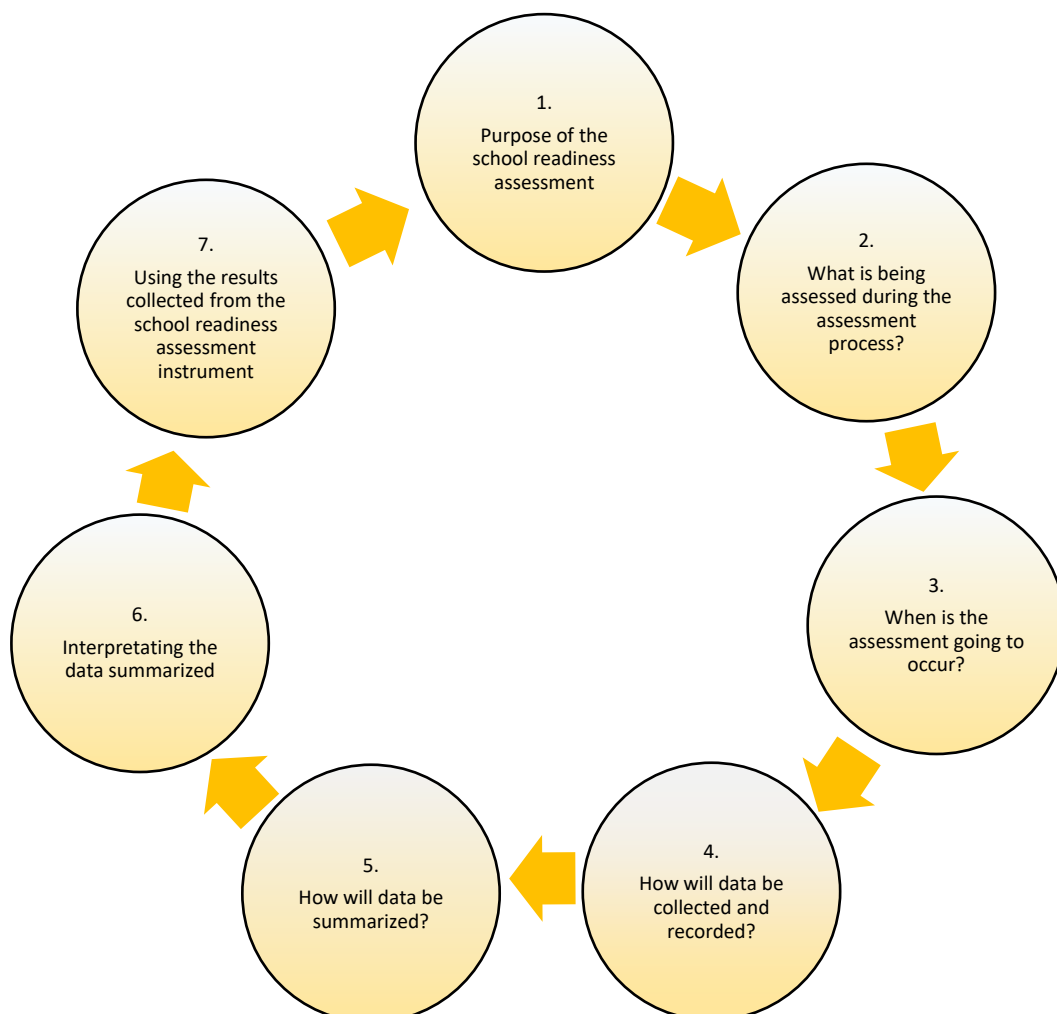


Figure 2.2: The process of school readiness assessment (McAfee & Leong 2007)

2.10.1 Purpose of the school readiness assessment

The first and most important aspect of school readiness assessment is to determine why the teachers want to assess learners for school readiness (McAfee & Leong 2007). Whether the purpose is to ensure that all learners have mastered the necessary skills or to ensure that the education programme is developing all the necessary skills, it is vital that the purpose of assessment be discussed by educators (Goldstein & McCoach 2011).

2.10.2 What is being assessed during the assessment process?

There are five criteria against which learner's readiness for school are measured: health and physical development, emotional and social skills, communication skills, approaches to learning and cognitive skills (Kagan, Moore & Bredekamp 1995 in Brown 2015). Knowing what learners should master before they enter the formal learning environment will assist educators to know what should be assessed in a school readiness assessment instrument. Educators will be able to find the correct school readiness assessment instrument by comparing the skills assessed with the skills that form part of school readiness.

2.10.3 When is the assessment going to occur?

Educators need to take the purpose of assessment into account when deciding when to assess (McAfee & Leong 2007). To ensure that the learners have mastered the necessary skills, it is vital to assess late in the year when most skills have been developed, but not too late in the academic year to still develop skills that have not been mastered. If the purpose was to evaluate the education programme (Aiona 2005), I recommend that educators assess learners over a period of time, for instance at the beginning of the year and later in the year (Goldstein & McCoach 2011). The results will reflect if skills have developed during the educational programme.

2.10.4 How will data be collected and recorded?

Data will be recorded by using the school readiness assessment instrument and also by using educators' notes and observations that are taken during the assessment (McAfee & Leong 2007).

2.10.5 How will data be summarised?

After the assessment, educators should take time to summarise (McAfee and Leong 2007) the data and make notes of their professional opinion. Educator's notes and observations should be part of the data summary. Educators should also make sure the data recorder and summaries are kept in a safe place for later use. It is recommended that it should be saved on a computer and in the learner's academic profile.

2.10.6 Interpreting the data summarised

Educators should use their notes, observations and results from the school readiness assessment instrument and give their professional opinion of whether the learner has mastered the necessary school readiness skills. Educators need to include recommendations if the learner has not mastered the necessary skills and how they can develop the skills that are lacking (Goldstein & McCoach 2011).

A meeting with the parents should be scheduled to give them the results regarding the skills that are mastered and the skills that are lacking. Parents need to know in order to assist educators as well as the learner to intervene and ensure holistic development.

2.10.7 Using the results collected from the school readiness assessment instrument

First, I would recommend that educators need to look for skills that are lacking in many or all of the learners. Educators need to look for similarities, and if there are numerous similarities it is recommended that the educational programme should be adapted to ensure that the skills that are lacking are developed in the educational programme (Aiona 2005).

If there are very few or no similarities, educators need to work on an intervention programme for each learner to make sure that every learner has mastered all the necessary school readiness skills (Aiona 2005). The intervention programme can be used during the school day and it can be sent to parents to help them develop the necessary skills at home as well.

Each learner is unique, with their own strengths and limitations. Inclusion of all learners in early childhood development includes the values, policies and practices

that provide support to all infants and young learners (as well as their families), regardless of their abilities, to participate and take part in school activities and their community (Deiner 2013).

2.11 INCLUSION POLICY

If all learners are part of the formal learning environment and everyone participates in the same curriculum, then assessment should be adapted for all stages of development. Deiner (2013) states that learners have diverse needs that need to be met in the classroom. If learners with disabilities are part of the curriculum but not part of the assessment, it creates a problem because there is no way to assess the learner's progress. Deiner (2013) recommends that a unique assessment instrument should be developed to assess learners with disabilities according to their own specialised educational programme.

2.12 SUMMARY

While reviewing the literature on school readiness assessment it became evident that school readiness assessment plays a vital role in assessing them in their formal schooling. School readiness assessment should thus not be underestimated. Moreover, it is essential that a learner be assessed for school readiness before starting their formal schooling as it helps to determine whether the learner has the necessary skills or which skills the learner still needs to master. It is also important that teachers choose an appropriate school readiness assessment instrument so that the results are valid and usable.

In Chapter 3 I will discuss the research methodology applied in this study regarding the importance of using school readiness assessment as perceived by Grade 1 teachers. How they use the results is also considered.

CHAPTER 3:

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

In Chapter 2, various school readiness assessment instruments were examined and compared to determine a list of criteria that are most commonly used. McAfee and Leong (2007) developed a model which represents the process of school readiness assessment. It was suitable because the purpose of the study was both to determine what Grade 1 teachers regard as essential criteria for the development of such an instrument, and to establish how it was implemented in general South African context. In this chapter, I will explain the research methodology that was used to determine the importance of using school readiness assessment by Grade 1 teachers perceive, and how they use the results to support their learners.

3.2 RESEARCH APPROACH

A qualitative approach was best suited for this study which explored Grade 1 teachers' perceptions of school readiness assessment instruments in the South African context. In addition, how they used the results of such assessments to support their learners in the formal learning environment was also valuable information gathered. As Nieuwenhuis (2007) points out, a qualitative approach does lead a good understanding of the situation. Creswell (2008) agrees that a phenomenon is best investigated by using qualitative research methods. I gained this insight about my chosen research topic as my study was open ended and qualitative. This was achieved by conducting focus group interviews with Grade 1 teachers at the research sites where the teachers shared views and described their school readiness assessment experiences (see Table 3.1). During a qualitative research study, it is better to collect data where the participants are in their natural setting (Creswell 2013).

Creswell (2013) states that the research findings should represent the voices of the participants, their expressed views, interpretations and perspectives of the

phenomenon under investigation. By conducting focus group interviews the participants had the opportunity to give their own perspectives on school readiness assessment instruments in their own words. Participants thus had the opportunity to freely express their opinions about school readiness assessment and the use of the results in Grade 1, a teaching level which they knew well.

Table 3.1: Characteristics and relevance of qualitative research study applied (adapted from Creswell 2013)

Characteristic	Relevance to this study
Data is collected in a natural setting.	Data was collected at research sites where participants (Grade 1 teachers) work.
The researcher is the primary research instrument.	Data was collected through focus group interviews with Grade 1 teachers using open-ended questions. All the interviews were conducted by the researcher.
Reasoning through inductive and deductive logic.	The aim of the data analysis was to gain an in-depth understanding of school readiness assessment and to identify themes that emerged during the research process.
Participants' perspectives are reflected.	The research findings were represented from the participants' point of view
Emergent design (research process may change after entering research sites and collecting of data).	The researcher was prepared to be flexible when collecting data since it might be necessary to make changes once the researcher entered the research sites.
Reflexivity (being sensitive to researcher bias).	The researcher was aware of the fact that the research findings had to reflect the participants' perceptions on school readiness assessment and the researcher had to remain as objective as possible by constantly reflecting on the role as researcher.
Research is presented holistically.	The aim was to present research findings in such a way that a holistic view of the participants' perceptions on school readiness assessment emerged to reach an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon under investigation.

The purpose of this study was to explore Grade 1 teachers' perceptions of the implementation of school readiness assessment instruments and how the use of the results in supporting learners therefore an interpretivist lens was used. According to Nieuwenhuis (2007), an interpretivist view focuses on the participants' perceptions and how they understand the phenomenon. Through understanding the participants'

views researchers develop an understanding of the phenomenon under investigation.

3.3 RESEARCH DESIGN

Case study research means to conduct research in a real life setting to investigate a phenomenon and to get a better understanding of the problem (Creswell 2013; Nieuwenhuis 2007). Basit (2010) maintains that a case study involves participants in the context of the phenomenon with their own understandings and their own perceptions of the phenomenon. The role of the researcher is to understand the case, to develop a better understanding of the phenomenon and to appreciate its uniqueness when interacting with the participants (ibid.). The benefit of using a case study is that it will reflect a detailed description of the participants' experiences and beliefs to understand how they perceive a phenomenon in their context (ibid.). According to Creswell (2013) a case study is bound by time and place. During this study, appropriate timeslots were arranged with the participants at each research site which was convenient for them. All focus group interviews were conducted at the schools.

In this study the focus was on the Grade 1 teachers from three selected English medium schools situated in low income areas to investigate the issue regarding school readiness assessment. A qualitative case study was conducted, because it led to an in-depth understanding of the perceptions Grade 1 teachers have regarding criteria for school readiness assessment instruments and the use of results from school readiness assessment in the Grade 1 classroom. The advice of Nieuwenhuis (2007) was taken and the limitations of conducting a case study were known as the participants were not representative of the whole population and the research findings therefore could not be generalised. The purpose of this study was not to generalise the findings, but rather to get a better understanding of the issue under investigation. By conducting a case study it was possible to collect the data that was needed to answer the main and secondary research questions.

A multiple instrumental case study research design consists of two or more cases that are described and compared to understand the problem (Creswell 2013). A case study involves a holistic and descriptive view of a phenomenon (Rossman & Rallis 2003). It is important for the researcher to identify suitable cases to study the

specific phenomenon to gain an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon (Stake 2005; Nieuwenhuis 2007). For the purpose of this study three English medium schools were identified and studied.

Case study research is characterised as exploratory in nature and it is necessary to use multiple sources to collect data. Various methods can be used such as observation, interviews and document analysis (Creswell 2013). Thus, the researcher has to spend time in the research environment to observe and reflect on the data (Stake 2005). Focus group interviews were conducted with Grade 1 teachers from selected schools to collect data on the phenomenon.

In conducting a case study, it is important to include a detailed description of the cases that are studied. The cases should be current to ensure that the data collected is accurate and appropriate to the study (Creswell 2013).

3.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

According to Creswell (2013) qualitative research questions is to define the purpose of the study. Qualitative research questions are open-ended to collect as much information about the phenomenon as possible from the participants. Qualitative research consists of one primary question and a few secondary questions. The primary research question is broad to solve the research problem (Creswell 2013). The secondary questions are there to clarify the primary research question. The secondary questions should be closely related to the primary question (Maree 2007). The secondary questions are also used during the focus group interviews to answer the primary research question (Creswell 2013).

3.4.1 Primary Research Question

What are teachers' perceptions of the implementation of school readiness assessment instruments?

3.4.2 Secondary Research Questions

- What does school readiness entail?
- What does school readiness assessment entail?
- What are the general features of school readiness assessment instruments currently used in the South African context?

- How do teachers use the results from school readiness assessment instruments in Grade 1?
- What criteria should be feature in a school readiness assessment instrument?

3.5 RESEARCH CONTEXT

3.5.1 Interpretivist Paradigm

According to Bertram and Christiansen (2014) an interpretivist paradigm is mainly about how the participants make sense of the world around them. Rossman and Rallis (2003) agree that this paradigm is about the participants' world view and they explain that it is the participants' perspective on how they experience the world around them. Thus, an interpretivist looks at a phenomenon through the eyes of the participants in its natural context. The purpose of an interpretivist paradigm is to develop an understanding of how participants make sense of their context. Basit (2010) states that an interpretivist paradigm is an in-depth understanding of human behaviour that includes a few participants to acknowledge differences and similarities about a certain phenomenon.

Bertram and Christiansen (2014) state that data is not out there ready to be found but it is developed through the participant's interpretation of a phenomenon. Participants create the data by forming and developing the world they view every day (Rossman & Rallis 2003). How the participants view and understand their context is how data is developed. An interpretivist view acknowledges that data is formed and shaped by the participants and not found as hard evidence in the world.

For the researcher to understand and make meaning of a phenomenon through the eyes of the participants, it is necessary to collect data directly from the participants. An interpretivist researcher beliefs in interacting with the participants (Bertram & Christiansen 2014) by having face to face encounters (Rossman & Rallis 2003). During this study focus group interviews were used to interact face to face with the participants at the three selected schools.

Bertram and Christiansen (2014) declare that there are a few essential aspects to ensure quality interpretivist research. In an interpretivist study the data should be clearly described to ensure that it is trustworthy. The data should reflect the

participants' understanding and not the researcher's point of view. The researcher should clearly state how the data was analysed and how the researcher came to the conclusions. It is important to remember that findings from interpretivist studies cannot be generalised to other contexts (Bertram & Christiansen 2014; Basit 2010).

Table 3.2: The interpretivist perspective applied (adapted from Nieuwenhuis 2007)

Interpretivist perspective assumptions	Interpretivist perspective in this study
Participants construct their own meaning; therefore, the researcher must focus on their experiences from inside their social environment.	Focus group interviews were conducted with Grade 1 teachers in their school environments to better understand the meanings they attribute to school readiness assessment.
Reality is socially constructed from within the social environment. Therefore, participants' understanding of a phenomenon was clearly understood.	The phenomenon of school readiness assessment was investigated in the school environment.
By examining the complexity of a phenomenon, a better understanding of how people construct knowledge is gained.	Conducting focus group interviews with participants provided an in-depth understanding of the use of school readiness assessment instruments and how teachers perceive its importance.
The interpretivist perspective states that there can be more than one reality of a phenomenon. While our knowledge increases, it enhances the theoretical framework. Therefore, a link is created between the theoretical framework and the research found.	Through focus group interviews the researcher could gain a better understanding of the participants' perspectives on school readiness assessment and how it is connected to the theoretical framework underpinning the study.
During the research our knowledge of the phenomenon expands which influences how we understand the phenomenon.	With the teaching experience, I have and the knowledge I have gained through my studies, I could compile my own understanding of school readiness assessment instruments.

3.5.2 The Role of the Researcher

A qualitative researcher should develop a cooperative partnership with the participants to collect data from them and to understand their perceptions of the phenomenon (Nieuwenhuis 2007). Thus a good relationship with all participants should provide maximum of information. The researcher needs to be engaged with the research site but not in such a way that the results are manipulated. According to McMillan and Schumacher (2010) the role of the researcher is to be socially interactive at the research site and to build a cooperative relationship with the participants to get their view points on the phenomenon under investigation. As a

researcher, I was a complete outsider who collected data from the research sites and participants and then left the research site with the collected data.

Researchers should be outsiders to research sites to enable them to reflect on the opinions of the participants and not their own (McMillan & Schumacher 2010). Researchers should take care not to include their own personal opinions. Only information from the participants who took part in the study is acceptable.

My role as researcher during the research process was to conduct the interviews, and choose methods to record them or transcribe key information. Open ended interview questions were developed to ask participants to gather detailed information about school readiness assessment instruments. Adding more questions enabled delving to expand and answer. During the discussion both verbal and non-verbal data was noted to assess how participants actually perceived school readiness assessment with a deeper understanding. The interviews were recorded and additional notes were taken during the interviews. Data was analysed to find themes that emerged from the transcribed interviews.

3.6 SAMPLE SELECTION

Rossmann and Rallis (2003) state that there are a few aspects to consider when choosing the ideal site to conduct research and the possibility of the selected site not providing data required. Obtaining detailed and accurate information especially for various processes to be used for finding answers to the research questions. It should be possible for the researcher to form a strong relationship with the participants. The ideal site should not overwhelm the researcher with any ethical and political issues. Researchers should identify the population and then select the sample within this population (ibid.).

Thereafter the researcher should decide how many participants should be included for the sample (Bertram & Christiansen 2014). The researcher can unfortunately not use the whole population during the study because of the number of participants and their possible lack of availability. The purpose of the study is not to generalise findings to represent its wider community therefore taking a small sample from the population is justified, as Basit (2010) suggests. Three schools were chosen from the Pretoria, Gauteng, South Africa area and they were willing and available to take

part in this study. It was very difficult to find schools because it seemed that very few schools in Pretoria use school readiness assessment instruments.

Criterion sampling was used to select schools where the study could be conducted. Criterion sampling is used when stating specific criteria for choosing cases to involve in a study (Hay 2005; Creswell 2013). At the design stage of the study the researcher should define different characteristics before choosing cases to include in the study. The participants chosen should have the experience and information needed to answer the research questions (Nieuwenhuis 2007; Bertram & Christiansen 2014). The selected participants should all meet the criteria that were set for the study.

The purpose of this study was to find schools that use school readiness assessment instruments or the results from these instruments. Three schools were found in Pretoria who use school readiness assessment instruments but only three of these schools were available to take part in my study. Grade 1 teachers were chosen to be part of this study to find out what their perceptions are about school readiness assessment instruments. At one of the research sites there was only one Grade 1 teacher so it decided to include two Grade R teachers as well as the Educational Head of Department because of their experience and expertise in school readiness assessment.

3.7 RESEARCH SITES AND PARTICIPANTS

I decided to select three schools from Pretoria for this study (see Table 3.3). These schools had to use school readiness assessment instruments or use the results from these tests in the classroom. Finding such schools proved to be more difficult than initially thought. The goal was to include schools with English second language learners whose mother tongue was not English. Unfortunately, this was not possible because there are very few schools that use school readiness assessment instruments or the results thereof. In the end the schools chosen to participate, included learners who speak English or Afrikaans as a home language.

Table 3.3: Research sites

Research sites	Location	Number of Grade 1 teachers	Number of other teachers involved in the study	Language of instruction	Mother tongue (HL) and/or second language learners (LL2)	More information regarding research sites
School 1	Pretoria	1	Two Grade R teachers as well as the Educational Head	English	HL and LL2	Private school with 16 learners in Grade 1
School 2	Pretoria	6	0	Afrikaans	HL	Public school with more than 150 learners in Grade 1
School 3	Pretoria	1	The principal and Grade R teacher	English	HL and LL2	Public school with 20 Grade 1 learners

According to Maree and Van der Westhuizen (2007), once research sites have been selected, it is important to get permission to access the research sites and to collect data from the participants. The researcher should clearly state the purpose and procedure of the study so that all the participants have the relevant information about the study (Maree & Van der Westhuizen 2007). To gain access to the research sites, principals from the schools were contacted by email and meetings with them were scheduled. Before the focus group interviews could be conducted, face to face meetings were arranged with the principal of each school to discuss the process of collecting data and the purpose of the study. Permission was gained to collect data at each school by conducting focus group interviews with Grade 1 teachers in order to understand their views and opinions on school readiness assessment.

It was made clear to the principals that the focus group interviews would not interfere with school activities because the interviews were to be conducted after school and should take approximately 30 minutes. The principals agreed and signed the consent letters (see Addenda A). After the initial meetings dates were set to conduct the focus group interviews with the Grade 1 teachers. Grade 1 teachers and all other participants who were involved on the day the focus group interviews were conducted signed consent letters (see Addendum B).

All the teachers who had experience with school readiness assessment instruments at the selected schools were involved in the study. All the participants agreed to sign the consent letters (Addenda B) and they were eager to share their expertise and knowledge during the focus group interviews. At the one school, there was only one Grade 1 teacher so I decided to include two Grade R teachers as well as the Educational Head of Department. They all knew about school readiness assessment instruments as they had an educational psychologist working at the school. Parents of learners attending these schools thus had the opportunity to have their learner assessed for school readiness at the school.

The teachers at the second school could identify learners who needed to be assessed for school readiness and they encouraged the parents to have this done. Three teachers were particularly knowledgeable about school readiness assessment, one of whom has been teaching for over twenty years. The third school had six Grade 1 teachers and they used the services of an educational psychologist to assess learners for school readiness. They could also identify the learners who would benefit from such an assessment, suggesting this option to their parents. This school was not available to take part in discussion, but they agreed to meet to answer the questions in writing and return them to me.

3.8 DATA COLLECTION TECHNIQUES

3.8.1 Semi-structured Focus Group Interviews

Focus group interviews consist of a small group of participants coming together and discussing a single phenomenon (Hay 2005). The researcher introduces the phenomenon and there after asks questions about the phenomenon to invite the participants to take part in discussing the phenomenon (Basit 2010). In this study focus group interviews were conducted with the participants to discuss their experiences of school readiness, school readiness assessment as well as the instruments they use to explore their perceptions regarding school readiness assessment instruments.

The benefit of a focus group interview is that participants get the opportunity to discuss their experiences freely and openly (Leong & Austin 2006). Thus, the researcher should make sure the environment is open for discussions and for

participants to freely express their opinions and points of view on the phenomenon (Rossman & Rallis 2003). The researcher should therefore invite participants to do so by asking semi-structured interview questions and probing participants to clarify their responses. During the semi-structured focus group interviews all participants discussed their points of view on school readiness assessment instruments. It was essential to ensure that all the participants had the opportunity to give their opinions because their opinions and views were important for the study.

It is important to keep in mind that not all opinions of participants on a phenomenon is formed in a vacuum but emerge from, or are shaped by other participants' points of view and opinions (Rossman & Rallis 2003). When participants listen to other participants' views they tend to reconsider their own ideas (Basit 2010). In this way, new insights about the phenomenon being studied develop (Hay 2005). Their opinion of every single participant added meaning to the data collection phase of this research, although they did not necessarily agree with each other. However, overall a clear picture of school readiness assessment instruments was obtained.

The interview questions to guide the interviews were:

1. How vital is it for a learner to be ready for school?
2. Is school readiness dependent on a learner's age?
3. Which skills do you see as essential for a learner's school readiness?
4. How long does it take you to determine whether a learner is ready for school?
5. Should all learners be assessed for school readiness? Why?
6. Who is responsible for administering the school readiness assessment at your school?
7. When are the learners assessed for school readiness?
8. How are you notified of the results of the school readiness assessments? How do you use the results of school readiness assessments to support learners who lack school readiness skills? How are the parents involved in this process?
9. Do you regard the school readiness assessment instrument that you use, as an effective tool in measuring school readiness? Why?
10. Would you change anything to your current school readiness assessment instrument and why?

The focus group interviews were recorded with permission from each participant and were transcribed for data analysis purposes.

3.9 DATA ANALYSIS

Qualitative data analysis has a wide range of approaches and procedures where researchers search for an understanding of a phenomenon by collecting data from participants who take part in the research (Nieuwenhuis 2007). When analysing data, the researcher should engage with the data and become familiar with it (Rossman & Rallis 2003). The main purpose of qualitative data analysis is to explore the collected data and to develop an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. The researcher aims to understand the participants' perceptions and knowledge of a certain phenomenon. The purpose of collecting and analysing data is to look for emerging themes and for the researcher to draw conclusions from the research findings to answer the research questions (Nieuwenhuis in Maree 2007). The aim is thus to explore and examine the data to answer the research questions

Seidel (1998), in Maree (2007), developed a process according to which data can be analysed. The steps of research are interlinked where the process of data analysis is noticed, data is collected and then is ready for use. The researcher analyses the data themes to answer the research questions (ibid.). These steps follow on each other and cannot exist without one another. Prior to starting the study, it was noticed that there were many learners who enter formal schooling without being ready for it nor equipped with necessary school readiness skills. Unfortunately they then fail their first school year. For this reason, I decided to investigate the phenomenon of school readiness, its assessment and the importance of school readiness assessment instruments and Grade 1 teachers' use of the results.

During data analysis, both content and conversation analysis were used. Content analysis uses the transcribed content from focus group interviews. This approach is systematic as themes are identified and summarised by exploring the data and looking for differing interpretations, similarities and differences. Conversation analysis results from listening to recorded focus group interviews. The researcher looks for patterns and themes in the conversations where participants discuss the phenomenon (Nieuwenhuis 2007).

Rossmann and Rallis (2003) suggest seven aspects to keep in mind when analysing data. The first aspect is for the researcher to refer to the conceptual framework, but it is important that participants have different meanings and understandings. The research questions too must be addressed, because they reflect the main purpose of why research was conducted. Data gathering has to be planned to answer the research questions. During a focus group interview it is important for the researcher to note the participants' opinions and views about the phenomenon. The researcher should talk to the participants about the data collected to develop a relationship with the participants and to make sure their opinions are reflected accurately (Rossmann & Rallis 2003). The data should be read and re-read to ensure that the researcher is familiar with it. The researcher should then look for emerging themes and patterns and decide how the findings can be summarised. Creswell (2013) developed a data analysis process to reflect the process of analysing data. Table 3.4 illustrates this process.

Table 3.4: The data analysis process (adapted from Creswell 2013)

Procedure	Explanation
Organising the data	Focus group interviews are recorded. Thereafter the recordings are transcribed and typed into documents to be saved in files for safe keeping and for later use.
Reading and memoing	After reading and getting engaged with the data, the next step is to look for emerging themes and patterns within the data and to make connections between them.
Interpreting data by organising it according to themes	The data is coded and organised according to small categories. A name is assigned to each category. These categories form themes which are then used to answer the research questions. Generally, there are only five to six themes.
Interpreting the findings	By exploring the data and emerging themes, the deeper meaning within the data is explored. When interpreting the findings, it is important to look for similarities, differences and relations between themes to explain the phenomena (Basit 2010).
Representing the findings	The findings are then represented and compared with the findings from other sources to look for similarities and differences (Basit 2010).

3.10 ADDRESSING CREDIBILITY AND TRUSTWORTHINESS

To address credibility and trustworthiness the study should be used to contribute in some way to improve the reader's knowledge base. The study might be read by policymakers, other researchers, practitioners or even those who participated in the study. It should therefore be credible and trustworthy. The study and its findings should adequately reflect the meanings participants voiced and not those of the researcher (Rossman & Rallis 2003).

Four aspects that ensure trustworthiness are credibility, transferability, conformability and dependability. Credibility means that the findings reflect the reality and the perceptions of the participants only. Member checking is used to confirm credibility. Transferability can be ensured by describing the research process thoroughly so that the reader can transfer the findings to similar cases with the same characteristics. Conformability make the research process transparent by presenting as much information as is possible so that the reader can come to the same conclusion as the researcher did when presenting to the findings. Conformability is confirmed by clarifying researcher bias, prolonged engagement at the research site and member checking, dependability is ensured. Findings can be discussed with experts not involved in the study. Using commonly accepted research practice confirms dependability.

It is important to use different sources of data when applying triangulation to provide evidence of different themes or perspectives (Creswell 2013). Triangulation can verify that the phenomenon was fully understood (Rossman & Rallis 2003). The reason for using multiple sources of data is to ensure that the findings are confirmed (Bertram & Christiansen 2014). This will establish that validity in research can come from different perspectives (Basit 2010) to ensure that various truths are reflected (Creswell 2013). During all the focus group interviews the discussions between the participants were audio recorded. Bertram and Christiansen (2014) contend that this would have ensured validity and accuracy of the findings.

Researcher bias should be stated and clarified beforehand to ensure that the reader understands the position of the researcher and its impact on the study as well as the researcher's perspective on the phenomenon (Creswell 2013; Creswell 2008). The reason for doing this study was to take notice of the situation that many learners

who enter formal schooling are not ready it and many do not have the necessary skills to achieve success academically.

Through member checking the researcher ensures that the participants' views were reflected in the recording of the data collected, its analysis and interpretation. The documented data and conclusions are sent back to the participants so that they can confirm their accuracy (Creswell 2013; Creswell 2008). This opportunity, with a chance to add information, is a vital element of the study (ibid.). The participants can expand, correct, contribute or change the findings (Rossman & Rallis 2003). Through member checking the accuracy and credibility of the findings are confirmed (Creswell 2013). I gave the participants the opportunity to check the analysed data and to be sure that their perceptions were reflected accurately in the data.

The reader should be able to understand the context of the study from rich, thick descriptions of the participants and the research setting and then decide whether the findings can be transferred to other similar contexts or not (Creswell 2013). This procedure also enhances the validity of the study. Each research site was described in detail.

Furthermore, researcher's prolonged engagement with the topic at each research site leads to the phenomenon being understood well, which is also reflected in the manner in which the data was handled (Rossman & Rallis 2003) especially during the research collection process. Bertram and Christiansen (2014) agree that the participants should also be given a chance to re-read the analysed data to ensure that it is credible and that their perceptions are well reflected. Before the focus group interviews were conducted, the participants were given the questions. This gave them time to think about them and to fully prepare plenty appropriate information. During the focus group interviews enough time was spent with the participants so that all the data needed to answer the research questions was captured. After the data had been analysed it was taken back to the participants for member checking to ensure that their perceptions were accurately reflected in the data. They were also given the opportunity to add information if they wished, either at the interview or to contact the researcher afterwards if they felt like adding more information.

Using the common practice of discussing research experiences with trusted colleagues about the data and the phenomenon under investigation took place.

Rossmann and Rallis (2003) mention that this ensures that the data is sufficient and trustworthy and credible findings. My supervisors are familiar with the phenomenon of school readiness assessment, as well as school readiness assessment instruments. They ensured that the data was correctly analysed and that the findings are trustworthy and credible.

3.11 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Creswell (2013) states that when conducting qualitative research, it is essential for the researcher to consider the possible ethical problems and plan ahead of them. They could arise at the start of the study, during the data collection or, analysis phase or when the findings are published (ibid.). The researcher should be prepared to address any ethical issues that might emerge. Table 3.5 indicates the procedure followed for this study.

It is clear that there are various ethical issues to consider before, during and after a study. It is therefore most important that a plan is in place to ensure that they are handled appropriately.

Table 3.5: Addressing the study’s ethical issues during this study (adapted from Creswell 2013)

Process in the study	Ethical issues that can emerge	How the ethical issue was addressed
Prior to the study	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Obtain ethical clearance from the University of Pretoria. Obtain informed consent from principals at research sites as well as the participants. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The University of Pretoria approved my application to collect data in schools. Select research sites and participants that will not raise issues with the researcher.
Beginning of the study	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> State the purpose of the study. Respect participants if they choose not to take part in the study. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Make sure participants understand the purpose of the study. Inform participants that they do not have to take part in the study and they can withdraw at any time.
Data collection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Respect the research sites and do not disturb. Be honest with participants. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Build a supportive, respectful relationship with the participants and conduct focus group interviews after school. Inform participants about the purpose of the study and how the data will be used.

Continues on next page ...

Process in the study	Ethical issues that can emerge	How the ethical issue was addressed
Data analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Represent data anonymously. • Do not side with participants. • Do not disclose only results that researcher expects from the study. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inform participants that findings will be portrayed anonymously. • Results reflect the perspectives of the participants.
Reporting the findings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Report the findings honestly. • Do not plagiarize. • Keep the data represented as anonymously. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Report the findings so that the voices of the participants are heard and not the voice of the researcher. • Use the Harvard method when referencing. • Participants will not be referenced by name or school but by number.
Published findings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Share the findings with participants and people who are interested. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide feedback of the study to participants. • State in the study who might benefit from the results.

3.12 SUMMARY

The purpose of this chapter was to discuss the research methodology that was used during my study of the criteria of school readiness assessment instruments and how these instruments would assist Grade 1 teachers. The qualitative approach adopted led to an in-depth understanding of how Grade 1 teachers could use such results and identify the criteria on which the assessment was based. Two English medium schools and one Afrikaans medium school in Pretoria, South Africa, were selected following the criterion sampling procedure. Focus group interviews with Grade 1 teachers at the selected schools were conducted. Analysis and interpretation of the data collected follow in Chapters 4 and 5 respectively.

CHAPTER 4:

DATA ANALYSIS AND RESEARCH FINDINGS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

In Chapter 3, I explained that a qualitative approach was followed when conducting this case study concerning the use of an instrument. Three schools in Pretoria, City of Tshwane, were selected through purposeful sampling. In a focus group, participants answered questions during a semi-structured interview sessions. They were mostly Grade 1 teachers with a few Grade R teachers who were familiar with school readiness assessment instruments. The purpose of the focus group interviews was to collect sufficient data about the participants' perceptions of suitable school readiness assessment instruments as well as the extent to which Grade 1 teachers used of the results of school readiness assessment. The focus group interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed. The following steps were used for data analysis:

- The answers obtained from the semi-structured interview questions were transcribed after listening to the audio recordings several times to make sure I had understood the participants correctly.
- The transcriptions were saved in electronic files.
- Transcribed data was coded and emerged themes were identified.
- Codes were used to organise the data as themes using a different colour for each theme.

The purpose of Chapter 4 is to present the themes and subthemes derived from the analysis of the data collected after it had been transcribed and organised. In this chapter, I will first describe the research sites, introduce the participants and explain the significance of the research sites and why they were chosen. To conclude the chapter, themes and subthemes that emerged from the data analysis will be discussed and summarised in a table.

4.2 DESCRIPTION OF CASES

To protect the anonymity of the selected schools and the teachers who took part in the study I will not use their names but refer to the schools as ‘School 1’, ‘School 2’ and ‘School 3’ and the participants as ‘Participants 1-13’.

4.2.1 School 1

School 1 is situated in eastern Pretoria on church grounds. It is an urban school with learners from both rural and urban areas. While most of the learners are funded by their parents, there are other learners in the school who depend on people from outside the school for paying their school fees. The school grounds are divided between a preschool and a primary school. Currently the school is very small and each year another grade is added. It has approximately 140 learners from the ages of three years old to those in Grade 5.

There is only one Grade 1 class with 15 learners. The maximum number of learners in a class is 20. The Grade 1 teacher is well-qualified with more than five years of teaching experience. The classroom itself is a rich learning environment and the teacher puts a great deal of effort into her lessons. She also extends the scope of learning experiences by including science, engineering, technology and mathematics activities in her lessons.

For the focus group interview I included two Grade R teachers as well as the Educational Head of Department because of their knowledge on school readiness and its assessment. The latter staff member has more than 10 years of teaching experience and she is well experienced in school readiness. All the participants were eager to discuss the matter of school readiness assessment and to provide answers to my semi-structured interview questions.

4.2.2 School 2

School 2 is also located in eastern Pretoria. It is a pre-primary school with a Grade R class included. The pre-primary division accommodates approximately 110 learners. The school includes learners from the age of 16 months to the age of six years old. The learners mostly come from rural areas, but also include learners from

urban areas. The school is very small, but the teachers are well qualified and provide quality education to all learners.

The Grade R teacher, who was part of the focus group interview, is well qualified in school readiness and school readiness assessment. She has almost 20 years of experience in teaching and assessing learners for school readiness. The reason I included this school and this teacher in the study, was because of their experience in school readiness assessment.

Three teachers from this school were willing to participate in the focus group interview. During the process of searching for participants this school contacted me and said they were very willing to participate because of their amount of experience with school readiness. The participants were very knowledgeable and could answer the focus group interview questions.

4.2.3 School 3

School 3 is an urban school to the north of Pretoria. The school has a primary school, as well as a pre-primary school on the premises. The pre-primary school starts from the age of two to Grade R, and the primary school has learners from Grades 1 up to 7. It is a large school with almost 1000 learners. The school has been a part of the community for many years and has teachers with many years of experience.

There are six Grade 1 teachers who each have between 20 and 28 learners. The Grade 1 teachers are well qualified and the classrooms are well resourced. All Grade 1 teachers have been teaching for more than two years.

Unfortunately, the teachers were not available to participate in a focus group interview. They were very busy with school activities and could not find the time to discuss the focus group interview questions but would answer the questions, so I gave them the questions.

4.3 DESCRIPTION OF SCHOOL READINESS ASSESSMENT INSTRUMENTS

4.3.1 School Readiness Assessment Instrument 1

This school readiness assessment instrument comprises numerous activities and worksheets to assess five- to six-year old learners for school readiness. An occupational therapist or a teacher who has the knowledge of the concept of school readiness can administer it. For a fee the learner's parents have to pay to assess the learner .

4.3.2 School Readiness Assessment Instrument 2

This school readiness assessment instrument is observation-based for learners from the age of two and a half to six years old. The instrument exposes six criteria, namely: initiative, social skills, creative abilities, sensitivity to movement and music, language and literacy, mathematics and science skills. Each criterion has three to eight areas and is scored on a 1-5 scale where 1 is the simplest level and 5 the most complex. The school readiness assessment instrument is developed for teachers to use by observing the learners during their daily programme and it will be examined later in this chapter.

4.3.3 School Readiness Assessment Instrument 3

This particular school readiness assessment instrument was developed for use in South Africa to be administered by Grade R teachers. It is used to assess learners when they turn five years old in Grade R. This instrument serves as a checklist to see whether the learner is ready to enrol for Grade 1 the following year. The seven main criteria are: language development, pre-reading skills, cognitive skills, numeracy skills, social skills, physical skills and emotional skills.

4.4 DATA ANALYSIS

During the focus group interviews I used the following semi-structured interview questions (see Addendum C) which are in line with my research questions:

1. How vital is it for a learner to be ready for school?
2. Is school readiness dependent on a learner's age?
3. Which skills do you see as essential for a learner's school readiness?

4. How long does it take you to determine whether a learner is ready for school?
5. Should all learners be assessed for school readiness? Why?
6. Who are responsible for administering the school readiness assessment at your school?
7. When are the learners assessed for school readiness?
8. How are you notified of the results of the school readiness assessment?
9. How do you use the results of school readiness assessment to support learners who lack school readiness skills? How are the parents involved in this process?
10. Do you regard the school readiness assessment instrument that you use, as an effective tool in measuring school readiness?
11. Would you change anything to your current school readiness assessment instrument and why?

During both the focus group interviews all participants agreed to being audio recorded for the data to be transcribed and analysed (Bertram & Christiansen 2014). While analysing the data, themes and subthemes emerged (see Table 4.1).

Table 4.1: Themes and subthemes from the data analysis

1. The concept of school readiness	i) Importance of school readiness
	ii) Essential skills for school readiness
	iii) School maturity and school readiness
2. School readiness assessment	i) Assessment of school readiness by Grade 1 teachers
	ii) Assessment of school readiness by professionals from outside
	iii) When should school readiness be assessed?
	iv) Why should school readiness be assessed?
3. General criteria of school readiness assessment instruments in the South African context	i) Teachers' perceptions of the current school readiness assessment instruments
	ii) Teachers' perceptions of an effective school readiness assessment instrument
4. Use of the results of school readiness assessment	i) Accessibility of school readiness assessment results to teachers
	ii) Use of school readiness assessment results by teachers

The schools and their participants will be referenced to by the following codes (see Table 4.2).

Table 4.2: Codes for referencing schools and participants

School 1	Participant 1	S1, P1
	Participant 2	S1, P2
	Participant 3	S1, P3
	Participant 4	S1, P4
School 2	Participant 5	S2, P5
	Participant 6	S2, P6
	Participant 7	S2, P7
School 3	Participant 8	S3, P8
	Participant 9	S3, P9
	Participant 10	S3, P10
	Participant 11	S3, P11
	Participant 12	S3, P12
	Participant 13	S3, P13

4.5 RESEARCH FINDINGS

4.5.1 The concept of school readiness

Participant 1, Participant 12 and Participant 13 said it is very important for a learner to be ready for school for the learner to achieve success in Grade 1. Participant 12 stressed that for those learners who are not ready for school coping with the simple activities that they have to do in Grade 1 will be a struggle. Participant 8 said the same thing about learning new skills.

All the skills that a learner needs to be school ready is what is needed to be successful in Grade 1 (S1, P1, 2-3).

So, it's a holistic approach: it's not just how they perform on that day (S2, P 4, 119-120).

It is very important so the child can achieve academically in Grade 1. Otherwise the child is going to struggle with basic things in Grade 1 (S3, P12, 9-11).

There are certain skills that should be learned in Grade R. If the learner is not ready for school they are not going to develop in Grade 1 (S3, P13, 12-14).

If not then the foundation is not steady for the other building blocks to be built on (S3, P8, 2-3).

4.5.1.1 Importance of school readiness

Participants 5, 6 and 7 from School 2 agree that school readiness is very important for a learner to achieve before entering Grade 1. For the learner to achieve basic skills and succeed in Grade 1 the learners have to be ready for formal learning.

It is very important (S2, P5, 2).

It is vital (S2, P6, 3).

Very important (S2, P7, 4)

School readiness is exceptionally important (S3, P9, 4).

Very important, because otherwise he or she can't learn basic skills (S3, P10, 5-6)

Very important. It is very difficult to send a Grade 1 child back to Grade R (S3, P11, 7-8).

Participants from School 1 agree that school readiness is important especially for the amount of work in Grade 1. The learners already need to be equipped with school readiness skills before they enter Grade 1 because they don't have time to master those skills that should have been developed in Grade R. Grade 1 learners have many new skills to develop in their Grade 1 year.

It is really important especially for the demands of work in Grade 1 (S1, P3, 10-11).

Due to the increasing amount of work the Grade 1's have to do there is no time to go back and develop these skills if they are not developed before they come to Grade 1 (S1, P1, 3-6).

The work load required of Grade 1 is a lot. You can't go back there is no time to go back and catch up Grade R skills (S1, P2, 7-9).

4.5.1.2 Essential skills for school readiness

The participants at all three schools mentioned various essential skills that they regard as very important for school readiness for a learner to succeed in Grade 1. Some of these vital skills are: gross and fine motor skills, midline crossing, auditory and visual perception, language development and communication, mathematical development, emotional and social development, following instructions, social adaptability, being able to be independent, and physical development (Participants 1-13).

I said gross motor and fine motor, midline crossing, auditory and visual perception, language development, mathematical development, and emotional and social development (S1, P1, 36-39).

Language but what is most important is language because they need to understand. Because if they don't understand you can't communicate, they cannot listen to instructions (S2, P5, 15-17).

Physical, fine motor, gross motor are very important for them (S2, P5, 20).

Gross and fine motor development, emotional readiness, language skills, social adaptability and obedience (S3, P8, 24-25).

Independence, emotional readiness and basic knowledge (S3, P9, 26).

Emotional stability, gross motor and fine motor skills (S3, P10, 27).

Socialising skills, discipline, pencil grip, ability to sit, fine and gross motor skills (S3, P11, 28-29).

Fine motor skills are very very important to cut and paste and colouring in. Socialising is also very important for Grade 1 to make friends (S3, P12, 30-32).

Socially, gross motor and fine motor skills, and emotionally (S3, P13, 33).

Participant 7 from School 2 mentioned that language and listening skills are very important because class sizes are increasing. If these are adversely affected of their school readiness skills will be impaired which will, in turn, hinder learning progress.

Language and listening skills are also vital especially with the size of the classes (S2, P7, 18-19).

It is essential for all these identified very important skills to be well developed for the learner to develop holistically as they work together to ensure that the learner is ready for school at an appropriate age to start formal schooling.

So basically, whole child development (S1, P2, 46).

Everything actually works together (S2, P7, 21).

4.5.1.3 School maturity and school readiness

Participants from Schools 1, 2 and 3 state that school readiness does not depend on a learner's age from birth. The learner can be school ready at a very young age or they can acquire the necessary school readiness skills much later. However, mastering all the skills necessary for being school ready requires that the learner should have developed holistically.

It depends on their total holistic development. If they are emotionally, physically and sociologically ready I think they can go earlier (S1, P2, 15-17).

It is not dependent on an age. You can get a six-year-old that is ready, and you can get a seven-year-old (S2, P5, 7-8).

And then you can get a five-year-old that is ready (S2, P7, 9).

It depends on where they are with their development (S2, P6, 10).

Not always, there are exceptions (S3, P8, 16).

Participant 3 from School 1 said that they attended a Department of Basic Education meeting where they discussed school readiness and at what age the learner should enter formal schooling. Official policy suggests that the learners should enter Grade 1 at the age of seven even if the expected level of learning has not been achieved. Participant 4 from School 1 said that it should be the decision of the Grade 1 teacher to determine whether a learner should be held back or not if the necessary school readiness skills have not been acquired. This contradicts what Participant 3 from

School 1 reported which was that, when the learner has turned seven years old, they have to enter Grade 1 at the beginning of the next school year.

I said yes. Getting from yesterday what they said at the meeting a child needs to turn seven irrespective of where they're at (S1, P3, 18-19).

And then it's basically from the Grade 1 teacher that if they need to keep them back then they will make that decision (S1, P4, 20-21).

4.5.2 School readiness assessment

School readiness assessment can provide information to help the Grade 1 teacher to determine a learner's level of the school readiness and which skills the learner still needs to acquire. To assess the situation it is essential for both the teacher and learner to benefit. Participant 9 from School 3 pointed out that some skills are only known through using a school readiness assessment instrument. The results can also determine whether the learner will be able to adapt to the formal learning environment and be able to reach the required academic goals after experiencing formal schooling for the first time.

Definitely; sometimes you can only notice things by using a test (S3, P9, 53-54).

Also with being assessed you are able to decide is this learner able to work in a normal midstream school (S1, P3, 76-77).

Yes, because you need a standard (S1, P2, 75).

Participant 2 from School 1 explained that she had a learner who was assessed for school readiness by an occupational therapist. According to the results of the school readiness assessment, the learner was not ready for school. After the learner spent a few weeks in class with the teacher though, she started to achieve success and now she is succeeding above level. It could happen that a learner feels overwhelmed when being assessed by someone they don't know.

But then again, I said the example of this one girl I got in, she was referred to a psychologist, she couldn't even assess on anything in this school readiness test. And then my class the same thing for about three weeks then she started doing little things in my class and now she's one of the best in my class. But that is the odd ones. But you must have a standardised test (S1, P2, 78-84).

4.5.2.1 Assessment of school readiness by Grade 1 teachers

Teachers have various opinions about how long it takes them to determine whether a learner is ready for school or not. For some of the teachers and set of circumstances it takes longer than a term and at other times it can be noticed within the first few weeks of formal schooling. Participant 10 from School 3 states that the Department of Basic Education expects teachers to determine if a learner is ready for school within the first few weeks.

For me I just see the signs from the second term. Because then we already enter the formal programme so then it becomes clear for me as to what they are capable of. As to what they can do and what they can't do (S1, P3, 50-53).

I would say when you get a child in Grade R class by the end of the first term we got a good idea (S2, P7, 27-28).

The whole first term during teaching and the perceptual programme. But it is visible during the first few weeks (S3, P8, 36-37).

About four months. Sometimes very quicker and sometimes longer (S3, P9, 38-39).

Six to eight weeks minimum. Although the Department says within four weeks (S3, P10, 40-41).

There is expected for us to decide within the first four weeks, but it makes it difficult for us to do Grade R work (S3, P11, 42-43).

In the first term when they need to adapt from Grade R to Grade 1. At the end of Grade 1 we can decide. But if the child doesn't

have the basic knowledge then within four to six weeks (S3, P12, 44-47).

In the first week, especially if they child has major deficits or falling behind (S3, P13, 48-49).

Assessing learners with school readiness assessment instruments is not compulsory but it can help teachers to see on what level the learner is and what skills the learner lacks. Participant 1 from School 1 states that they do baseline assessment during the first week in the first term. Baseline assessment can also pick up whether a learner lacks certain skills.

I said I take the school readiness report and then obviously out of that I can see whether the child is school ready or not. But children that didn't do the school readiness assessments, in Grade 1 we do baseline assessment. Out of baseline assessment we kind of have a very good idea (S1, P1, 64-68).

4.5.2.2 Assessment of school readiness by professionals from outside

Participants from all three schools stated that they refer parents to an occupational therapist or the school psychologist if a learner needs to be assessed for school readiness. Participant 7 (School 2) who has almost 20 year is experience in assessing learners for school readiness, is also qualified to do this correctly.

She is the occupational therapist. And then I also do some of the tests but she does the majority (S1, P1, 96-97).

We have a Grade R teacher that's qualified to do that (S2, P5, 59).

I can do it but the teachers do most of the assessments (S2, P7, 61).

But the actual school readiness assessment, that's sort of official is done by either and OT [occupation therapy] or someone who has done the course (S2, P5, 62-64).

The school psychologist (S3, P11, 66).

4.5.2.3 When should school readiness be assessed?

In School 1 and School 3 learners are assessed towards the end of their Grade R year if their parents give their consent. That is more or less when the learners are between five and six years old.

In September (S1, P4, 99).

Well, it is not a set rule. I mean it depends on the case. The ones that I do they've got to be five and a half or even six. It depends on the test that they do. But there is no set rule. They don't even have to do it (S2, P7, 66-69).

But at the minimum age five and a half S2, P5, 70).

Last term of Grade R (S3, P8, 71).

Participant 1 from School 1 states that during a Departmental meeting they attended, the Department of Basic Education indicated that they would like to bring in an assessment instrument to assess learners for school readiness at the end of Grade R. If the Department of Basic Education decides to bring in an assessment instrument to assess school readiness it would be very interesting to see which skills, they will assess and how it will be implemented in schools.

Interestingly yesterday we were at a Departmental meeting for Grade R's. They want to bring in a sort of school readiness assessment for the teachers to do but in November to December (S1, P1, 102-105).

4.5.2.4 Why should school readiness be assessed?

The participants from the three participating schools have various opinions on whether learners should be assessed for school readiness or not. Four participants agree that it is necessary or an advantage, especially for a teacher to know the learners' skills. However, participant 7 (School 2) and Participant 10 (School 3) felt that it is not a necessity. If there is a concern the teacher will recommend that the learner is assessed for school readiness.

It is not a must but it is always a good thing and in some cases very necessary (S3, P8, 51-52).

Definitely, sometimes you can only notice things by using a test (S3, P9, 53-54).

Yes, to determine the skills that should be in place before they go to Grade 1 (S3, P13, 58-59).

In Grade 1 it is also important that I kind of know where the learners are if they come to me (S1, P1, 90-92).

If you are concerned about something, then you refer the child. Maybe to an occupational therapist but a teacher should know (S2, P7, 47-49).

If it is necessary or if the pre-primary suggests it (S3, P10, 55).

Participant 1 (School 1) mentioned that there is an advantage to having a learner assessed for school readiness. Not only can the teacher see what skills are lacking, but the teacher can intervene and work on those skills before the learner enters formal schooling. It depends on when the learner is assessed for school readiness or not. If the learner is assessed for school readiness in Grade R, then it will still give the teacher enough time to focus on those skills. If the learner is only assessed in Grade 1 then it will be difficult for the Grade 1 teacher to go back and develop Grade R skills in Grade 1.

I said it's important in Grade R depending on what time of the year they do it, if they do it in September then there is still time for them to see where they are, to work on that to get them school ready (S1, P1, 85-88).

4.5.3 General features of school readiness assessment instruments in the South African context

There is a concern among teachers in South Africa that they do not know what their learners are being assessed on even though they are eager to see the school readiness assessment instrument.

But I would actually like to see the test. The one that she's sitting and asking questions with (S1, P3, 170-171).

I have never seen such information (S3, P12, 80).

4.5.3.1 Teachers' perceptions of the current school readiness assessment instruments

According to the participants they are not allowed to see the actual school readiness assessment instrument that is being used to assess learners. Participant 3 from School 1 said that she is curious to see the actual school readiness assessment instrument that is used. The person responsible for administering the school readiness assessment instrument has a meeting with the learner's parents and, only with their consent is the teacher allowed to see the report. The report is a summary of the test, which gives results and indicates the skills the learner still needs to develop.

I like my report that I do more because you can see exactly what they could and couldn't do. With [Name] it's an OT [occupational therapist] report. She discusses obviously with the parents but we're not there for the discussion. So, there is sometimes things that I would like more detail on. But it's not always in the report (S1, P1, 165-169).

But I would actually like to see the test. The one that she's sitting and asking questions with (S1, P3, 170-171).

But we are not allowed to see the test anyway. Unless a parent give consent, we are not allowed to be in that meeting. We are not allowed to have it. Unless the parents give permission for every single person that is allowed to see it (S1, P2, 172-176).

I have never seen such information (S3, P12, 80).

Only if the parents give consent (S3, P10, 79).

Participant 5 from School 2 states that the results from a school readiness assessment instrument is not a true reflection of what the learner is able to do and what not. The learner's teacher knows the learner better and the learner might not

feel comfortable with the person responsible for administering the school readiness assessment instrument.

It is not a hundred percent reflection of that child's potential abilities. Because a teacher has worked with that child far more than the actual therapist (S2, P5, 128-130).

But then again, I said the example of this one girl I got in, she was referred to a psychologist, she couldn't even assess on anything in this school readiness test. And then my class the same thing for about three weeks then she started doing little things in my class and now she's one of the best in my class (S1, P2, 78-82).

Participant 7 (School 2) administers school readiness assessments at the school and she is well qualified with many years of experience. She is quite satisfied with the choice of instrument she uses but commented that several other instruments are available. She was not able to say whether they cover all the essential school readiness skills.

It already covers everything. I can't speak for the others and of course there are many (S2, P7, 109-110).

4.5.3.2 Teachers' perceptions of an effective school readiness assessment instrument

Participants point out that, when assessing a learner for school readiness, the person who administers the assessment too, the learner's background and how they are feeling on that specific day, should be considered. The learner might not feel well, or feel comfortable with the person administering the instrument.

You must always remember testing a pre-schooler that child on that day might not be feeling well. And just not want to cooperate. So, to test only once as far as I know is not right. We must set it against the child, the child's background (S2, P7, 111-115).

And the history. The whole emotional stability of that child (S2, P5, 116).

Has the child even eaten that morning? That can even play a role (S2, P6, 117-118).

I mean he could for example not count on that day where as you know he can count. So, if you don't know the child you are going to say that child can't count. And that's not the case (S2, P7, 123-125).

The person administering the school readiness assessment instrument should observe the learner to ensure that the learner is willing to cooperate when being assessed (Participant 5 from School 2). The learner's state of mind and willingness to cooperate and participate play a role in their ability to reflect their potential accurately.

So it's a holistic approach it's not just how they perform on that day. You will monitor as you go along and see this one is not coping. If it's getting too long, weary and he's not producing his best or to his potential then give him a break (S2, P5, 119-122).

4.5.4 Using the results of school readiness assessment

The participants declared that after an occupational therapist has assessed a learner, therapy sessions to develop the skills that are lacking are recommended. The occupational therapist might also suggest that the parents consider enrolling the learner for extra activities, for example swimming lessons.

If it's done by an OT, obviously they will recommend sessions. (S2, P7, 82).

She would suggest they need to go for swimming and extra murals and stuff. And then she would give them exercises if they have to do activities with her. But if it's just with us then we incorporate it into the programme and give homework relating to that (S1, P4, 126-130).

4.5.4.1 Accessibility of school readiness assessment results to teachers

At School 1 the report is shared with the teacher only if the parents give consent, as the occupational therapist at the school explains. Otherwise the teachers cannot see the results or the school readiness assessment instrument.

She comes two weeks later to school with the results but she also gets permission from the parents after she meets with them whether we can see the report (S1, P4, 113-115).

Then she gives it to us (S1, P3, 116).

We just get the results and the results are very accurate in what we assess with the children as well (S1, P2, 146-148).

School 2 receives the reports from the person who administered the school readiness assessment instrument or from the parents after they agreed to get the learner assessed.

We get a report from the person who's tested them and it is given to the parents. And usually it gets emailed to the school.

You get the results either from the parents or from the actual therapist who's done the testing (S2, P5, 74-77).

The pre-primary teachers from School 3 assess learners in Grade R. After assessment and writing their reports they discuss the results with the learners' parents and what parents should work on to develop skills that are lacking. After consent from the parents, the Grade 1 teachers can see the learners' reports but not the results from the school readiness assessment instrument.

Parents need to give consent for their children to be assessed.

The pre-primary staff makes appointments to discuss the results with parents and what should be done (S3, P8, 85-87).

We only get the report from the pre-primary school but never the results from the tests (S3, P12, 88-90).

It is clear that the teachers are not able or allowed to see the school readiness assessment instruments when a learner was assessed. The teachers are allowed to see the report only if the parents give consent.

4.5.4.2 Use of school readiness assessment results by teachers

School 1 uses the results by incorporating the learners' skills that are lacking into their educational programme. The teachers also give the learners homework to do with their parents to develop the skills that are necessary.

When we see there's general lack of skills like for example in general it is motor skills or fine motor skills then we work it into the planning. For the fourth term. And then it actually stays there then we start with those types of things in the first term (S1, P2, 120-124).

But if it's just with us then we incorporate it into the programme and give homework relating to that (S1, P4, 129-130).

At School 2 the teacher who is qualified to administer school readiness assessment assesses learners and then she works with the learners to develop the skills that are lacking. The teacher works with the learners on Tuesdays especially those learners whose parents cannot afford to pay for extra therapy from the occupational therapist. The teacher also sends a programme home to the parents to practice with the learner to develop the necessary skills.

Yes, we do extra work or extra classes and if you think it's in your capability otherwise I recommend them (S2, P7, 86-87).

[Name] does on Tuesdays when her class is open take those learners that are lacking. So, she has gone out of her way to actually help them knowing that there is a deficit in areas. Not all the teachers will do that. And it's also affordability, we know if the parents are financially not able to and then assist them in that way of doing as much as we can in the class time (S2, P5, 88-94).

And you do a little home programme, send a home programme home. This is what we did on this Tuesday please practice these skills (S2, P5, 97-99).

At School 3 the Grade R teachers work with parents whose children do not have the necessary school readiness skills. It became clear to me that the Grade 1 teachers from this particular school do not assist learners who are not ready for school themselves, but rather rely on the parents to do so.

The pre-primary staff and the parents work together (S3, P13, 91).

Each school has different ways of using the results from the school readiness assessment to assist the learners. It is interesting to see that the teachers do use the results when assisting learners to be ready for school.

4.6 ANALYSIS OF SCHOOL READINESS ASSESSMENT INSTRUMENTS

4.6.1 School Readiness Assessment Instrument 1

When examining this school readiness assessment instrument, all four necessary school readiness skills stand out: health and physical development, cognitive development, emotional development and communication skills. Table 4.3 summarises four of the necessary school readiness skills in detail.

Table 4.3: School Readiness Assessment Instrument 1

Health and Physical Development	Cognitive Development	Emotional Development	Communication Skills and Social Skills
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fine motor skills • Eye hand coordination and visual integration • Visual-motor integration • Visual sequence and memory • Visual sequencing • Visual closure • Visual discrimination • Visual figure-ground • Midline crossing • Auditory perception • Posture and control • Balance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Know basic visual concepts: colour and form • Mathematical numeracy • Counting • Application of basic numeracy • Ordinal numbers • Saying and using number names in appropriate contexts • Recognising, describing, estimating, comparing and grouping of objects • Thinking, reasoning and pairing of objects • Cognitive thinking 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Body awareness • Self- knowledge 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Auditory long term memory • Auditory short term memory • Auditory discrimination • Auditory analysis and synthesis • Auditory closure • Word association

From Table 4.3, it is clear that more focus is on the assessment of health and physical development and cognitive development with less attention being given to social and emotional development and communication skills. I also noticed that the worksheets were not scored to determine whether the learner is ready for school or not. Also concerning is that some of the physical activities were not scored either making the assessment incomplete.

4.6.2 School Readiness Assessment Instrument 2

The six criteria represented in this instrument are initiative, social skills, creative abilities, movement and music, language and literacy skills, mathematics and science skills. It includes all five necessary school readiness skills, namely, health and physical development, social and emotional development, communication skills, cognitive skills and approaches to learning. As analysed, it is summarised in Table 4.4.

Table 4.4: School Readiness Assessment Instrument 2

Criteria	Detail
Initiative	<p>Making choices and plans:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Approaches to learning: learners take initiative to explore their context and make plans to complete their choices <p>Solving problems:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Approaches to learning: learners engage in their own interests and solve problems during play periods <p>Initiating play:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Social and emotional development: learners develop relationships with peers and adults and engage in play <p>Personal needs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Social and emotional development: participation in class activities Health and physical development: learners take care of themselves and participate in healthy practices
Social relationships	<p>Relationship with adults:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Social and emotional development: the learner builds a relationship with adults <p>Relationship with peers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Social and emotional development: the learner builds a relationship with peers <p>Resolving conflict:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Social and emotional development: developing a sense of what is right and wrong. Learners resolve social conflict <p>Expressing feelings and understanding feelings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Social and emotional development: recognise, name and control feelings. Demonstrate empathy towards peers and adults

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Criteria	Detail
Creative abilities	<p>Making and building projects, drawing and pretending:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creative arts: learners need to express and represent their observations, what they think, their imaginations and their feelings
Movement and music	<p>Movement:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Health and physical development: gross motor skills including strength, flexibility and balance • Movement: learners express and represent their observations, what they think, their imagination and feelings through movement <p>Movement with objects:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Health and physical development: gross-motor skills • Fine-motor skills: use small muscle movement such as eye hand coordination <p>Feelings and expressions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Health and physical development: body awareness <p>Movement with music:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Express and represent through music <p>Singing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Express and represent through music
Language and literacy	<p>Listening and understanding:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Comprehension and speaking <p>Using vocabulary:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understand and use a variety of words and sentences <p>Patterns of speech:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learners can express themselves using spoken language by using a wide variety of vocabulary <p>Awareness of sounds:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Phonological awareness <p>Knowledge about books:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading skills and book knowledge <p>Using letters and names:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alphabetic knowledge <p>Reading:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading for pleasure and to gain knowledge <p>Writing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Writing for various purposes
Mathematics and science skills	<p>Sorting objects:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Classifying <p>Identify patterns:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify, describe, copy, complete and create patterns <p>Comparing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Measuring, using the concept of units and classifying objects <p>Counting:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number names and number symbols and counting objects <p>Position and direction:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spatial awareness

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Criteria	Detail
	Identifying sequence and change <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Measuring and drawing conclusions Identifying materials and properties: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify, name and describe various shapes

This school readiness assessment instrument includes all five necessary school readiness skills. This instrument is well developed and put together because it states all five school readiness skills and what necessary skills should be developed within each skill. The developer of this school readiness assessment instrument chose six criteria to assess learners for school readiness namely: initiative, social skills, creative abilities, movement and music, language and literacy skills and mathematics and science skills. These six criteria were linked to the five necessary school readiness skills namely: health and physical development, communication skills, social and emotional development, cognitive skills and approaches to learning. The school readiness assessment instrument also includes more in-depth details and skills under each necessary school readiness skill.

4.6.3 School Readiness Assessment Instrument 3

This school readiness assessment instrument was developed for assessing South African Grade R learners. It is used to make sure that the learner has the necessary school readiness skills before Grade 1. The seven main criteria relating to specific skills concern language development, pre-reading ability, cognition, numeracy, socialising, physical and emotional aspects as described in Table 4.5.

Table 4.5: School Readiness Assessment Instrument 3

Language Development	Memorising nursery rhymes
	Uses expressive and receptive language
	Able to follow instructions
	Uses different sounds of a language
	Uses sentences to make themselves understood
	Takes turns in conversations
Pre-reading Skills	Identifying and naming basic colours
	Identifying and naming letters of the alphabet
	Recognising their own name
	Knowing how to hold a book and that we read from left to right
	Interest in books and reading
Cognitive Skills	Understanding the concept of size
	Identifying opposites

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Cognitive Skills (continued)	Able to build a puzzle
	Able to put cards in a sequence
	Able to pay attention and plan how to complete an activity
	Identifying different shapes
	Able to copy patterns
	Identifying positions in space (in front, on top, behind etc.)
	Persistence when experiencing challenging activities
	Able to categorize objects
	Curiosity during intellectual activities
Numeracy Skills	Able to count to at least ten
	Understanding the concept of counting, sorting and grouping objects
	Uses different words for time such as morning, afternoon and night
Social Skills	Able to ask for something
	Able to share
	Able to take turns
	Able to listen without interrupting
	Able to relate with peers and adults
Physical Skills	Able to use the bathroom on their own
	Able to blow their noses
	Able to wash their hands
	Catch and throw a ball
	Balancing on one foot for a certain time
	Walking up and down stairs
	Uses scissors, pencils and crayons
	Able to build with blocks
	Able to hop
	Able to use a fork and a knife while eating
	Midline crossing
Emotional Skills	Able to ask for help when struggling
	Realising that he/ she cannot always get his/ her own way
	Working independently
	Coping with criticism and failure
	Able to separate from adults
	Able to express their feelings and needs

This school readiness assessment instrument is used as a checklist to see whether the learner has developed the necessary skills or not.

4.7 SUMMARY OF THEMES

Table 4.6: Summary of themes

Themes	Feedback from the participants
The concept of school readiness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Skills needed to be successful and achieve academically in Grade 1 • The foundation for new skills learned in Grade 1 • If not ready for school, then the learner will struggle to learn basic skills • Necessary skills: Gross motor and fine motor, midline crossing, auditory and visual perception, language development and

Continues on next page ...



Themes	Feedback from the participants
	<p>communication, mathematical development, emotional and social development, following instructions, social adaptability, ability to act independently, and physical development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Work load in Grade 1 is too intense to go back and teach skills from Grade R• To be school ready the learner needs to develop holistically• Department of Basic Education states that a learner should enter Grade 1 when turning seven irrespective of the learner's stage of development
School readiness assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Assess learners to determine the standard• Grade 1 teachers can use the results to see on what level the learners are• An occupational therapist or a qualified Grade R teacher can assess learners for school readiness• Learners can be assessed near the end of Grade R• Assessing learners can show which skills they still need to master• If learners are not school ready, then teachers can intervene before they go to Grade 1
General features of school readiness assessment in the South African context	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Grade 1 teachers have never seen the school readiness assessment instruments that are used at their schools• Grade 1 teachers are eager to see the school readiness assessment instruments• Parents need to give permission before Grade 1 teachers can see the report from the school readiness assessment• The results are not a 100% reflection of a learner's abilities the learner might not be comfortable with the person responsible for assessing the learner; the learner's own class teacher knows them better• The learner's background and state of mind should be considered when the learner is being assessed• The learner should be observed over time and not just assessed within a day
Using the results of school readiness assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Sessions with an occupational therapist are recommended for the learners to develop the necessary skills• Grade R teachers incorporate the learners' skills that are lacking into their educational programme• The teachers only receive the results from the occupational therapist if the parents give consent• The teachers also give extra homework to help the learners master the skills they lack

4.8 SUMMARY

The purpose of Chapter 4 was to present the research findings from the data collected and the process of data analysis. Themes and subthemes emerged and were documented. These included the concept of school readiness, school readiness assessment, general features of school readiness assessment in South Africa, and the use of results from school readiness assessment reports. The participants' views on school readiness assessment and the school readiness assessment instruments being used in their schools were recorded.

After completing the literature study in Chapter 2, I developed an understanding of what school readiness assessment and school readiness assessment instruments include. It was clear that school readiness assessment has been researched by many authors who see school readiness as an important factor for successful formal schooling. I interviewed Grade 1 and Grade R teachers, as well as teachers who are knowledgeable to find out how they perceive school readiness and the instruments used to assess it. From the results obtained I could see that teachers do understand the importance of assessing school readiness. I was disappointed that teachers do not have insight into school readiness assessment instruments. They have never seen school readiness assessment instruments.

Not all teachers use the results of school readiness assessments to benefit the learner who is not ready for school. There seems to be a lack of knowledge about what a school readiness assessment actually assess and what learners need to have achieved to be ready for school. I realised that some teachers are eager to see what school readiness assessment instruments look like while other teachers do not feel the same way. I feel that Grade 1 teachers should see what school readiness assessment instruments look like to better understand the concept of school readiness.

I feel that the research done will be sufficient to answer my research questions. I trust that my research findings are trustworthy and it will be valuable for other researchers to use in the future. In Chapter 5 the research findings will be discussed in relation to the literature found on school readiness assessment.

Chapter 5:

INTERPRETATION OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter 4 focused on the themes and subthemes that emerged from the data that was analysed. Discussion followed on the criteria observed in school readiness assessment instruments; the participant's view of certain aspects of school readiness and some general features of South African school readiness assessment instruments; and how teachers use the results from school readiness assessment instruments. Teacher's perceptions regarding to school readiness and school readiness assessment instruments were also represented as well as who is responsible for administering these instruments.

The purpose of Chapter 5 is to connect the data obtained with relevant literature (see Chapter 2) and the theoretical framework adopted for this study about and school readiness assessment instruments discussed and investigated in Chapter 2. In Chapter 5, I will address the stated research problem concerning the use of school readiness assessment instruments for an in-depth understanding of the criteria considered in a school readiness assessment instruments. To achieve this, it is necessary to look for connections between the themes and subthemes to understand this phenomenon. The accompanying diagram (Figure 5.1) illustrates that school readiness and the instruments used to assess a learner's readiness to start the country's formal schooling system. The main features of school readiness assessment procedures in South African schools are described and compared against examples found in a range of literature sources. Characteristics features of documented examples are noted and the criteria used in their compilation are listed and compared against the data collected for this study and the chosen theoretical framework for school readiness assessment devised by McAfee and Leong in 2007.

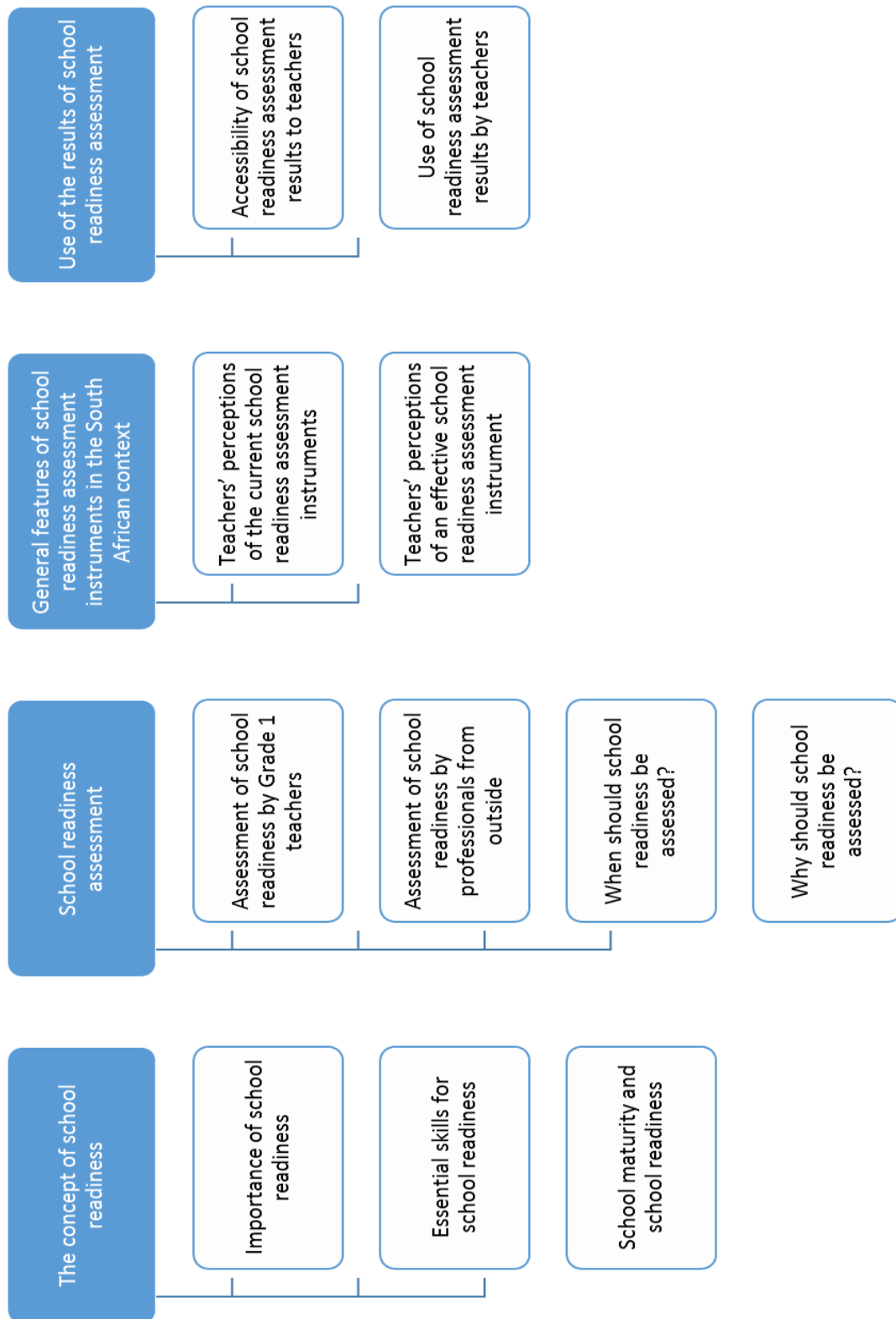


Figure 5.1: The connection between themes and subthemes

In Chapter 5 the criteria for school readiness assessment and school readiness assessment instruments will be discussed by comparing the research findings with the literature on school readiness assessment instruments. Thereafter the research

findings will be represented through the theoretical framework on school readiness assessment through McAfee and Leong (2007).

5.2 THE CRITERIA FOR SCHOOL READINESS ASSESSMENT INSTRUMENTS

Comparing the information I have gathered in my South African case study and the views of other educators and researchers in other countries (see Section 2.2), similarities are evident. The literature on school readiness and its assessment instruments stresses the importance. I have come to realise that my participants' perceptions on this matches other work closely. It is vital for teachers to see whether a learner is on the appropriate level (see section 2.2) or not to ensure academic success in the formal learning environment. The teacher has to assist the learner to acquire the necessary skills to be ready for school (see Section 2.2) or if not yet ready for school.

For effective assistance, a learner's needs regarding health and physical as well as their social and emotional development needs to have to be met. Communication skills, their approach to learning and cognitive development too are important aspects (Kagan, Moore & Bredekamp 1995 in Brown 2015). The teacher should help the learner to have the necessary skills to be ready for school (see section 2.2).

In the following sections, discussion first centres on the teacher's perceptions and views about the skills that are necessary for a learner to be ready for school. The second point is about school readiness assessment and teachers' experiences and concerns about it (see section 5.2.2); and third, the teachers' opinions and views of school readiness assessment instruments (see section 5.2.3). Fourth and lastly, points about school readiness skills are raised as presented in Chapter 2.

Participants in this study agreed it is essential for a learner to be ready for school. Assessing for school readiness the year prior to having to start school formally is advisable. Learners who are not quite ready for the experience can also have a chance to improve necessary skills to enable them to cope with the demands of learning in a school environment (see section 4.4.1). A school readiness assessment instrument that is carefully designed and based on established criteria should be used. It will then cover all aspects of a child's development. Importantly, it should not only be correctly administered but also identify gaps to be addressed

for satisfactory performance. This will allow for an opportunity for the learner to benefit from participating in all school activities, be exposed to a teacher or other professional guidance that will promote personal growth and achievement.

5.2.1 Teachers' perceptions and views about necessary school readiness assessment skills

Discussion on this study's participants' perceptions and views on the criteria applicable both to the value of school readiness assessment and the instruments used follows. Detail about the criteria that apply to the topic of this research is given in Chapter 2. The criteria are listed as health and physical development, social and emotional development, communication skills, approaches to learning, and cognitive skills. The teachers interviewed stressed that these skills do not develop separately but, when analysed theoretically for effective action, form a holistic picture of the learners' level of school readiness (see Section 4.4).

5.2.1.1 Health and physical development

Participants in this study named a few aspects of health and physical development that play an enormous role in school readiness. They named aspects such as gross and fine motor skills, midline crossing, physical development, pencil grip and the ability to sit still during lessons (see Section 4.4.1). Janus and Offord (2007) point out that, if a learner's health and physical development are not well developed and mastered, their ability to be ready for the formal learning environment is seriously negatively affected in the long-term. They continue to say that health and physical development are an absolutely vital part of a learner's skill mastery achievement (see Section 2.2.1).

5.2.1.2 Social, emotional development and communication skills

Social and emotional development is a vital part of school readiness in early childhood. The formal learning environment places new demands on learners and, as they face these, they have to learn to cope by adapting emotionally to perform the required tasks (Denham & Brown 2010). The opinions of the participants from the study are similar.

The participants also state that learners need to be emotionally well developed to be independent and stable to adapt to the formal learning environment. The participants continue to say that a learner should be socially well developed to make new friends when in Grade 1, to socialise with other learners and teachers and to understand the language of learning and teaching (see Section 4.4.1).

Some of the participants stressed that the learner's ability to communicate and to understand the language of learning and teaching was important because the learner needs to understand instructions and how to communicate (see Section 4.4.1). If a learner does not understand what is expected on them they will be put under a lot of stress. Denham (2006) advises that self-management is one aspect of social and emotional development that allows a learner to cope with stressful situations and overcome difficult tasks (see Section 2.2.2). Hence, to avoid or deal with the challenges of the formal learning environment learners have to understand it. They must be able to respond to the language of learning and teaching, to socialise, communicate and adapt emotionally.

5.2.1.3 Communication skills

Teachers cannot expect a learner to be ready for school without having the skills needed to cope in a classroom situation when reaching school-going age. If thus deprived, they will not achieve academically. The extent and nature of exposure to language opportunities and what is learnt through learning and teaching, before entering formal schooling, determine the communication skills a learner has (Emig 2000). Such interaction influences a learner's academic progress (see Section 2.2.3). Those who are exposed to communication and language opportunities in their home environment benefit.

The learner's social, emotional and communication development are closely linked but it is vital for the learner to understand the language of learning and teaching in order for the learner to socialise and communicate with peers and teachers and for the learner to adapt emotionally to the school environment.

5.2.1.4 Approach to learning

Approaches to learning include learners' attitudes to learning and their participation in both the teaching and learning processes (see Section 2.2.4). While analysing

the data, I noticed that none of the participants had specifically mentioned either learners' attitudes or their participation as necessary developmental skills for school readiness. A learner's ability to interact and participate when learning is vitally important (Kagan, Moore & Bredekamp 1995). A learner who does this, and is involved while learning, acquires knowledge through focusing and completing tasks (Chen, Masur and McNamee 2011).

The way in which teachers design the appearance of their classroom, develop their lesson plans and teaching strategies reflects the role they play to ensure that their learners have the necessary skills for the age they are teaching (see Section 2.2.4). The fact that none of the teachers specifically mentioned these aspects as necessary to school readiness skills is a point to consider. However, these two aspects are theoretically aligned to a workable approach to learning as Kagan *et al.* (1995) envisage (see Chapter 2). It is one of the five criteria that a learner needs to master to be ready for the formal learning environment (*ibid.*).

5.2.1.5 Cognitive development

One of the participants commented that basic knowledge is vital for a learner to be ready for school (see Section 4.4.1). Bruwer (2014) states that the learner's working memory, inhibitory discipline and the learner's ability to be cognitively adaptable needs to be well developed for the learner to recall knowledge and to incorporate new knowledge learned (see Section 2.2.5).

5.2.1.6 Holistic development

Two of the participants referred to developing learner needs holistically. The learner's health and physical development, social and emotional skills, communication skills, approaches to learning and cognitive development should not be developed individually but they should all be well developed because they all work together for the learner to be ready for school and achieve academically (see Section 4.4.1). Kiernan, Axford, Little, Murphy, Greene and Gormley (2008) too remark that all of the necessary school readiness skills should be integrated and well developed so that the learner is holistically well developed (see Section 2.2).

5.2.2 Teachers' experiences and concerns regarding school readiness assessment

Participants from this study agreed that it is very important for learners to be assessed for school readiness to see on what level the learner is and confirm what skills still need to be developed and mastered. A school readiness assessment instrument will reflect whether the learner is ready for the formal learning environment or not and if the learner would be able to adapt to further teaching and learning and achieve success academically (see Section 4.4.2).

Learners who are not ready for school as they do not have the necessary school readiness skills might struggle with academic intervention in later years at school (Umek *et al.* 2008). School readiness is a good indicator of academic success and that schools should put more effort into promoting it as well as the consequences of assessing learners (Quirk *et al.* 2011). This research report documents that the teachers contributing information as sampled participants agree with the views of other scholars that school readiness assessment is essential to predict whether a learner will cope when beginning formal schooling (see section 2.5).

Some of the teachers had learners who had been assessed by occupational therapists for school readiness. The results were that the learners were not ready for school but, after a few weeks in class, the learners achieved success academically above the required level. Another view teachers' expressed was that the school readiness assessment instrument might reflect that the learner is not ready for school. However, the results could have been influenced adversely by how the learner felt towards the person responsible for administering the school readiness assessment instrument (see Section 4.4.2).

Janus and Offord (2007) state that one of the risks of using a school readiness assessment instrument is that there are too many learners who are evaluated as not ready for school because school readiness assessment instruments are too strict as they sought to meet specific goals. The results from a school readiness assessment instrument could classify learners inappropriately. Results can also be used incorrectly (see Section 2.6).

By looking at the teachers' experiences, I noticed that they do not actually administer the assessment instrument used at the school to assess school readiness. The

teachers observe learners and then they decide whether a learner is equipped with the necessary school readiness skills or not. The teachers then decide whether a learner should be sent to an occupational therapist to get assessed for school readiness with a school readiness assessment instrument (see Section 4.4.2).

Denham (2006) states that there is no single school readiness assessment instrument that can assess a learner for school readiness. He suggests that multiple school readiness assessment instruments should be used to reflect all the necessary skills. Goldstein and McCoach (2011) continues to recommend that school readiness assessment instruments should be administered over a period to compare the results to see if the learner is improving or not (see Section 2.6) while waiting to start school.

Most of the teachers said that they do not assess learners for school readiness because they are not qualified to do so (see Section 4.4.2). Not all school readiness assessment instruments that are available have to be administered by a specially qualified person who has had prior training. Aiona (2005) definitely does not agree with this happening.

This is very disturbing for me because teachers do not know of available school readiness assessment instruments to administer without the necessary training needed (see Section 2.6). Thus, there are instances where teachers can assess school readiness without training and get a result that gives them an idea of what skills the learner still has to master.

As previously mentioned, teachers are concerned that learners who are assessed by an occupational therapist often gets evaluated as not ready for school (see Section 4.4.2) although the learners achieve academic success after a while. If this is the case, then teachers should administer school readiness assessment instruments which require no prior training so learners can feel comfortable and then the teachers might get a true reflection of the learners' school readiness level and the skills that are lacking.

5.2.3 Teachers' opinions and views on school readiness assessment instruments

During the focus group interview it became aware that the sampled teachers in this study had never seen a school readiness assessment instrument. These teachers were most curious and wanted to know more about school readiness assessment (see Section 4.4.3). They were not allowed to see the school readiness assessment instrument and only a learner's results if the parents had given permission for the report to be shared with the teacher (ibid.).

The concern expressed about administering school readiness assessment instruments is that the instrument does not reflect a true reflection of the learner's school readiness level and skills they have. They state that the learners' teacher knows the learner more than the person administering the school readiness assessment instrument. The learner might not feel comfortable with the person responsible for administering the instrument which could affect the test results (see Section 4.4.3).

Many of the participants stressed that, when a learner is assessed for school readiness there are a few aspects to consider. The learner's physical and health condition and home environment are two examples. If the learner was not feeling well or might not have eaten at home before leaving for school or is not emotionally stable, are circumstances that could affect the administration of the test. The length of the school readiness assessment instrument can also have an effect on the learner. The assessment might take too long and the learner might get weary or distracted (see Section 4.4.3).

Essentially, all that has to be decided is when to complete the structured test, who will do it and what should be included (Janus and Offord 2007) is all that is necessary (see Section 2.6). The teachers in this study held the same view. The person administering the school readiness assessment instrument should make the learner feel comfortable; the learner's state of mind should be receptive; and the length of the instrument should be an appropriate length before starting the exercise.

5.2.4 Teachers' opinions on how the results from school readiness assessment instruments can be used

The participants explained that, when a learner is evaluated as not ready for school by an occupational therapist, then the learner gets recommended by the occupational therapist to go for extra session with them to develop the necessary skills. If the teachers are given consent to see the results from the school readiness assessment instrument, then the teachers assist learners who are not ready for school to develop the necessary skills (see Section 4.4.4).

The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) specifies four ways in which the results of a school readiness assessment instrument can be used: first, to make decisions about a learner's learning opportunities; second, to determine what the necessary intervention strategies would be to assist the learner; third, to see whether the learner has in fact mastered the necessary skills; and fourth to determine whether the educational programme should be adapted (Aiona 2005).

The results from a school readiness assessment instrument should be used to benefit the learner. The teacher participants in this study said that, if they are given the results they would be very willing to help the learners develop the necessary skills. This would mean incorporating them in their daily programme. The result would be that the learner would be likely to be ready to cope academically in the formal learning environment (see Section 4.4.4). Grade R teachers are known to put in a great deal of effort into making sure that, when the learners reach Grade 1 the following year, they will be ready to use the skills they have mastered.

Freeman and Brown (2008) conducted a study on how teacher use the results from a school readiness assessment instrument. They found that the teachers refused to use the results to help learners because they felt that the school readiness assessment instrument did not reflect the holistic development of the learner (see Section 2.8). This was very reassuring to see that the participants in my study use the results from the applied assessment to assist the learners rather than refusing to use them. By using the results from a correctly designed test appropriately the learner will benefit.

5.3 A COMPARISON BETWEEN THE SCHOOL READINESS ASSESSMENT INSTRUMENTS

After examining the school readiness assessment instruments the three participating schools used, I compared them (Table 5.1) to see which school readiness assessment instrument included all school readiness areas and the

Table 5.1: A Comparison between school readiness assessment instruments

School Readiness Assessment Instrument	Health and Physical Development	Cognitive Development	Emotional Development	Communication Skills	Social Skills	Approaches to Learning
1	Fine motor skills	Knowledge of basic concepts	Body awareness	Auditory memory, discrimination, analysis and synthesis	Auditory memory, discrimination, analysis and synthesis	
	Eye hand coordination	Knowledge of numbers	Self-knowledge	Word association	Word association	
	Visual development	Counting skills				
	Auditory development	Ordinal numbers				
	Midline crossing	Use numbers appropriately				
	Posture and control	Recognise, describe, estimate, compare and group objects				
	Balance	Think, reason and pair objects				
		Cognitive thinking				
2	Creative abilities	Comprehension skills	Initiate play	Appropriate use of vocabulary	Initiate play	Making choices and plans
	Movement	Vocabulary skills	Participate in activities	Patterns of speech	Participate in activities	Solve problems
	Gross motor skills	Reading skills	Taking care of themselves	Phonological awareness	Taking care of themselves	
	Fine motor skills	Alphabet knowledge	Relationships with adults and peers		Relationships with adults and peers	
	Body awareness	Identify and recognise patterns	Resolve conflict		Resolve conflict	
		Counting skills	Experience and understand feelings		Experience and understand feelings	
		Position and direction of objects				
		Identify and recognise sequences				
3	Able to use bathroom	Alphabet knowledge	Ask when struggling	Memorise rhymes	Able to ask questions	Interest in books and reading

Continues on next page ...

School Readiness Assessment Instrument	Health and Physical Development	Cognitive Development	Emotional Development	Communication Skills	Social Skills	Approaches to Learning
	Gross motor skills	Counting skills	Work independently	Expressive and receptive language	Able to share	Curiosity during intellectual activities
	Balance	Identify and recognise sequences	Separation from adults	Follow instructions	Take turns	
	Fine motor skills	Identify and recognise patterns	Express feelings and needs		Listen without interruption	
	Midline crossing	Position and direction of objects				
		Recognise, describe, estimate, compare and group objects				

necessary skills. School Readiness Assessment Instrument 1 only covered five of the six school readiness skills. School Readiness Assessment Instruments 2 and 3 covered all the necessary school readiness skills.

5.4 RESEARCH FINDINGS AND THE PROCESS OF SCHOOL READINESS ASSESSMENT ACCORDING TO MCAFEE AND LEONG (2007)

Looking at the data collected through consulting the theoretical framework adopted (see Section 2.8), will help me interpret it to draw my conclusions. McAfee and Leong (2007) point out that school readiness assessment makes it possible to see the purpose, process and importance of school readiness. The skills necessary too are brought to light (see Section 2.8). This theory (see Figure 1.1) was specifically chosen and Figure 5.2 summarises the school readiness assessment process.

Figure 5.2 represents the process of assessing learners for school readiness by using a school readiness assessment instrument. The process involves seven aspects for assessors to follow when they assess learners for school readiness. This specifically applies to an instrument for which no prior training is required for its use.

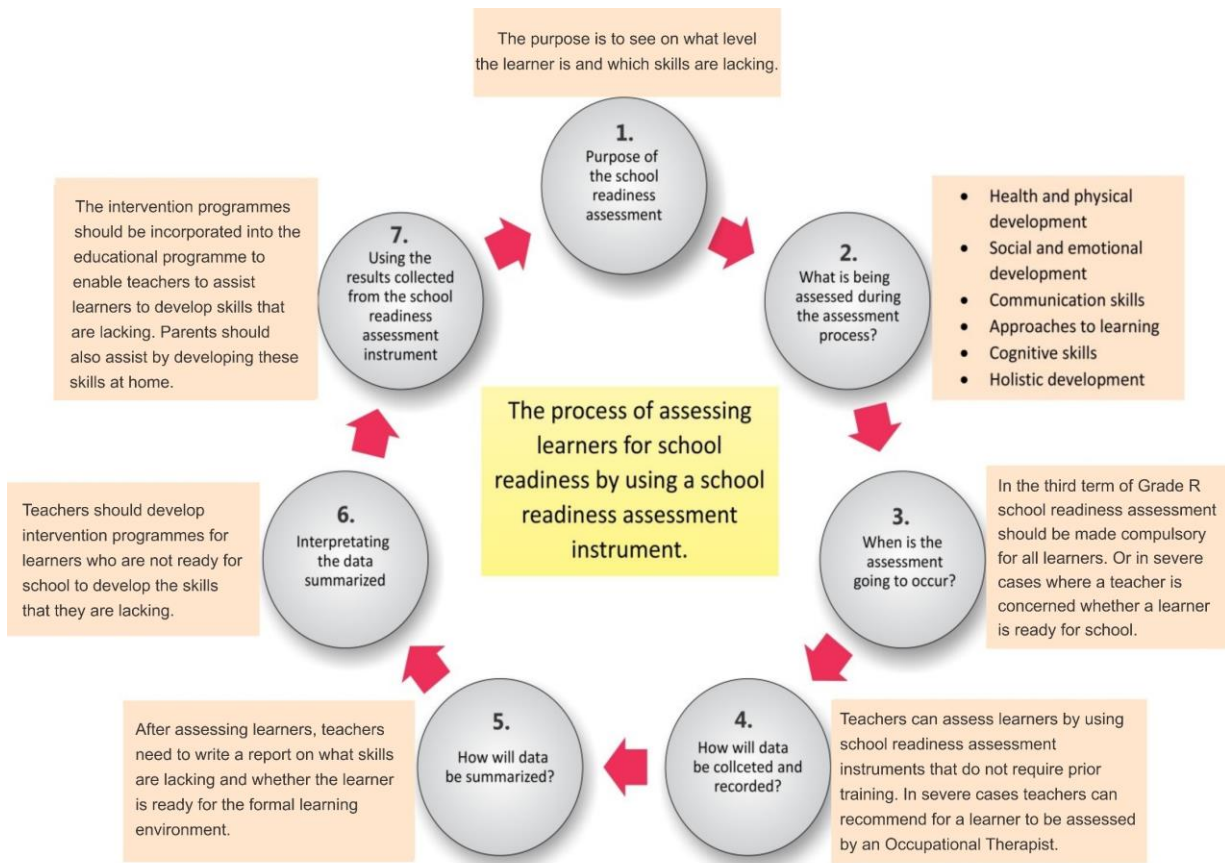


Figure 5.2: Research findings through the lens of the theoretical framework of McAfee and Leong (2007) (adapted for the purpose of my study)

The purpose of school readiness assessment is for teachers to see on what level of readiness the learner is before going to school and what skills still need to be mastered. By using an appropriate school readiness assessment instrument the teacher will be able to see the learner’s skills’ levels and those that still have to be mastered. Teachers should make sure that the school readiness assessment instrument assesses the learner’s health and physical development, social and emotional development, communication skills, approaches to learning, cognitive skills and reflect the learners’ holistic development.

The third aspect is to decide when to assess learners for school readiness. Learners should be assessed for school readiness in the third term of Grade R. The reason for assessing learners in Grade R is to ensure that, if there are school readiness skills that a learner still has to master, then the teacher can intervene to develop them as they are necessary for academic progress. This will be discussed in the aspect numbered six.

The fourth aspect is to decide how the data will be collected and recorded. Teachers need to use school readiness assessment instruments for which no prior training in implementation is needed. The test must also be accessible and available for teachers to use freely. In severe cases where a teacher is very concerned about a learner's school readiness skills, the teacher can recommend that a professional occupational therapist assess the learner after the parents have given consent. This can be done at any age. If the learner is not ready for school, a recommendation can be made for another skills session to focus on mastering the required skills.

Aspect number five concerns how to summarise the data. After a learner is assessed for school readiness the teachers can examine the results and write a report on whether the learner is ready for school or not. If the teacher assessed the learner as not ready for school, the report will refer to the skills the learner still needs to master to be ready for the formal learning environment. The report involves an in-depth description of these skills.

The sixth aspect would interpret the data from the report to develop an intervention programme that provides activities for the learner to work on so that the lacking skills are improved to promote school readiness. This phase builds on the previously identified problem areas.

The last aspect is the most important part of this school readiness assessment process. This is where the teachers use the results from the school readiness assessment instrument intervention programme to be sure that the necessary skills have developed. It is beneficial if the activities are included in a teacher's educational programme for the class for all learners to practise and master necessary skills. Teachers can also send intervention programme exercises home so that the parents can assist them in this initiative that seeks to ensure that all learners improve their school readiness skills, especially the ones that were lacking.

5.5 SUMMARY

The aim of Chapter 5 was to connect the research results to the relevant literature and the study's theoretical framework. The concerns addressed were school readiness assessment instruments and the process of assessing learners for school readiness. The criteria for school readiness assessment instruments were examined

by comparing them to the literature and the conceptual framework as presented in Chapter 2. This theoretical framework was also linked to reported results.

As teachers, the participants' opinions and views about school readiness skills and assessment instruments were noted. It became clear that the teachers are well equipped with knowledge on these topics. The teachers know a great deal about school readiness skills and stated that school readiness is a very important aspect of education. Infact, it is essential for learners to master them before they enter the formal learning environment to ensure future academic success.

Chapter 6:

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 INTRODUCTION

In Chapter 5, the research findings of this study were presented. The perceptions and views of the teachers who participated in this study regarding school readiness, its assessment and instruments used were dealt with following its research design (Chapter 2; Section 5.2.1). The research's aim and the literature on school readiness assessment instruments to discover and understanding of the empirical research were documented. The school readiness assessment process (see Section 5.2.2); the study's theoretical framework (see Section 5.3); the teachers' opinions, views and concerns about school readiness assessment instruments and its results were the main themes (see Section 5.2.4). Strategies for learners who are not ready for school and the research findings were given.

The purpose of Chapter 6 is to conclude this study by providing an overview of the literature regarding school readiness assessment instruments (Chapter 2), and the empirical research work done for the study (Chapter 4). Similarities and possible contradictions between the literature, the conceptual framework and new insights from the findings (Chapter 5) will be discussed briefly. Conclusions will be drawn in this chapter by answering the secondary questions first and then the main research question. After which recommendations for practitioners, policy makers and further research will be given.

6.2 AN OVERVIEW OF IMPORTANT INFORMATION

6.2.1 A short overview of the literature on school readiness research

One aspect that is very concerning for me is that the participating teachers had never seen the school readiness assessment instrument that is administered to their learners. This concerns me because the teachers should know what school readiness skills are being assessed to ensure that they develop the necessary school readiness skills for their learners. Teachers are not allowed to examine the results from a school readiness assessment instrument without prior consent from

parents. This is concerning because, if the parents do not give consent, the teachers would be unable to assist the learner to develop the necessary skills. It should be recommended to parents that teachers should be able to see the results to assist the learner.

I suggest that further research should be done urgently to examine whether other schools experience similar issues about school readiness assessment instruments as the participants in this research. Research should be done to find out whether all teachers know the necessary skills for school readiness and whether they know the importance of developing the necessary skills. I suggest that further research should be done to find out whether parents will give consent to teachers for seeing the school readiness assessment instruments results and if not, why they are not willing give their consent.

I have gained clear insight into the necessary school readiness skills and how important it is for a learner to be assessed for school readiness by assessing learners with school readiness assessment instruments. The participants from this study gave me a lot of insight about this issue through their opinions and views regarding school readiness assessment instruments. In Chapter 6 I will answer my research questions followed by recommendations for policy makers and further research. I trust that the recommendations will be useful to assist learners who are not ready for school.

A considerable amount of research has been done on school readiness assessment and school readiness assessment instruments because school readiness skills are important especially in the transition phase from preschool to formal learning. School readiness skills are vital as a learner has had to have to mastered necessary skills before enrolling for Grade 1. It is the beginning of their formal schooling. It is very important for a learner to be assessed for school readiness to see what skills have been mastered and what the learner still needs to learn with the provision of extra intervention opportunities (see Section 2.1).

School readiness skills are explained as learners' holistic development involving physical and motor, social and emotional development and cognitive and language skills to gain knowledge (see Section 2.2). The National Education Goals Panel (NEGP) (1991) defines school readiness as the learners' readiness for school, the

school's readiness to accommodate the learners and their various levels of development, as well as the support from families and the community to ensure learners' mastery of the necessary school readiness skills (see Section 2.2).

For a valid and useful school readiness assessment instrument a learner's holistic development has to be considered which include the identified necessary school readiness skills (see Section 2.2 and Section 2.4). It has some limitations and conditions. The person responsible for administering such a test should have its purpose in mind. Hence the choice of an instrument must do this while meeting the criteria for school readiness (see Section 2.4).

The results from a school readiness assessment instrument should be used to benefit the learner using them so that lacking skills are acquired through intervention strategies. The results should also be used to monitor the learner's progress to ensure that the necessary school readiness skills are developed (see Section 2.6).

6.2.2 A short overview of the empirical research findings of this study

Focus group interviews were conducted with teachers at three selected schools in Pretoria, City of Tshwane, South Africa where school readiness assessment instruments are used. The focus group interviews revealed that the teachers' views and perceptions regarding the importance of school readiness assessment and school readiness assessment instruments were similar.

They named a few examples of school readiness skills that a learner needs to master that are also found in the literature, namely, physical development, emotional and social development, cognitive development, communication skills as well as approaches to learning. As pointed out in Section 6.2.1, also stressed is that these skills should not be learnt in isolation but together to form a holistic picture of a learner's development. That having school readiness skills before entering the formal learning environment is very important for a learner (see Section 4.4.1) is a recurring point made in this study. As noted (see Section 2.4), the person responsible for administering the school readiness assessment instrument should have a purpose in mind when assessing learners for school readiness, and should choose an instrument that fits the purpose as well as the generally accepted criteria of a school readiness assessment instrument.

The teachers from this study mentioned that there are trained people responsible for administering school readiness assessment instruments to assess learners for school readiness (see Section 4.4.2). However, as the teacher of the learner, they are only allowed to see the results if the parents have given their consent (see Section 4.4.3) and not the physical school readiness assessment instrument. When this happened the learner would benefit as they use the results to assist the learner to develop the school readiness skills that the learner still needed to master before entering the formal learning environment. The Grade R teachers said that they incorporate these missing skills in their class educational programme to ensure learner develops and practises these skills. Teachers also send home extra activities home for the learner to do with their parents (see Section 4.4).

6.2.3 Similarities and possible contradictions between the literature and the empirical research findings

Numerous studies were conducted over the years regarding school readiness and the school readiness skills that a learner needs to master before a learner can enter the formal learning environment. Almost all the work I read concluded that learning will be a struggle for learners who have not mastered the necessary school readiness skills. Hence those learners who struggle and are not likely to totally succeed academically in the formal learning environment. Even after doing this proposed research I did not come across specific criteria for school readiness assessment instruments nor teachers' perceptions and views about them. Little seems to be known about this matter.

When I compared my empirical research findings to the findings from previous studies documented in the literature of school readiness, I found that they corresponded regarding health and physical development, social and emotional development, cognitive skills, communication skill and approaches to learning (see Section 5.2.1). In both cases, teachers' experiences and concerns confirmed the importance of school readiness assessment and that the results obtained would indicate what level the learner was and which skills they still needed to master (see Section 5.2.2).

The criteria for school readiness skills also matches but the teachers' perceptions and views concerning school readiness assessment instruments seemed to differ. I

found that the teachers in this study never physically saw their learner's completed school readiness assessment instrument. They eagerly said they would like to so that they would know exactly what had been assessed and how the skills were identified. Teachers are only allowed to see the results from the school readiness assessment instrument if and when parents give their consent for this exposure. Since I did not find any evidence of similar research findings in other national or international literature, it seems that this arrangement is unique to the South African context. I also found very little reference to South African schools concerning school readiness, its assessment and the instruments used. This observation seems to show that teachers neither get the opportunity to express their views and opinions about this issue nor make them known.

6.3 RESEARCH CONCLUSIONS

The final conclusions of this study will be drawn by answering the research questions that guided my study, namely:

Main research question

What are teachers' perceptions of the implementation of school readiness assessment instruments?

Secondary research questions

- What does school readiness entail?
- What does school readiness assessment entail?
- What are the general features of school readiness assessment instruments currently used in the South African context?
- How do teachers use the results from school readiness assessment instruments in Grade 1?
- What criteria should be featured in a school readiness assessment instrument?

First, I will answer the secondary research questions, which will subsequently lead to answering my main research question.

6.3.1 Secondary research question no. 1

What does school readiness entail?

School readiness entails a certain set of skills that a learner needs to master before the learner can enter the formal learning environment to succeed academically in Grade 1, and cope with the challenges they will face during the learning process. School readiness skills include the learners' health and physical abilities, social and emotional development, communication skills, cognitive abilities and approaches to learning. These skills should all be well developed so that the learner develops well and holistically. The learners need to use these skills and apply them in the learning process. School readiness support also includes the school's readiness to be equipped for their scholars who are at various levels of development.

6.3.2 Secondary research question no. 2

What does school readiness assessment entail?

School readiness assessment involves the process of assessing learners by using a school readiness assessment instrument for seeing what school readiness skills the learner has mastered and what skills still need attention. Looking at the research results and the literature, the importance of having a learner assessed for school readiness is valuable as it gives an idea of how the learner is progressing and what skills the learner still needs to master. By assessing learners for school readiness, the teacher can also use the results to plan intervention strategies to help the learner with skills that still needs to be mastered.

In some schools in South Africa the learners are assessed for school readiness at the end of Grade R. Other schools assess learners only if teachers feel it is necessary when worried about a learner's academic progress. A qualified occupational therapist usually does this using a specific school readiness assessment instrument. The reason for such assessment is for teachers to have guidance from accurately interpreted results to intervene advisedly when assisting a learner to develop skills have not yet been mastered but which facilitate improved learning.

6.3.3 Secondary research question no. 3

What are the general features of school readiness assessment instruments currently used in the South African context?

Unfortunately, the general features and criteria of appropriate school readiness assessment instruments for use in South African schools are unclear. The reason for this is because teachers are unable to see the physical school readiness assessment instrument that is administered to the learners. The teachers are very eager to see the instrument but unfortunately this is not possible because the instrument is not accessible for the teacher's use (see Section 4.5.3).

Teachers are only allowed to see the results from the school readiness assessment instrument when the learners' parents give consent to the occupational therapist. This is most concerning because the teachers do not know precisely what is being assessed and how it is assessed. Teachers should know what school readiness assessment instrument is used in the school and the skills applicable to the year and grade of the learner they are teaching. Another concerning aspect is that parents should give their consent for the teacher to see the results. If parents do not give consent, then the teacher remains uninformed about the learners' progress and not able to help the learner with skills the learner still needs to master. Teachers should be able to see the results to intervene and ensure the learner masters the skills before they enter the formal learning environment.

There are various school readiness assessment instruments used in South African schools to assess learners. Not one of the instruments are the same although they do assess most of the school readiness areas. Even though all three school readiness assessment instruments assess the same school readiness areas, of each area is dealt with differs. For instance, in health and physical development one school readiness assessment instrument will assess midline crossing where as the other instrument will not.

6.3.4 Secondary research question no. 4

How do teachers use the results from school readiness assessment instruments in Grade 1?

When teachers receive the results from a school readiness assessment instrument, they use the results to assist learners who are not ready for school to master the skills they still must master. Teachers develop intervention strategies and incorporate them into their educational programme to ensure the learner masters the skills before they enter Grade 1. The intervention strategies include activities for the learners to do that will develop the skills that they still need to master.

The teachers also develop extra homework programmes that they send home for parents to get involved and assist the learner to develop the skills that are lacking. Parents need to do these extra homework activities with the learner to ensure the learner develop the skills that are lacking. The problem with sending extra activities home for parents to do with the learner, is that parents do not always assist teachers by completing the activities with the learner. If parents do not assist teachers with this matter it can prevent or slow down the learners' development. It is very important that teachers and parents work together to ensure the learner develops all the necessary school readiness skills so the learner can enter the formal learning environment and succeed academically and cope with the tasks that they are going to face when they enter Grade 1.

6.3.5 Secondary research question no. 5

What criteria should be featured in a school readiness assessment instrument?

Teachers agree with the literature regarding what skills are essential to assess learners for school readiness namely: health and physical development, social and emotional development, communication skills, cognitive development and approaches to learning. The teachers from this study added that these skills should all be developed together to form the learners' holistic development. All the necessary school readiness skills form the learners' holistic development.

Health and physical development should be well developed before the learner can sit still to do academic tasks. It also assists the learner during the writing process by

holding a pencil and crossing the middleline when writing. The learner's social and emotional development should be well developed so that the learner can socialise with peers and the teachers as well as coping emotionally with tasks the learner will have to do in the formal learning environment. These become more and more difficult so the learner has to complete the tasks, try their best and not give up. Some tasks are done individually and some in groups with peers. Therefore, the learner must be able to communicate with peers to complete activities.

All learners has to be able to communicate in the same language with their peers and teachers use. A learner who does not understand the language of teaching, will find being at school very challenging, particularly when having to understand instructions and apply them to complete an activity. Understanding the language of teaching is closely linked to a learner's cognitive abilities. Cognitive abilities include the learner's ability to reason, remember, understand and solve problems. A learner must understand instructions given, remember what to do, know how to do it and find ways to solve problems during activities that are done in the formal learning environment. The criteria that a school readiness assessment instrument should include a measurement that shows the learner's ability to take the opportunities the teacher gives, to complete an activity by not giving up when the challenge is too difficult and to have a positive attitude towards learning and the learning environment.

6.3.6 Main Research Question

What are teachers' perceptions of the implementation of school readiness assessment instruments?

Criteria to be included in school readiness assessment instruments concern health and physical, social and emotional development, communication skills, cognitive development and approaches to learning that look at the learner's holistic development. These school readiness skills are vital to a learner's overall readiness for school and should be included in an assessment instrument. Teachers and occupational therapists who assess school readiness should explore various instruments and be sure the one they use one that includes all the necessary skills be ready to learn.

Figure 2.1 explains the process of school readiness assessment which was developed by McAfee and Leong (2007). Figure 5.2 was adapted from Figure 2.2 after all the data had been transcribed to explain the in-depth process used to develop the study's theoretical framework. The main research question is represented in this Figure 5.2.

The purpose of school readiness assessment is to see on what level the learner is and what skills the learner still needs to develop. There are six criteria a learner needs to develop such as health and physical development, social and emotional development, communication skills, approaches to learning, cognitive skills and the learners' holistic development. It is vital for a learner to be assessed in Grade R in the third school term. In severe cases, it is suggested that a learner must be assessed as soon as possible to see what skills still need to be developed and for the teacher to develop these necessary skills before the learner enters Grade 1.

Teachers can use school readiness assessment instruments to assess learners and to collect data about what skills still needs to be developed. Teachers can also recommend that a learner be assessed by an occupational therapist. It is vital that the report from a school readiness assessment instrument be on record for teachers to be able to see to assisting the learner. I recommend that teachers should be able to see the school readiness assessment instrument that was used by an occupational therapist to assess their learners. The teacher can then write her own report on what skills the learner needs to develop.

Teachers can use the results from the school readiness report to develop intervention programmes to assist the learner in developing these skills. If learners are assessed in the third term in Grade R it can also assist the Grade R teacher to intervene and assist the learner with developing the necessary skills before the learner enters Grade 1. The intervention programmes can then be incorporated in the educational programme to develop the skills. Parents should also be included in this process. They can assist the teacher in doing extra intervention programmes at home which will benefit the learner.

6.4 RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations can be made for policy makers, practitioners and further research:

6.4.1 Recommendations for policy makers

The teachers in the study stressed the importance of school readiness and the necessity for assessing learners for school readiness skills. Assessing learners for school readiness by using a school readiness assessment instrument can benefit teachers see the level the learners are at and what skills still need to be mastered (see Section 4.4.1 and Section 4.4.2).

Assessing learners for school readiness is not a compulsory activity in schools but schools choose to assess learners when the teacher is concerned about the learner's abilities (see Section 4.4.2). However, teachers recommend that it would benefit the learners if all learners are assessed for school readiness (see Section 4.4.2). Considering the importance of school readiness skills and school readiness assessment, it is recommended that policy makers develop a school readiness assessment instrument for teachers to use to assess learners. It is also recommended that all learners should be assessed at the end of Grade R using a school readiness assessment instrument because the results can be used to ensure that learner's school readiness skills are as well developed as is possible.

6.4.2 Recommendations for practitioners

Teachers suggest that assessing learners for school readiness is very important and by assessing learners for school readiness can give teachers a clear view of the learner's school readiness level (see Section 4.4.2). It is the responsibility of the teachers to ensure that all learners have mastered school readiness skills. They should speak up and let their opinions about assessing all learners be known. Teachers should implement school readiness assessment by making sure that it is a compulsory activity for all learners to be assessed by using a school readiness assessment instrument. Teachers can use a school readiness assessment instrument that does not need prior training. They could also develop their own school readiness assessment instrument according to the school readiness skills that they mentioned as very important (see Section 4.4.1).

The research participant teachers mentioned that they were not allowed to see the actual school readiness assessment instrument that occupational therapist has used to assess their learners for school readiness. Teachers are eager to see the

physical school readiness assessment instrument (see Section 4.4.3). They should be given the opportunity to see the physical school readiness assessment instrument to see precisely what skills the learner still needed to master. It is recommended that when an occupational therapist assessed for school readiness the teacher should be given permission to see the school readiness assessment instrument to know what the test says about the learner's abilities.

6.4.3 Recommendations for further research

According to my empirical research findings, teachers are expected to ensure that their learners have the necessary school readiness skills before they enter the formal learning environment. The teachers stressed that they do not know what school readiness skills are being assessed in a school readiness assessment instrument and how it is assessed. Teachers are very eager to see an actual school readiness assessment instrument (see Section 4.4.3). Accordingly, it is beneficial that a study should be conducted by another early childhood education researcher, in collaboration with Grade R and Grade 1 teachers, to investigate school readiness assessment instruments and the curriculum to ensure that what is implemented in schools according to the curriculum is being assessed by school readiness assessment instruments.

Similarly, an investigation can be conducted to develop school readiness assessment instruments can be developed by Grade R and Grade 1 teachers. It can be very useful for teachers to develop their own school readiness assessment instrument according to the school readiness skills that they develop during the school year. By doing this it can empower teachers by giving them the opportunity to develop their own school readiness assessment instrument to ensure that all learners have the necessary school readiness skills before they enter the formal learning environment.

6.5 CONCLUDING REMARKS

The purpose of my study was to investigate the criteria for a school readiness assessment instrument as a Grade 1 teacher in a typical South African school would perceive its application. Through studying accessible literature on school readiness and its assessment, I realised the importance of the topic. A framework for the

research was designed and data was collected, analysed and interpreted. The empirical research findings revealed that the teachers do not know what is being assessed in a school readiness assessment instrument although they knew what skills should be assessed. They felt that urgent intervention is needed to support teachers and promote school readiness and school readiness assessment.

The research findings cannot be generalised. However, numerous teachers in South Africa experience similar circumstances. Therefore intervention is widely needed in South African schools and an issue important to address. Not all schools use school readiness assessment instruments, although the teachers from these schools recommend this practice. I realise that intervention should be done urgently to develop such an instrument in line with the current curriculum used in South African schools. Teachers would then be able to measure their own learner's school readiness levels and determine whether they have the necessary school readiness skills or not.

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ADDENDA

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Addendum A

The Principal

_____ Primary School

Dear Mr/ Mrs _____

Requesting assistance with research on school readiness assessment instruments

I am currently completing my Masters degree at the University of Pretoria. I am busy with my dissertation regarding the criteria for school readiness assessment instruments. My study will include the exploration into various school readiness assessment instruments and how teachers use these instruments to assist learners who are not ready for school.

I am conducting a study on the contribution of school readiness assessment instruments to enhance teaching and learning in the foundation phase and being able to work in collaboration with teachers in the field is very important to me. I would like to interview the Grade 1 teachers at your school, since their participation in this research project can greatly enhance my understanding of the issue under investigation.

The purpose of my study is to explore school readiness assessment instruments and how Grade 1 teachers use the results from these instruments. I want to examine how schools go about choosing a school readiness assessment instrument which is suitable for their needs. Furthermore I want to determine the value of school readiness assessment results in assisting Grade 1 teachers to support learners who lack school readiness skills. I would like to conduct a focus group interview with your Grade 1 teachers and in doing so, create an opportunity for them to share their experiences regarding this issue with me.

Your participation in this research project is voluntary and you are free to decide not to participate or to withdraw at any time. You are welcome to ask questions about the study before participating or during the study and I will be happy to share the findings with you after the research is completed. All participants will remain anonymous. Neither the school, nor the teachers' names will be associated with the research findings in any way, and only the researcher will know identity of the school and the participants. The use of the data will be limited to this research project, as authorised by the University of Pretoria.

Thank you for your interest and participation in this study. I appreciate your time.

Yours sincerely

Miss M Yzel
ysielani@gmail.com

Dr J Van Heerden (supervisor)
judy.vanheerden@up.ac.za

AGREEMENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

I, _____, hereby agree that the Grade 1 teachers at my school may take part in the research project. I understand that the participation of my staff is voluntary and that they may withdraw at any time. I understand the purpose and procedure of the study.

Principal

Date

Addendum B

Grade 1 teachers

_____ Primary School

Dear Grade 1 teacher

Requesting assistance with research on school readiness assessment instruments

I am currently completing my Master's degree at the University of Pretoria. I am busy with my dissertation regarding the criteria for school readiness assessment instruments. My study will include the exploration into various school readiness assessment instruments and how teachers use these instruments to assist learners who are not ready for school.

As a Grade 1 teacher, you undoubtedly have valuable knowledge and experience in teaching and supporting your Grade 1 learners. I am conducting a study on the contribution of school readiness assessment instruments to teaching and learning in the foundation phase and being able to work in collaboration with teachers in the field is very important to me. Your participation in this research project can greatly enhance my understanding of the issue under investigation.

The purpose of my study is to explore school readiness assessment instruments and how Grade 1 teachers use the results from this instrument. I want to examine how schools go about choosing a school readiness assessment instrument which is suitable for their needs. Furthermore I want to determine the value of school readiness assessment results in assisting you as the Grade 1 teacher to support learners who lack school readiness skills. I would like to conduct a focus group interview with you and your Grade 1 colleagues and in doing so, create an opportunity for you to share your experiences regarding this issue with me.

Your participation in this research project is voluntary and you are free to decide not to participate or to withdraw at any time. You are welcome to ask questions about the study before participating or during the study and I will be happy to share the findings with you after the research is completed. All participants will remain anonymous. Your name will not be associated with the research findings in any way, and only the researcher will know your identity. The use of the data will be limited to this research project, as authorised by the University of Pretoria.

Thank you for your interest and participation in this study. I appreciate your time.

Yours sincerely

Miss M Yzel
ysielani@gmail.com

Dr J Van Heerden (supervisor)
judy.vanheerden@up.ac.za

AGREEMENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

I, _____, hereby agree to take part in an interview. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I may withdraw at any time. I understand the purpose and procedure of the study.

Grade 1 Teacher

Date

Addendum C

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Primary research question

What are teachers' perceptions of the implementation of school readiness assessment instruments?

	Focus group 1	Focus group 2	Focus group 3
Date	2 June 2016	10 August 2016	15 August 2016
Time	14:00	14:00	Own time
Place	School 1	School 2	School 3
Interviewees	One Grade 1 teacher, two Grade R teachers, Educational (Participants 1, 2, 3, 4).	Six Grade 1 teachers (Participants 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10).	One Grade 1 teacher, Grade R teacher and the Principal (Participants 11, 12, 13).

Interview questions

1. How vital is it for a learner to be ready for school?
2. Is school readiness dependent on a learner's age?
3. Which skills do you see as essential for a learner's school readiness?
4. How long does it take you to determine whether a learner is ready for school?
5. Should all learners be assessed for school readiness? Why?
6. Who are responsible for administering the school readiness assessment at your school?
7. When are the learners assessed for school readiness?
8. How are you notified of the results of the school readiness assessment?
9. How do you use the results of school readiness assessment to support learners who lack school readiness skills? How are the parents involved in this process?
10. Do you regard the school readiness assessment instrument that you use, as an effective tool in measuring school readiness?
11. Would you change anything to your current school readiness assessment instrument and why?

Addendum D

DATA: TRANSCRIBED AND ARRANGED ACCORDING TO INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

INTERVIEW QUESTION 1

How vital is it for a learner to be ready for school?

I said it is very important. All the skills that a learner needs to be school ready, is what is needed to be successful in Grade 1. Due to the increasing amount of work the Grade 1's have to do there is no time to go back and develop these skills if they are not developed before they come to Grade 1.

That is basically what I said as well. The work load required of Grade 1 is a lot. You can't go back, there is no time to go back and catch up Grade R skills.

I said most of the same thing. It is really important especially for the demands of work in Grade 1.

Me too - as well as socially and emotionally they need to be ready.

I said it is very important.

It is very important.

It is vital.

Very important.

Exceptionally important! If not then the foundation is not steady for the other building blocks to be built on.

School readiness is exceptionally important.

Very important, because otherwise he or she can't learn basic skills.

Very important. It is very difficult to send a Grade 1 child back to Grade R.

It is very important so the child can achieve academically in Grade 1. Otherwise the child is going to struggle with basic things in Grade 1.

There are certain skills that should be learned in Grade R. If the learner is not ready for school they are not going to develop in Grade 1.

INTERVIEW QUESTION 2

Is school readiness dependent on a learner's age?

I said I don't think so. It depends on their total holistic development. If they are emotionally, physically and sociologically ready I think they can go earlier. Or if they are not they can go later.

I said yes. Getting from yesterday what they said at the meeting a child needs to turn 7 irrespective of where they're at.

And then it's basically from the Grade 1 teacher that if they need to keep them back then they will make that decision.

But if it's not the Departments decision then what then? Do you still think they can only go then?

I would say in some cases it depends on the child.

On the intellectual development.

I agree.

I said the closer, not really the age, the closer them going to Grade 1, the more closer to the end of the year the better they will do better if you test them. Like early in the year if you test them. Not really age dependent but the closer they are to going to Grade 1 the better. It depends on the development of a child.

It is not dependent on an age. You can get a six year old that is ready, and you can get a seven year old.

And then you can get a five year old that is ready.

It depends on where they are with their development.

And what skills they have developed.

They can be behind emotionally but high up cognitively.

Not always, there are exceptions.

I do not believe that it is dependent on age.

Yes.

Yes.

Yes.

Yes definitely.

INTERVIEW QUESTION 3

Which skills do you see as essential for a learner's school readiness?

Following instructions.

Listening skills.

Okay so I've got a list. I said gross motor and fine motor, midline crossing, auditory and visual perception, language development, mathematical development, and emotional and social development. Because if all of these things aren't in place they won't be successful in Grade 1. Like with the gross motor if your posture and muscle tone isn't developed then you won't be able to sit the chair during the day. If you can't cross your midline you can't read and you can't write. Auditory and visual perception they won't be able to form letters the right way and recognise sounds.

So basically, whole child development. If it's not developed the child will fall out somewhere.

So it's basically a lot of different skills that has to be in place.

Language, but what is most important is language because they need to understand. Because if they don't understand you can't communicate, they cannot listen to instructions.

Language and listening skills, is also vital especially with the size of the classes.

Physical, fine motor, gross motor are very important for them.

Everything actually works together.

So, if you're asking for the most important I would say language. Because language has to do with listening skills.

Understanding and comprehension skills.

Gross and fine motor development, emotional readiness, language skills, social adaptability and obedience.

Independence, emotional readiness and basic knowledge.

Emotional stability, gross motor and fine motor skills.

Socialising skills, discipline, pencil grip, ability to sit, fine and gross motor skills.

Fine motor skills are very very important to cut and paste and colouring in. Socialising is also very important for Grade 1 to make friends.

Socially, gross motor and fine motor skills, and emotionally.

INTERVIEW QUESTION 4

How long does it take you to determine whether a learner is ready for school?

For me I just see the signs from the second term. Because then we already enter the formal programme so then it becomes clear for me as to what their capable of. As to what they can do and what they can't do. Especially with social as well.

And a new learner? Because we spoke about it and I said with a new learner you can't really assess before four to six weeks if it's a new Grade R learner. Because this one child that are new. If I had a month to say if they are ready, I would have said no. But now that we are going to our second month the children are just flying. They are doing so well. I don't think before four to six weeks you will be able to say whether they will be ready or not. Especially if there is emotional problems.

I said I take the school readiness report and then obviously out of that I can see whether the child is school ready or not. But children that didn't do the school readiness assessments, in Grade 1 we do baseline assessment. Out of baseline assessment we kind of have a very good idea. But by the end of the first term, because the first term is a lot of Grade R concepts, so by the end of the first term in Grade 1 you know whether the child is ready for school or not.

I would say when you get a child in Grade R class by the end of the first term we got a good idea.

Of their deficits.

And other areas that we need to work on.

I wouldn't say that you can tell in a couple of weeks.

Definitely not.

You need at least the first term, because they can change as well. When they come in they don't know you they still need to get used to you, they need to get confidence in you.

If they feel safe and secure then they will be able to communicate better.

And perform better.

And show you what they can do. You need to win them over first.

Especially a child that comes in the middle of the year and all of a sudden needs to get ready for school. You have to give him a few months.

The whole first term during teaching and the perceptual programme. But it is visible during the first few weeks.

About four months. Sometimes very quicker and sometimes longer.

Six to eight weeks minimum. Although the Department says within four weeks.

There is expected for us to decide within the first four weeks, but it makes it difficult for us to do Grade R work.

In the first term when they need to adapt from Grade R to Grade 1. At the end of Grade 1 we can decide. But if the child doesn't have the basic knowledge then within four to six weeks.

In the first week, especially if they child has major deficits or falling behind.

INTERVIEW QUESTION 5

Should all learners be assessed for school readiness? Why?

Yes

Yes

Yes, because you need a standard.

Also with being assessed you are able to decide is this learner able to work in a normal midstream school.

But then again, I said the example of this one girl I got in, she was referred to a psychologist, she couldn't even assess on anything in this school readiness test. And then my class the same thing for about three weeks then she started doing little things in my class and now she's one of the best in my class. But that is the odd ones. But you must have a standardized test.

I said it's important in Grade R depending on what time of the year they do it, if they do it in September then there is still time for them to see where they are, to work on that to get them school ready. And then I know that you guys do if there is one big problem where most of the children have a gap then you guys work it into the curriculum. In Grade 1 it is also important that I kind of know where the learners are if they come to me.

Teachers will know and if they have any issues then they will recommend surely.

If you are concerned about something then you refer the child. Maybe to an occupational therapist but a teacher should know.

Especially a Grade R teacher working with skills and are getting ready for school she will know immediately.

You don't feel that each one should go for a readiness test?

No.

No.

Not as a general rule, I don't think they should go for a school readiness test.

It is not a must but it is always a good thing and in some cases very necessary.

Definitely, sometimes you can only notice things by using a test.

If it is necessary or if the pre-primary suggests it.

If it's necessary and the pre-primary staff suggests it.

If it's necessary and if the pre-primary school suggests it.

Yes, to determine the skills that should be in place before they go to Grade 1.

INTERVIEW QUESTION 6

Who are responsible for administering the school readiness assessments at your school?

[Name].

She is the Occupational Therapist. And then I also do some of the tests but she does the majority.

We have a Grade R teacher that's qualified to do that. [Name] is qualified to do school readiness.

I can do it but the teachers does most of the assessments.

But the actual school readiness assessment, that's sort of official is done by either an OT [occupational therapist] or someone who has done the course. And [Name] is qualified to do that.

It is done by pre-primary staff. And it should be completed before learners go to Grade 1.

The pre-primary staff.

School psychologist.

The school psychologist.

Only with consent from the parents then the school psychologist can.

Pre-primary staff.

INTERVIEW QUESTION 7

When are the learners assessed for school readiness?

In September.

So it's compulsory?

No, we want it to be but it's not. Most of them do it.

Interestingly yesterday we were at a Departmental meeting for Grade R's. They want to bring in a sort of school readiness assessment for the teachers to do but in November to December.

But that's for the Grade 1 teachers to see on what level they are, that's the only reason they want to.

It's not an OT [occupational therapist] assessing them. When the OT [occupational therapist] assesses them they give recommendations. Like this child has this and they should rather go to an OT [occupational therapist]. Those tests are just for the Grade 1 teachers to know what the child can do.

Well, it is not a set rule. I mean it depends on the case. The ones that I do they've got to be five and a half or even six. It depends on the test that they do. But there is no set rule. They don't even have to do it.

But at the minimum age five and a half.

Last term of Grade R.

In pre-primary.

In Grade R.

In Grade R.

In Grade R, when the learner is five years old.

Grade R

INTERVIEW QUESTION 8

How are you notified of the results of the school readiness assessments? How do teachers find out if the learner is not school ready?

She comes two weeks later to school with the results but she also gets permission from the parents after she meets with them whether we can see the report.

Then she gives it to us.

And then I get the report.

We get a report from the person who's tested them and it is given to the parents. And usually, it gets emailed to the school. You get the results either from the parents or from the actual therapist who's done the testing.

Yes.

Only if the parents give consent.

I have never seen such information.

Through the therapist that completes the assessment.

INTERVIEW QUESTION 9

How do you use the results of school readiness assessments to support learners who lack school readiness skills? How are the parents involved in this process?

When we see there's general lack of skills like for example in general it is motor skills or fine motor skills then we work it into the planning. For the fourth term. And then it actually stays there then we start with those type of things in the first term.

And with parents, once they have the meeting with [Name] then she would give them activities. She would suggest they need to go for swimming and extra murals and stuff. And then she would give them exercises if they have to do activities with her. But if it's just with us then we incorporate it into the programme and give homework relating to that. But mostly the suggestions are you have to go for swimming, go for gymnastic, or you have to see the OT [occupational therapist].

They actually work quit well. Last year she said, because that's the way we work, we actually work those skills down to Grade RR and RRR. And she said there are not really a general lack of skills there were only general fall outs here and there.

And then when I see the parents in Grade 1 I look at the reports as well and if I know they can't recommend an OT [occupational therapist] then I kind of can go back to the reports and say listen it was recommended and I think it's really time that they go for OT [occupational therapist] or start something.

If it's done by an OT [occupational therapist] obviously they will recommend sessions. If it is for example, from me inside of the school I will tell the parents what is lacking and try to help them in that area.

So you do exercises with them?

Yes, we do extra work or extra classes and if you think it's in your capability otherwise I recommend them.

[Name] does on Tuesdays when her class is open take those learners that are lacking. So, she has gone out of her way to actually help them knowing that there is a deficit in areas. Not all the teachers will do that. And it's also affordability, we know if the parents are financially not able to and then assist them in that way of doing as much as we can in the class time.

And with that you need the parents support.

O definitely yes.

And you do a little home programme, send a home programme home. This is what we did on this Tuesday please practice these skills.

Parents need to give consent for their children to be assessed. The pre-primary staff makes appointments to discuss the results with parents and what should be done.

We only get the report from the pre-primary school, but never the results from the tests.

Only the report on how they are improving in sounds, fine and gross motor skills.

The pre-primary staff and the parents work together.

INTERVIEW QUESTION 10

Do you regard the school readiness assessment instrument that you use, as an effective tool in measuring school readiness?

I would say yes.

You know what I like as well is [Name] doing it. We just get the results and the results are very accurate in what we assess with the children as well. Because she is an Occupational Therapist she can see little things that we can't see. There are other people who just do it and don't really have a background. But I mean that it's just normal teachers doing a course and doing it, they don't really know to look for the finer details of child development that she can pick up.

And the thing is she is able to tell us in general what we need to focus on, what we can incorporate into our programme and then improves the next year. Because every year is a different thing, but then she comes back and tells us what we need to focus on or do extra things. To try and improve it every year.

I just want to add to that, in the holidays once a year she also has a little course with you where she shows you how to work that in. She shows them activities and ideas.

Yes.

Yes.

I have never seen the school readiness assessment test so I can't say.

INTERVIEW QUESTION 11

Would you change anything to your current school readiness assessment instrument? Why?

No, I don't think so.

I like my report that I do more because you can see exactly what they could and couldn't do. With [Name] one it's an OT [occupational therapist] report. She discusses obviously with the parents but we're not there for the discussion. So there is sometimes things that I would like more detail on. But it's not always in the report.

But I would actually like to see the test. The one that she's sitting and asking questions with. But because it's OT [occupational therapist].

But we are not allowed to see the test anyway. Unless a parent doesn't give consent we are not allowed to be in that meeting. We are not allowed to have it. Unless the parents give permission for every single person that is allowed to see it. There the test doesn't really matter because she gives us all the information.

It already covers everything. I can't speak for the others and of course there are many. You also have to see it in relation to the child. You must always remember testing a pre-schooler that the child on that day might not be feeling well. And just not wants to cooperate. So, to test only once as far as I know is not right. We must set it against the child, the child's background.

And the history. The whole emotional stability of that child.

Has the child even eaten that morning? That can even play a role.

So, it's a holistic approach it's not just how they perform on that day. You will monitor as you go along and see this one is not coping. If it's getting too long, weary and he's not producing his best or to his potential then give him a break.

I mean he could for example not count on that day where as you know he can count. So, if you don't know the child you are going to say that child can't count. And that's not the case.

Unfortunately that once of the OT [occupational therapist] or whoever is the only hour and a half or two hours or whatever long it takes and then you can feed of that. It is not a hundred percent reflection of that child's potential abilities. Because a teacher has worked with that child far more than the actual therapist.