International Journal of Learning and Teaching

Volume 16, Issue 2, (2024) 74-84

www.ij-lt.eu

Exploring teachers' understanding and conception of Grade R readiness development

Mapule Yvonne Segooa*, University of South Africa, Pretoria, South Africa
Maphetla Magdeline Machaba, University of South Africa, Pretoria, South Africa.

Suggested Citation:
Segooa, M.Y. & Machaba, M.M. (2024). Exploring teachers' understanding and conception of Grade R readiness development. *International Journal of Learning and Teaching, 16*(2), 74-84. https://doi.org/10.18844/ijlt.v16i2.9229

Received from May 2, 2023; revised from October 12, 2023; accepted from March 25, 2024.

Selection and peer review under the responsibility of Assoc Prof. Dr. Jesus Garcia Laborda, Alcala University, Spain.

Abstract

Grade R readiness is a critical component of education that may be a future prerequisite to attain quality learning outcomes in post-Grade R classes. Hence, teachers' understanding of readiness may hinder or promote the quality of performance in their classrooms. This article was extracted from the study titled, 'The impact of Grade R readiness on Grade 1 teaching', which aimed to explore teachers' understanding of the concept of readiness as an instrument for developing learners' abilities in Grade R for Grade 1 preparation. The study was conducted in a natural setting in the Limpopo Province of South Africa by interviewing four Grade R teachers. The study adopted the qualitative interpretivism approach with data being generated through face-to-face semi-structured interviews, document analyses, and observations. Findings revealed that the teachers had different understandings of the concept of readiness which had a negative impact because teachers were unable to display their competencies and understanding of developing readiness within the Foundation Phase environment. This denied them the opportunity to effect the successful implementation of processes that promote readiness. It is recommended that teachers utilize learning planners and resource kits written in Sepedi as their home language.

Keywords: Grade R; grade R readiness; teachers; understanding

* ADDRESS FOR CORRESPONDENCE: Mapule Yvonne Segooa , University of South Africa, Pretoria, South Africa
E-mail address: mapule.segooa@ul.ac.za

1. Introduction

The purpose of this study was to obtain an in-depth understanding of how teachers understand the concept of readiness, and how teachers' knowledge of readiness impacts successful Grade R transition to Grade 1. This study is based on my experiences as a deputy principal (DP), head of department (DH), supervisor, curriculum manager, and teacher in the Foundation Phase, which led to the discovery that Grade R learners proceed unprepared to Grade 1. The teachers' conceptualization of readiness differs even though they believe that it is important for Grade R learners to be prepared before entering Grade 1. According to the resource kit provided by the National Department of Basic Education, Grade 1 learners were supposed to read and write the phonic sound in Grade R, which was largely not the case. The different conceptions (or misconceptions) of readiness had a negative impact on Grade R readiness development such that teachers' implementation in developing readiness in their classes was general. Erasmus et al., (2016) attest that the majority of Grade 1 learners in South Africa were not ready to transition into the formal education sector which can be generally attributed to teachers' misconception of the concept of readiness. in support, Kaufman, (2017), agrees that the concept of readiness is complicated and based on different views influenced by political, social, and cultural perspectives established beyond society. De Jager (2020) defines readiness as being two-fold: learning readiness and school readiness - both play a critical role in developing learners holistically.

The current Grade R curriculum included in CAPS together with the Resource Kit with its stipulated guidelines (SADBE, 2019) were used as readiness tools to ensure readiness development. However, the standards and requirements of these documents are not implemented effectively to develop learners' readiness. De Witt (2017) asserts that preparing children for formal school requires pedagogical intervention to broaden their range of knowledge, skills, and values through the use of their different senses (e.g., tactile, visual, and auditory). As I perused the Resource Kit, I discovered different strategies to stimulate learners' senses and latent abilities that play a major role in developing Grade R readiness. Venter (2022) contends that readiness is a stage of holistic development where an individual can understand and grasp those concepts and skills that have been deemed necessary for a child of a specific age to attain. Similarly, De Jager (2020) emphasizes that "readiness to learn does not match a specific age that the child is ready for experiences, tasks, and skills that match his/her age". Presently, the challenge is how teachers' understanding of readiness influences Grade R learners' readiness. Teachers in their responses conceptualized readiness based on their understandings and experiences of school and learning readiness as a process to enhance readiness.

Chorrojprasert (2020) reiterates that readiness can be enhanced by encouraging learners to use their senses to explore a wide variety of concrete experiences as stipulated in the Resource Kit and the CAPS policy. Since learners' readiness is crucial to predict their future success, their barriers to achieving successful academic outcomes should be circumvented to enhance school readiness (Musonda & Matafwali, 2023). Hence, the following research question was emerged to address the phenomenon under investigation:

1.1. Theoretical framework

This study selected the ecological systems theory by Bronfenbrenner & Evans (2000) as a framework because it focuses on human development. Soyer (2019) believes that human development is a lifelong process that considers individuals' understanding of their environment and their interaction with the said environment. According to the systems theory, the microsystem is the home environment, and the mesosystem (school environment) is where the child is in contact with parents, teachers, peers, and caregivers. The ecological systems theory relates to the learner's key domains of development (social, physical, emotional, cognitive, psychosocial, and language) aspects as key to human development (De Witt, 2017). It promotes psychosocial wellness by regulating the interaction and interrelationships of learners. Rasheedah et al., (2019) state that the microsystem and the mesosystem explore the interconnection of children with those around them (teachers, peers, siblings, parents, and the community) which can influence both positive and negative reactions through language usage, social interactions, physical activities, and cognitive tasks. Thus, if learners are not well-developed at home, their normal development will be affected (Yzel, 2017).

Ferreira et al., (2018) state that the application of the ecological systems theory concerning Grade R readiness explains the interrelationships and interactions within systems that can either hamper or encourage learner development. Factors influencing the quality of interconnections are complex and include situations in schools, local communities, classrooms, and families. In addition, time factors determine maturation and development in the specific environment.

Grade R teachers should develop Grade R learners to be ready for Grade 1 teaching and learning. De Witt (2017) believes the development of readiness could be achieved when a child as a total being can adapt successfully to the learning and teaching processes in the school environment. The exosystem represents the informal and formal social environments that indirectly influence learners but have a significant effect on them (Elliott & Davis, 2020). Studies reveal that since a child is seen as the beginning of the social system within the ecological system, their readiness is influenced by attitudes, beliefs, norms, values, cultures, and socio-economic conditions within the environment (Elliot & Davis, 2020). Hence, the development processes of Grade R learners, and how they interact with the different systems, play a major role in their holistic development.

Since holistic development entails the acquisition of intellectual, emotional, spiritual, physical, and social skills, Bronfenbrenner & Evans (2000) ecological systems theory is in line with the practices of holistic education which involves people, time, contexts, and circumstances of the interacting systems. Thus, holistic development requires harmony between the domains of development and the developmental context which involves the biological, cognitive, emotional, psychosocial, and psychological changes that occur as a child progresses from conception through to early childhood, and then to the end of adolescence.

Moreover, Cherry (2020) maintains that the holistic development of a child is influenced by sociocultural, cognitive, behavioral, attachment, social learning, and psychosocial elements. These factors are significant for Grade R learners, especially in their development stages when holistic development is most wanted for the smooth transition to Grade 1. Theories on needs by Maslow (1954) thus play a key role in developing Grade R readiness. A holistic approach to education offers the opportunity to design formal education systems that promote much more than skilled individuals that satisfy and encourage richer forms of education with the promise of richer human experiences for both the individual and society.

1.2. Literature review

Readiness, described as a complex concept (De Witt, 2017), is generally defined according to a specific context. This is because teachers, politicians, and parents interpret readiness according to their beliefs, experiences, insights, and views (Munnik & Smith, 2019). Kaufman (2017) attests that parents understand readiness in Grade R for entry into Grade 1 as counting ability, object naming, and letter identification; while Munnik and Smith (2019) believe that teachers in schools interpret readiness as learning abilities that will assist learners to improve the outcomes of their learning program. Mcllroy (2018) mentions that there is no specific method to measure readiness because all learners are unique, have different degrees of development, and have different weaknesses and strengths. Mcllroy (2018) deduces that readiness is determined by how children interact, behave, and cope in their daily routines.

Similarly, Venter, (2022) suggests that readiness is a stage of total development where an individual can understand and grasp those concepts and skills that have been deemed necessary for a child of a specific age to attain. Bhise and Sonawat (2016) add that school readiness is understood as the skills and characteristics children should acquire for effective learning in the learning environment. De Jager (2020) emphasizes that "readiness to learn does not match a specific age the child is ready for experiences, tasks, and skills that match his/her age". Similarly, Oosthuizen & Mokoena (2016) purport that readiness is "bidirectional", implying that readiness stems from two directions: learning readiness and school readiness. Bhise and Sonawat (2016) elaborate that "[r]eadiness is more than the basic knowledge of language and maths. Readiness expectations should include all areas such as the physical, cognitive, social, and emotional competencies [including] positive attitudes towards learning".

In Argentina, a child enters a childhood education program without the consideration of his/her socio-economic background. Numerous learners are admitted to primary education without readiness capabilities, so they end up struggling to cope with their learning and consequently drop out, underperform, or repeat classes. Similarly, in Germany and Lebanon, readiness is hindered through under-preparedness. In the USA, school readiness is judged by communication skills, social development, and health and physical development in a learning context that is adjusted to suit the child's learning (Pekdogan & Akgul, 2017).

The ECCDE curriculum is aimed at developing learners' dexterity and posture, psychological well-being for self-actualization, and physical health and motor activities. Learners from the age of three to five in the ECD curriculum are encouraged to explore nature, music, and art, and develop creativity; these are personality-building and social interaction opportunities that lead to the holistic development of the child. As such, ECCD is aimed at opportunities for young Nigerians to get a Head Start in life. In Jamaica, Harries-Mortley (2019) attests that readiness in preschools and Grade 1 should be prioritized by focusing on skills like speaking, observation, role-playing, and listening to improve learning in a vibrant classroom environment.

The migration of Grade R from the LSDS to the LDoE in South Africa exposed the challenges regarding Grade R readiness; hence, Minister Angie Motshekga's (2019) directive of implementing a two-year ECD plan for schooling before Grade 1. This shift of responsibility regarding ECD from the Department of Social Development (DSD) to the Department of Basic Education (DBE) generally engendered positive results. Motshekga, (2019) stated that she remains committed to the rolling- out of high-quality childhood learning programs by offering two years of universal and compulsory ECD education.

1.2.1. What does readiness imply?

Stevenson (2019) believes that school readiness at the kindergarten stage should focus on communities, educators, policymakers, families, and politicians. However, Stevenson (2019) acknowledges that nationally, there are no clear definitions of school readiness as an important aspect of the development of readiness for children in Grade R. Studies by UNICEF prioritize SDG 4 as the key target for the development of school readiness in ECD classes. The focus is to ensure that all learners are taught by well-trained teachers who provide compulsory quality education to learners in primary and ECD schools, as well as one-year free primary education for all learners. This idea implies that the goal is to enable sustainable development to ensure that all learners in preprimary schools have access to care and quality ECD. Moreover, the strategy for improving teaching and learning outcomes was through ensuring the delivery of quality preprimary education to all learners by well-equipped educators.

Finland and Sweden share the same focus concerning SDG 4, as both countries believe that sustainability promotes justice for all children. Both countries believe that quality practice is based on a policy enacted by early childhood educators who adopt a holistic approach as a means of delivering quality teaching and learning in ECD classes (Engdahl & Furu, 2022). Similarly, in Botswana, to ensure that learners are school-ready, the focus is on ECD care, where the education policy directs the development process by pursuing a holistic approach that considers learners' needs, degree of readiness, and healthy growth for primary education. To strengthen readiness needs and to ensure quality ECD and care, play-based learning is prioritized. In addition, according to Davin (2020), the focus of school readiness is on the total development of a child which includes comprehension and acquiring relevant skills and knowledge required for their specific age.

In South Africa, Stevenson's (2019) study reveals that "by considering a holistic approach to school readiness, a child's development is not isolated to mastering one domain to be ready for school". The DBE (SADBE, 2019) recommended specific criteria to gauge school readiness such as pre-literacy, knowledge of following oral instruction, recognizing own name when writing and reciting rhymes, and pre-numeracy with a focus on knowledge of colors, one-to-one counting to five or 10, and knowing basic shapes. In addition, De Witt (2017) proposes that determining Grade R readiness includes emotional, social, physical, cognitive, and normative readiness.

1.2.2. The importance of readiness

Since this study was about the impact of Grade R readiness on Grade 1 teaching and learning, I deemed it necessary to understand the significance of Grade R readiness according to different countries' perspectives. Studies conducted in Poland revealed that Polish parents acknowledge the importance of readiness and believe that readiness is not based only on cognitive development but on the skills and knowledge gained through the partnership between teachers and parents (Michalska et al., 2018). In support, Michalska et al., (2018) agree that cordial parent-teacher relationships are critical for shaping the readiness of Grade R learners.

In Mexico, the importance of Grade R was demonstrated by the fact that all parents send their three-to-four-year-old children to preschool for quality learning (Van der Berg & Jacobs, 2018). In Uruguay, pre-schooling is compulsory for learners aimed at enhancing school readiness (Van der Berg & Jacob, 2018). Studies conducted in the USA by the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) to measure the importance of Grade R readiness used the sampling system (WSS) to determine the social, linguistic, and cognitive skills of all learners in the pre-school phase (Reynolds et al., 2011).

ECD is promoted to enhance mutual dependence, obedience, sharing, cooperation, fear of God, social etiquette, and respect such that children are taught not to interfere in adult discussions, and how to sit, greet, and eat. In Mozambique, studies reveal that learners who attend preschool outshine their non-preschool peers in behavioral, fine motor, cognitive, emotional, and problem-solving qualities. However, in Botswana, though Grade R is regarded as being an important phase, the language gap has been a major obstacle that discourages learners from attending school (Mokibelo, 2015). In South Africa, according to Oosthuizen & Mokoena (2016), the CAPS guidelines concerning Grade R readiness suggest certain assessment standards that need to be achieved by the end of the Grade R year. These assessment standards are adapted and aligned to Grade 1 requirements which include the attainment of normative, affective, cognitive, linguistic, physical, and socio-cultural skills to be ready and well-grounded to enter the formal schooling stage.

Additionally, Munnik and Smith (2019) confirm that Grade R readiness is viewed as a crucial foundation stage that contributes to the smooth transition from Grade R to Grade 1. However, barriers such as professional development, teachers' qualifications, and infrastructure hamper learner enrolment and readiness in Grade R. Since children are not naturally born to be ready for Grade R, they need to be exposed and developed in a context that fosters the acquisition of relevant life-skills. In Poland, there are highly qualified educators, a well-structured education system, and tried-and-tested teaching approaches that are adapted to suit the diverse abilities of all Grade R learners (Mishalka et al., 2018). An integrated approach is aimed at enhancing support and care for all young learners in the community to ensure their holistic development and to offer them a foundation to succeed in formal schooling years.

From the above assertions, it is clear that readiness is influenced by various aspects that extend far beyond Grade 1. Kabiru (2019) believes that children who attend preprimary education centers are more likely to enter formal school on time, less likely to drop out or repeat grades, and more likely to complete primary and secondary school education. Additionally, if children receive the right stimulation and exposure to discover themselves through free play activities during this Grade R year, then the attainment of cognitive and physical skills (among others) accelerates school readiness (Oosthuizen & Mokoena 2016). Moreover, De Witt (2017) states that in Grade R, children must reach a certain level that would enable them to display sound behavior and demonstrate relevant skills for successful daily living. Lastly, Polat and Yavuz (2016)) advise that the quality of ECD is developed categorically through successions in learning spheres, but opportunities may be hampered if the learners never get to attend preschool.

1.3. Purpose of study

The significance of this study is to explore teachers' understanding and conception of Grade R readiness development. To address the research aim, the question below guided the study.

- What is the teacher's understanding and conception of Grade R readiness development?

The paper was structured such that it would provide the context of the study and its relevance based on the topic as directed by the research question. The study adopted the ecological systems theory as a lens to understand how teachers conceptualize readiness. Studies presented in the literature review were based on global, African, and South African contexts presenting conceptualization of readiness. The methodologies applied to engender an incisive understanding of the phenomenon under investigation were based on the research question, the selected sites, sampling, research design, and analysis of data. Data was collected by conducting semi-structured interviews, observations, and data analyses to reveal findings elicited from the responses of participants that led to recommendations.

2. Methods and materials

The qualitative case study research method was adopted for this study because it was suitable as it addresses the scientific challenges and real-life problems in society (Aspers & Corte, 2019). Also, a case study design was appropriate as it enabled me to access deeper insight into Grade R readiness (Creswell, 2015) through the participants who provided lived experiences of their real world. This case study further assisted me in measuring how teachers assess Grade R readiness by utilizing appropriate tools. Also, the main research question was linked to the teachers' methods and strategies they used daily in their different classes to determine the readiness level of each learner. The experience of the selected participants and their verbal responses to the research questions assisted us in understanding the realities in Grade R classrooms regarding readiness. Due to unique participants' situations in real-life settings, they constructed a sense of their real-life world and adapted to such worlds.

This study was conducted in the Limpopo Province of South Africa (RSA). Two schools from two different Circuits in the Capricorn South District of the Capricorn Municipality were involved. Both schools are ranked quintile three. School A is situated in a rural area, while School B is situated in a suburban area. School A was chosen by the district to pilot the Molteno Project for the development of readiness and training of teachers for the development of readiness during indoor and outdoor activities, but School B was not selected as part of the Molteno Project.

2.1. Participants

In this study, a purposive sampling technique was employed to select participants. According to McMillan and Schumacher (2014), qualitative sampling entails selecting information-rich cases for an in-depth study. Ames et al., (2019) advise that when employing purposive sampling, the researcher needs to select participants who would provide relevant, rich information pertaining to the research question and the topic. In this study, four teachers who taught Grade R learners were selected as participants because they facilitated and developed learners' readiness at their respective schools. The sample size was limited but manageable as it allowed the researchers to expeditiously collect sufficient data from the participants. The participating teachers had different experiences regarding developing Grade R readiness at their various schools. Both schools were situated in rural villages and had an intake of children with and without preschool experience. For confidentiality purposes pseudonyms/codes were assigned to protect participants' identities and information: Participant 1 (P1), Participant 2 (P2), Participant 3 (P3), and Participant 4 (P4).

2.2. Data collection procedure

Data was generated through semi-structured interviews. Petty et al., (2015) state that conducting "semi-structured interviews involve a few predetermined areas of interest with possible prompts to help and guide the conversation". Additionally, such an interview "is superbly suited for several valuable tasks" (Newcomer et al., 2015). Prior determiners helped the researchers to facilitate the conversation between them and the participants. In this study, open-ended questions helped me to delve deeply into the social and personal backgrounds of the participants. Questions were repeated (when necessary) so that the interviewee could correctly interpret them before deciding how to answer them. Probing and prompting techniques were used to attain clarity or for elaboration, which helped me to draw subtle distinctions between the participants'

responses and their views such that in-depth, rich information was obtained from Grade R teachers. After the audio-recorded interviews (with consent), all responses were transcribed verbatim for member-checking (De Vos et al., 2014). All the interviews were analyzed according to set procedures such that similarities and differences were easily recognized and noted. Further, the researcher obtained an understanding of the participating teachers' attitudes toward developing readiness, including how they assessed readiness in their Grade R classes. The consent forms which were voluntarily signed by the selected participants before the interviews contained all the finer details of all research processes, including the exit option. All names, school sites, and responses were kept anonymous through the allocation of pseudonyms/codes to protect identities and participants' information.

2.3. *Data collection instrument*

Data was generated through interviews, observations, and document analysis. The interviews were used to gain an in-depth understanding of the teachers' knowledge of Grade R readiness and their skills applied to achieve full readiness for Grade R learners in preparation for entry into Grade 1. Interviews involved teacher-participants from schools A and B. Each participant was interviewed for about 30 minutes on a one-on-one basis by using open-ended questions on an interview schedule. Also, classroom observations were conducted to glean data from directly noting classroom behavior in terms of developing learners' readiness skills. Moreover, in both schools, document analysis was conducted by perusing the relevant documents that assisted me in identifying and determining how DBE policy documents and resource kits influenced readiness in Grade R classes. Additionally, lesson plans and learners' workbooks assisted me in gaining a comprehensive understanding of teachers' plans to develop readiness.

2.4. Data analysis

Thematic analysis was used to analyze data as it was deemed relevant to a qualitative study. In this case, the responses from participants were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed. Conclusions were drawn based on authentic evidence and reasoning from raw data (Hunter et al., 2019). This method of data analysis involved "dismantling, segmentation, and assembling data to form meaningful patterns to draw inferences" (Hunter et al., 2019). After transcription, the collected data from participants was interpreted, synthesized, and then combined with all other relevant information into a single unit. McMillan and Schumacher (2014) view data analysis as "primarily an inductive process of organizing data into categories and identifying patterns and relationships among categories. Even though the analytic methods were different, their induction procedures and techniques were the same. After categorizing the collected data, themes, and sub-themes were identified.

3. Results

This section presents the findings that were revealed in line with the research questions of the study.

3.1. Teachers' conceptualization of readiness

We asked the research question: How do you conceptualize readiness in your class? This question was aimed at getting an in-depth understanding of how teachers conceptualize readiness, and how their understanding impacts their development of readiness in their different classes. This is how the participants responded:

> ***P1:*** *Eh, the child is ready when she/he can answer questions related to their age, answering simple questions, fasten a button, tie shoes, color inside the circle, repeat and retell the story, start the story, and end the story where I ended it. Recognize the color and be able to copy the numbers one-to-ten and read them and recognize sounds because in Grade 1 they need to combine sounds to form consonants.*
>
> ***P2:*** *Readiness, we talk about learners who are between 5–and 6 years old, and who can do with or without your help, count to 10, or one to five. Readiness is about learners' understanding of instructions and knowing how to imitate, tell, and do what you request them to do. They should be able to recognize the alphabet. They should be able to socialize with*

> *other learners. They should be able to tie their shoes and should be vocally developed. They should be able to button their shirts. They should be able to follow instructions without help. Hold pencil traces on the dotted lines, express themselves answers, and socialize with other peers and teachers. Write names, surnames, and numbers in words and differentiate between big letters and small letters of the alphabet. Write what they see on the wall, cut and paste, paint, and color inside the shape.*
>
> ***P3**: Mm, readiness is about the development of young learners cognitively, physically, emotionally, and socially. Read pictures, answer questions, hop, sequence story events, stand, grip pencil, and recognize shapes and colors. Socialize with other learners and develop confidence. Ehh! The learner can respond to questions, read posters, jump using one leg forward and backward, and ask permission when they want to visit the restroom. Wash their hands when they return from the restroom.*
>
> ***P4:** Eish! Readiness is about the development of the learner in totality, emotionally, mentally, socially, and physically, when they can sing songs to develop language, use small muscles, gross muscles, and eye-hand coordination, hold a pencil, draw with crayons from left to right, jump on the jungle gym and as they jump the gross motor muscles are developed. Again, squeeze play dough to make numbers, write their names, and colors, and when they can use the alphabet in Sepedi. The children are ready for Grade 1 if they can solve problems on their own.*

All the participants had a common understanding of readiness, even though they explained this concept from different perspectives. All participants' understanding of readiness entailed what learners could do by using fine and gross motor skills such as jumping, tying shoelaces, squeezing dough, painting, and coloring. Also, P1, P2, and P3's interpretation of readiness entailed how to retell and sequence stories, imitating and telling, and reading posters, while P1 and P2's response was about learners' writing of numbers from 1 to 10 and their names. In addition, P2, P3, and P4's understanding of readiness involved emotional, social, physical, cognitive, confidence, and general learner development. Furthermore, P1, P2, and P3's thinking was associated with sounds and letters of the alphabet. Moreover, P1 and P2 mentioned learners' ages while P4 believed readiness could be seen in learners' problem-solving abilities.

4. Discussion

All participants' understanding of the concept of readiness was supported by Mcilroy (2018) who believes that readiness is not scientific since it is measured and established by the teachers who develop learners' understanding of Grade R activities to evaluate capabilities that learners will possess when they progress to their next level of learning. Also, P2, P3, and P4's view of holistic development affirms that readiness focuses on developing children's motor activities, self-actualization, physical health, and psychological well-being. Concerning P1 and P2's views based on age, Kaufman (2017) argues that readiness is more about children's thinking abilities, enthusiasm, and curiosity when engaging in new activities and spaces. De Jager (2020) attests that readiness involves children imbibing skills and knowledge for developing holistically. Oosthuizen & Mokoena (2016) summarized the different interpretations of readiness as being two-fold, implying that it incorporates school and learning readiness. Bronfenbrenner & Evans (2000) ecological systems theory validates that all systems have an impact on learner development of readiness as expressed by McLeod (2020) who claims that development is a progressive process based on the complicated commonality between the bio-psychological human organism and active interaction.

Wang et al., (2023) confirm that readiness is about the teachers' preparedness, vision, ability, and understanding when teaching in the classroom, while Jahreie (2023) maintains that readiness is understood and used in two distinct ways that need explicit expectation situations, adding that readiness includes language development in the early grades. The findings reveal that the participants' understanding of readiness is determined by language development through reading stories, identifying sounds and alphabets, and responding to instructions. Hence, readiness "is actively challenged and negotiated on an implicit or

explicit level between actors in everyday lives inside and outside kindergartens" (Jahreie, 2023). Emanating from the findings, it was revealed that teachers and parents' perception of readiness was misunderstood in terms of the concept of readiness.

Hence, Jahreie, (2023) contends that a misconception or a misunderstanding of a concept that an expert has agreed upon confuses the concept itself. Jamluddin et al., (2023) state that a misconception is usually influenced by experiences and contexts that individuals find themselves in. This was evident from the participants' responses. However, Wang et al., (2023) warn that inadequate readiness may contribute to the gap between rapid advances and unsatisfactory progress in education.

5. Conclusion

This study explores how teachers understand and conceptualize readiness in the teaching and learning environment. The study revealed that teachers have a common understanding of the conceptualization of reading. They all viewed readiness as the holistic development of the learner holistically. Their understanding of readiness emanated from different aspects like reading stories, counting from 1 to 10, recognizing colors, sounds, letters, and consonants, and following instructions. They also believed that if learners can imitate, express themselves verbally, color shapes, and ask for permission to visit restrooms then such learners are ready to transition to Grade 1. Teachers must understand the concept of readiness to develop learners' potential based on their experiences

The teachers understanding and conceptualization of readiness should be based on the DBE's Resource Kit which consists of relevant resources that teachers need to use to enhance readiness in Grade R classes. It consists of 20 theme posters, two Big Books with 12 themes linked to the stories, a Teacher's Guide, lesson plans, assessment activities, a DVD with songs, and guidance on how to develop learning materials. For learners' learning, teachers received learners' support materials consisting of workbooks, exercise books, drawing books, pencils, pencil crayons, wax crayons, paint brushes, glue sticks, and pairs of scissors. These activities that teachers are expected to implement and use to develop learners' readiness will ensure that teachers reach their goals of developing learners' readiness and increasing their understanding of the concept of readiness. Hence, teachers must read the Resource Kit and implement what is expected in each theme.

The limitation of this study is linked to the sample size used which included two schools with two teachers from each school. Although this small sample size enabled me to make sense of how readiness is promoted and to get an in-depth understanding of how teachers conceptualize readiness, it prevented generalizations from being made to other schools and Districts. Since it was the fourth term, these schools were busy with end-of-year administrative duties, which caused time constraints and limited data collection processes. I managed to access both schools as they were not affected by final exams as they used the continuous assessment approach.

Acknowledgments: This paper was extracted from the doctoral thesis of Mapule Yvonne Segooa titled: *The Impact of Grade R Readiness on Grade 1 Teaching,* which was submitted at the University of South Africa

References

Ames, H., Glenton, C., & Lewin, S. (2019). Purposive sampling in a qualitative evidence synthesis: A worked example from a synthesis on parental perceptions of vaccination communication. *BMC Medical Research Methodology*, *19*, 1-9. https://link.springer.com/article/10.1186/s12874-019-0665-4

Aspers, P., & Corte, U. (2019). What is qualitative in qualitative research? *Qualitative Sociology*, *42*, 139-160. https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s11133-019-9413-7

Bhise, C. D., & Sonawat, R. (2016). Factors influencing school readiness of children. *Research Journal of Recent Sciences*, *5*(5), 53-58.

Bronfenbrenner, U., & Evans, G. W. (2000). Developmental science in the 21st century: Emerging questions, theoretical models, research designs and empirical findings. *Social development*, *9*(1), 115-125. https://edisciplinas.usp.br/pluginfile.php/2091427/mod_resource/content/1/Nature-Nurture%20Reconceptualized%20in%20Developmental%20Perspective%20A%20Bioecological%20Model.pdf

Segooa, M.Y. & Machaba, M.M. (2024). Exploring teachers' understanding and conception of Grade R readiness development. *International Journal of Learning and Teaching, 16*(2), 74-84. https://doi.org/10.18844/ijlt.v16i2.9229

Cherry, L. (2021). *Conversations that make a difference for children and young people: Relationship-focused practice from the frontline*. Routledge. https://www.taylorfrancis.com/books/mono/10.4324/9781003124375/conversations-make-difference-children-young-people-lisa-cherry

Chorrojprasert, L. (2020). Learner Readiness--Why and How Should They Be Ready? *LEARN Journal: Language Education and Acquisition Research Network*, *13*(1), 268-274. https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1242968

Creswell, J.W. (2015). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approach.* 6th edition. London: Sage.

Davin, R. J. (Ed.). (2020). *Handbook for Grade R teaching*. Pearson Education South Africa.

De Jager, M. (2020). School readiness: Does age matter? https://www.mindmoves.co.za/2022/04/04/24/school-readiness-does-age-matter/

De Vos, A.S., Strydom, H., Fouche, C.M. & Delport, C.S.L. (2014). *Research at grassroots: For the social sciences and human service professions.* 4th edition. Pretoria: Van Schaik.

De Witt, M.W. (2017). *The young child in context: A psycho-social perspective.* Pretoria: Van Schaik.

DiCicco-Bloom, B., & Crabtree, B. F. (2006). The qualitative research interview. *Medical education*, *40*(4), 314-321. https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/pdf/10.1111/j.1365-2929.2006.02418.x

Elliott, S., & Davis, J. M. (2020). Challenging taken-for-granted ideas in early childhood education: A critique of Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory in the age of post-humanism. *Research handbook on childhoodnature: Assemblages of childhood and nature research*, 1119-1154. https://link.springer.com/content/pdf/10.1007/978-3-319-67286-1_60.pdf

Engdahl, I., & Furu, A. C. (2022). Early childhood education: A vibrant arena in the complex transformation of society towards sustainability. *International Journal of Early Childhood*, *54*(1), 1-12. https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s13158-022-00323-0

Erasmus, M., Janse van Rensburg, O., Pienaar, A. E., & Ellis, S. (2016). The effect of a perceptual–motor intervention programme on learning readiness of Grade R learners from South African deprived environments. *Early child development and care*, *186*(4), 596-611. https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/03004430.2015.1048245

Ferreira, A. F., Zimmermann, H., Santos, R., & Von Wehrden, H. (2018). A social–ecological systems framework as a tool for understanding the effectiveness of biosphere reserve management. *Sustainability*, *10*(10), 3608. https://www.mdpi.com/2071-1050/10/10/3608

Hunter, D., McCallum, J., & Howes, D. (2019). Defining exploratory-descriptive qualitative (EDQ) research and considering its application to healthcare. *Journal of Nursing and Health Care*, *4*(1). https://eprints.gla.ac.uk/180272

Jahreie, J. (2023). Early childhood education and care teachers' perceptions of school readiness: A research review. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, *135*, 104353. https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0742051X23003414

Jamaluddin, J., Jufri, A. W., & Ramdani, A. (2023). Effect of E-readiness skills, metacognitive awareness, and biological literacy on the high school students' misconceptions. *Jurnal Pendidikan IPA Indonesia*, *12*(2), 252-264. https://journal.unnes.ac.id/nju/jpii/article/view/37536

Kabiru, D. (2019). Millions of African Children missing out on crucial preschool education. *Early childhood development, Their world.* [Online]. https://theirworld.org/news/day-of-african-child-lack-of-crucial-early-childhood-education-preprimary/

Kaufman, S. J. (2017). South Africa's civil war, 1985–1995. *South African Journal of International Affairs*, *24*(4), 501-521. https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/10220461.2017.1422012

Maslow, A. H. (1954). The instinctoid nature of basic needs. *Journal of personality*. https://psycnet.apa.org/record/1955-00357-001

McIlroy, T. (2018). *The ultimate school readiness checklist for parents and teachers*: *Empowered Parents Teaching Through Play.* https://empoweredparents.co/

McLeod, S. (2020). *Cognitive approach in psychology*. Simply Psychology. https://www.simplypsychology.org/cognitive.html

McMillan, J., & Schumacher, S. (2014). Research in education 7th ed. *Harlow: Pearson Education Limited*.

Michalska, P., Szymanik-Kostrzewska, A., & Trempała, J. (2018). School readiness of pre-school children are six-year-old children ready for a school education. https://repozytorium.ukw.edu.pl/handle/item/5334

Mokibelo, E. (2015). The outcomes of learning a foreign language: Cases of rural primary schools in Botswana. *US-China Education Review*, *5*(9), 573-590. https://www.davidpublisher.com/Public/uploads/Contribute/56050cdd8429f.pdf

Motshekga, A. (2019). Budget speech. *News24.* 10 July. https://www.news24.com>life>archives

Munnik, E. & Smith, M. (2019). Contextualising school readiness in South Africa: Stakeholders' perspectives. *South African Journal of Childhood Education, 9*(1), 1-13. https://hdl.handle.net/10520/EJC-1f8fd467b6

Segooa, M.Y. & Machaba, M.M. (2024). Exploring teachers' understanding and conception of Grade R readiness development. *International Journal of Learning and Teaching, 16*(2), 74-84. https://doi.org/10.18844/ijlt.v16i2.9229

Musonda, C.M. & Matafwali, B. (2023). What do Preschool and Grade 1 Teachers say about School-readiness and Transition from Early Learnerhood Education to Grade 1? A Case of Selected Schools in Zambia's Chongwe and Lusaka Districts. *American Journal of Educational Research*, *11*(3), 133-137. https://doi.org/10.12691/education-11-3-5

Newcomer, K.E., Hatry, H.P. & Wholey, J.S. (2015). Conducting semi-structured interviews. In K. Newcomer, H.P. Hatry & J.S. Wholey (Eds.). *Handbook for practical program evaluation*. 4th edition. Hoboken, NJ, Jossey-Bass, 494-505.

Oosthuizen, I., & Mokoena, M. A. (2016). *A scholarly contribution to educational praxis.* Aosis, 370.

Pekdogan, S., & Akgül, E. (2017). Preschool Children's School Readiness. *International Education Studies*, *10*(1), 144-154. https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1124803

Pekdogan, S., & Akgül, E. (2017). Preschool Children's School Readiness. *International Education Studies*, *10*(1), 144-154. https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1124803

Petty, N.J., Thomson, O.P. & Stew, G. (2015). Ready for a paradigm shift? Part 2: Introducing qualitative research methodologies and methods. *Manual Therapy, 17*(4), 378-384.

Polat, O. & Yavuz, E.A. (2016). The relationship between the duration of preschool education and primary school readiness. Childhood Education, 92(5), 396-404. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00094056.2016.1226115

Rasheedah, O., Ojugbele, A. & Moletsane, R. (2019). Towards quality early childhood development for refugee children: An exploratory study of a Grade R class in a Durban child-care centre. *South African Journal of Childhood Education, 9*(1), 1-8. https://hdl.handle.net/10520/EJC-1f8f45ff34

Reynolds, A.T., England, M.M., Hayakawa, C., Hendricks, M., Ou, S.R., & Warner-Richter, M. (2011). *Assessing the validity and Minnesota school readiness indicators*. Minneapolis, MN, Human Capital Research Collaborative. http://humancapitalrc.org/mnschoolreadinessindicators

South Africa Department of Basic Education (DBE). 2019). *Early Learning National Assessment.* Pretoria, Government Printer.

Soyer, G.F. (2019). Book Review: The ecology of human development by Urie Bronfenbrenner. *Journal of Culture and Values in Education*, *2*(2), 77-80.

Stevenson, W. A. (2019). Examining school readiness. https://uknowledge.uky.edu/edsrc_etds/74/

Van der Berg, S. & Jacobs, C. (2018). *The impact of the introduction of Grade R on learning outcome.* Stellenbosch, RESEP.

Venter, L. (2022). A systems perspective on early childhood development education in South Africa. *International Journal of Child Care and Education Policy*, *16*(1), 7. https://link.springer.com/article/10.1186/s40723-022-00100-5

Wang, X., Li, L., Tan, S. C., Yang, L., & Lei, J. (2023). Preparing for AI-enhanced education: Conceptualizing and empirically examining teachers' AI readiness. *Computers in Human Behavior*, *146*, 107798. https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0747563223001498

Yzel, M. (2017). *Teachers' Perceptions of the Implementation of School Readiness Assessment Instruments*. University of Pretoria (South Africa). https://search.proquest.com/openview/5e0312b3889373406a5daaa9ea11f20a/1?pq-origsite=gscholar&cbl=2026366&diss=y