EXPLORING FOUNDATION PHASE TEACHERS' EXPERIENCES AND PERCEPTIONS OF THE CHALLENGES THAT IMPEDE SCHOOL READINESS

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ABSTRACT

Several studies concur that children from a disadvantaged background are as prepared for formal schooling, compared to their advantaged peers who have access to attend good quality pre-schools. This is particularly true regarding the literature aimed at understanding the challenges that impede school readiness of Foundation Phase learners and the consequences of poor school readiness on learner's school performance. The overall aim of the study was to explore Foundation Phase teachers' experiences and perceptions of the challenges that impede school readiness. The research questions for this study probed the challenges that impede the school readiness of Foundation Phase learners of low-to middle-income background; the consequences of poor school readiness on learners' school performance; the challenges encountered in the classroom by teachers regarding learners with poor school readiness; and the programmes used to assist children with poor scholastic performance. The study was informed by Bronfenbrenner's Bio-ecological Systems Theory, to understand how the environment shapes the development of a child. The study adopted a qualitative methodological framework with an exploratory research design. The design was suitable since limited literature exists on this topic, thus proving in-depth information of Foundation Phase teachers about the phenomenon under study. Furthermore, a total number of 20 participants were included in this study, and participants were purposively selected. Data was collected by means of semi-structured individual interviews and was thematically analysed. Ethics approval for this study was sought from the Human Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee at the University of the Western Cape (UWC) and permission to conduct the study was included from the Gauteng Department of Education (GDE) and the principals of the primary schools. The researcher strictly adhered to ethics guidelines including confidentiality, anonymity, and informed consent, and all participants were ensured the right to withdraw from the study at any stage of the research process without any negative impact. The main findings were that

Foundation Phase teachers were familiar with the term "school readiness" and they believed that learners must be developed in all aspects of development; physical, social, cognitive, and emotional, to be considered ready for school. Teachers indicated that the lack of support that children receive from their immediate surrounding impede their academic achievement. Furthermore, teachers explained that learners who are not ready for school develop problematic behaviours such as disrupting the teachers and peers in the classroom. Also, overcrowded classrooms, the lack of resources, language barrier, and time spent preparing for underperforming learners are some of the classroom challenges that impede school readiness. Lastly, teachers emphasised parental involvement and encourage children to learn through play for them to be able to interact with their peers. The importance of the research findings was to gain a comprehensive understanding of the challenges that impede the school readiness of foundation phase learners and contributing towards moving closer to developing policies that will assist in school readiness in South Africa. Research findings will be disseminated in an accredited peer-reviewed journal.

DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this research report titled *Exploring Foundation Phase Teachers' Experiences and Perceptions of the Challenges that Impede School Readiness* has not been submitted before to any university or institution. If any text from books, journals, thesis papers or any peer reviewed sources have been presented as my own, I take sole responsibility for my actions. All sources, as well as the written style of the paper have been cited and acknowledged according to the American Psychological Association (APA) referencing style.

Signed on **03 November 2021**

Keila Vilanculo

Student Full Names and Signature

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TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

Disadvantaged schools: According to Xaba and Malindi (2010), disadvantaged schools in South Africa are the ones that encounter difficulties in acquiring resources that will enable effective education delivery and most of these schools are situated in poverty-stricken areas like townships, rural areas and farms.

Early Childhood Development: refers to an umbrella term that applies to the processes by which children grow and thrive mentally, physically, emotionally, socially, spiritually, and morally from birth to at least nine years of age (Department of Education, 2001).

Formal education: It refers to an organised and structured model of education which is administered by law, customs and norms and it is subjected to strict curriculum objectives methodology and content (Grajcevci & Shala, 2016). The Organisation for Economic Co-operation Development (2007) indicated that formal learning takes place through structured programmes and generally leads to one obtaining a certificate.

Foundation Phase: refers to early years in which a child is introduced to formal learning environment. In the context of the study, the term Foundation Phase refers to the early stage of schooling which includes Grade 1, 2 and 3 (National Education Policy Act 27 of 1996: A-32). However, Grade R in now regarded as the first grade prior to Grade 1, but it is not compulsory for all learners.

Learner: in terms of the South African Schools Act 84 of 196 a "learner" is an individual who receives education or obliged to obtain education in an educational facility whether public, independent, or private.

Mathematics: refers to the study of quantity which seeks to draw necessary conclusion about measurement expressed by symbols and numbers (Yadav, 2017). It is a skill adopted by individuals on daily basis to calculate costs, change in transactions, basic percentage and an average (Coffey, 2011).

Pre-school: is an educational framework for children between the ages of three to six years which contribute to children's development and addresses children's needs, starting the journey through formal education system (Preschool Education Division, 2010).

Quality education: Heyneveld and Craig (1996, p. 13) define quality education as a "concept comprising both changes in the environment in which education takes place and detectable gains in learners' knowledge, skills, and values".

School readiness: refers to "the state of child competencies at the time of school entry that were important for later success" (Snow, 2006, p. 9), which includes both socio-emotional and pre-academic competencies (Raver, Garner & Smith-Donald, 2007). According to Peckham (2017), it is indicated that school readiness is perceived as the ability to develop social, emotional, and cognitive and independence at an early stage of development.

Teacher: According to Mbise (2008), a teacher is professional that is capable of facilitating and imparting knowledge that will assist learners to obtain relevant skills needed to resolve issues. In South Africa, for one to be considered a qualified teacher they are supposed to register with South African Council for Education as a professional.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ACE - Advanced Certificate in Education

BEd - Bachelor of Education

CAPS - National Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement

DBE - Department of Basic Education

DoE- Department of Education

DSD - Department of Social Development

ECCE - Early Child Care and Education

ECD - Early Child Development

GDE - Gauteng Department of Education

GHS - General Household Survey

Grade 1 - First year of formal schooling

Grade R - Reception year

HSSREC- Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

LoLT - Language of learning and teaching

LURITS - Learner Unit Record Information and Tracking System

NCS - National Curriculum Statement

NDCP - National Day Care Centre Policy

NDP - National Development Plan

NELDS - National Early Learning Development Standards

NIECDP - National Integrated Early Childhood Development Policy

NPC - National Planning Commission

OECD - Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

PIRLS - Progress in International Reading Literacy Study

PPCT - Person Process Context Time

RSA - Republic of South Africa

SA - South Africa

SACMEQ - Southern and Eastern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality

SANPC - South Africa National Planning Commission

SDG - Sustainable Development Goal

SONA - State of the Nation Address

UNESCO - United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation

UNICEF - United Nations Children's Fund

UWC - University of the Western Cape

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background

School readiness is a multi-dimensional concept that includes "the skills of the child, family and environmental factors, behavioural and cognitive aspects of a child's development, the child's adaptation to the classroom, and the characteristics of the educational and community systems available to the child and family" (Brown, 2015, p. 183). According to McGettigan and Gray (2012), school readiness incorporates several dimensions of all aspects of children's lives that have a direct contribution to the ability of the child to learn. In simple terms, school readiness is considered as the age at which a child ought to start school and their readiness for it (Bingham & Whitebread, 2012). Furthermore, Cappeloni (2013) indicated that school readiness can be seen as a broad concept that involves facets of children's lives that may contribute to their ability to learn. The definitions of school readiness thus suggest consideration of the setting and the conditions that enable children to acquire skills and learn. Whitbread and Bingham (2012) argue that there is no evidence of how this concept manifests itself in the lives of children, therefore, the term school readiness is ambiguous. Furthermore, in the study of Ofsted (2014), the emphasis was put to say there is no agreed definition of school readiness. The lack of clarity in terms of school readiness has implications on how school readiness is implemented by the researchers, teachers, and parents (Texas Early Learning Council, 2011).

However, at a later stage, Peckham (2017) indicated that school readiness is perceived as the ability to develop social, emotional, and cognitive and independence at an early stage of development. Once the child demonstrates these scholastic qualities, they are considered ready to start school. Perhaps the latest study might have yielded different definition of school readiness due to the fact that the researcher adopted a combination of interviews, observations

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and questionnaires which formed a triangulation of data (Bratley, 2019). The understanding of school readiness among teachers in some cases still echoes the literature where there is no stable definition (Mohamed, 2013; Besford, 2017). Within the early childhood stage, there are consensus proposed personal readiness criteria that learners need to adhere to at school entry, and this includes emotional and physical development, communication and cognitive skills, approaches to learning, and general knowledge (Pan et al., 2019). Also, it is pointed out in the study of Pekdoğan and Akgül (2017) that learners must be mature, acquire knowledge on everyday aspects, and have good communication skills to achieve school readiness. Learners are also required to work independently, complete the given tasks, and adhere to classroom routines (Li-Grining et al., 2010). Furthermore, gross motor play is essential especially during pre-school years as children depend on physical activity to keep focus and on-task behaviour through other structured parts of the school day (Bredekamp, 2011). Gross motor refers to the ability to perform large movements with fluency, accuracy, and precision. Gross motor skill development suggests that learners must have strong muscles, physical coordination, and balance (Bruce, 2010). Furthermore, it involves acquiring the ability to control large muscles of the body that is needed for walking, jumping, skipping, and more. (Pedro & Goldschmidt, 2019). Gross motor skills are important for children to control their bodies and stabilise themselves, explore their environment, and manipulate objects (Jahagirdar et al., 2017). Also, fine motor skills consist of using small muscles in the hands and fingers to enable learners to undertake tasks such as painting, cutting, and drawing, and writing (Louw & Louw, 2014).

Peckham (2017) indicated that children with a positive attitude towards schoolwork, easily adapt to the requirements of formal schooling. The study of Hatcher et al (2012) concurs that there is a strong relationship between scholastic achievement and emotional readiness. Therefore, it is important to understand the environment that children spend time in to ensure that they transition smoothly from home to school (Williams & Lerner, 2019). Tomlinson

(2013) stated that it is mainly the responsibility of the public: caregivers, teachers, and professionals such as educational psychologists to contribute to the school readiness of children. The role of caregivers is to primarily fulfill the children's daily self-care needs, while teachers assist to acquire the relevant skills needed for the classroom environment and school readiness. Educational psychologists often act in the best interest of the learner by conducting assessments and providing guidance for their academic development (Rimm-Kaufman & Sandilos, 2017). Walker (2008; 2013) explains that teachers need to present with the following traits: need to always be prepared for a lesson, be respectful and show sensitivity towards learners, be creative, and be warm and show passion to the learners. It is confirmed in the study of Soulis (2009) that a virtuous teacher is the one that can effectively communicate and show affection towards the learners. Teachers should be able to recognise, be very observant, and manage the classroom, as well as demonstrating patience and taking accountability in improving learners' scholastic performance (Papadopoulou et al., 2014). The Department of Education (DoE) in South Africa introduced and implemented formal provisions to enhance the quality of education for all learners as quoted below:

> *"It is universally recognised that the main objective of any education system in a democratic society is to provide quality education for all learners so that they will be able to reach their full potential and will be able to meaningfully contribute to and participate in that society throughout their lives."*
> (Department of Education [DOE], 2007, p. 1).

The majority of children in South Africa are adversely affected by a range of social and economic inequalities (Ashley-Cooper et al., 2019). Apartheid, together with consequential socio-economic disparities, has deprived most children in South Africa of their fundamental socio-economic privileges, including access to education, social services, health care, and nutrition (Ashley-Cooper et al., 2019). In South Africa, more than one-third (36%) of 19.5

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million children are aged under six years (Hall et al., 2016). Approximately 4 million children who are below the age of six live in the poorer 40% of households, with the gap between the middle and low-class family background widening (Hall et al., 2016; Aubrey, 2017). It is evident that access to quality early childhood development (ECD) programmes play a crucial role in offsetting inequalities by protecting younger children against the effects of poverty, lack of education, insufficient nutrition and inadequate health (Van der Gaag & Putcha, 2015). Appropriate intervention and early provision enable children to grow and develop to their full potential, which results in increased enrolment rate in primary school, improved school performance, lower grade retention, lower school dropout rates, and lessen the need for costly remedial interventions to address developmental delays, and social problems are reduced for the future (Atmore et al., 2012; Heckman et al., 2010; Department of Education, 2001). Thus, the importance of early childhood development opportunities is profound.

Access to ECD provision is important, and it is agreed that "access must be coupled to quality if early childhood programmes are to improve child outcomes, particularly in low-income settings" (Biersteker et al., 2016, p. 342). South African research shows that childhood programmes are effective in children's development, and it provides a greater probability of improving school readiness (Biersteker, 2017). Specifically, the quality ECD centres and Grade R education should include qualified and competent school staff, a functioning school governing body; oversight from relevant government departments or facility managers; friendly infrastructure, age-appropriate resources and adequate outside space for outdoor play (Ashley-Cooper et al., 2019).

1.2. Rationale

The strong foundation that is laid in the early years of children improves their probability of having a quality and successful life in adulthood (Mbarathi et al., 2016). The developmental stages of life from birth to the age of five years are considered to be a crucial

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period for most children (Mbarathi et al., 2016). Early childhood development centres play an important role in preparing children to transition to primary school education (Atmore et al., 2012). Furthermore, these facilities aim to ensure the synergy of safety and protection, better health, good interaction, stimulation, and opportunities for exploring the environment and ensuring that children are ready for school (Arnold et al., 2006).

Early childhood development programmes are important in enhancing children's development from childhood to adulthood (Mbarathi et al., 2016). The main objective of ECD programmes is to enhance fundamental opportunities for children's social, psychological, and cognitive development (Atmore et al., 2012). International literature has shown that ECD programmes have a positive outcome on cognitive development (Woldehanna & Gebremedhin, 2012), the development of language and communication skills (Burchinal et al., 2000), the ability to comprehend math, health (Barnett, 2008), and socio-emotional development (Love et al., 2003). Access to high-quality education results in children scoring higher across the mentioned domains, compared to children who are not exposed to ECD programme intervention (Burchinal et al., 2016). The South African literature indicates that there are comparable patterns of effect on children's outcomes (Dawes et al., 2012; Gustafsson et al., 2010), as well as the effects on mathematics and literacy (Southern and Eastern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality [SACMEQ], 2011). It has been indicated that income level and socio-economic status have an impact on children's outcomes (Rubio-Codina et al., 2015; Davis-Kean, 2005; Aughinbaugh & Gittleman, 2003). For instance, Rubio-Codina et al. (2015) found that there are discrepancies in the language and cognitive performance of children from low-income and middle-income backgrounds and these discrepancies increased with age.

Recently in South Africa, it has been found that income level has similar effects on outcomes in children. Dawes et al. (2016) explain that children from disadvantaged

backgrounds perform poorly in all domains, across various developmental areas, compared to their wealthier counterparts. Therefore, most learners from poor backgrounds are thus set to begin formal education on an unequal footing and perform poorly at school compared to children from a wealthier background (Ashley-Cooper et al., 2019). It is important to provide relevant support to learners by addressing several learning difficulties to enhance the academic performance of the learner, the learning environment, as well as psychological well-being (Bojuwoye et al., 2014).

Winter and Kelley (2008, p. 262) emphasise the significance and impact of school readiness when stating that "educators agree that early intervention with high-quality school readiness programmes offers advantages to individual children and families and is also economically beneficial to society because it builds a stronger workforce and improves the quality of life for all citizens". Therefore, teachers must identify intervention strategies that will assist in supporting Foundation Phase learners with learning difficulties to enhance their chances of successful scholastic performance and achievement and later in life a successful career (Bruwer et al., 2014). Osamwonyi (2016) emphasises that pre-service training and in-service training should be made a priority for Foundation Phase teachers in the early identification of learning difficulties in learners. Furthermore, Bruwer et al. (2014) emphasised that for children to successfully adapt to the formal learning environment they need to adhere to several expectations.

The teacher training qualification alone is not sufficient to produce enough ECD practice. More practical hands-on training for teachers should be implemented, and there should be onsite support by experts within the field, as well as a conducive working environment (Biersteker, 2017). The implementation of intervention strategies to successfully provide support to learners with different educational backgrounds at the earliest point of entry are crucial and essential for these learners to improve school readiness sooner rather than later

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(Bruwer et al., 2014). There is limited literature regarding the challenges impeding school readiness of learners within the South African context, precisely from the perceptions of foundation phase teachers. The current study should contribute to the gap in the literature and increase the knowledge on the challenges that impede school readiness as explained by teachers. Furthermore, the findings of the study provide detailed perceptions and experiences of foundation phase teachers in Randfontein in the Gauteng Province in South Africa, including the challenges they encounter. The study provides an honest reality of what happens in the formal learning environment.

1.3. Theoretical Framework

This study is informed by Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, which has been recently renamed Bio-ecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 2005), and explains that the development of the child is shaped by the environment they find themselves in and the inter-relationship with it (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). The development of children is influenced either positively or negatively by the existential environment that they find themselves in; it does not occur in isolation (Cohen & Friedman, 2015). Bronfenbrenner (1979) further explains that each system has a significant influence on children, parents, family, and society as a whole. "The ecological environment is conceived of a set of nested structures, each inside one another, similar to a set of Russian dolls" (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994, p. 39). This theory is best suited for this study as it focuses on the interaction between the development of individuals and the different systems that are interlinked in the general social environment. Bronfenbrenner (1979) explains that children's world comprises of five systems of interaction: a Microsystem, Mesosystems, Exosystem, Macrosystem, and Chronosystem. The fundamental aspect of this theory is the interactions of structure that occurs within and amongst these five systems (Paquette & Ryan, 2001). This theory highlights that the external factors as well as the close relations that children have an impact directly on their development (Berk, 2007).

Furthermore, Paquette and Ryan (2001) indicated that the interaction factors between children's maturing biology, family and community members, as well as social background fuels and steers the development. The development and learning of the child are affected by each sphere, wherein should change occur in any of the five environmental systems, definitely change will occur in other spheres. The transition period to the formal learning environment begins way before the child start school and proceed throughout their school life (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). To study school readiness and children's development, the focus should not only be on children's immediate setting, but also on the interaction of the larger environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1998).

Bronfenbrenner's (2005) Bio-ecological Systems Theory enables this study to identify and view education in a certain context (social context) and highlights the significance of interaction (Partin, 2017). A conducive schooling system and environment can be achieved by promoting teaching and learning in the environment that children spend time in. Also, Bronfenbrenner (2005) explains that the development of children and learning experiences are moulded in their school-going years. Therefore, this study acknowledges that children are reliant on the inter-connected systems of the education system.

1.4. Research Question

- What are the challenges that impede the school readiness of foundation phase learners of low- to middle-income background?

- What are the consequences of poor school readiness on learner's school performance?

- What are the challenges encountered in the classroom by teachers regarding learners with poor school readiness?

- What programmes available programmes used to assist children with poor scholastic performance?

1.5. Aim and Objectives

The overall aim of the study is to explore Foundation Phase teachers' experiences and perceptions of the challenges that impede school readiness. The objectives of the study are to:

- explore the challenges that impede the school readiness of foundation phase learners of low- to middle-income background;

- explore the consequences of poor school readiness on learner's school performance;

- explain the challenges encountered in the classroom by teachers regarding learners with poor school readiness; and

- identify the available programmes used to assist children with poor scholastic performance.

1.6. Significance of the Study

When learners are in the formal learning environment, the expectations on them tend to be high, they are expected to work independently, complete learning tasks within a given time allocation, and be able to abide by the strict classroom routine. The main contribution of this study is that it adds to the South African literature on the topic under study, and also provides insight and real-world experiences of the challenges that Foundation Phase teachers in Randfontein encounter with learners who are not well-prepared for mainstream schooling. Through this study, light could be shed on the effective programmes that could be employed to enhance the school readiness of learners, not only in Randfontein, but other communities in South Africa as well. Furthermore, the significance of the findings is to fill the gap and create awareness within the South African context and disseminate the findings in the form of a publication. The importance of the research findings is to gain a comprehensive understanding of the challenges that impede on the school readiness of Foundation Phase learners and contributing towards moving closer to developing policies that will assist in school readiness in South Africa.

1.7. Chapter Overview

This thesis is outlined in six chapters, each describing the different steps involved in the research process.

Chapter One - Introduction

This chapter provides an introduction to the study by describing the background and rationale for the research study. The research questions, aims, and objectives are briefly outlined. Lastly, the theoretical framework, significance of the study, and the overview for the entire study will be outlined.

Chapter Two - Theoretical Framework

This chapter entails of the theory that steered the study, i.e. the bio-ecological theoretical framework by Urie Bronfenbrenner. The details about the origin, the application, and the aspect of the theory will be explained in chapter two.

Chapter Three - Literature Review

This chapter presents an overview of the literature relevant to the topic of the study and empirical studies are considered on school readiness. The review attempts to highlight gaps in the literature and provide a detailed academic rationale.

Chapter Four - Methodology

The method adopted in the study is briefly described in this chapter. The description of the research design, research context, participants and sampling, data collection and procedure, data analysis, trustworthiness, reflexivity, and most importantly the ethics considered in the execution of the research study.

Chapter Five - Presentation and Discussion of Results

The presentation and discussion of results were reported relative to the employed methodology. The themes which were derived from data analysis were presented with illustrative quotes.

Chapter Six - Conclusion

The last chapter outlines the summary of the study, the strength and limitations acknowledged as well as the recommendations made for further research studies.

CHAPTER 2: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1. Introduction

This chapter focuses on exploring the conceptual framework for the study. The Bio-ecological Systems Theoretical framework by theorist Bronfenbrenner (1979, 2005) is the predominant theory that is used to outline the logical structure for this study. This chapter aims at providing a theoretical understanding of the experiences, perceptions, and challenges that impede school readiness of Foundation Phase learners. Furthermore, the purpose of this conceptual framework is to build a theoretical understanding of available programmes that are used to assist learners with poor scholastic performance in the Foundation Phase. A brief discussion of the research problem is outlined in this chapter and it concludes by aligning the phenomenon of the study with the knowledge of the theory.

2.2. Bio-ecological Systems Theory

The theory developed by Bronfenbrenner evolved from initially being known as the Ecological Systems Theory to the newly renamed Bio-ecological Systems Theory. The purpose of the Ecological Systems Theory was to understand the development of the human (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). According to (Berk, 2000) this theoretical perspective views human development as an individual in their environmental context, and various types of relationships and surroundings are used to assist in explaining their development. Also, the development of Bronfenbrenner's theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1998, 1999; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006) involves the ecology of human development, and further evolved as the bio-ecological model that consists of a process, person, context, and time framework (Griffore & Phenice, 2016). The study of Bruno et al. (2003) suggests that ecologists perceive the natural world as the structure of conflicts and communication that constantly evolves. The Bio-ecological Systems Theory involves an immediate interaction environment and it contemplates the life of the developing individual in the larger societal

environment and both formal and informal dimensions of life are being considered (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). The study of Bronfenbrenner and Morris (2006) explains that around the 1970s to 1980s the Ecological System Theory formed part of the main informal discussion up until its formal publication. Bronfenbrenner continued to explore additional essential factors that might be influential in the development of humans throughout the theory. The Ecological System Theory was finally named the Bio-ecological Systems Theory in 1986 (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998).

Bronfenbrenner developed his theory, the Ecological Systems Theory with the main influence from Lev Vygotsky, one of the best psychologists, teachers, and founder of the Social Learning Theory that was published around the 1920's. The theory was based on the context of learned behaviours from social content. The founder of Modern Social Psychology, Kurt Lewin (Greathouse, 1997), also played a strong influential role in the development of the Bio-ecological Systems Theory. Bronfenbrenner and Ceci (1994) introduced the bio-ecological Person Process Context Time (PPCT) model to restructure the Bio-ecological Systems Theory.

The Bio-ecological System Theory focuses on the environmental aspect that influences the behaviour of individuals. This aspect refers to the conflicts encountered in the environment and the relationships formed with different dimensions including families, teachers, and community members (Hatcher et al., 2012). The theory further comprises of the Person Process Context and Time model. This model describes the interconnection between a person's developmental processes, the existing life content, as well as the period of development that impacts an individual behaviour within the ecosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The Bio-ecological Systems Theory is best suited for the study as it facilitates better exploration in the ecosystem, from the relations created within families and the outside world. Furthermore, the theory describes the role played by individual surroundings on the behaviours that individuals display (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). For instance, learners are likely to dropout of school due to

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the behaviour they grew up observing in their immediate environment, and it is commonly deemed acceptable in certain societies.

2.3. Conceptualisation of Bio-ecological Systems Theory

The lack of school readiness and the discrepancy level amongst children from a low-income background and those from wealthier families is the main cause for concern in this present day (Desmangles, 2017). It is clear that socio-economic status is one of the influential factors that is associated with poor school readiness. Furthermore, research findings have shown that the discrepancy of school readiness continues to grow over time and it is recognised even before a child enters formal schooling (Burchinal et al., 2011; Halle et al., 2009). The Bio-ecological Systems Theory explains that children are both influenced and influential in the nested social systems they live within this ecological model (Coady & Lehmann, 2016).

There are different influential factors that this theory evaluates, internal as well as external and that leads to poor school readiness of children. Internal factors include aspects such as family and the environment that children spend time in, and external factors refer to factors that have an indirect influence on children's behaviour, such as the divorce of parents or unemployment (Crosnoe et al., 2014). Furthermore, parents or caregivers, teachers, and anyone in the school setting is considered to influence the lives of children and have a major impact on their school readiness level (Desmangles, 2017).

According to Coady and Lehmann (2016), the Bio-ecological Systems Theory includes different concepts such as social support, parental involvement, and coping strategies or mechanisms. The actions and strategies that parents or caregivers, teachers, and principals take in improving school readiness are influenced by their beliefs, and that contributes to reinforcing and imparting school readiness skills on children before entering the formal learning environment (Hatcher et al., 2012). This can further contribute to reducing the school readiness

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gap between low income and wealthier children (Desmangles, 2017). The decisions that parents or caregivers, teachers, and the principal make about school readiness are very crucial, and they may have an impact on the entire educational career of children (Desmangles, 2017). Though teachers, parents, and caregivers, and school leaders might contribute to the school readiness of children, it is still not clear how they view and promote school readiness.

Therefore, it is essential to comprehend the perception of teachers, parents, and principals on school readiness, and how these individuals, as well as society, impact and promote the school readiness of children (Barbarin et al., 2008). The attention of many researchers was drawn by the concept of the ecosystem, and they are constantly used to interact and comprehend the social dependence on interaction in the ecological life (Daily, 1997; De Groot et al., 2002). Bronfenbrenner was regarded as one of the ideal developmental researchers who laid the foundation for comprehending the dynamics of relations through cohesive human development within the bio-ecological system (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). According to Bronfenbrenner (1999) the proximal processes is regarded as the driving force of development, wherein more powerful influence is exerted on developmental outcomes rather than contextual factors (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994; Bronfenbrenner & Evans, 2000), and the proximal processes vary according to the function of the Process, Person, Context, Time Model (PPCT Model).

2.4. Proximal Process in Children's Development

The Bio-ecological Systems Theory is a theoretical framework that evolves for scientific study (Tudge et al., 2016). The theory explains the developmental processes and how these processes influence the interactions within the surroundings. This theory further consists of a four-element model, that involves the synergy relation between the Process, Person, Context, Time Model (PPCT Model). The development of humans is simultaneously influenced by these four elements as they form part of an interactive system (Bronfenbrenner,

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1999; Tudge et al., 2016). Furthermore, the two propositions of this theory are brought into play. The first proposition is conveyed by a dynamic interaction between a developing bio-psychological human organism and the objects in the ecosystem, which involves a direct external setting. According to Bronfenbrenner, a proposition is described as an authority of enduring proximal process. The second proposition is characterised by the environment and the developing process of individuals. The enduring relationships consist of direct situations in the bio-ecological system as well as other circumstances that are influenced by environmental incentives (Bronfenbrenner, 1999).
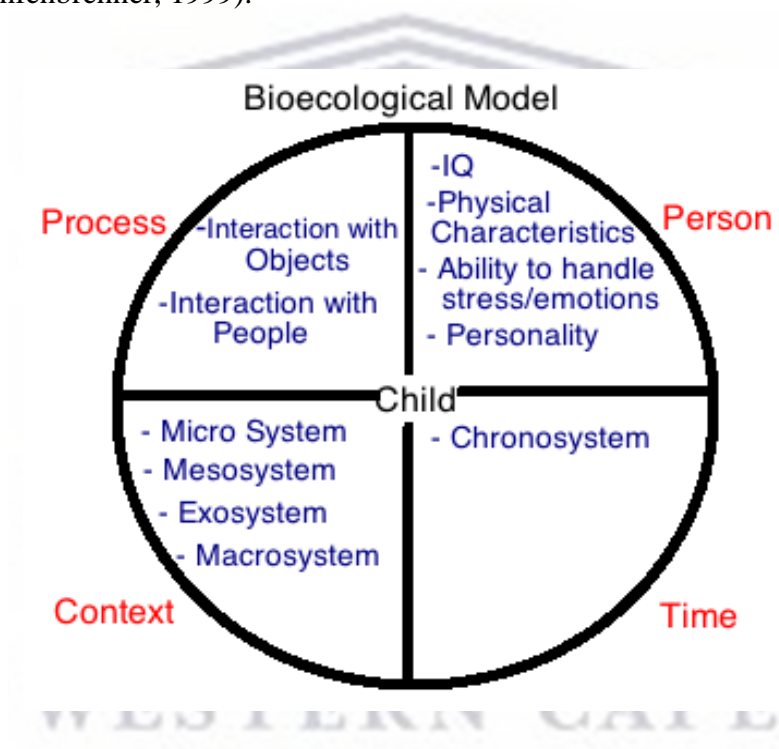
Figure 2.1: A diagrammatic representation of The Process, Person, Context, Time Model (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006).

2.4.1. Person

Person involves the biological, emotional, cognitive and behavioural aspects of an individual. The personal characteristics of individuals in social interaction are acknowledged in the study of Bronfenbrenner (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998). The Bio-ecological System Theory describes a person as being portrayed by the biological makeup structure and by

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different personal features that individuals reveal in social solutions (Bronfenbrenner, 1995; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998). The functioning of the person is centred on three specific features including demand, resources, and force. The behaviour of humans is directed to the fulfilment and gratification of those needs. Personal demands refer to personal stimuli in which physical characteristics such as appearance are dominant (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998). The resource feature is associated with material needs, experiences, and the skills that an individual possesses (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998). Lastly is the force which consists of motivation and perseverance. These are the aspects that an individual does not have control over also regarded as uncontrollable force (Tudge et al., 2009). Access and exposure to different resources have an enormous impact on the development of humans. It takes a change of environment to change the character of a person, however, a huge change on individuals is centred on the PPCT model of Bronfenbrenner. Therefore, the entire idea of the person can be summarised as individual characteristics.

2.4.2. Process

Process involves individual's relationships and the environment in which they find themselves. The proximal process is viewed as the main mechanism for development, and it is featured in two propositions of the Bio-ecological Systems model, interconnection with objects and interactions with individuals (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). The process is the mechanism that constitutes the connection between related contexts including an individual and culture (Bronfenbrenner & Crouter, 1983). The PPCT model of Bronfenbrenner became the focal of the Bio-ecological System Theory after the developmental processes were considered influential factors on behaviour by scholars (Bronfenbrenner, 2005; Bronfenbrenner & Evans, 2000; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). Furthermore, it is indicated that the PPCT model is considered to be the primary mechanism for development (Tudge et al., 2009).

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The theory explains that the development of humans occurs during processes of propositions and increasingly multi-faceted reciprocal interaction between an active, developing bio-psychological human organism and the persons, objects, and symbols in the external direct environment Tudge et al. (2009). The preposition process includes the actions that occur within the system and the reciprocal interaction that is characterised by the exchange of similar behaviour (Tudge et al., 2009). To comprehend the process concept of the PPCT Model, the results of the current study might confirm if parental involvement forms part of influential factors enhancing school readiness.

2.4.3. Context

The context is described as the setting that individuals spend time on, which is further explained in the spheres of the bio-ecological system such as microsystems, mesosystems, exosystems, macrosystems, and the chronosystems level. The different interactions and experiences within the spheres of the bio-ecological system have a major influential role in the lives of individuals (Tudge et al., 2009). For instance, a learner who has been retained in grade more than once is likely to dropout of school due to poor academic performance. Their peers or family members who have dropped out of school or performed poorly academically might influence this particular behaviour. The direct interaction and experience play a crucial role in the perception of content and communication with other individuals in their setting. Hence, the context is defined by the interaction process in the bio-ecological system. The environment is the immediate factor that results in individuals engaging in certain practices. However, the components, as well as perception regarding the situation in the context, changes constantly based on the undefined continued progress of existence and the available knowledge (Bronfenbrenner, 1986).

2.4.4. Time

This refers to the change that occurs over time considering the context of an individual. Time is prominent in human development and is one of the influential factors in human behaviour and it consists of three different levels such as microtime, mesotime, and macrotime (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998). Microtime refers to the recent period of communication between an individual and their immediate environment. Mesotime is the extent and consistency of the interaction or activity in an individual environment (Tudge et al., 2009). Lastly, macrotime explains the history that is interconnected to the specific behaviour of the phenomenon under study (Tudge et al., 2009). This impacts the proximal processes and it functions within and across generations and through the lifespan of the individual (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). The study of Renn (2003) explains that the macrosystem shift changes the population on different levels and it includes interaction between the populations, cultural customs, birth of children, and other components that impact the way of living. The concept of time influences the way generations experience life. According to Bronfenbrenner (1986), the lifestyle and lifespan of individuals are concurrently influenced by time. The education and school readiness of children can also be interlinked with time, just like history has an important impact on human behaviour Bronfenbrenner (1986). The Bio-ecological Systems Theory affects human development related to time, and the theory further provides an insight into the environment and the biological element.

2.5. Contextual Influence on the Development of Children

The development of individuals in the bio-ecological system theory is influenced either positively or negatively by the immediate environment (Haihambo, 2010). The theory entails five environmental systems that influence the growth of children and how the child interacts; the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and the chronosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). All these environmental spheres influence the behaviour and

adaptation of the child, and also impacts on the development of children and learning (Cohen & Friedman, 2015). The study of Bronfenbrenner and Ceci (1994) highlight that an environment is an existential structure which surrounds an individual like a nest. The figure below provides a diagrammatic illustration of Bronfenbrenner's model which integrates into the discussion of contextualising and influencing the development and behaviour of a child.
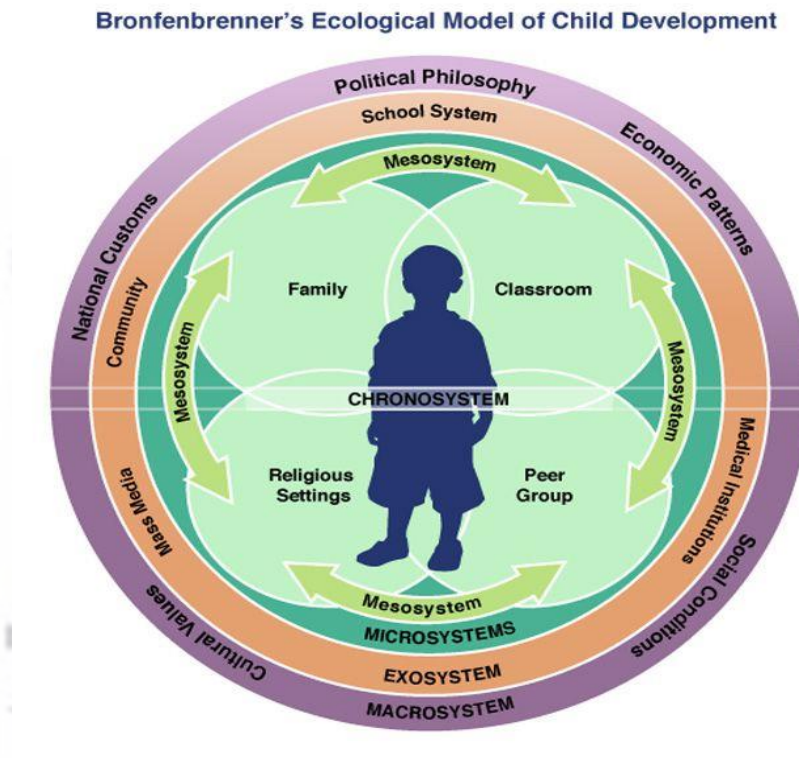
Figure 2.2: Diagrammatic illustration of Bronfenbrenner's Bio-ecological Theory (Nielsen, 2011).

2.5.1. Microsystem Level

The first level of Bronfenbrenner's theory is the microsystem. It refers to the immediate living environment in which an individual has direct contact to learn about the world. This involves children in a formal education setting (Swick & Williams, 2006). At the microsystem level, the individuals that are in the child setting greatly influence the development of the child. The microsystem of the child will include the interaction between parents or caregivers, the school, teachers, as well as peers. The family is the main socialiser of the child, and plays an

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important role in the child's development. Nevertheless, the family is not the only determining factor (Bronfenbrenner, 1973). The school is the environment in which children are taught new skills, society, and appropriate behaviours (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994). Peers provide an environment that enables children to gain independence, therefore children need to socialise with their friends to learn new skills of responsibility, and role-taking as well as skills for coping with mainstream (Bronfenbrenner, 1973).

2.5.2. Mesosystem Level

The mesosystem is an interaction between two or more systems that involves the environment in which the child, parents, and family live. It involves interaction between teachers and parents (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The influence of the mesosystem on children strongly depends on the quality of inter-relationships. It involves the interaction between the children's teacher and the parents, between the neighborhood and church, practitioners, family, and peer group (Cohen & Friedman, 2015). Furthermore, the role of the parents is to support children with their schoolwork and ensuring that children acquire the knowledge that they need to cope with formal schooling (Epstein & Sanders, 2000). For instance, parents who are involved in their children's schoolwork will impact positively on children's microsystem. Parents must also create an environment that reinforces children to narrate what is going on at school. Also, participation in parents' meeting is essential, and parents should encourage peers to visit children at home as that might encourage independence e (Berk, 2000).

2.5.3. Exosystem Level

In the exosystem level, individuals are indirectly affected by their environment. The individual might not be the direct subject of the situation and yet it has a direct impact on them and includes the curriculum and school policy (Swick & Williams, 2006). This level or layer does not necessarily feature the child, however, children are affected by the events that occur in their setting and that hampers their development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). For example, if

parents lose their job and they are unable to buy essential goods or pay rent, this might negatively impact the microsystem level of the child (Cohen & Friedman, 2015). Furthermore, a teacher who once taught a bright child or sibling might expect the younger sibling to perform to the ability of the sibling, and that alone demoralises the child (Cohen & Friedman, 2015). All the individuals involved in the exosystem level can influence children's personal development and have an indirect impact on the microsystem and mesosystem.

2.5.4. Macrosystem Level

The macrosystem consists of cultural beliefs, societal customs, and political trends; these are the factors that influence individual lives and might delay learning (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). The macrosystem involves socio-economic status, ethnicity, religion, urban and rural areas, individual lifestyle and belief. Parenting style and socio-economic status are considered to impact greatly on children's independence and school readiness (Cohen & Friedman, 2015). Parents who are from a high socio-economic background are likely to enroll their children for extracurricular activities that will thoroughly prepare children for school compared to parents who are from a low socio-economic background (Cohen & Friedman, 2015). Culture also impacts the school readiness of children. Children whose English is not their first language, often start school with less acquisition of the language and most families lack resources and they have little or no knowledge on how to assist children to acquire school readiness (Cohen & Friedman, 2015). All these components affect the connection between the other layers.

2.5.5. Chronosystem Level

Lastly, we have the chronosystem which is the interconnection within all the systems levels. It represents the timeframe at a specific point in history and further emphasises the impacts of time on the development of humans; the death of parents at an early age (Bronfenbrenner, 1989). It is emphasised that the development of humans cannot be separated from social history (Elder, 1994). The development of children is shaped by society, the events

that are happening around them, as well as the historical components (Hanniffy, 2017). This level influences school readiness in various ways. For instance, a preschool child who is orphaned might be required to relocate and attend a new school, and that child might respond differently than an adolescent at a tertiary level (Cohen & Friedman, 2015). Similarly, the divorce of parents might have a greater impact on an adolescent than a child who is at preschool (Cohen & Friedman, 2015). The development of children is mainly based on the interaction between families, schools, communities, and social indicators (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2016).

2.6. Critique of Bronfenbrenner's Bio-ecological Systems Theory

Bronfenbrenner's Bio-ecological Systems Theory considers various challenges when it comes to development. The application for this theory is applicable and understood globally. However, there are several challenges encountered when having to put this theory into practice. The following points are the main ideologies that influence these challenges: (1) there is a lack of detailed mechanisms in the Bronfenbrenner Bio-ecological Systems Theory that is needed for guidance. When dealing with the ecological and environmental detail a larger scope needs to be adopted, and this is essential to ensure the developmental description of individuals. Bronfenbrenner's framework provides less description for mechanisms needed for development; (2) there is a lack of balance in the Bio-ecological Systems Theory. The hierarchy of various systems is not addressed in Bronfenbrenner's theory. There is no clear emphasis as to whether the microsystem or mesosystem can strongly influence the child or individual, and the categorisation data is unclear and unknown; (3) Bronfenbrenner's Bio-ecological Systems Theory is considered difficult to implement. This is due to the fact that it is essential to factor in the small possible influence when applying this theory. In Bronfenbrenner's Bio-ecological Systems Theory, all factors are systematically influential, and implementation can be daunting. Also, it is difficult to apply reductionist principles due to the concept of holism and complexity.

This is necessary to form an operationalised framework that can be established for practical implication and analysis (Elliott & Davis, 2018).

Christensen (2016) highlighted that the concept of resilience is one of the critiques that Bronfenbrenner's Bio-ecological Systems Theory fails to address. The understanding of human development and societal influences would have been provided by the inclusion of this concept. The study of Christensen (2016) provides a precise understanding of persons' capacity. Resilience imparts sense of purpose, capability, and belief that there is hope for a brighter future. It also instills a sense of motivation, goal setting, and a path that enables individuals to have educational ambitions. Miller (2008) explains that resilience provides individuals with the strength and the capability to handle challenging situations presented through hardships. The theory of Bronfenbrenner mainly focuses on the negative influence instead of what the positive influence hardships can provide such as looking at a person raised in negative environmental situations who become successful based on the resilience factor.

2.7. Conclusion

The theoretical framework of the study extensively discussed the Bio-ecological Systems Theory to avoid the misconception of the theory. This theory has provided insight into how the environment influences human development. Therefore, the publications of Bronfenbrenner in conceptualising the current study are exhausted. Bronfenbrenner is regarded as a self-reflective theorist, as he has acknowledged the nature of evolution (Tudge et al., 2009). The theory addresses the recent environmental factors that align with poor school readiness among learners.

In Chapter 3, the literature is reviewed with reference to findings of other researchers related to the phenomenon of the study.

CHAPTER 3: LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter presents a summary of the literature on the challenges that influence poor school readiness of Foundation Phase learners and the related aspects relative to the research questions. It further outlines how poor school readiness affects the school performance of learners, explains the challenges encountered in the classroom by teachers regarding learners with poor school readiness, and explores the available programmes used to assist children with poor performance.

School readiness plays an important role in the development of children. The exposure to quality learning opportunities at early childhood impact positively on the development of the child and future school career, especially for children who are from a disadvantaged background (Green et al., 2011). It is demonstrated that children from disadvantaged backgrounds with limited resources and low levels of parental education are likely to perform poorly at school and dropout, as compared to children from middle-class backgrounds (Hall et al., 2018). The disadvantaged background is a concept that takes into account several dimensions of social positions, including socio-economic status, and educational attainment (Rijlaarsdam, 2014). Individuals who are unable to pay for the education of their children, provide necessary basic needs for their family, with low capita income, and with no running clean water are considered to be living within the conditions of a disadvantaged community (Kapur, 2018). Therefore, it is imperative that educational programmes are accessible to children from disadvantaged communities as this is a strong predictor for school readiness success and future career opportunities (Furlong & Quirk, 2011, p. 88). The education system has gone through an immense reinvention since the end of the Apartheid era ensuring that resources are equally distributed to all children (Franklin & McLaren, 2015).

3.1. The South African Education System

The South African education system has devoted extensive resources to education since the end of apartheid and strives to ensure that all children regardless of race are afforded quality and equal education (Franklin & McLaren, 2015). The post-Apartheid government education system was confronted with racial segregation and high-level inequality in education, such as lack of infrastructure and learning materials (Franklin & McLaren, 2015). The education system in the Apartheid era had no authenticity with regard to delivery and providing quality and equal education for all racial groups, given that its role was to perpetuate racial disparities (Van der Berg & Hofmeyr, 2018). Unlike the schooling system for white learners, formal schooling for black African children was not free nor compulsory. The study of Donohue and Bornman (2014) further confirms that during the Apartheid era, education was compulsory for white learners, but not for learners from other ethnic groups. The white education system also provided and allocated many resources to the white learners as opposed to the minimal resources provided to other learners from the other races (Atmore, 2018). As a result, there was a slow growth in learning for coloured, Indian, and mainly for black African learners.

The racial grouping during this period lead to unequal regulations such as who could attend school and which school will be best suited for each individual to attend, the available resources allocated at schools, funding, the curriculum content that was to be covered, and the language of instruction that black African learners needed to adhere to (Case & Yogo, 1999; Smith, 2011). During this period, various mandatory levels of education required lower requirements for non-whites (Motala et al., 2009). For instance, in white schools more academic subjects were emphasised, wherein the academic expectations in African schools were lower and emphasis was more on "practical" subjects that taught learners to become blue-collar workers in the future (Fiske & Ladd, 2004, Hyslop, 1993; Kallaway, 1984; Maharaj, et al., 2000; Nkomo, 1990; Rakometsi, 2008). Hence, Fataar's (1999, p. 88) explains that "the

early thinking around the aims of black education was saturated with racial paternalism and the need to secure sufficient and compliant workers for the economy."

There was growth in terms of the economic needs of the country particularly in the enrolment rate of black African learners in secondary schools between 1975 and 1985 (Atmore, 2018). During these years the government invested more money in black African education, however, the quality of education remained poor for those classified as coloured, Indian, and black African compared to white education (Gallo, 2020). The inequality in the education system and the requirements that black African schools needed to adopt Afrikaans as their language of instruction resulted in learners engaging in riots between 1976 to late 1980s (Atmore, 2018). This explains that the use of the mother tongue in black African schools was prohibited and it was considered to be myopic and was perceived to lack the standard orthography (Mhlauli et al., 2015).

According to Brauns and Stanton (2016), racial prejudice was revealed in all aspect of health, such as severe segregation of health facilities and uneven expenditure on the healthcare of whites compared to that of black Africans, and that resulted in outstanding medical care for white people and black Africans were commonly referred to dirty and overcrowded facilities. Also, black Africans were denied basic sanitation, the supply of clean water, and other public health components especially in rural areas and townships (Brauns & Stanton, 2016). The study of Coovadia et al. (2009) indicated that the history of South Africa has a noticeable impression on the health of individuals, health policies, and the service delivery of the present day. All these results of the following factors: the critical shortage of health workers, the disproportion of resources, unfair recruitment of staff, and more infections on certain illnesses (Brauns & Stanton, 2016). Furthermore, individuals who suffered from mental illnesses and retardation were kept away in facilities, deprived of human rights, and with a lack of access to community-based programmes that would assist them to recover (Brauns & Stanton, 2016).

However, the racially-based education system was disassembled in 1994, with some fair adjustments that allowed black African learners to enroll at white schools that were made towards the end of this period (Van der Berg & Hofmeyr, 2018). The post-Apartheid education policy reform was introduced and it focused mainly on deracialising education in South Africa, provide learning opportunities for black African learners, establishing learning and teaching culture, developing curricula, infrastructure, and resourcing education (Atmore, 2018). Although the newly elected democratic government had good intentions for improving education policies, the school choice policy continued to inadvertently perpetuate educational inequalities in disadvantaged black African communities such as rural areas or townships where most learners attend school (Ndimande, 2016). The post-Apartheid government provides all public schools with equal funding as part of the "pro-poor" policy, however, this does not address continuous inequalities of resources among black African and white schools (Ndimande, 2013).

Black African learners, especially those enrolled in previously disadvantaged schools, are still racially segregated and the lack of educational resources persists (Jansen & Amsterdam, 2006; Ndimande, 2006). A question may arise as to why inequalities concerning educational resources continue when there has been an increase in funding in all schools. Ladson-Billings (2006) explains that inequalities are not eradicated due to added funds, however, the discrepancy is greater than equalising the funds, and is not enough for providing equal resources at school. Most disadvantaged schools have accumulated an enormous education debt which needs to be addressed if resource inequalities are to be disregarded or even alleviated (Ndimande, 2016). In South Africa, education is a human basic right that is fundamental in building life-long learning and economic opportunities (Atmore et al., 2012). Recently around the globe, the interest in early childhood development (ECD) and variety of support has substantially expanded to ensure that children grow and develop to their full ability

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(Britto et al., 2013; Britto et al., 2017). Mental stimulation in the early years of children's life lays a foundation for different outcomes, including social adjustment, emotional and physical development, and the ability of children to learn.

3.1.1. Early Childhood Development in South Africa

Early Childhood Development (ECD) focuses on the holistic development of children's capabilities and it is recognised for its concern regarding the important foundation years of life (Atmore, 2018). In the South African context, ECD is concerned with the development, education, and care of children before enrolling for formal education (Atmore, 2018). This normally includes children from birth to at least nine years old, and the focus is on the social, emotional, cognitive, and physical development of children to enable them to grow and develop to their full ability (Berry et al., 2011). The Department of Basic Education (2009) further explains that the main aim of Early Childhood Development programmes in South Africa is to provide educational support by enhancing the cognitive, physical, social, and emotional capabilities of learners. Moreover, Early Childhood Development is referred to as an inclusive approach which includes programmes and policies that can be implemented for children from birth to the age of nine, with the active involvement of caregivers or parents (SA, DoE, 2001). The purpose of this inclusive approach is to protect children's right to develop fully in their cognitive, emotional, physical, and social wellbeing (SA, DoE, 1995). The importance of the development of the human right of children is recognised in the South African Constitution (Act 108 of 1996).

Children have the right to survival, health, protection, and development; all these rights are protected in the highest court of law in our country. The vision of South Africa for early childhood development is to ensure that the rights of children are protected and that they have access to resources and environments that enable children to develop in numerous areas of growth and development (DBE, 2009). Due to the environment that children find themselves

in, most of them are unable to recognise their potential and that impacts negatively on their development (Goldschmidt & Pedro, 2019). The South African government has committed to ensuring that children, especially from disadvantaged backgrounds, have access to a comprehensive package of ECD education that is of high quality by 2030 (Republic of South Africa, 2015). The package will comprise programmes that will reach and support children and their families at their homes through home-visits (Republic of South Africa, 2015). Furthermore, Janse van Rensburg (2015) indicated that the officials from the Gauteng Department of Education are concerned that most Grade R learners in a primary school in the province did not achieve school readiness.

According to the Children's Act 38 (2015), as amended, it is indicated that an extensive national strategy is developed to enable ECD systems that are properly resourced, coordinated, and managed (Hall et al., 2017). Children who fail to receive developmental support during the early childhood period might lag in formal schooling (Hall et al., 2017). The South African government implemented the National Integrated Early Childhood Development Policy [NIECDP] (2015), which aims to provide a multi-sectoral supporting framework for ECD services. This policy is effective in providing quality early childhood development services to children and it prioritises the delivery of an important package of early childhood development services (Republic of South Africa [RSA], 2015).

Furthermore, the National Integrated Early Childhood Development Policy (NIECDP) emphasises that information concerning ECD should be made available to the public and all caregivers of children, as this policy focuses on addressing the importance of early learning and stimulation (Republic of South Africa, 2015). The South African government has acknowledged the significance of the early childhood period and different provinces have come up with strategies on how to facilitate ECD (Mbarathi et al., 2016). However, to ensure that all these strategies implemented are beneficial to learners, amendments to the existing

legislation need to be made, the establishment of leadership structure, allocation of enough budget, and the establishment of accountability and communication amongst stakeholders from national to district to municipal level (Hall et al., 2017).

The National Planning Commission (NPC) has drawn up the National Development Plan (NDP) which explains early childhood development as "a top priority among the measures to improve the quality of education and long-term prospects of future generations" (NPC 2013, p. 71). Also, Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) is the education goal which aims to ensure comprehensive and equitable education that is of quality and to encourage lifetime learning opportunities for everyone (Marchetta & Dilly, 2019). There was a proposal made within the National Development Plan (NDP) that an additional year of pre-school is added to schools prior to the current reception year or Grade R (Van der Berg & Hofmeyr, 2018). There are various disciplines that agree that early childhood development reduces inequality and is cost-effective (Van der Berg & Hofmeyr, 2018). According to Ashley-Cooper et al., (2012) investing in early childhood development programmes in the most effective way assist in reducing poverty and inequality within the South African context and enhance the achievement of social and economic well-being. Early Childhood Development education plays a pivotal role in ensuring that children's basic education needs are addressed (Richter et al., 2012).

The South African Early Childhood Development education, government and private ECD programmes consist of two main programmes (Van der Berg & Hofmeyr, 2018). The first one is the system of community-based Early Childhood Development or Pre-Grade R programme which accommodates children between 0 to 4 years old (Van der Berg & Hofmeyr, 2018). The Pre-grade R programmes are directed by the National Early Learning Development Standards (NELDS), as well as the Department of Social Development [DSD] (Van der Berg & Hofmeyr, 2018). The second one is Grade R, and it is mainly found at primary schools and

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it is for children between the ages of 5 to 6 years old, and it is subsidised by the Department of Basic Education (DBE) mainly in public schools (Van der Berg & Hofmeyr, 2018).

3.1.2. Early Childhood Development Curricula

The South African education system consists of two main curricula for early childhood development years namely the National Early Learning Development Standards (NELDS) and a National Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS). Both curriculums aim on equipping children with skills and knowledge, as well as facilitating their competencies in main areas such as cognitive, physical, social, and emotional development (DBE, 2009, 2011). The National Early Learning Development Standards (NELDS) which was released in 2009 attempts to influence the social transformation framework of the South African society through the lives of children from birth to the age of four (Ebrahim, 2012). The Department of Basic Education (2009) further explains that the National Early Learning Development Standards (NELDS) is a curriculum-related policy which primarily focuses on the early learning needs of children from zero to four years old (DBE, 2009).

Furthermore, the National Early Learning and Development Standards (NELDS) was designed "to provide children with the best start in life by establishing standards of learning achievements and activities for young children across appropriate age ranges" (DBE, 2009, p. 8). The NELDS curriculum aims at assisting teachers, practitioners, caregivers, and parents to provide children with a better learning environment and to ensure that they reach their full potential (Kirsten, 2017). Also, it is intended in developing the language, knowledge, intellectual, physical, social, and emotional abilities of children and to assist them to become active and responsible individuals (DBE, 2009; Kirsten, 2017). The NELDS curriculum focuses mainly on addressing the social, health, and educational needs of children, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds (Kirsten, 2017).

According to the Department of Education (2011), the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) is explained as an amendment of what is taught (a curriculum) and not how it is taught (teaching methods). The Department of Education (2011) further explains that the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) is meant to prepare Grade R to Grade 12 learners regardless of their race, physical and intellectual ability, gender, and socio-economic status, by equipping them with skills, knowledge, and values that are necessary for self-actualisation and meaningful contribution in the society. The CAPS curriculum which was an effect from January 2012 in South African schools, focuses primarily on language, life skills, and mathematics in the early years (Department of Education, 2011). The CAPS refers to documents for every subject, which indicate the content that teachers need to teach and assess for each subject in the National Curriculum Statement (NCS) Grades R to 12.

The new Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statements is intended to repackage the then-existing curriculum into the common purpose of the South African curriculum, the explicit aims of every subject, topics clearly outlined to be covered each term, and the mandatory number and type of assessments also per term (Ministry of Basic Education, 2010). In the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS), the "learning area has been changed into the subject, and Learning Outcomes and Assessment Standards are omitted, but are reworked into general aims of the South African curriculum and specific aims of each subject" (DoE, 2011, p.7). The main purpose of these curricula is to be used as guidelines by ECD practitioners/teachers during their daily programmes (Kirsten, 2017).

3.1.3. Early Childhood Education in South Africa

Early childhood education in South Africa is recognised as a critical area. The South African government has indicated the necessity of increasing access to ECD and improving the quality of education offered at early childhood facilities precisely for children who are from a disadvantaged background (Atmore et al., 2012). There has been an increase of funding for

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both ECD centres for children of 0 to 4 years old through the Department of Social Development, and 5 to 6 years old (Grade R education) through the Department of Basic Education (DBE, DSD & UNICEF, 2010). According to the information that was directly obtained from the Department of Basic Education (2015), the enrolment rate of Grade R learners in disadvantaged schools across South Africa equates to approximately 792, 691 in 2015. Furthermore, based on preliminary results from the Department of Basic Education (2018), Learner Unit Record Information and Tracking System (LURITS), and other provincial databases, it was found that in 2017 about 862,000 learners were enrolled for Grade R or Pre-Grade R at primary schools, of whom 5% or 40,240 learners were attending independent schools and the remaining 95% were at public or government schools (Department of Basic Education, 2018). The attendance rates are high across all provinces, and in 2017, Gauteng was found to be having about 95% of learners enrolled for ECD or Grade R education (Hall et al., 2018). The access to education has greatly expanded, particularly in disadvantaged schools.

According to Xaba and Malindi (2010), disadvantaged schools in South Africa are the ones that encounter difficulties in acquiring resources that will enable effective education delivery, and most of these schools are situated in poverty-stricken areas like townships, rural areas and farms. These were the areas that were historically designated for black Africans and are associated with poor socio-economic conditions and a lack of educational infrastructure and resources (Xaba & Malindi, 2010). Moreover, Kamper (2008) explains that disadvantaged schools are characterised by unkempt or damaged premises, damaged furniture, lack of water and sanitation, and physical danger areas. Though there has been an improvement in the access and quality of education in the Early Childhood Development centres and Grade R classrooms, however, there is still a long way to go to improve service delivery (Mbarathi et al., 2016). The study of Gustafsson (2018) indicated that there are about 1,530,554 children in both private and subsidised centres who are having access to ECD programmes in South Africa. During the

2018 State of the Nation Address (SONA), the president of the Republic of South Africa, Cyril Ramaphosa mentioned that about one million children are accessing Early Childhood Development facilities (Presidency, 2018). The data from the General Household Survey (GHS) show that about 69% of children aged between three to five years in South Africa are attending some form of early childhood development programme including Grade R, pre-school, crèche, or educare centre (Hall et al., 2019). Despite the progress, there are almost 1.1 million children between the ages of three to five years who still do not have access to any form of early childhood learning programme (Hall et al., 2019). Learners who do not have access to early childhood programmes are likely to start school at a distinct disadvantage (Hall et al., 2019).

Improving the quality of Grade R education in disadvantaged schools should be made a priority to ensure that inequality in the cognitive performance of learners is reduced (Van der Berg & Hofmeyr, 2018). The majority of early childhood development facilities continue to offer poor education due to a lack of monitoring and support from the government (Van der Berg & Hofmeyr, 2018). Van der Berg and Hofmeyr (2018) further explain that the majority of teachers in South Africa are sufficiently qualified (in terms of certification), however, they lack adequate knowledge and pedagogical skill to teach efficiently. Most teachers in South Africa have Grade 12 and at least a three years suitable post-school qualification, but the question remains as to whether the pre-service training for teachers is thoroughly preparing students for the teaching profession (Taylor et al., 2013). Pre-service training or initial teacher education (Darling-Hammond, 1996) provides new teachers with an opportunity of gaining knowledge that expands their professional intellectual capacity to ensure that they teach rigorously and appropriately (Reid, 2017). This serves as a connection between a student teacher and a professional teacher in the field of education (Taylor, 2016). According to Deacon (2012), the journey begins with an entry into a teaching programme and continues

through the first few years of teaching as a newly qualified teacher. The most important part of pre-service teacher education is the practicum or work-based learning (Mensah et al., 2018). Practicums provide student teachers with an opportunity of putting their academic knowledge into practice in the actual world of work, thus, during this time, their classroom skills management, lesson presentation and planning, and professional development are being tested (Mashau, 2012).

Pre-service education includes the confidence and ability of the teacher to present pedagogical content knowledge and to approach the required tasks in a professional manner (Mensah et al., 2018). According to Cherrington (2017), most pre-service teachers starting are often faced with the fear of the unknown and that results in mounting frustration. This normally occurs when a teacher feels unprepared to handle the socio-emotional barriers that most learners bring to the classroom (Cherrington, 2017; Darling-Hammond, 1996). However, on the brighter side, student teachers who perceive these challenges as the opportunity towards positive development, are likely to embark on a self-actualisation process and that promotes positive well-being on the student-teacher (Cherrington, 2017).

Furthermore, the Department of Basic Education has undertaken a plethora of strategies to support both the teachers and principals, however, there is little or no sense of what is actually working or why (Van der Berg, et al., 2016). "This is further complicated by the fact that different strategies are based on different models of support" (Van der Berg, et al., 2016, p. 25). It is clear that one cannot choose the most effective strategies to implement throughout the system without an appropriate systematic assessment of which of these competing models work best (Van der Berg & Hofmeyr, 2018). The South African government fails to provide schools with learning resources such as books, they are also unable to provide facilities such as libraries to communities (Du Plessis & Mestry, 2019). Therefore, the government should extensively invest in infrastructure, learning and teaching material, and provide training and

capacity development programmes for ECD practitioners (Kotzé 2015). The quality of ECD education should be prioritised and carefully monitored to ensure that there is an improvement of the cognitive, social, and emotional development of children (Martin, 2012).

The quality of learning and teaching is important to ensure that successful early development takes place (Atmore et al., 2012). Regardless of the situation of the facility that a child is enrolled at, a good teacher is always capable of providing a learning environment that enables the learner to develop optimally and holistically (Atmore et al., 2012). However, some teachers might hinder the development of the learner by putting less effort into their work (Van der Berg & Hofmeyr, 2018). There is a high rate of teacher absenteeism from schools and classrooms, little or no classwork and homework given to learners, poor preparation for lessons, and the lack of interest in children's academic performance (Armstrong, 2014). In addition to the above risk factors, lack of effort can be due to a lack of motivation inside the education system and the lack of desire to become a teacher (Armstrong, 2014).

The study of Wolhuter (2014) indicated that most students who are enrolled in teaching programmes perform poorly in the university admission test compared to students enrolled in other study programmes. This is due to the fact that often a teaching programme is the last resort for most student teachers (Wolhuter et al., 2012). Also, the majority of prospective teachers do not seem to have the necessary passion and are inadequately inspired by the profession itself (Wolhuter et al., 2012). Furthermore, the study of Wolhuter et al. (2012) highlighted that South African teachers lack morale, lack work ethic, and they are likely to be symptomatic of a lack of inspiration. On the other hand, looking at the history of South Africa, enrolling in a teaching programme was the most accessible route to institutions of higher learning or obtaining higher education and to enhancing social mobility (Wolhuter et al., 2012). This has resulted in most students enrolling for the teaching education programmes (Wolhuter,

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2010). Therefore, it is in the interest of everyone to support and invest their time and resources in Early Childhood Development education.

3.1.4. Early Childhood Development and School Readiness in South Africa

It is important to invest resources in Early Childhood Development education to ensure that children have access to quality education, develop to their full potential, and enhance their chances of performing better at school (Van Niekerk et al., 2017). According to Daries (2017, p. 12), "economic arguments for investing in ECD include a potential increase in productivity over a lifetime, as well as a better standard of living when the child becomes an adult. This is possible if investment into human capital starts at an early age." Early Childhood Development education has shown a positive impact on school readiness and performance, particularly amongst disadvantaged children (Van der Berg & Hofmeyr, 2018). Children from a disadvantaged background with access to an ECD programme that is well-resourced and of high quality, and who grows up in a healthy and safe environment with supportive parents are likely to be prepared for school and be successful in life (Berry & Malek, 2017; Ebrahim et al., 2013).

The study of Bakken et al. (2017) points out that there is a growing volume of literature that supports the conclusion that children who are from a disadvantaged background and are exposed to high-quality pre-school education tend to be ready for school and they experience a long-lasting positive impact throughout their academic lives. According to Bakken et al. (2017), the development of children's intellectual, social, and emotional well-being extends throughout their school years in areas such as (1) learning; (2) reduced need for being placed in special school or classes in later childhood; (3) higher school accomplishment and more commitment to their schoolwork in early adolescence; (4) lower rates of school dropout, juvenile arrests, and welfare assistance as an adult; and (5) higher instances of wealth in late adolescence or early adulthood.

Conversely, when a child is exposed to unresponsive parents, insufficient environmental stimulation and distress in their early years, they are likely to develop problem behaviours which lead to grade retention, and early school dropout (Ebrahim et al., 2013). Furthermore, children living in monetary poverty or disadvantaged background are extremely vulnerable to discrimination, isolation, lack of health and well-being, lack of access to education as well as lack of nutrition and health care services (Atmore et al., 2012). The quality of ECD education has proved to prepare children for school by enhancing their cognitive, physical, spiritual, social and emotional development, and later contribute to a successful adulthood (Atmore et al., 2012).

One of the ways in which the South African government is ensuring the preparation of children for formal schooling is through the provision of a reception year, commonly known as Grade R (Atmore et al., 2012). Unfortunately, Grade R education in South Africa is not yet accessible to all children. It is mostly accessed by those living in urban areas, and with better financial resources (Biersteker, 2018). Moreover, the main reason for introducing Grade R was to reduce inequality in access to education amongst those from disadvantaged backgrounds (Biersteker, 2018). Regardless of the inequalities in the education system, it is found that 83% of children have access to Early Child Care and Education (ECCE), and they are enrolled for Grade R (South Africa National Planning Commission [SANPC], 2012; Van der Berg et al., 2013).

The Department of Basic Education (DBE) is making progress in expanding its provision to make Grade R compulsory (DoE, 2001a). Furthermore, the 2014-2019 medium-term Strategic Framework (DSD, 2014) indicates the importance of improving the quality of education in Grade R and expanding the establishment of pre-Grade R (DSD, 2014; SANPC, 2012). There is a strong link between Grade R and ECD education in preparing children for

formal schooling. In so doing, providing accessible education to children in disadvantaged communities is pivotal to enhance early learning during the foundation years.

3.2. School Readiness in African and European Countries

In African countries as well as European countries, considerable advances have been implemented to improve the accessibility of education to children and to achieve universal primary education (Nakajima et al., 2016). However, not all children have access to quality education (Pritchett, 2013). According to Spaull (2015) quality education is defined as acquiring knowledge, skills, and values that the community deems helpful and normally is articulated in the curricula that are being taught at school. Heyneveld and Craig (1996, p. 13) define quality education as a "concept comprising both changes in the environment in which education takes place and detectable gains in learners' knowledge, skills, and values". Furthermore, quality education comprises of healthy and well-nourished learners who are ready for the formal learning environment with the involvement of the family and community, available adequate resources at the learning facilities, and the acquisition of basic skills such as math, literacy, and other skills needed to cope with the demand of formal schooling (UNICEF, 2000). The study will therefore explore the provision and access to quality education programmes in developing countries such as South Africa, Botswana, and Mozambique. Furthermore, the provision and access to quality education will be explored for countries located within a European context including Sweden, Netherlands, and Turkey.

In developing countries, the early hostile circumstances result in 250 million children below the age of 5 years are at high risk of not reaching their development potential (Black et al., 2017). Above 80 million of these children reside in sub-Saharan African countries which represent two-thirds of children in the region (Blimpo et al., 2019). Most countries in sub-Saharan Africa including Botswana, South Africa and Mozambique are faced with two predominant challenges, including promoting the development of children (Blimpo et al.,

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2019). Firstly, there is a lack of access to early childhood development services. It is stated that the enrolment rate of pre-primary schooling in sub-Saharan Africa is 22%, compared to that of OECD countries which are 79% (World Bank 2015). Secondly, it is challenging to ensure the quality of existing ECD services (Blimpo et al., 2019). Furthermore, school readiness programmes are rare in sub-Saharan African countries, and where they are available, the quality is poor (Bonilla et al., 2018). Also, there has been great progress in the access of education worldwide but the quality of education in most developing countries remains a concern (Bruns & Luque, 2014; Filmer & Fox, 2014; UNESCO, 2014).

The majority of children in Mozambique are still struggling to access formal education and for those with access, they either enter late or make slow progress in the education system, with an immense school dropout rate before transitioning to high school (van der Berg et al., 2017). In Botswana, pre-school education is only available for privileged learners (Mswela, 2017) and is mostly accessed by children whose parents can afford fees for private day-care facilities and pre-schools (Mswela, 2017). Furthermore, Roodt (2018) state that the education system of South Africa is considered to be in crisis. Although there is an increasing number of children in the system, the question remains as to whether the education they are receiving is of high-quality (Roodt, 2018). The Annual National Assessment (ANA) was conducted by the Department of Basic Education (2014) for Grade 1-3 in language and mathematics. The finding revealed that learners could not write meaningful sentences using the correct grammar and punctuation marks (Department of Basic Education, 2014).

It is the desire of the European countries to provide learners with high-quality education (Göksoy, 2017). However, the inequality in different education systems remains to be a predominant issue in European countries (Chzhen et al., 2018). Children do not have access to quality education especially those from disadvantaged background (Chzhen et al., 2018). Furthermore, some European countries do not permit children to attend formal schooling due

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to a lack of school readiness qualities, regardless of their school-going age (Eurydice, 2014).

In many European countries, pre-school education is considered to be compulsory (Göksoy, 2017). The Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) 2011 report states that about 15% of Swedish learners perform poorly in reading and literacy. This is due to a lack of parental support and the inability to comprehend the language of instruction used in the classroom (Garbe et al., 2016). The Netherlands is known for the quality of its education system and above 80% of children aged between two to four years attend pre-school or daycare centres before formal schooling, however, most learners leave primary school without reaching the literacy attainment target and being able to read properly due to poor quality education (Gubbels et al., 2017; Slot, 2014). The Turkish education system emphasises the importance of providing quality and equal education to all learners (Kotaman, 2014). However, Children who are from an advantaged family background are five times more likely to attend pre-schools that are of high quality compared to disadvantaged children (Agirdag et al., 2015). Access to high-quality pre-school programmes enables children to be ready for the formal learning environment and it is considered a promising way to improve learning outcomes (World Bank, 2018).

3.3. The Challenges Influencing School Readiness

Children entering the formal education system for the first time encounter a multitude of experiences, interactions, and learning with people in their surroundings (Arnold et al., 2006). Learners need to be exposed to various learning experiences to be able to possess the required skills, knowledge, and attitude to cope with the demands of a formal learning environment (Bhise & Sonawat, 2016). The social environment that children encounter at school is completely different from their home environment; they encounter new rules and new life experiences (Kartal & Guner, 2018). Most children in South Africa are deprived of the quality learning opportunities in the years before they begin schooling and this might be due to

the poverty, lack of resources in the community and lack of family support (Mouton et al., 2013). Socio-economic background, the language of learning and teaching, parental education and lack of community support all play a crucial role in setting the early learning foundation for children and therefore has a direct influence on their developmental trajectory.

3.3.1. Socio-economic Background

Socio-economic factors also play a crucial role in poor preparedness for school. Family income can have a direct impact on the development and school readiness of the child (Isaacs, 2012). Children who belong to a higher family income background are more competent at school compared to their disadvantaged peers (Bhise & Sonawat, 2016). Disadvantaged children perform poorly at school due to lack of nutritious food, poor home environment, lack of high-quality care environment, and insufficient health care resources (Isaacs, 2012). In 1995 an estimation was made concerning the South African population, and it was found that about 48% of the population and 28% of households were living below the estimated poverty line (Steyn et al., 2011). In many cases, poverty is linked to unemployment, which results in learners selling alcohol and drugs and joining a gang as it may make access to the selling of these items more accessible (Benjamin, 2011a). Ngqela and Lewis (2012) further elaborate that these learners tend to be violent and may even carry weapons to school. Therefore, it is imperative to come up with possible ways to strengthen the quality of education learners receive and to comprehend how their socio-economic background may influence their education (Spaull, 2015).

3.3.2. The Language of Learning and Teaching (LoLT)

There is a substantial gap between children's first language and the language of instruction that learners are expected to comply with when they are at school (Arnold et al., 2006). The majority of learners in South Africa are learning in a language which they are not proficient in (Daniels, 2010). Furthermore, children are often taught in the national language

(second language) often known to be the medium of instruction language, and in most cases, this is not the language they use to communicate at home (Kosonen, 2017). This results in children not having access to education in a language that they understand, and this impacts negatively on their learning and academic progress (UNESCO, 2016). Owen-Smith (2010) revealed that the majority of learners in South Africa are taught in a language that they do not understand and that results in learners' underperforming academically. According to UNICEF (2012), learning problems occur when the language of instruction used in school is not the child's first language or their mother tongue. The use of mother tongue in the classroom has been found to improve participation in the classroom and enhance the chances of family involvement in the child's education (Trudell, 2016). The use of language that learners understand in the classroom promotes a smooth transition between home and school.

3.3.3. Illiteracy Among Parents and Caregivers

According to Mathambo and Gibbs (2008), many caregivers in South Africa, especially those living in rural areas, encounter many challenges including poverty, inadequate education and skills, and social isolation. These factors, directly and indirectly, affect the ability of parents to look after their children, and that impacts negatively on the child's educational and social development (Makunga et al., 2017). According to Makunga et al., (2017), illiteracy is the main challenge that is encountered by many families, and the majority of adults are reliant on others to survive and function. Furthermore, illiterate parents do not have the skills and knowledge to deal with daily challenges they encounter in their interactions with their children, such as helping them with schoolwork and comprehending notifications they receive from teachers (Makunga et al., 2017). Therefore, illiterate parents negatively impact the health, hygiene, and nutrition level at home as they have limited knowledge of how to enhance these aspects (Makunga et al., 2017). Furthermore, children who are from families whose parents did not attain high school education are more than five times more likely to become illiterate

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than children from well-educated families, and to dropout of school (Roman, 2004; Khan et al., 2015). Parents or caregivers with low educational backgrounds often tend to experience low self-esteem which limits the assertiveness required to motivate their children to excel at school (Makunga et al., 2017). Moreover, parents who encouraged language and cognitive activities, and showed interest in their children's homework positively correlate school with the readiness of children compared to those who are not involved (Lau et al., 2011).

3.3.4. Lack of Afterschool Programmes and Community Support

Afterschool programmes offer support to families by safely keeping their children and offer academic support mainly for children who are not performing well at school and enhance their emotional and social development (Smith & Bradshaw, 2017). These afterschool or educational programmes provide structured intervention in a supervised and supportive environment to learners who lack academic supervision when they get home (Jenson et al., 2018). Also, engaging learners during the lesson has proven to have a positive impact on their academic performance. There are multiple goals of teacher-learner interaction, which include the improvement of outcomes in school performance, stimulating positive development, and preventing delinquency, the use of substances at a tender age, and other behavioural problems (Kremer et al., 2015). Although the teacher-learner interaction is diverse in other components, it provides a combination of academic instruction, leisure, mentoring, and social and emotional development (Jenson et al., 2018). Furthermore, many community educational programmes increase positive social interaction with peers, parents, and teachers (Jenson et al., 2018). Afterschool or community educational programmes are often offered in low-income neighbourhoods to assist disadvantaged learners to have access to academic support and to be involved in recreational developmental activities commonly afforded to their peers from a middle-class background (Jenson et. al., 2013). Many afterschool or community educational programmes use intervention mechanisms to improve the academic performance of learners,

in mathematics, reading, and science (Jenson et al., 2018). The majority of afterschool or community educational programmes focuses on enhancing the reading skills of learners (Jenson et. al., 2013). Most schools and Foundation Phase teachers, especially Grade 1 teachers, do not look forward to receiving new learners every year (UNICEF, 2012), since the majority of learners are not responsive to the requirements of formal learning (UNICEF, 2012). Most learners make it to primary schools, however, due to confusion of the formal education and lack of academic support from the community, they dropout of school (UNICEF, 2012).

3.3.5. Lack of Early Childhood Development (ECD) Programmes

However, while ECD education has improved in South Africa, the challenge remains that a lack of qualified ECD practitioners are found in classrooms teaching children (Motala, 2014). These children end up not receiving pre-school education that is of high quality and they are not thoroughly prepared for formal education (Motala, 2014). In addition, the absence of school readiness programmes, learning materials, congested classrooms, inconvenient locations, and absent teachers worsen the situation (UNICEF, 2012). Early childhood quality programmes are important and children who fail to access quality pre-school education are often unable to cope with the demands of formal education (Workman & Ulrich, 2017). Due to poverty in some communities, ECD centres still struggle with appropriate infrastructure (Mbarathi et al., 2016). A study that was conducted (Van der Berg et al., 2011) indicate that children from poor background often enter school with a cognitive disadvantage due to lack of resources. They acquire language skills very slowly, unable to comprehend mathematics, and experience delays in recognising letters, and phonological sensitivity (Barbarin & Aikens, 2015). Children often perceive themselves as scholastically unable, which results in them dropping out of school, they are always bullying and causing problems amongst their peers (Goodman & Gregg, 2010). Furthermore, these children might struggle with financial issues in

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adulthood due to poverty and school dropout, which can be seen as a result of academic and behavioural struggles encountered in early grades (Isaacs, 2012).

3.4. The Consequences of Poor School Readiness on Learner's School Performance

The majority of children in South Africa live in poverty and that has a negative impact on their school performance. The study of Hall et al. (2018) explained that South Africa is one of the countries that have a high rate of children living in poverty. The data from Statistics South Africa (2018) indicated that about 65% of African black children lived in disadvantaged households, and 31% of coloured children were subjected to poverty, and only 3% of white children were defined as poor and this has resulted in children not obtaining quality education and enough nutrition. According to Hall et al. (2018) poverty of children remains prominent mostly in the rural areas of the former homelands, whereby 81% of children lives in poverty, and for those children living in urban areas, the poverty rate is about 44%. Poverty plays a major role in the delay of school entry, school dropout, and high grade repetition of learners (Dieltiens & Meny-Gibert, 2009). The poor school performance of learners is due to a lack of basic foundation in numeracy and literacy skills in lower grades (Hartnack, 2017). In addition, the lack of early childhood development programmes, and the lack of quality early childhood education contribute to poor school performance of learners (Spaull, 2015). Children in South Africa do not have access to quality learning opportunities before entering a formal learning environment (Bruwer et al., 2014). This results in children not reaching the required level of school readiness (Bruwer et al., 2014).

3.4.1. Low Academic Performance

Low academic performance is one of the challenges that both the learners and teachers face. There are no specific causes of low academic performance, however, learners who did not attend pre-school education show less academic capabilities and competencies (Ilyas et al., 2018). The large family system and lack of educational facilities in the community due to a

poor socio-economic background can destroy the desire of the child to learn (Ilyas et al., 2018). The socio-economic status of the school that the learner attends plays a vital role in their academic performance (Visser et al., 2015). Learners who attend disadvantaged schools are more likely to achieve low academic results due to a lack of resources at school (Visser et al., 2015). Also, children who grow up witnessing violence at home or at the community are at risk of performing poorly in school (Al-Zoubi & Younes, 2015). Low academic performance impact on the learners' psychological aspects, decrease mental capabilities, lowers self-confidence, and levels of fear and anxiety (Saad, 2016). These learners may easily get frustrated and give up on the task without finishing it (Jensen, 2009).

3.4.2. Grade Retention

Grade retention is a controversial issue. According to Haidary (2013) repeating a grade has a negative impact on learners' academic performance, self-esteem, and social adjustment. The majority of learners perceive retention as punishment and a humiliating measure used by teachers (Ndaruhutse, 2008). It further creates a negative image on learners towards school and education (Terry, 2011). Grade retention can be due to academic failure, unsatisfactory results, poor school attendance and lack of education programmes in the community (UNESCO, 2012). However, there has been a controversial issue wherein some teachers defend it as a positive remedial practice to improve the academic performance of learners, while others believe that it has a negative impact (Peixoto et al., 2016). There are no conclusive remarks on the controversial issue of how retention impacts on the academic lives of learners (Blazer, 2019). However, previous studies found that grade retention can negatively impact the learner's academic achievement and self-esteem, and recent studies has concluded that retention has a positive impact on learner's long term academic achievement (Mariano et al., 2018; Bayer, 2017; Lynch, 2017). Also, grade retention is related to a negative impact on academic accomplishment and socio-emotional adjustment; learners tend to develop a negative attitude

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towards school, and this results in emotional stress, low self-esteem, and unacceptable behaviour such as violence especially during puberty (Jimerson & Renshaw, 2012). Children from disadvantaged backgrounds tend to enter formal schooling environment late, which then results in them repeating grades and leaving school without the necessary skills required (UNESCO, 2012). According to Haidary (2013), various reasons result in grade retention of learners: firstly they could not reach the academic requirements for that particular grade, and secondly, they are considered immature for the next grade. Furthermore, these children are unable to adhere to instructions and there is a lack of learning materials available (Haidary, 2013). Grade repetition is considered to be an effective measure to improve the academic performance of learners before they proceed to the next grade (Terry, 2011).

3.4.3. School Dropout

School dropout is not a sudden event. Rather, it is a long process that results from various circumstances including learners' disposition, learning difficulties, poor school readiness, and lack of academic support from home and school (Department of Basic Education, 2012). The majority of learners' dropout of school after years of grade retention (Department of Basic Education, 2017), and most of these learners are idle once they have dropped out of school (Branson et al., 2014). Furthermore, low achievement in class and lack of school support programmes in communities may result in school dropout (Hartnack, 2017). According to Van der Berg (2015), poor academic performance of learners can be identified as early as in Grade 4. Therefore, emphasises should be put on the Foundation Phase to improve learners' academic performance (Van der Berg, 2015). As noted previously, when learners progress to higher grades, the promotion rate decreases, and the dropout rate increases (Grossen et al., 2017). School dropout is a complex phenomenon that should not only be based on poor school readiness, however, the economic and social losses, the family and the community that leaners belong to play a crucial role in ensuring that learners stay at school (Andrei et al., 2011).

It is crucial to understand the reason behind school dropout, to assist in preventing the phenomenon.

3.4.4. Absenteeism

Demir and Akman Karabeyoglu (2015) indicated that underperforming learners usually do not feel safe at school due to the abuse they encounter from their peers, moreover, they find being in the classroom boring as they feel academically and socially inadequate. Demir and Akman Karabeyoglu (2015) explain that absenteeism can be a result of learners' perception of the school environment, the commitment of learners to school, the learners' family structure, and learner-family communication. Absentee learners sometimes do not feel safe and comfortable at school, due to them being academically or socially inadequate (Demir & Akman Karabeyoglu, 2015). They get bored being in a classroom and their positive perspective related to school is less than those who are regularly at school (Demir & Akman Karabeyoglu, 2015). Also, some families show little of no interest in their children's academic lives, and children end up not seeing the importance of remaining at school due to lack of support they get from home (Gubbels et al., 2019). Wadesango and Machingambi (2011) confirms that absenteeism is extensive in the South African education context. Absenteeism as such is not only an aspect which impacts on education, in addition it is a social and political setback which poses huge social expenses (Wadesango & Machingambi, 2011).

3.5. The Challenges Encountered in the Classroom by Teachers Regarding Learners with Poor School Readiness

The expectations of formal education tend to be high for children. Some of the challenges experienced by teachers include large classroom sizes, which impact on the quality of teaching, even for those committed teachers (Gustafsson 2011, p. 42), and lack of resources such as stationery and furniture (De Witte et al., 2013). Moreover, the social environment that children encounter at school is completely different from their home environment; they

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encounter new rules and new life experiences (Kartal & Guner, 2018). They are expected to obey the classroom rules, follow instructions, form friendships, detach from their parents, take responsibility for their belongings and most importantly, learn subject matters such as math, reading and writing (Polat et al., 2014). The transitioning period is not an easy period for all learners, and some need more support to successfully adapt to formal learning environment (Polat et al., 2014).

3.5.1. Disruptive/ Problematic Behaviour

In South African schools, disruptive behaviour remains to be the most consistently discussed issue. In the formal learning environment, learners are expected to cooperate, follow instructions, control impulsivity, display good social interaction, control anger, and respect the physical limitations set by the teacher, however, they do the opposite (Jacobsen, 2013). In the Foundation Phase, classroom disruptive behaviour is deemed to be the biggest challenge experienced by teachers (Marais & Meier, 2010). Learners talk and make a noise while the teacher explains the content of the curriculum or when they are required to complete a task (Marais & Meier, 2010). Furthermore, they throw stationery and objects around, defy the teacher, and run and walk aimlessly in the class (Marais & Meier, 2010). It is unfortunate that on a daily basis, teachers have to deal with these disruptive behaviours. "Misbehaving learners and disciplinary problems are a disproportionate and intractable part of every teacher's experience of teaching" (Marais & Meier, 2010, p. 41). The majority of teachers in South Africa are concerned with the disciplinary issues encountered at schools since corporal punishment was banned (Marais & Meier, 2010). The level of burnout on teachers is very high, since they have to deal with learners that are disruptive in the classroom, and this results in less learning taking place (Bergin & Bergin, 2012). Disruptive behaviour in the classroom involves conduct such as throwing tantrums, physical aggression including bullying, fighting, unnecessary disagreements, stealing, and other forms of disobedience or resistance to authority

(Stadler, 2017). Bullying is an alarming factor that most Foundation Phase teachers are encountering in classrooms, and this results in a disruption in learning (Singh, 2014). Bullying occurs in many forms, including emotional and physical abuse, intimidation, and name-calling, stealing, showing less respect to the teacher, and disrupting classroom lessons (Olweus, 2010). Often learners are being teased by their fellow peers due to poor academic performance and age, and this results in social isolation, low self-esteem, inability to comprehend or grasp concepts in the classroom, and a lack of desire to learn and concentrate (Thompson & Iwata, 2001). The lack of concentration is a common educational problem that most underperforming learners encounter, and it results in them having a negative attitude towards schoolwork (Ncontsa & Shumba, 2013).

3.5.2. Overcrowded Classrooms

Overcrowded classrooms are one of the biggest issues facing schools and teachers. In South Africa unfortunately the issue of overcrowded classrooms remains to impact the immediate future and might even transpire in a long-term future (Maraip, 2016). Little has been done on reducing classroom sizes of the Foundation Phase (Spaull, 2016). The classroom sizes in the Eastern Cape and Limpopo of Grade 1 to 3 learners are between 10 - 15% whereby learners are in class sizes of more than 60 pupils (Spaull, 2016). According to (Spaull, 2016) classroom sizes of learners aged six to eight years should be smaller, as it may be more difficult for teachers to manage, teach, and direct these learners. Furthermore, the lack of infrastructure at school, a limited number of teachers, and poorly resourced no-fee schools result in overcrowded classrooms (West & Meier, 2020). According to West and Meier (2020), teachers in South Africa are encountering a challenge with overcrowded classrooms due to the lack of qualified teachers and infrastructure such as limited classrooms. It is challenging for teachers to carry out a lesson in an overcrowded classroom and create a learning environment that is conducive for each learner (Maraip, 2016). Teachers cannot apply different teaching methods

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such as high-order questioning and active learning approaches (Maraip, 2016). In fact, they are limited to the 'chalk and talk' method of instruction (Opoku-Asare et al., 2014). Also, the study that was conducted by Cortes et al. (2012), Marais (2016), and Van Wyk (2008) indicated that overcrowded classrooms are one of the common issues that leads to didactic neglect, which refers to the inability of the teacher to give attention to the educational needs of every learner. Van Wyk (2008) emphasises that overcrowded classrooms contribute to a lack of academic performance due to lack of space, fresh air, and noise, that can result in learners not being to pay attention and can cause stress within learners.

3.5.3. Lack of Motor Coordination Development Emotional and Social Competency

School-going aged children demonstrate poor development of motor coordination in the classroom (Zeng et al., 2017). According to Van Biljon and Longhurst (2011), learners with poor motor coordination development have difficulties coping with writing, sitting up, and being attentive in the classroom. Writing is the common way of communication that can easily be taken for granted (Blease & Condy, 2014). However, it is one of the skills that learners need to acquire to eradicate the stigma of poverty and illiteracy (Blease & Condy, 2014). Children who fail to acquire all appropriate physical skills needed for formal schooling might end up performing poorly at school and have social and behavioural difficulties (Sherry & Draper, 2013). Moreover, learners whose fine motor skill is not fully developed struggle with colouring-in and cutting required activities (Bruwer et al., 2014). This results in learners having incomplete and untidy work, leading learners to be discouraged and having poor self-image (Bruwer et al., 2014). Social and emotional development is crucial in early childhood. The lack of emotional competency hinders the child's learning pace, learners disrupt classrooms, are unable to follow instructions, and keep up with the requirements of the curriculum (Graziano et al., 2007). Furthermore, learners are unable to take responsibility for

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their belongings, which results in them losing their stationery and teaching aids (Bruwer et al., 2014). The social skill that learners need to acquire to adapt to formal learning environment includes obeying classroom rules, successfully forming friendships and keeping up with the social expectations of the learning situation (Bulotsky-Shearer et al., 2008). However, children who fail to acquire the relevant social skills needed are likely to develop disruptive behaviours during the learning process and they end up having negative relationships with their peers and teachers (Romano et al., 2010). Teachers spend most of their time teaching children to obey to classroom rules and to adhere to social expectations, and this results in them losing out on the teaching time (Bruwer et al., 2014).

3.5.4. Age

Cantalini-Williams et al. (2016), agrees that younger children are likely to be retained in a grade or be delayed in their learning due to the lack of development skills. Teachers and parents rated the social skills of younger children to be significantly low compared to those of older children (Cantalini-Williams et al., 2016). According to Michalska et al. (2018), children who are six years of age are not adequately mature to cope with the demands of the formal learning environment, and emphasised that due to the absence of socio-emotional competency, younger children are not ready to take up the formal education. The research that was conducted by Ensar and Keskin (2014) shows that younger children in a grade, especially males, are more likely to be delayed in their development and that might lead to low academic performance at school. Contrary to that, the study that was conducted by Stipek (2009) argues that the age difference amongst learners is not a strong determinant for school readiness, because younger children tend to catch up with their older peers after few years of being at school.

3.5.5. Lack of Parental Involvement

Parents encounter several challenges that impede the involvement of their children's education (Poe, 2015). The study of Hornby (2011) indicated that often teachers think that

parents are not interested in being involved in their children's education. From the study of Sapungan and Sapungan (2014), it was emphasised that some parents are passive in their children's education, some are not involved, and sadly some parents display the obvious "I-don't-care" attitude. However, Naicker (2013) emphasised that parents do not have time to be involved in their children's education due to a busy schedule and trying to ensure that they provide for their families. It has been found that some parents do not attend parent meetings due to work commitments (Mbokodi & Singh, 2011).

3.6. The Strategies to Assist Children Overcome Poor Scholastic Performance

Improving school readiness should be integral to the whole society. To ensure that children are prepared for formal learning, teachers, parents, and communities need to ensure that children have academic support during their childhood (Hu & Pattugalan, 2017). School readiness can be improved through proper planning by introducing children to fundamental activities that will assist in a smooth transition to formal schooling (Bhise & Sonawat, 2016). The main focus of these activities should be on the child's holistic development; their physical, social, emotional, communication, and intellectual abilities to ensure that they are ready for school (Ebrahim et al., 2013). To effectively create a smooth transition of learners, teamwork between the government, teachers, communities, and the policymakers is required to ensure that children get the support they need (Moore, 2008).

3.6.1. Improve Children's Environment

The transitioning period is the most difficult time for school-going age children. However, the environment in which children spend time needs to be addressed to develop and improve children's skills and behaviour (Meyer & Warnich, 2010). Children require responsive care with organised and purposeful experiences and activities that will contribute to their school readiness (Meyer & Warnich, 2010). According to UNICEF (2018), children need to have regular access to, and experience play-based learning materials. The child needs exposure to

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print, music, languages and arts, and have daily readings of stories; and the government should ensure that schools are provided with relevant work schedules (Meyer & Warnich, 2010). Furthermore, "parents can promote children's school readiness by providing educational toys and literacy materials such as books and writing supplies" (Welsh, 2014, p. 3). Due to school phobia, children might find it difficult to adapt to a formal learning environment. However, children, parents, teachers, and schools should work together at all times to ensure successful adaptation of learners to a formal learning environment (Pekdoğan & Akgül, 2016).

3.6.2. Parental Involvement

Parental involvement can be very beneficial in improving the school readiness of children. There are several positive activities that parents can undertake with their children to develop and promote school readiness (Marti et al., 2018). Parents can provide support by reading with the learners, teaching them nursery rhymes and songs, playing with numbers and letters, taking children on adventure visits, and encourage them to play with their peers at home (Moore, 2008). Such support can be provided by parents regardless of their educational or occupational level; what matters is what parents do with their children more than who they are (Sylva et al., 2010). Davidovitch and Yavich (2017) found that homework improves children's grade and academic performance and enhance problem-solving skills that will later enable the learner to be independent. Parental involvement during homework sessions reinforces children's self-confidence, enable independent learning, and creates an opportunity to practice tabling gratification (Cooper et al., 2012). The study of Cheung and Pomerantz (2012) indicated that children whose parents are involved in their education are likely to stay motivated and reach the parents' academic expectations and score higher marks. Teacher-parent communication can result in better parental involvement and improved academic performance and achievement of learners (Kraft & Dougherty, 2013; Bergman, 2012). Furthermore, teacher-parent meetings are essential, as they enable direct interaction regarding

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the behaviour and academic performance of the child, and this will also result in both parties having equal responsibility in ensuring that the child learn effectively (Bilton et al., 2017). However, learners whose families do not have enough resources are less likely to experience these activities during childhood.

3.6.3. Implement Community Programmes

Taking part in high-quality education and early childcare programmes can have a positive impact on the child's development during the early years and in their school readiness (Boethel, 2004). High-quality education includes adult-child responsive interactions, and a well-trained practitioner, therefore the schools must implement school-based assessment policies and give continuous guidance to parents and teachers (Meyer & Warnich, 2010). Children who have actively engaged in high-quality preschool education programmes have shown a long-term improvement and benefits from what is known to be 'pre-school advantage' (Noel, 2010). These learners have proven to have greater stability in relationships, increased mental health, and positive outcomes in their education (HSRC, 2012). While the evidence indicates that all children benefit from high-quality pre-school education, the gains are greatest for children from disadvantaged family backgrounds (Cunha et al, 2006; Sylva et al, 2004).

3.6.4. Pre-school Education

Pre-school education enables children to be more prepared for formal learning. It teaches children to acquire skills on how to overcome different scholastic, personal and social challenges (Bhise & Sonawat, 2015). According to Lamy (2013), it is indicated that pre-school attendance enables children to gain social capabilities for the smooth transition to the formal learning environment and enables them to acquire foundational academic skills. It is evident in the study of Jones et al. (2014) and Webster-Stratton and Reid (2004) that early exposure to quality pre-school education endorses academic and emotional skills. It has proven to be one of the factors that reduce the rate of school dropout of learners (Gettinger, 2013). However,

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the majority of learners from disadvantaged backgrounds do not have access to pre-school education that is of high quality, and this results in them not being ready for school (Spaull, 2015). Pre-schools need to have an effective curriculum that benefits children, particularly those from disadvantaged households (Meyer & Warnich, 2010). Teachers should be the primary facilitators to ensure that learning takes place effectively (Meyer & Warnich, 2010). Furthermore, the government should provide support to teachers to enable them to integrate childcare and formal education by being responsive to cultural diversity, provide early literacy and mathematics skills, and provide emotional support and regular school (Duncan et al., 2007). The transition programmes have shown significance in ensuring that learners make a positive start to school and lays a strong foundation for lifelong learning (Bhise & Sonawat, 2015). Hall et al. (2013) support the notion that quality pre-school education reduces the risk of poor academic performance and promotes a sense of independence to learners. The school-based transition programmes are beneficial to learners, as there is positive outcome of progressive academic achievements (Melhuish et al., 2008).

3.6.5. Learning Through Play

In today's Foundation Phase classrooms, the concept of play is emphasised, whilst also recognising the importance of maintaining academic standards (Pyle & Danniels, 2017). Learning through play is recognised at a theoretical level, however, there lacks clarity on teaching through play (Whitebread & O'Sullivan, 2012). It is found that most practitioners experience challenges when having to incorporate academic standards with play-based teaching (Danniels & Pyle, 2018). Teacher-directed instructions was found to improve the academic performance of learners, however, modern research has also emphasised the critical role that play has on early academic and social skills (Pyle, 2018). According to Bhise and Sonawat (2016), the natural way of learning is through play. The study that was conducted by Bhise and Sonawat (2016) concurs with the findings of the study that learning through play is

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an important predictor in the ability of learners to comprehend math, reading and writing. The findings of the study of Isaacs et al. (2019) confirms that learning through play improves the mood of learners to learn, and enables them to acquire knowledge and develop their cognitive, social, emotional and physical development. The different types of play enhance various developmental areas of children, mostly the intellectual, academic, social, and emotional well-being (Bubikova-Moan et al., 2019). It is indicated that child-led play enhances problem skills and enable children to construct knowledge about the outside world (Fredriksen, 2012). Children develop a positive attitude when they learn through play and learning becomes more meaningful (Aras & Merdin, 2020).

In conclusion, this chapter aimed to discuss relevant literature concerning the challenges that impede poor school readiness of foundation phase learners as well as early childhood education and development within the South African context. From the literature, it is indicated that this is an under-researched topic that needs attention. The majority of learners in South Africa, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds, do not have access to quality education. Furthermore, this chapter highlighted the challenges that Foundation Phase teachers encounter day to day in their classrooms, and the relevant programmes that might be adopted in enhancing the scholastic performance of learners were also discussed.

The following chapter discusses methodological approach that the study adopted in responding to the research questions and reaching the research objectives.

CHAPTER 4: METHODOLOGY

This chapter comprises of the methodology of sections of the study and discusses the methods employed, the research paradigm, research design, research setting, an overview of participants, and sampling methods. It further discusses the data collection method and procedure as well as the data analysis method utilised. Lastly, this chapter is concluded with trustworthiness, reflexivity, and the presentation of ethics considered throughout the entire study.

The design of the study is seen as the ideal or strategic framework for the study, with the objective of ensuring that the findings of the study are rigorous and the overall aim is fulfilled (Terre Blanche et al., 2011). A coherent design consists of various components of the study which enable a sound connection between the paradigm of the study, the aim, the context, and the data collection and analysis techniques (Terre Blanche et al., 2011). Paradigm is explained as a pattern of ideas, values, and presumptions that guide and impact the study (Terre Blanche et al., 2011). The study of Denzil and Lincoln (2011) further describes paradigm as a worldview that consists of the researcher's ontological, epistemological, and methodological premises. Ontological refers to the nature of reality; the researcher's beliefs and assumptions about the world's view. Epistemological refers to the background, the role and limitations of knowledge, and the techniques of obtaining knowledge (Reber et al., 2009). In this study, the term epistemological refers to the collective perspective of teachers regarding the nature and acquisition of knowledge on the learners. Furthermore, the term ontological in this study refers to the experience of teachers regarding the nature of reality and being.

The study adopted a qualitative methodological framework. The study of Creswell and Poth (2018) explains that qualitative study consists of a range of techniques which includes non-numerical analysis approach and unstructured data. Qualitative research analyses and attempts to discover the importance of human behaviour, and to gain an in-depth understanding

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of contradictory beliefs, while still allowing flexibility and recognising subjectivity and contextual influence (Mohajan, 2018). The qualitative approach was suitable as it allowed the researcher to learn about the individual's subjective experiences and seeks to generate an in-depth explanation about the phenomenon under study (Gentles et al., 2015). This research study seeks to provide rich and in-depth findings on the phenomenon under study and does not intend to provide generalised empirical results.

4.1. Research Design

An exploratory research design was employed to align with the aim of the study. It was relevant as it assisted in exploring and understanding the viewpoints of Foundation Phase teachers' experiences and perceptions of the challenges that impede school readiness (Babbie, 2016). This design was appropriate since limited literature exists on this topic. It seeks to explore the research topic and questions at a grassroots level, but it does not intend to provide conclusive results to the phenomenon under study (Dudovskiy, 2018). The findings of this study have also informed existing and future educational programmes that are geared to capacitate and enhance learning for Foundation Phase teachers.

4.2. Research Setting

This study was conducted at three different primary schools situated in Randfontein, which is in the Rand West City Local Municipality, under the West Rand District in Gauteng Province, and it is situated 40km from the city of Johannesburg. As of 2016, Randfontein had a population of 265,887, which incorporates Mohlakeng, Toekomsrus, and Westonaria. According to the Randfontein Socio-Economic Survey of 2006, Randfontein's population is divided into black African (79.2%), white (10.6%), coloured (10.1%), and Asian/Indian (0.1%) people. Dominant languages currently are Tswana, Sesotho, English, and Afrikaans, with many other languages being spoken, both local and international. English serves as the lingua franca for the town. Randfontein is a diversified area with many schools and Early Childhood

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Development facilities and many parents have enrolled their children in these facilities. However, children continue to fail grades and later dropout of school (Randfontein Herald Newspaper, 2019), and this indicates that the quality of education that is being provided at these educational facilities remains questionable. Therefore, the dropout rate context has informed the study with the most relevant information needed.

4.3. Participants and Sampling

A total number of 20 participants were purposively selected for the study. According to Dworkin (2012), the researcher must have at least between five to fifty sample sizes for rich and in-depth data that would lead to saturation. Data saturation was reached at the 19th and 20th interview. The inclusion criteria for the participants for this study comprised of: (1) being employed as a Foundation Phase teacher in Randfontein, Gauteng; (2) have a recognised qualification, such as a Bachelor of Education; and (3) at least two years' experience as a Foundation Phase teacher. Three schools in Randfontein accommodating learners from low and middle-income backgrounds were selected for the purpose of finding participants who are knowledgeable about the aspect under study. Low-income family background is characterised by little wage income, different life events and experiences such as family structure and environment, neighbourhood events such as exposure to violence and crime, and peer stimuli that may result in less access to resources and limited access to obtaining jobs (Bartik & Hershbein, 2018). The middle-class family background is defined as having achieved a certain level of wealth or lifestyle, and it is a relative financial position of the average citizen in the community (Visagie & Posel, 2011).

Purposive sampling indicates that participants are selected for a specific purpose of gathering data to get in-depth information on their experiences and perceptions of the challenges that impede school readiness (Babbie, 2013b). According to Patton (2002), purposive sampling is described as a selection element for rich data within the qualitative

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approach. Purposive sampling is suitable for exploring in-depth and obtaining first-hand data (Teddlie & Yu, 2007) by selecting participants who have experience and who are knowledgeable about the phenomenon under study (Tongco, 2007). The two schools that were selected use English as a medium of instruction and their second language is Afrikaans. These schools are formerly known as white schools and were selected in the middle-income area (Randfontein town) and based on the availability of resources at schools. The third school uses the second language 'mother tongue' Sesotho, Setswana, or Zulu as a medium of instruction and the school was selected in the low-income area (Township in Randfontein) based on the limited resources in the surrounding community where the school is situated. The Foundation Phase teachers from the three primary schools were approached to participate in this study. Below is a profile of the participants:

Table 1

Participants' Profile

Participant/ Teacher	Age (Y)	Gender	Race	Highest Qualification Held	Years of Teaching Experience	Nationality
1	52	Female	African	B Ed Honours in Education and Training and Development	20	South African
2	40	Female	African	B Ed in ECD and Foundation Phase	4	South African
3	48	Female	African	Advanced Certificate in Education (ACE)	18	South African

4	55	Female	African	Advanced Certificate in Education (ACE)	29	South African
5	58	Female	African	B Ed Foundation Phase	12	South African
6	27	Female	White	B Ed in Intermediate and Senior Phase	4	South African
7	40	Female	Indian	Honours B Ed (Psycho Educational Support)	4	South African
8	59	Female	White	B Comm Degree	36	South African
9	31	Female	White	B Ed Foundation Phase	10	South African
10	57	Female	African	Senior Primary Teachers' Diploma (SPTD) and Diploma in ECD	31	South African
11	64	Female	African	Advanced Certificate in Education (ACE)	41	South African
12	46	Female	African	Advanced Certificate in Education (ACE)	12	South African
13	43	Female	African	B Ed Honours	18	South African
14	39	Female	African	B Ed in Foundation Phase	5	South African
15	42	Female	African	B Ed Foundation Phase	6	South African

16	37	Female	African	B Ed Foundation Phase	2	South African
17	43	Female	African	Certificate in Grade R Teaching	3	South African
18	49	Female	African	B Ed Honours	20	South African
19	44	Female	African	Diploma in Grade R	23	South African
20	27	Female	African	B Ed Foundation Phase	2	South African

Table 1 provides a summary of the demographic profile of the participants. The study included twenty participants who were purposively selected to participate in the study, and their ages ranged between 27 to 64 years old. Regarding the racial classification, sixteen of the participants were black African, three were white and only one was Indian. The dominant race in the Randfontein area is the black African group. The years of teaching experience that participants had ranged from 2 to 41 years and all the participants were South African nationals. The majority of participants had recognised qualifications to teach Foundation Phase. Four participants had Advanced Certificate in Education (ACE), four teachers had honours in BEd, seven teachers had a Bachelor's Degree in Education for Foundation Phase, one had a Bachelor's Degree in Education for Intermediate and Senior Phase, one had a Senior Primary Teacher's Diploma (SPTD) and a Diploma in Early Childhood Development, one had a Certificate in Grade R, one had a Diploma in Grade R. Lastly, one participant had a Bachelor's Degree in Commerce.

4.4. Data Collection and Procedure

Ethical approval was sought from the Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (HSSREC) at the University of Western Cape (UWC), and permission was sought from the Gauteng Department of Education (GDE), as well as the principals at the different primary schools to gain access to the participants. Since South Africa is currently experiencing the National State of Disaster with the Covid-19 pandemic, the South African government has implemented a national lockdown, which means that the researcher was not able to physically meet with participants.

The researcher used semi-structured interviews through online video platforms such as Zoom, which was an effective platform that enabled effective probing to take place. Semi-structured interviews are a flexible interview structure that enables the researcher to explore the thoughts and feelings of the participant by allowing them to actively engage in the conversational flow of the interview (Bryman, 2017). This also facilitated rapport between the researcher and the participants. The study of (Fossey et al., 2002; Jamshed, 2014) explains that a semi-structured interview is used to get in-depth exploration on a topic under study by using an interview guide that is promptly designed with various open-ended questions that allows focused yet flexible and conversational interaction. The development of the interview guide was guided by the literature and the research questions of the study and it comprised of two sections. Section A comprised of demographic information of the participants and Section B comprised of open-ended questions designed to explore the experiences and perceptions related to the aims and objectives of the study. The participants were contacted via email to inform them about the aims and objectives of the study, their rights as participants, and how the findings of the study will be protected and disseminated. The participants were emailed the Information Sheet (Appendix A) and the Consent Form (Appendix B) in English, Sesotho, and Afrikaans.

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After the initial contact via email, the participants who volunteered to participate in the study were contacted telephonically to gain their verbal consent. Thereafter, they were asked to complete and sign the Consent Form (Appendix B) either electronically and send it back to the researcher as an agreement to participate in the study or to send a WhatsApp message indicating their consent. The signed consent form (Appendix B) or the WhatsApp message served as an agreement between the researcher and the participant that allowed the researcher to use the information shared in the interview. The interviews were arranged at a date and time convenient for both the researcher and the participants and sufficient data was provided for participants who were not able to afford data. The duration of each interview was estimated to be approximately 25-30 minutes. The sessions were audio-recorded with permission and transcribed using intelligent verbatim. The interviews were conducted in English, Afrikaans, or Sesotho. A translator was not used since the researcher is multi-lingual and understands these languages. Forward and backward translation was used to transcribe the data.

Confidentiality was maintained throughout the entire data collection process; interviews were held in a private room or space. To ensure anonymity throughout the data collection process, pseudonyms were used so that information is unable to be traced back to the participants' identity. To ensure that the data collected remain secured at all times on these platforms, the participants were informed to protect their accounts by using a strong and unique password and use end-to-end encryption to allow a secured communication. Also, all online interview data was kept in a secure folder. All WhatsApp or email interview information was kept secure in a transportable media such as a flash memory device. Debriefing sessions were held with participants to gain insight regarding their experience of the interview to ensure that they are still feeling emotionally contained and calm. None of the participants requesting the need for a psychologist, even though one was available free of charge.

4.5. Data Analysis

In this study, the generated data was analysed according to Braun and Clarke (2006; 2012) six steps of thematic analysis. According to Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 79) thematic analysis is defined as "a method for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data". In the study of Clarke and Braun (2013) thematic analysis is explained as a process for categorising and analysing themes in a qualitative study. This method enables the researcher to interpret data conscientiously and rigorously and it involves a careful reading of data (Fertuck, 2007). Thematic analysis is beneficial as it ensures reliability and consistency in the analysis phases (Clarke & Braun, 2018). It is also found to be useful in generating unexpected perceptions (Clarke & Braun, 2013). Furthermore, this method of data analysis is of benefit to researchers who have little or no experience with qualitative research, and it does not require comprehensive theoretical knowledge (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis is suitable for this study as it enables the researcher to extract themes, patterns, and similarities from the obtained qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2012). It also enables the objectives of the study to be met. The data were analysed according to the following phases.

Phase 1: Becoming Familiar with Data

As outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006), the first step requires that the researcher becomes familiar with the data collected. The researcher needs to read through the whole set of data at least twice before they begin with the actual data analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In this study, the researcher familiarised herself with the data by repetitively reading through the interview transcripts. According to Clarke and Braun (2013), it is essential for researchers to ultimately become familiar with the data by in-depth reading. Furthermore, the researcher listened to the audio-recorded interviews repeatedly before starting the transcription. The researcher made notes and jotted down important impressions that emerged from the data before proceeding to the next phase, which is coding.

Phase 2: Generating Initial Codes

In this phase, data is organised in a meaningful and systematic way. According to Braun and Clarke (2013, p. 207), "a code is a word or brief phrase that captures the essence of why you think a particular bit of data may be useful." Coding assists in reducing large data into small chunks of meaning, and there are different methods that a researcher can adapt depending on the perspective and research questions (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). The initial codes were generated with the intention of providing guidance for the interview conversation, and codes were also developed with reference to the notes regarding themes and patterns in the data. The researcher worked through each transcript coding every segment of text that appeared to be relevant or addresses the research questions. As the researcher worked on each transcript wherein new codes were generated and sometimes modified the current or existing ones. Initially, the researcher coded the data manually, working through hardcopies of transcripts using pens and highlighters to develop potential themes (Clarke & Braun, 2017).

Phase 3: Searching for Themes

The third phase is about searching for themes. Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 10) indicated that a theme provides a summary of important data regarding the research question and "represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set". The theme is defined as a pattern that captures something important or fascinating about the data obtained or research question (Braun & Clarke, 2012). As indicated by Braun and Clarke (2006) there are no hard and fast (or definitive) rules on what makes a theme and, in most cases, it is characterised by its significance. In this instance, the researcher examined the codes and some of them fitted together well into a theme. The identified codes were combined to form the potential themes and the relevant coded data extracts were combined within the identified themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The researcher organised codes into broader themes and the

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themes were predominately descriptive; they described patterns that are relevant to the research questions. The researcher provided preliminary names for the main themes.

Phase 4: Reviewing Themes

This phase enabled the researcher to review, modify, and develop the initial themes that were identified in the previous chapter (Braun & Clarke, 2012). The study of Braun and Clarke (2006) explained that the researcher needs to determine if themes combine or merge in a meaningful way and that there is a clear and identifiable distinction between the themes. This process involved the review of extracts for every theme to determine if they appear to form a logical pattern. The researcher considered the validity of each theme related to the data and whether the themes reveal the meanings that are apparent in the data set as a whole (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This was done by re-reading the whole set of data to discover if the themes have a meaning related to the data set and to allow coding within themes that were overlooked in the earlier stages of coding (Braun & Clarke, 2006). After the entire process was completed in this phase, the researcher had a notion of different themes, the connection, and the overall story conveyed about the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Phase 5: Defining and Naming Themes

This is the final adjustment of the themes and it aims to "identify the essence of what each theme is about" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 92). It was important for the researcher to revisit the definition of theme before proceeding with this phase to ensure that every theme consists of essential information that would answer the research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The researcher identified the meaning of each theme and every aspect of what each theme represents (Braun & Clarke, 2012). Furthermore, this phase involved the researcher identifying whether the themes consisted of sub-themes. The sub-themes that were identified gave structure to a broader and more complex theme (Braun & Clarke, 2012). In conclusion to

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this phase, the researcher defined and generated names for the themes that will be used for the final is writing up and report.

Phase 6: Producing the Report

This is the final phase of (Braun & Clarke, 2012) and it involves writing the research report. The essential task of this phase is to articulate unclear stories of the data presented by giving the reader the assurance of quality and accuracy of the researchers' analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This last phase involves building coherent, concise, logical, and non-repetitive arguments for the themes. This was done wherein the existing literature was linked with the findings of the study to prepare the thesis. The presented results (articulated in Chapter 5) provides adequate evidence of themes within the data as indicated by data extracts to validate the prevalence of themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Analysing the Foundation Phase teachers' experiences and perceptions of the challenges that impede school readiness through thematic analysis have revealed several themes that emerged from different perceptions and experiences of teachers. The thematic analysis allowed in-depth findings on exploring the challenges that impede school readiness; consequences of poor school readiness on learner's school performance; explain the challenges encountered in the classroom by teachers regarding learners with poor school readiness; identify the available programmes used to assist children with poor scholastic performance.

4.6. Reflexivity

Reflexivity is defined as the process of examining the researchers' background, beliefs, perceptions, and thoughts on the interpretation and collection of data (Babbie, 2013d). According to Cunliffe (2020), reflectivity refers to the method that enables the researchers to validate their research practice is important to the truthfulness of qualitative study. This is one of the techniques that the researcher committed to throughout the entire research process. The

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researcher acknowledges that she is a registered counsellor and completed her practicum work as a teacher. However, the researcher attended regular supervision and debriefing sessions to protect the integrity of emerged data. Thereafter, a report was generated based on the data from the participants' viewpoints rather than that of the researcher. To ensure that the findings are based on the participants' voices and experiences, the researcher remained aware of bias. The researcher has therefore been consistently journaling, engaging in active reflection with the supervisor of the study, and recording of participant's feelings, thoughts, perceptions, and beliefs related to the research process as this has assisted in developing self-awareness (McGhee et al., 2007).

4.7. Trustworthiness

The study used the four criteria of trustworthiness as indicated by Guba (1981) namely: Credibility, Transferability, Dependability, and Conformability. Credibility refers to the accuracy of the findings. According to Shenton (2004), credibility is defined as the accuracy that the study measures what is supposed to measure. For this study credibility was ensured by 'member-checking'; confirming the data with the participants and confirming if the data and findings were captured correctly, this ensured that it remained consistent at all times (Cope, 2014).

Transferability refers to generalising the findings to other groups (Bitsch, 2005; Tobin & Begley, 2004). For this study, transferability was ensured wherein clear and detailed description of the final research results, research setting, methodology and analysis used were provided. Transferability is the degree to which the findings of the study relate to other content or individuals, and it was also ensured by providing a detailed description of the context of the research study, and by using purposive sampling for a specific group of participants who meet the criteria of inclusion in the study (Guba, 1981).

Dependability refers to the consistency of data over comparable circumstances

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(Shenton, 2004). Dependability is further explained as the degree to which the study can be replicated by other scholars and present consistent findings (Korstjens & Moser, 2017). It was ensured by frequent debriefing with the supervisor of the study to confirm and compare findings of previous studies (Cope, 2014).

The extent to which data represents the responses given by the participants is confirmability (Cope, 2014). According to Korstjens and Moser (2017, p. 4), confirmability refers to the extent to which the results are grounded in data in contrast to being "figments of researcher imagination". It was ensured through describing how the information was interpreted and through audit trail (in-depth approach of research activities and process) by member checking and reflexivity to explain how the outcomes were made and interpreted (Cope, 2014).

4.8. Ethics

Ethical approval for this entire study was sought from the Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (HSSREC) at the University of the Western Cape (UWC) and permission was obtained from the Gauteng Department of Education (GDE) and the Principals of the three schools. Permission was also obtained from the participants who agreed to participate in the study. Once ethical approval and access had been obtained, the participants were informed telephonically about the nature of the study. Participants were assured that their personal information was safeguarded and the manner in which their personal information was processed was regulated by the Protection of Personal Information Act (De Bruyn, 2014). Pseudonyms were used to ensure that information is not traced back to the participant.

The researcher did not share any information with third parties outside the study, and to ensure that confidentiality was maintained, interviews were held in a private room and only the researcher had access to the digital-physical copies of data. The transcripts were kept in a locked drawer while the digital recordings were secured through encrypting the data into a file

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on a computer that was accessible to the researcher and it was password protected. The data collected from the study will be safeguarded for a period of five years. Thereafter, all physical documents or data relating to participants will be shredded five years after the study had been conducted and digital recordings will be permanently disposed of by erasing digital copies of data from the researcher's personal computer. Debriefing sessions were held with participants to gain insight regarding their experience of the interview to ensure that they felt emotionally contained and calm. A psychologist was available free of charge for any other participants who feel the need to consult with one, however none of the participants requested the need for one.

In Chapter 5, the results that were thematically analysed will be presented and discussed

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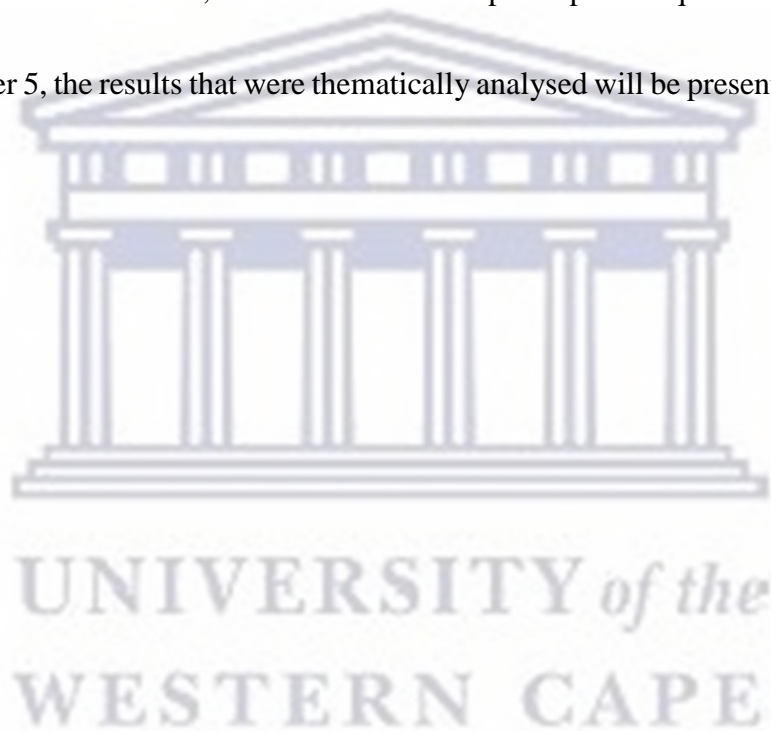
CHAPTER 5: PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

The purpose of this study is to explore Foundation Phase teachers' experiences and perceptions of the challenges that impede school readiness. The study set out the following objectives: (a) to explore the challenges that impede the school readiness of foundation phase learners of low-to middle-income background; (b) to explore the consequences of poor school readiness on learner's school performance; (c) to explain the challenges encountered in the classroom by teachers regarding learners with poor school readiness; (d) identify the available programmes used to assist children with poor scholastic performance. Once all the data had been analysed, the following themes and sub-themes emerged.

Table 2

Theme and Sub-themes

Theme	Sub-themes
5.1. Understanding of school readiness	5.1.1. Definition of school readiness 5.1.2. Interpersonal skills of learners 5.1.3. The qualities of teachers
5.2. Challenges that impede school readiness of learners	5.2.1. Definitive age for entry into formal schooling 5.2.2. Lack of parental involvement 5.2.3. Inability of parents to understand the curriculum
5.3. Lasting consequences of poor school readiness	5.3.1. Problematic behaviour 5.3.2. Grade retention 5.3.3. School drop-out 5.3.4. Absenteeism 5.3.5. Teachers' feeling incompetent
5.4. Classroom challenges impeding school readiness	5.4.1. Overcrowded classrooms 5.4.1. Lack of resources 5.4.3. Language barrier

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	5.4.4. More time and attention given underperforming learners
5.5. Suggestion of programmesf or improving poor scholastic performance of learners	5.5.1. Parental involvement
	5.5.2. Attaining Preschool or Grade R education
	5.5.3. Learning through play
	5.5.4. Provide support to the learners

5.1. Theme 1: Understanding of School Readiness

The school readiness of children is multi-faceted and it is centred on all aspects of development: social, emotional, physical, and mental development. Hence, the developmental rate of children is not the same. This theme considers the interpersonal skills of learners to be an important aspect of identifying if the children are ready for school. Teachers, like any other professionals, have certain qualities that enable them surpass in their work and assist learners to successfully transition into the formal learning environment.

5.1.1. Definition of School Readiness

Teachers stressed the importance of young children being able to adapt to the formal learning environment. This sub-theme highlights what teachers thought school readiness requires. The majority of teachers were familiar with the term "school readiness" and some strongly believed that learners must be developed in all aspects of development; physical, social, cognitive and emotional, to be considered ready for school.

As highlighted in the following statements, school readiness consists of various developmental areas that children need to acquire before they start school. In addition, teachers noted that children should be able to pass the school readiness test and adhere to some of the requirements they would have set out. The following response justifies the claims made above:

"What the child needs to be ready by the time they go to school be it physical development, social development, language development and early literacy is very important." (**Teacher 20**)

"By school readiness I understand that the child must be ready for school on all levels, physical, emotional and they must pass all the test, and all the blocks that must be ticked for him to be ready for school." (**Teacher 9**)

"School readiness is when we are preparing……okay not really preparing but is to check if children are ready for school. We check their mental and physical development, if they can handle themselves as individuals." (**Teacher 17**)

According to McGettigan and Gray (2012), school readiness incorporates several dimensions of all aspects of children's lives that has a direct contribution to the ability of the child to learn. There are also proposed personal readiness criteria that learners need to adhere to at school entry, and it includes emotional well-being, physical development, approaches to learning, communication skills, cognitive skills, and general knowledge (Pan et al., 2018). Teachers described school readiness a step further than just referring to the developmental areas, as emphasis was put on the expectations that children need to adhere to specific requirements when they are in the formal learning environment like having a sense of responsibility and independence.

The teachers reportedly based their understanding of school readiness mainly on their subjective experiences and perceptions within the classroom environment. They strongly felt that school readiness is dependent on the age and the ability of the child to have the basic knowledge and to be able to comprehend simple aspects that are being taught at school so that they can easily progress to the next level:

"School readiness is the child's ability to actually be at school or be at the right developmental stage to be at school. So for me school readiness is about a child's development, basically, to actually be at school at a certain age or time or whatever it is. For me development means for a child to be ready for school a child needs to know certain things, like maybe for Grade R, what they need to know is like shapes, know how to count a little bit, you know certain things. I teach Grade 3, so school readiness for me means is the child's development ready for me to take the child to the next level." (**Teacher 7**)

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Peckham (2017) indicated that children with a positive attitude towards schoolwork, easily adapt to the requirements of formal schooling.

It is also evident that school readiness is not only about the learners, but the teachers and schools need to be ready to ensure successful transitioning of learners to the formal learning environment. The teachers and the management always need to be a step ahead and have everything prepared such as Annual Teaching Plans (ATPs) for the learners, to ensure achievement of school readiness. Teachers also elaborated to say that a learner that has all the required resources such as study materials, a supportive teacher, all contribute to a sense of well-being and facilitate school readiness. The achievement of school readiness of children is the responsibility of all the people in the learners' surroundings, including the teachers or anyone at school.

> *"School readiness means that the learners must be ready for formal schooling. The teachers must have their ATPs and lesson plans ready to be able to continue with the lesson for the day and teachers must always be ready."* **(Teacher 10)**

> *"My understanding about school readiness is to see how far like… or how ready the school is in terms of their planning, starting from their management plan, going into how they would plan their day to day say curriculum activities and then how they would go about….yah the things that are needed to be done for that year, that's how I understand school readiness."* **(Teacher 14)**

> *"I think school readiness is the availability of the study material, presence of the teachers, emotional and physical well-being of the child."* **(Teacher 16)**

> *"Learners have to be ready to be educated or for formal learning environment, I have to be ready to educate them to know their sentences and everything and learners and schools must have all the things or school material ready to start to learn."* **(Teacher 6)**

Tomlinson (2013) stated that it is mainly the responsibility of the public; caregivers, teachers, and professionals to contribute to the school readiness of children. The role of caregivers is to fulfill children's more general needs, while teachers assist the child to acquire the scholastic skills needed, and educational psychologists often act in the best interest of the learner by conducting assessments and providing guidance (Rimm-Kaufman & Sandilos, 2017). The above response explained that the teachers need to ensure that the study material

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provided to learners are quality education and learners need to ensure that they do their best to prepare for the mainstream schooling.

5.1.2. Interpersonal Skills of Learners

To be ready for school the learner needs to develop their interpersonal skills to be able to adapt to the learning environment. This sub-theme elaborates that for learners to be considered ready for mainstream schooling they must be emotionally ready and able to think and work independently; be self-independent, and be knowledgeable and familiar about the basic concepts that are required to adapt to the formal learning environment; they must be emotionally ready. Once learners demonstrate these specific scholastic qualities, they are considered ready to start school:

> *"A well-prepared child, I think is a child who is able to go to the toilet, like show independence, be able to monitor themselves… You will be able to tell when the child is ready for mainstream, when a child shows some independence. Independent thoughts, independent… for example going to the bathroom, doing simple tasks like following directions. The child must be able to take instructions, and I think also just the basics like colours and things like that, that is how you will know."* **(Teacher 7)**

> *"If they are able to show you that they can get their work done, if they can work fast on a task, they do not struggle with anything, they are not slow workers, they understand something immediately and they do not ask a lot of questions."* **(Teacher 6)**

It is pointed out in the study of Pekdoğan and Akgül (2017) that learners must be matured, acquire knowledge on everyday aspects, and have good communication skills to achieve school readiness. Furthermore, Peckham (2017) indicated that children with a positive attitude towards schoolwork easily adapt to the requirements of formal schooling.

Teachers indicated that early literacy was also one of the aspects that showed that children were ready for school. They further indicated that ready children should have literacy abilities such as reading, writing, and counting and they should also have their fine motor skills developed:

> *"A child who is ready for school is the one who has developed her fine motors. The child must have fine pencil grip or be able to hold their pencil, be able to read, be able*

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to write and interact well with other kids… A well prepared child is a child who is ready and is able to write his or her name, be able to count, understand instructions that the teacher give, and who is responsible to take care of his belongings." (**Teacher 19**)

"If the child is able to write his or her name, counting from zero to ten, has to have a fine pencil grip; must know how to hold his or her pencil. They must be able to recognise shapes and colours, being able to answer simple questions like maybe the name of their street, the name of their parents, and where they live, I think they will be ready to go to the mainstream." (**Teacher 12**)

Peckham (2017), it is indicated that school readiness is perceived as the ability to develop social, emotional, and cognitive and independence at an early stage of development. It is pointed out in the study of Pekdoğan and Akgül (2017) that learners must to be independent and self-reliant, acquire knowledge on everyday aspects, and have good communication skills to achieve school readiness. These responses indicate that teachers feel that early literacy is essential for learning to take place, and each learner should acquire these skills to be considered ready for school. They further elaborated to say children who are responsible to take care of themselves will achieve school readiness.

The teachers shared that the ability for learners to follow instructions and communicate were essential skills needed to achieve school readiness. They also stated that it was important for learners to be able to express themselves, think 'out of the box' to resolve problems, and communicate effectively:

"Is the child who is able to understand concepts that are taught in class and understand the instructions that you give out. A child who is able to think out of the box on own their own, who is able to come up with a possible solution to a problem or basically solve their own problem." (**Teacher 17**)

"A learner who is well prepared should be independent, can do things on his own, the learner who can carry out instructions, the learner who can speak, listen, read and write and who can express himself /herself that learner I think is ready." (**Teacher 18**)

"Those who are well prepared they follow instructions well and do what they are required to do, they complete work on time and concentrate longer." (**Teacher 2**)

"You can see that immediately if you give them a simple task, even if it is a paper just to draw a picture or say easy sums of whatever, you can immediately see if that child is able to follow your instructions and then you will see if there is a problem somewhere

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if the child can follow the instruction, is he distracted by something then you will immediately see if something is wrong." **(Teacher 9)**

The above sentiments presented by the teachers concur with Li-Grining et al. (2010), who also expressed that learners are required to work independently, complete the given tasks, and adhere to classroom routine. Learners are expected to obey the classroom rules, follow instructions, form friendships, detach from their parents, take responsibility of their belongings and most importantly, learn subject matter such as math, reading and writing (Polat et al., 2014). The concentration span for those who are ready for school tends to be longer and that would mean that these learners are able to complete more tasks as compared to their peers who may under-perform for different reasons. These peers may even find it challenging to complete simple tasks given to them.

The teachers identified physical competencies and mastery of motor skills as important indicators for school readiness:

"*No, not all the children in my class are ready for school, because some of them are struggling with their muscular development… hold a pencil, skip a rope, hold a scissor and sit up straight when they are in class."* **(Teacher 3)**

"*A well prepared child is the learner that masters the concept of physical, motor, and growth muscles that has already been developed… the ability of the learner to be able to sit up straight, cut using a scissor or even tie their shoelaces. For example, a learner who is five years and older is expected to able to run, hop, throw or kick a ball and balance on one foot and even and picking up small objects such as crayons."* **(Teacher 1)**

The gross motor skill development suggest that learners must have strong muscles, physical coordination, and balance (Bruce, 2010). Gross motor development plays an essential role, especially during pre-school years as children depend on physical activity to keep focus and on-task behaviour through other structured parts of the school day (Bredekamp, 2011). Gross motor development involves acquiring the ability to control large muscles of the body that is needed for walking, jumping, skipping and more. (Pedro & Goldschmidt, 2019). Gross motor skills are important for children to control their bodies and stabilise themselves, explore

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their environment, and manipulate objects (Jahagirdar et al., 2017). Teachers highlighted that children need to attain muscular development to be able to relate to other children and obey some of the classroom rules.

5.1.3. The Qualities of Teachers

Teachers, just like any other professionals, play an important role in our society as they are one of the primary socialisation agents who have certain qualities and skills that allow them to mould the minds of the learners. Teachers indicated that one must be passionate to ensure that learners get the warmth and feel comfortable to be able to settle into the formal learning environment. Teachers emphasised that teachers needed to have various skills or qualities and felt that it was also essential be emotionally supportive towards the learners:

> *"First of all, I can say as a teacher you must have passion for your work, because if you do not have the passion of what you are doing, your skills will not work. You must have the passion and the skills that you were taught at school on how to handle learners with problems and you must have the love and perseverance. You must not even be a short-tempered person because you will not manage. Some learners do not get love at home, so when they come here crying, you have to be able to comfort them. Sometimes, you can even put them on your lap and hug them… before corona otherwise (Laughing)."* **(Teacher 4)**

Soulis (2009) concurs that a virtuous teacher is the one that is able to effectively communicate and show affection towards the learners. Due to school phobia, children might find it difficult to adapt to a formal learning environment. However, children, parents, teachers, and schools should work together at all times to ensure successful adaptation of learners to a formal learning environment (Pekdoğan & Akgül, 2016).

Furthermore, teachers emphasised having communication and listening skills to be able to reach out to the learners so that they adapt to the formal learning environment. Teachers must be very observant as observation is one of the qualities that teachers need to have to understand learners' behaviour, needs and interaction:

"Basically, learning skills and I have to listen, try to understand the learner and communication is very important. Communication skills and listening skills I must have that to understand where the learner is and how he is doing in terms of his school work." (**Teacher 6**)

"You have to be very observant, you have to know your learners and you observe every little things. Some of the things one might say they are small things, but they are not small you observe their behaviour, you observe how they interact with other kids, you observe how they conduct themselves, you observe how you reprimand them and if they are listening or if you are going to repeat yourself couple of times that's what you look at. You look at... you just observe, like observation is very important because in a class... let's say I am teaching a content you can see from the body language and if you are starting to ask question.....you can see from the body language that this child is understanding, so observation is one of the.....you need to be very observant." (**Teacher 14**)

Walker (2010) explains that teachers need to present with the following traits: need to always be prepared for a lesson, be respectful and show sensitivity towards learners, be creative, and be warm and show passion to the learners. This teacher highlighted the importance of interacting effectively with the learners and to be able to understand their academic performance and support them in their academic journey. The transitioning period is not an easy period for all learners, some need more support to successfully adapt to formal learning environment (Polat et al., 2014).

Teachers have mentioned that teaching is a gift and for one to value this gift they need to persevere and be patient with it. Teachers have stressed the point that perseverance and patience are some of the core qualities that a teacher needs to have. Also, the ability to manage a large number of children in a classroom and attend to their individual and collective needs is a skill:

"Teaching is like a gift and it is the responsibility of every teacher to make learners to reach their full potential. A teacher must be able to persevere with the learner's behaviour and always make sure be patient with them because learners have different capabilities." (**Teacher 19**)

"Another skill that I think that we need as teachers is management skills, management skills, why am I saying management skills, for me to be able to manage 60 learners in a class, I know how all of them need my help here and there... my management skills need to be in a very proper way because without all these things then I won't even be teaching, I'll be wasting children's time, I don't even want to lie." (**Teacher 20**)

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Teachers should be able to recognise, be very observant, and manage the classroom as well as patient and be accountable for the learning and teaching of learners in their class (Papadopoulou et al., 2014). This teacher has indicated that every learner has their potential and teachers should treat learners according to their abilities. As highlighted, it is essential to manage the number of overcrowded classrooms so that time is not wasted on reprimanding learners. Teachers strive to reach out to support their learners and it is evident that for learners to successfully adapt to the formal learning environment, they ought to have adequate interpersonal skills, although teachers in this study highlighted that the qualities or skills that they have are important to enable the smooth transitioning of learners.

Teachers illustrated their understanding of the term school readiness and the interpersonal skills that learners need to have to adapt to the formal learning environment. Also, teachers elaborated on the qualities that one needs to have such as being passionate about the work and be able to persevere to ensure successful transitioning of learners into mainstream schooling. For teachers, a well-prepared child for the mainstream is the one that can work independently and follow classroom rules and instructions. However, teachers have highlighted that not all children are ready for the formal learning environment as some struggle with muscular development such as holding a pencil or even sitting up straight. Therefore, teachers must identify intervention strategies that will assist in supporting Foundation Phase learners with learning difficulties to enhance their chances of successful scholastic performance and achievement and later in life a successful career (Bruwer et al., 2014). International literature has shown that ECD programmes have a positive outcome on cognitive development (Woldehanna & Gebremedhin, 2012), the development of language and communication skill (Burchinal et al., 2000), ability to comprehend math, health (Barnett, 2008), and socio-emotional development (Love et al., 2003).

5.2. Theme 2: Challenges that Impede School Readiness of Learners

Poor school readiness has long-term effect on the development and academic achievement of learners. Teachers indicated that there are various challenges that impede on the school readiness of foundation learners and the lack of support that children receive from their immediate surrounding impede on their academic achievement. This theme comprises three sub-themes namely: age, lack of parental involvement, and inability of parents/caregivers to understand the curriculum. These sub-themes will be discussed below.

5.2.1. Definitive Age for Entry into Formal Schooling

It is difficult to identify the appropriate age that is best suitable for children to enter school, since children do not develop at the same pace. This sub-theme points out the important role that age plays in determining the school readiness of children. Teachers indicated that younger children are not fully developed physically to be in a formal learning environment, and their gross motor skills are still very weak and that might cause delays in their learning. Language, literacy, fine motor skills and independent behaviour are also areas of development that affect school readiness:

> "*Our government should look into the age because a child has milestones and sometimes you find that they are not ready, their bodies are not ready, their gross motors are not ready and when that child come to school to enrol for Grade R they are still a baby…*" (**Teacher 14**)

> "*The age cohort of the learners that we are phasing in mostly in Grade R is not suitable for the formal education stream…*" (**Teacher 1**)

> "*Age plays an important role as well as the ability of the child to be able to do things on their own.*" (**Teacher 10**)

> "*I think first of all, we concentrate on the age and then, it is now difficult because in the past learners had to start school at the age of seven and now is six years. Some of these learners are not yet ready… So I think age determines if one is ready for school.*" (**Teacher 4**)

> "*…lot of underperformers are mostly aged 6 years, so they are struggling a lot and they are the ones who are mostly slow, like fine motors are not ready, and they are not ready to handle a pencil… Like in Grade 1 they are expected to be reading, they are expected to be writing, and be expected to be building their own sentences, so a six year*

old is only starting now to learn vowels and alphabets and it is late for them." **(Teacher 13)**

Cantalini-Williams et al. (2016), agrees that younger children are likely to be retained in a grade or be delayed in their learning due to the lack of core developmental skills. Ensar and Keskin (2014) show that younger children in a grade, especially males, are more likely to be delayed in their development and that might lead to low academic performance at school. This response indicates that teachers view younger children as the ones who are mostly struggling with the demands of the formal learning environment. Teachers and parents rated the social skills of younger children to be significantly lower compared to those of older children (Cantalini-Williams et al., 2016). Children do not generally come 'ready' to school, but those who are older, have a sense of independence, and tend to be more responsible than the others.

Furthermore, teachers strongly linked chronological age with school readiness and indicated that the younger the child, the less prepared they are ready for school. According to Michalska et al., (2018), children who are six years of age are not adequately matured or prepared to cope with the demands of the formal learning environment, and emphasis was put on the fact that due to the absence of socio-emotional competency, younger children are not ready to take up formal education. This statement indicates that six year old learners are still young to be in the mainstream. If it was according to the teachers, they would prefer that learners start school when they are at least seven years of age, as they will be matured enough to cope with the demands of the mainstream schooling environment. Age is considered to be one of the determinants for successful adaptation to the formal learning environment.

5.2.2. Lack of Parental Involvement

The majority of parents are not involved in their children's education, and they do not even try to communicate with the teachers to enquire about their children's academic progress.

Parents have mentioned that at times teachers make them feel like their involvement in their children's education is not a big deal and that is solely based on the attitude they get from the teachers which makes them feel unwelcome (Hornby & Blackwell, 2018):

"Not all parents. I have experienced some learners in my class I can really tell that the parents is involved, they communicate with me by writing letters and asking me a lot of questions, like teacher what do we need to do here, and how do we get the learner to do this. It just that some of the learners that struggle I do not hear anything from the parents, they never communicate with me, so yes that is the thing not all parents is involved and that is a problem." (**Teacher 6**)

The study of Hornby (2011) indicated that often teachers think that parents are not interested in getting involved in their children's education. Teachers highlighted that mostly the parents of underperforming learners are the ones who do not try to reach out to the teacher to find out about their children's progress.

It is the responsibility of every parent to check their children's school work regularly and to find out if they have any homework. However, most parents put the blame on their children to say they did not tell them about the existing homework. Teachers complain that parents are not cooperating and involved enough. Often the teachers maintain contact with the parents to update them on their children's progress. However, parents are still not doing enough to assist the learners with their school work when they get home:

"The sad part is that even when we give out homework the parents do not assist the child… Some of the parents will mention that the child did not say anything about having a homework, and some would tell you that they knock off very late. There are a lot of excuses, as a parent if you know that you are going to be knocking off late ask someone or a neighbor to assist your child with schoolwork that is what I can recommend. Parents can also arrange to meet with me over the weekend so that I provide them with the work for the entire week so that whenever they are free, they assist the learner with the work. By the end of the week we know that you have covered work that the child was supposed to do for that week." (**Teacher 15**)

"Okay, as a teacher myself, the challenge that I find is that parents are not cooperating. You see, when a child underperforms as a teacher what I do is I call the parents. I call them instantly for meetings to say that this is where your child is at, this is where the other children are at and how we can bridge that gap… It is up to us, the teacher as well as the parent, so that relationship between the teacher and the parent should be

good in order to make sure that the child grasp the concepts and is able to get the help that the child need to progress for that year." **(Teacher 7)**

Naicker (2013), shared that parents do not have time to get involved in their children's education due to busy schedules and trying to ensure that they provide for their families. Parents do not make an effort to be involved in their children's education and they believe that it is only the responsibility of the teacher to ensure that their children learn. Msila (2012, p. 308) indicated that "most of the time parents believed that educators are better qualified to run the school alone," therefore, parents do not see the need to be involved in their children's education. The study of Hornby (2011) indicated that often teachers think that parents are not interested in getting involved in their children's education. The study of Ahmed and Said (2013, p. 122) indicated that "they see poverty as having both direct and indirect effect on parental involvement in schools because parents from poor family background will feel uninterested in coming to school to support teaching and learning since they are undermining themselves".

Teachers elaborated to say that learners are given homework almost on daily basis, but the unfortunate part is that the majority of learners come back with work undone or incomplete work. Parents often complain that learners are given a lot of work and they feel that it is unfair for the teachers to overwork learners. It is evident that parents do not want to meet teachers halfway to assist children to achieve school readiness. Teachers also indicated that parents do not involve themselves in their children's education they do not cooperate nor adhere to requests of the teachers:

> *"It is very problematic when some of the parents do not assist the learners with their work because when they come back the following day, we do not proceed with the business of that day, but instead we start with doing the homework in class. So that is a waste of time and energy as well, because the parent was supposed to assist the learner with the homework, and that would give them a chance to identify the things that the learner is struggling about. We formed a WhatsApp group with the parents so that if there is something they do not understand either on the work given or anything in relation to school work they should ask, but they do not ask… Most of the time they complain that we give children a lot of work. Some parents' feels that it is fair that…*

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okay since the learners spend most of their time at school, when they get home they need to relax. Because parents complain that I give learners more homework." (**Teacher 16**)

'The challenges that I face is when the parents are not cooperating and when they do not meet us halfway as teachers because I can only do so much at a very little time… Yes, we experience the challenges, we experience the time… there is always not enough time, you will feel like you wish you had more time for that child. But another thing you will see the improvement only if the parents are cooperating, because if the parents are not cooperating and you are helping this child alone it is as if you are fighting a losing battle. You are fighting the losing battle because now it's like you are doing this alone with this child and this child also need support at home at school." (**Teacher 14**)

"As they say charity begins at home, so parents should give themselves time to assist their children with school work, if they struggle, they should make an effort to get assistance from other people. Parents should not throw their children at the teacher and expect the teacher to do everything. They should also make an effort to communicate with the teacher to say I have noticed that my child have these weaknesses and when the child moves to the next grade they should keep the communication going with other teachers until the learner reach their full potential." (**Teacher 10**)

"I have four learners who underperform in my class. The challenges I have now is that I keep on supporting them but others even when you support them by giving them extra work to take home, but when they come back the following day, they still did not do the work. I even called the parents to request that they assist learners with homework, but children always come back to school with work undone and when you ask then why did they not do the work, they say that my mother says she is tired, or busy for me that is a challenge because I do my part at school but when they get home there is no extra support and parental involvement, and it is frustrating." (**Teacher 2**)

Sapungan and Sapungan (2014), emphasised that some parents are passive in their children's education, some are not involved, and sadly some parents display the obvious "I-don't-care" attitude. Teachers highlighted that parents do not show interest in their children's academic work, and most of the parents do not train their children to become independent and hard workers, instead they just want to rely on the teacher. Also, parents do not assist children with homework instead, they write work on their children's behalf using their handwriting. The study of Hornby (2011) indicated that often teachers think that parents are not interested in being involved in their children's education. Teachers indicated that there is always not enough time to cover everything on the syllabus, therefore, parents and teachers must work together to assist the learners with schoolwork. The lack of parental involvement results in learners not

doing the extra work that they are been given at school, as parents do not assist their children with their schoolwork and often they mention that they are tired or busy.

5.2.3. Inability of Parents to Understand the Curriculum

Illiteracy is one of the major issues that prevent parents from being involved in their children's education. Most parents are illiterate and they do not understand the language of instruction used at school. Hence, they are unable to support learners in their schoolwork. Teachers mentioned that some parents are unable to support learners on their schoolwork due to a lack of knowledge of the new curriculum that has been implemented:

> "*No, they are not doing enough because most of the parents are illiterate, and some are foreigners and they even come to school to explain that do not understand the language of instruction used at school…*" **(Teacher 12)**

> "*No, they don't. They say that the new education system is difficult for them because they did not do it at school so they do not understand. They even write me notes to say ma'am you have given my child a homework but I don't understand.*" **(Teacher 11)**

> "*The challenge that most of them face especially those from informal settlements is that they do not understand the curriculum and what is expected of them to do.*" **(Teacher 5)**

Parents or caregivers with low educational backgrounds often tend to experience low self-esteem which limits the assertiveness required to motivate their children to excel at school (Makunga et al., 2017). Teachers mentioned that high-quality education includes adult-child responsive interactions, and a well-trained practitioner, therefore the schools must implement school-based assessment policies and give continuous guidance to parents and teachers (Meyer & Warnich, 2010). It is evident from the above statement that some parents have negative view towards the new curriculum and they are not willing to go an extra mile to learn about the new curriculum. According to Mathambo and Gibbs (2008), many caregivers in South Africa, especially those living in rural areas, encounter many challenges, including poverty, inadequate education and skills, and social isolation. These factors, directly and indirectly, affect the ability

of parents to look after their children, and that impacts negatively on the child's educational and social development (Makunga et al., 2017).

Teachers have elaborated that some parents cannot read nor write hence they are not involved in their children's education. But for those who are literate, they ensure that they involve themselves in their learners' education. Also, there are parents who assist their children with schoolwork, however, they just do not know how to reach out to the learners' level. Unfortunately, there are no available policies or explicit guidelines within the Department of Basic Education on how schools should support and involve parents in learners' education to enhance their academic performance (Masha, 2017):

> *"Not all the parents are doing enough because they don't understand. Some of them cannot even read or understand what they are supposed to do with the learners. But most of them are helping the learners to do the work, and to try and get the children up to date."* **(Teacher 8)**
>
> *"Most of them they do, but the challenge is they do not know how. They teach these learners like they are adults. I try to tell the parents that when they teach their children, they should try by all means to come to the learner's level." (***Teacher 2)**

Illiterate parents do not have the skills and knowledge to deal with daily challenges they encounter in their interactions with their children, such as helping them with schoolwork and comprehending notifications they receive from teachers (Makunga et al., 2017). Teachers highlighted that parents do not assist learners with the school work due to illiteracy. Parents who encouraged language and cognitive activities, and showed interest in their children's homework positively correlates with school with the readiness of children compared to those who are not involved (Nirmala & Rao, 2011).

The concerns of teachers are predominately based of the age and lack of parental support that Foundation Phase learners encounter when they are at home. Moreover, teachers highlighted the inability of parents to understand the curriculum to be a major concern, as parents are unable to assist the learners with homework, however, those who show interest in

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their children schoolwork improve the child's school readiness. The engagement of parents or caregivers in children's schoolwork impact on the child behaviour, such as improved ability to self-regulate (Mistry et al., 2010); enthusiasm to learn, devotion, and persistence with challenging tasks (Fantuzzo et al., 2004); improved level of cooperation and positive interactions with friends either at home or at school (Hindman & Morrison, 2012; McWayne et al., 2004); limited behavioural problems (Mistry et al., 2010); reduced hyperactivity (Fantuzzo et al., 2004); enhanced school readiness skills (Britto et al., 2006); more time in shared book reading and language activities at home (Weigel et al., 2006); and higher levels of social-emotional support from caregivers (van Tuijl & Leseman, 2004).

5.3. Theme 3: Lasting Consequences of Poor School Readiness

Theoretically, all children must be ready for school when they enter the formal learning environment. However, the majority of learners are still not ready for the formal schooling and this impacts negatively on their academic life. The majority of learners who are not ready for school develop problematic behaviours such as disrupting the teachers and peers in class. Moreover, grade retention, school dropout, and absenteeism are considered to be the main issues that are encountered by most learners as they progress to higher grades. Children in South Africa do not have access to quality learning opportunities before entering a formal learning environment (Bruwer et al., 2014). This results in children not reaching the required level of school readiness (Bruwer et al., 2014).

5.3.1 Problematic Behaviours

Problematic behaviours tend to occur mostly in children who are performing poorly and are unable to adapt to the formal learning environment. Teachers explained that these learners often become bullies, troublemakers, or even withdrawn from others taking other learners' belongings without consent, and they even isolate themselves from their peers, thus the aggression tendencies:

"You know some of the learners who are poorly prepared at the end they hate school, their behaviour changes, they beat others, they will fight, some become withdrawn, and they keep quiet and lose interest in the school work." (Teacher 13)

"...what I saw with him is that he's starting now to be more of a bully and he's starting now to fight other kids, to steal things because now I'm thinking when it comes to school, something else so it's easier for him to go do other things to other learners..." (Teacher 20)

"...not doing his or her work, become aggressive, become bullies and they tend to be bossy towards their peers." (Teacher 15)

Disruptive behaviour in the classroom involves conduct such as throwing tantrums, physical aggression including bullying, fighting, unnecessary disagreements, stealing, and other forms of disobedience or resistance to authority (Stadler, 2017). Furthermore, bullying occurs in many forms, including emotional and physical abuse, intimidation, and name-calling, stealing, showing little respect towards the teacher, and disrupting classroom lessons (Olweus, 2010). In the formal learning environment, learners are expected to cooperate, follow instructions, control impulsivity, good social interaction, control anger, and respect the physical limitations set by the teacher, however, they do the opposite (Jacobsen, 2013).

Teachers mentioned that learners who underperform become discouraged to be in the classroom as they are teased by their peers for underperforming and they sometimes find tasks to be challenging:

"Children who are not in same level as the other children in the Grade, they get teased by the other children, they feel distracted because they are aware that they are not on the same level as the others, and in class they lose concentration, sometimes they have an attitude like I am giving u because I am not on the same level and sometimes they find the work too difficult to understand because their intelligence is not developed so much as the others." (**Teacher 9)**

"The learner shows lack of interest in their school work, losses focus, and cannot concentrate." (**Teacher 18)**

Often learners are being teased by their fellow peers due to poor academic performance and age and this results in social isolation, low self-esteem, inability to comprehend or grasp concepts in the classroom, and lack of desire to learn and concentrate (Thompson & Iwata, 2013). As highlighted by the teachers, underperformers develop negative self-image and self-

esteem towards themselves and they disregard their intelligence, thus the lack of interest in their school work.

The loss of concentration amongst learners who underperform is a big issue. Teachers have emphasised that learners do not put an effort into their schoolwork, as they are already having a negative attitude towards themselves and their studies:

"Learners who underperform lose concentration because they just feel like why must I even bother if I am always finishing last. And then they can also get behaviour problems like they feel like I am not on the same level so I can do what I want because I am anyway going to fail. Sometimes children have that attitude." **(Teacher 9)**

The lack of concentration is a common educational problem that most underperforming learners encounter and it results in them having a negative attitude towards schoolwork (Ncontsa & Shumba, 2013). Teachers believes that most underperformers do not put effort into their schoolwork due to the stigma that they attached in their mind that they are not going to succeed, so they might as well put less effort into their school work.

Teachers encounter disruptive behaviours in the classroom, especially with those the learners who have been retained and are older than their peers in that grade:

"I have learners who are repeating in my class and most of the time they attend with younger learners, and those who are repeating cannot concentrate in class. These learners are always standing up in class, always out to the toilet or asking to go drink water frequently. They are very impatient especially during the lesson and their concentration span cannot even last for 30 minutes or even 15 minutes it is very difficult for them." **(Teacher 10)**

Learners talk and are noisy while the teacher explains the content of the curriculum or when they are required to complete a task (Marais & Meier, 2010). Teachers acknowledge that they always encounter difficulties with learners who repeat grades and somehow these learners tend to be problematic as their concentration span does not last long.

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The majority of children are unable to cope with the demands of the mainstream schooling; some are due to barriers to learning they are encountering and others are trying, by all means, to prove themselves to their peers and teachers:

> *"They are unable to cope with mainstream work because of the barriers to learning most of them are encountering. They become withdrawn, disrupting other learners who are willing to learn and they are always not paying attention in class… and they also bully other children."* (**Teacher 11**)

> *"They cannot sit up still and cannot grasp anything."* (**Teacher 10**)

> *"It becomes difficult for children to relate to other children because they are aware that their learning pace is slower as compared to the other children, and they are not coping with the work of the mainstream and that damages them... The child also become under pressure to prove themselves that academically they can be capable and that affect them psychologically… they tend to have aggression and become bullies."* (**Teacher 15**)

In Foundation Phase classrooms disruptive behaviour is deemed to be the biggest challenge experienced by teachers (Marais & Meier, 2010). Teachers highlighted that disruptive behaviour of underperforming learners are due to the inability of coping to the demands of the formal learning environment, hence the aggressive and bullying behaviour.

Teachers indicated that children who are not ready for the formal learning environment often become withdrawn, cry, or even throw tantrums:

> *"…if the child is not ready for this type of an environment they become withdrawn, some are clingy, and some when the parents drop them off they will cry and they throw tantrums and all that."* (**Teacher 14**)

> *"You give them work is frustrating for them, most of them cry and they do not want come in to the classroom. I remember the was this one time were a learner ran away from the classroom, I had to keep on following him because he was not used to the class environment."* (**Teacher 2**)

The social skills that learners need to acquire to adapt to formal learning environment includes obeying classroom rules, successfully forming friendships and keeping up with the social expectations of the learning situation (Bulotsky-Shearer et al., 2008). Disruptive behaviour in the classroom involves conduct such as throwing tantrums, physical aggression including bullying, fighting, unnecessary disagreements, stealing, and other forms of

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disobedience or resistance to authority (Stadler, 2017). Teachers indicated that a formal learning environment is a crucial place that presents many demands, the environment is overwhelming for most learners, and this may result in them being frustrated and withdrawn. Marais and Meier (2010) stated that it is unfortunate that on a daily basis teachers have to deal with these disruptive behaviours and the majority of teachers in South Africa are concerned with the disciplinary issues encountered at schools, since corporal punishment was banned (Marais & Meier, 2010).

5.3.2. Grade Retention

The majority of learners tend to repeat grades due to the inability of coping with the demands of the formal learning environment:

> *"It is possible, most of these learners who are not ready for school are likely to be retained in… Some learners fail grades because they cannot keep up to the demands of higher grades."* **(Teacher 10)**

Grade retention can be due to academic failure, unsatisfactory results, poor school attendance, and lack of education programmes in the community (UNESCO, 2012). Teachers indicated that learners who were not thoroughly prepared to be in the formal learning environment are likely to be retained in the future.

In contrast to the other participants, two teachers who indicated that the poor school readiness of learners does not result in school dropout, but rather in grade retention. Teachers further elaborated to say that cases of dropping out of school amongst learners who are not well prepared are very rare. However, most learners who underperform are likely to repeat a grade:

> *"They do not drop-out, but usually they repeat the grade. But what I normally do, I give them support. I call those who are struggling to my table, 30 minutes before after school since their concentration span is short… Usually they pass, it is only few that repeat grade. If you give them enough support, they are able to catch up."* **(Teacher 2)**

> *"Normally these learners repeat the grade and some might even dropout of school, but the cases of dropping are very rare. We have a lot of repeaters and our problem is that the government does not allow the learners to repeat twice even when you see that this learner need to be retained, but due to age they need to progress to the next level."*

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(Teacher 12)

Grade repetition is considered to be an effective measure to improve the academic performance of learners before they proceed to the next grade (Tery, 2011). Teachers highlighted that learners who receive academic support from the teachers are more likely to improve their school performance and progress to the next grade. It is clearly stated in a statement that when a child is exposed to unresponsive parents, insufficient environmental stimulation and distress in their early years, they are likely to develop problem behaviours such as grade retention, and school dropout (Ebrahim et al., 2013). Also, there has been a controversial issue whereby some teachers defend it as a positive remedial practice to improve the academic performance of learners, while others believe that it has a negative impact (Peixoto et al., 2016). There are no conclusive remarks on the controversial issue of how retention impact on the academic lives of learners (Blazer, 2019). However, previous studies found that grade retention can negatively impact on a learner's academic achievement and self-esteem, and recent studies has concluded that retention has positive impact on a learner's long term academic achievement (Mariano et al. 2018; Bayer, 2017; Lynch, 2017). Teachers highlighted that the challenge they are faced with is of progressing learners to the next grade even when they do not meet the requirements for being progressed.

As the learner progresses to the next or higher grade, the demands and expectations of the formal learning environment tend to be high and for those who cannot cope with demands are likely to repeat a grade. Grade retention is a serious issue that is encountered by most learners who are not ready for school and this might result in them not being committed to their school work:

> *"Say for instance like I teach Grade 3, if they have that problem in Grade 3 and they pass, the problem they have been experiencing goes with them to Grade 4 and I think the pressure is worse in the Intermediate Phase because the workload is more and they feel the pressure more. So I think definitely it could be that they can fail the grade."* **(Teacher 9)**

"If the learner is not ready for school, he/she might end up repeating a grade or even lose interest in his/her school work. You find that the learner does not pay attention when they are in the class, they always disrupt other learners who are willing to learn." **(Teacher 3)**

According to Haidary (2013), various reasons result in grade retention of learners. Firstly, they could not reach the academic requirements for that particular grade, and secondly, they are considered immature for the next grade. Teachers mentioned that learners who are not prepared for formal schooling are unable to handle the pressure and always fall behind in their schoolwork which results in the possibility of grade retention. Grade retention is related to a negative impact on academic accomplishment and socio-emotional adjustment, learners tend to develop a negative attitude towards school, and this results in emotional stress, low self-esteem, and unacceptable behaviour such as violence especially during puberty (Jimerson & Renshaw, 2012). The teachers illustrated that insufficient school readiness results in children being retained in a grade and the learners sometimes develop problematic behaviours.

5.3.3. School Dropout

Teachers indicated that school dropout is a common issue especially to those learners in puberty and who have been emotionally neglected. Most children are likely to dropout when they are at an age where they are old enough to make their own decisions as most of them become naïve:

"But sometimes it depends on how much that child or how badly the child is being hurt, emotionally and mentally. If they are hurt to an extend where maybe the teachers or the mother realise the problem later in the lives, chances of them maybe succeeding are very slim because immediately when they leave the primary school to high school they are already in puberty and with puberty we know that they will dropout and do their own things, it is not as easy to get to them as it is at a younger age." **(Teacher 14)**

"…that because they are not on the standard for that grade, and cannot meet the requirements and the possibility is that later on in life they will dropout when they reach the age where they can dropout of school." **(Teacher 8)**

Teachers highlighted that the rate of learners who dropout of school tends to be higher when at an older age. According to Van der Berg (2015), poor academic performance of

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learners can be identified as early as in Grade 4. The majority of learners' dropout of school after years of grade retention (Department of Basic Education, 2017), and most of these learners are idle once they have dropped out of school (Branson et al., 2014). As noted previously, when learners' progress to higher grades, the promotion rate decreases, and the dropout rate increases (Grossen et al., 2017).

It is evident that Foundation Phase learners do not yet know the reason why they should be at school, and unfortunately some learners who are not ready end up dropping out of school:

"So I think if a child is not ready in all aspects that I think I've mentioned earlier on about school readiness, in the long run that's how we have kids who dropout at school, that's how we have kids who don't see the importance of even going to school. With foundation phase they don't know why they are going to school…" (**Teacher 20**)

Emphasises should be put on the Foundation Phase to improve learners' academic performance (Van der Berg, 2015). Children often perceive themselves as scholastically unable, which results in them dropping out of school; they are always bullying and causing problems amongst their peers (Goodman & Gregg, 2010).

5.3.4. Absenteeism

Absenteeism of learners is a common issue that is encountered at schools by the teachers, and in most cases it due to bullying inflicted by peers or family:

"It can be abuse they are experiencing at home, abuse in relation to bullying encountered at school, and negligence. Sometimes as teachers we are not aware that children are going through bullying because they do not even report it to us. This results to children being absent from school, and when I follow up with the parents why is their child absent from school, they start explaining to me that the child is encountering bullying, and this affect their academic performance because they get left behind, they are always not at school and end up disliking school." (**Teacher 16**)

Demir and Akman Karabeyoglu (2015) indicated that underperforming learners usually do not feel safe at school due to the abuse they encounter from their peers, moreover, they find being in the classroom boring as they feel academically and socially inadequate. Teachers

highlighted that the absenteeism of learners can be influenced by different factors from the home to the school environment resulting in poor academic performance.

There is a relation between absenteeism, problematic behaviours, and grade retention of learners. The sudden loss of interest in one's schoolwork could result in learners being absent from school. It is evident that most children who are unable to cope with the demands of the formal learning environment are likely to stop coming to school due to the pressure they encounter. Absenteeism is not a standalone factor, and something must have happened for learners to dislike school and stop not coming to school:

> *"The learner shows lack of interest in their school work, loses focus, and cannot concentrate. Absenteeism is very common on those learners who are not interested in their school work, and the learners repeat grades especially when they go to higher grades."* **(Teacher 18)**

> *"That one is a damage to a child I don't want to lie because a child cannot cope and the child will always struggle academically and in future the child will not be coming to school. He will always be absent from school; absenteeism is a problem, not doing his or her work... The child does not want to come to school anymore because he/she can see that I am not performing so what is the point of coming to school. He hates and dislike school and he feels that the best way is to stay at home, and when I try to follow up as to why were they absent they come up with excuses, such as they had headaches or even say to their parents we are not doing anything at school. They come up with excuses as long as the excuse will keep them at home or not to do the work and we get to be left behind with schoolwork because always revisit the activities that we are already done with."* **(Teacher 15)**

Demir and Akman Karabeyoglu (2015) explain that absenteeism can be a result of learners' perception of the school environment, the commitment of learners to school, learners' family structure, and learner-family communication. Absentee learners sometimes do not feel safe and comfortable at school, due to them being academically or socially inadequate (Demir & Akman Karabeyoglu, 2015). Also, some families show little or no interest in their children's academic lives, and children end up not seeing the importance of remaining at school due to lack of support they get from home (Gubbels et al., 2019). Teachers highlighted that underperforming learners tend to isolate themselves due to the negative self-image they have towards themselves.

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5.3.5. Teachers Feeling Incompetent

Teachers indicated that they use different teaching methods to ensure that they reach out to the learners to achieve school readiness, however, not all the learners improve their academic performance and this leads to teachers feeling incompetent:

> *"My challenge is that I feel like I am incompetent because I have been trying different teaching methods to assist this particular learner and if the situation is not bearable, I even seek help of other teachers and request for a different teaching method that will assist to reach out to the learner. So I feel like I am very incompetent and sometimes ask myself question like where do I fail as a teacher because, I tried everything and provided them with extra activities that I could think off and even requested the parent to the school. So somewhere somehow as an individual I feel like maybe I was not doing enough and that becomes very stressful because I have been trying my level best."* (**Teacher 12**)

This teacher highlighted that not only do they feel incompetent by the underperforming of learners, but they also encounter stress as they have exhausted all the options available to assist learners.

Furthermore, teachers do everything they can to prepare learners for school, they even go down to the learners' level of understanding just to make sure that learners understand what they are being taught in the classroom. Failure to get learners to understand the concept that the teacher is teaching in the classroom will lead the teacher to doubt themselves:

> *"I think as a teacher, once the child does not get what you are saying or doesn't get the concept that you are teaching, so funny you will always say there is something wrong that I am doing, and you will find a way to make them understand what you are saying. Even if you have to make yourself a puppet so to speak, you do whatever even if you have to go down on their level you do so. I am teaching Grade 3 and if this child doesn't understand I have to go down to that lower grade so that they can be able to understand."* (**Teacher 14**)

It is indicated that it is ideal to not give up on the underperforming learners, it is essential for teachers to always get to the learners' level of understanding to make sure they perform to their best of ability.

The under-performance of the learners always makes teachers feel as if they are not doing enough to prepare the learners for the formal learning environment. Often, teachers blame themselves for not implementing extra classes to foundation phase learners:

"Also there is self-blame, as a teacher you know sometimes you feel that you did not do enough though you might have tried so much. You might have… along the way you might have created an extra classes… There is self-blame that I could have done this, I could have done this and even if you try the next year, something else just comes along the way to just stop or impede. So, yeah, so those are some of the things that I experience." (**Teacher 20)**

This teacher emphasised that the challenges that they experience at school and in the classroom have a negative image on themselves because they feel that it is their fault for learners to underperform.

The lasting consequences that learners experience due to poor school readiness negatively affect both the learners and teachers in the sense that learners end up having a negative self-image and as for the teacher, their only concern is that the leaners might not be able to catch up on their schoolwork. It is important for learners to be thoroughly prepared for school to avoid all encountering all the consequences discussed above. Moreover, teachers feel incompetent when learners' do not perform to their ability, and they tend to blame themselves for learners' underperformance.

Teachers reported that problematic behaviour, grade retention, and absenteeism are some of the issues that they have to deal with in the Foundation Phase, especially with learners who are not yet ready for mainstream schooling. The underperforming learners are likely to become withdrawn and some tend to develop bullying tendencies. Furthermore, teachers highlighted school dropout to be another issue that some Foundation Phase teachers might be encountering in their classrooms. However, it was highlighted by the teachers that school dropout in the Foundation Phase is not common, and learners are likely to dropout when they are in adolescence. Teachers also indicated that they sometimes feel incompetent, especially

when they are unable to reach out to all the learners. Appropriate intervention and early provision enable children to grow and develop to their full potential, which results in increased enrolment rate in primary school, improved school performance, lower grade retention, and less school dropout rates, also the need for costly remedial interventions to address developmental delays and social problems is reduced for the future (Atmore et al., 2012; Heckman et al., 2010; Department of Education, 2001). Thus, the importance of early childhood development opportunities is profound.

5.4. Theme 4: Classroom Challenges Impeding School Readiness

There are many challenges that teachers encounter in classrooms and some of them hamper both the learners' and teachers' progress. This theme reflects on the classroom challenges that Foundation Phase teachers encounter, which points out the classroom challenges related to overcrowded classrooms, the lack of resources, language barrier and lastly, time spent preparing for underperforming learners.

5.4.1. Overcrowded Classrooms

Some teachers indicated that it is very challenging to give all learners attention and provide individual support, especially in an overcrowded classroom. Teachers further indicated that there are learners who are slow and but due to time constraints they are unable to reach out to them. They also indicated that the schools should consider hiring more assistant teachers. It is evident that the majority of teachers are complaining about the number of learners that they have in a classroom, and the reality is that learners are not receiving the quality of education they are supposed to; there are also no remedial classes to assist learners:

> *"So you need to get individual attention to that child, what I feel it's not…..how can I put it….it is not always possible in a class of 40 children because you need to attend to all 40 learners and now you have this one or two learners that are slow and you don't always have time for them to give individual attention… Well, they can just… maybe they can put less children in one class because I feel they put 40 learners in a class and it is very difficult for a Grade R even a Grade 1 teacher to give individual*

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attention to each child and make sure that they are able to know what they need to know, so they can put less children in a class and they need to get more assistant teachers to make the job easier for them the teachers." **(Teacher 9)**

"As a teacher we have about 40-60 learners in a class, so you cannot reach out to all the learners. So if there is a remedial class, you know that after school that child goes to the remedial class, and he/she is assisted… what makes it a challenge is the number of learners in a classroom… as a teacher you cannot reach out to all the learners due to large classes, so that affect you." **(Teacher 4)**

"I mean, typical example, we've been crying about the number of learners we have in class, how you teach and focus in 60 learners, how do we teach 60 learners? There is no movement space, there is no creative space and we've been complaining about the same thing that we need more schools, we need more classrooms, and even if it's a container we will organise it. We've been complaining about the same thing…" **(Teacher 20)**

"Pupil teacher ratio also impact negatively on the teacher and the learners because you find that the learners are overcrowded in a class, so I would suggest that they reduce the number of learners in class to be able to have one on one interaction with learners." **(Teacher 18)**

It is challenging for teachers to carry out a lesson in an overcrowded classroom and create a learning environment that is conducive for each learner (Maraip, 2016). Teachers cannot apply different teaching methods such as high-order questioning and active learning approaches (Maraip, 2016). Teachers highlighted that they are not coping with the number of learners they have in a classroom, hence they suggest that more teachers be hired to assist in classrooms. Also, teachers emphasised the importance of having remedial classes at schools where they will assist the learners with schoolwork and that since they are unable to reach out to all the learners, remedial classes will be a good initiative.

Teachers complain that the number of classrooms they have at schools are compared to the number of learners enrolled, hence the overcrowded classrooms. The classroom environment that they find themselves in is congested and there is a lack of infrastructure. Van Wyk (2008) emphasises that overcrowded classrooms contribute to a lack of academic performance due to space, fresh air, and a noisy classroom that can result in learners not being able to pay attention and can cause stress within learners. This simply indicates that teachers are not satisfied with the classroom environment that they find themselves in on daily basis and

more classrooms need to be built to ensure that the number of learners in one class is reduced. According to (Spaull, 2016), classroom sizes of learners aged six to eight years should be smaller, as it may be more difficult for teachers to manage, teach, and direct these learners. Teachers have highlighted that both the teachers and learners are not coping with the overcrowded classrooms, and that the Department should reconsider the number of learners in a classroom.

5.4.2. Lack of Resources

Teachers mentioned that schools do not have adequate learning and teaching material that teachers could use when dealing for learners who are struggling academically or those who are underperforming. Instead, they need to start planning from scratch for those learners and that can be time-consuming:

> *"The resources must be available for learners who are struggling with their schoolwork so that it becomes easier for the teacher to support the learner unlike starting over. I know as a teacher I must improvise and come up with other activities for that learner but it would be easier if there is an existing document with different activities. It is my responsibility as a teacher to make learners cope with the workload by going to his/ her level."* **(Teacher 18)**

Leepo (2015) indicated that the unsatisfactory distribution of resources at schools negatively impact on the learning outcomes of learners. Teachers are interested in having more advanced activities that will be best suitable for learners who underperform, as it will also be easier to track their academic progress.

Often teachers find themselves having to answer to management as to why are learners underperforming. The challenges that the majority of teachers that are confronted with are lack of resources, time, and teachers feels that the curriculum that is used at schools does not favour the learners who underperform:

> *"Before we do anything else, first things first you still need to go and answer to management as to why certain kids did not perform, and the one thing about that is during the year you will go in and tell management that we lack resources, we lack*

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time, how can we cut off the curriculum because you know with curriculum how it happens, it does not care about the learner that was not ready to be in the class." **(Teacher 20)**

Although children are having access to early childhood education, the quality is low and there is a lack of resources and ECD practitioners are poorly skilled (Blimpo et al., 2019). As highlighted by the previous statement, the curriculum should be designed in a manner that accommodates the underperforming learners, and that Foundation Phase learners should be introduced to extra classes.

Teachers complain that the available resources are not enough for every learner due to overcrowded classrooms:

"...some of the things are the resources that we have, are not enough to accommodate all learners." **(Teacher 4)**

There is a lack of resources at school to be utilised by the learners for their own academic benefit. The South African government still fails to provide schools with learning resources such as books, and they are also unable to provide facilities such as libraries to communities (Du Plessis & Mestry, 2019).

5.4.3. Language Barrier

One of the challenges that impede the school readiness of Foundation Phase learners is the language barrier. Teachers indicated that most learners do not understand the language of instruction that is used at school. For some, English is not their mother tongue. They only use it at school and some do not have the background of English from pre-school:

"...there are very much challenges because they are not ready for school and because we are an English school and they are coming from different backgrounds, language barrier is the biggest problem in the beginning of the year. If they are English then it is much easier, but otherwise the language barrier is the worst." **(Teacher 8)**

"You use pictures, or make an example, or you make demonstration with other children so that the learners can see what you are talking about. You engage them wherein one is speaking and one is answering that you can see what miming things like that will help a lot. But mainly pictures to explain what you are doing and then if it is really a

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big problem someone in the class who understands English very well can try to translate to the learner in their mother tongue." **(Teacher 8)**

The majority of learners in South Africa are learning in a language which they are not proficient in (Daniels, 2010). A teacher further mentioned that she explains to the learners who do not understand the language of instruction by either using pictures to demonstrate what she is talking about and engage them. Furthermore, children are often taught in the national language (second language), often known to be the medium of instruction language, and in most cases, this is not the language they use to communicate at home (Kosonen, 2017). Teachers stressed that learners whose home language is not English, and who do not have a background of English from pre-school tend to struggle at school. Therefore, it is the responsibility of the teacher to ensure that learners learn as much as they can. She further stressed the fact that it is always important to get a peer or someone who speaks the same language as the learner to explain what has been taught or to ensure that the learning material includes the child's mother tongue.

Furthermore, teachers indicated that the majority of learners do not understand English, so it is always wise to further explain to children in a language that they understand or rather change the teaching method to accommodate them:

"I change my teaching method to accommodate those learners who underperforms, because I cannot teach that child in a level that he/ she does not understand. So what I do, at my school English is first language, so I teach in English thereafter repeat it in Setswana just to ensure that learners understand what is taught and sometimes it is time consuming, but that is what I do." **(Teacher 2)**

Children are often taught in the national language (second language), often known to be the medium of instruction language, and in most cases, this is not the language they use to communicate at home (Kosonen, 2017). This results in children not having access to education in a language that they understand, and this impacts negatively on their learning and academic progress (UNESCO, 2016). A teacher highlighted that it is essential to explain to learners in a

language that they understand so that they are able to have an idea of the concept that was taught in class, however, that can be time-consuming.

The language barrier is a big issue for most learners, because they do not understand simple concepts such as addition and subtraction signs and simple words:

> *"Their language barrier is a big issue because they don't even understand what plus or minus is, cannot read, and cannot understand simple words and it is very difficult. As the class go on they pick up very quickly, so you just need some bright learners who can translate for them the whole time and then they eventually pick up to say when the teacher say this, it means this. What I even realised is when give them an instruction the learner whose mother tongue is not English will look around to see what the others are doing and he will just copy them."* **(Teacher 9)**

> "*Well, we try to speak slowly but sometimes they pick up one or two words and sometimes it is not possible that they pick up any word. Then we need to call somebody, other learners who can translate for him or even some of the school workers; the cleaners, so they can just translate to them."* **(Teacher 9)**

There is a huge gap between children's first language and the language of instruction that they are supposed to comply with when they are at school (Arnold et al., 2006). Besides just getting other learners to translate what the teacher has been saying, teachers go to the extent of finding a colleague to translate to the learner what she is talking about, this is evident from the statement above. Owen-Smith (2010) revealed that the majority of learners in South Africa are taught in a language that they do not understand and that results in learners' underperforming academically. Teachers highlighted that learners adopt and imitate the behaviour that they are exposed to; being that of the teacher or their peers, as long as it is appropriate behaviour that is being modelled. Teachers also try to involve other people who are in the learners surrounding to take part in children's learning.

As indicated by teachers it is not easy to transfer information to learners especially if you both do not speak the same mother tongue.

> *"I try to explain more to them so that they can understand things on their level. If they are difficult for you as a teacher, especially in our school where the home language is not English, so explaining the work to them so that they can understand in their language, is very difficult."* **(Teacher 6)**

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According to UNICEF (2012), learning problems occur when the language of instruction used in school is not the child's first language or their mother tongue. Despite the language barrier between the teachers and the learners, a teacher highlighted that she goes down on the learners' level to ensure that she comprehends what she explaining.

5.4.4. More Time and Attention Given Underperforming Learners

The underperformance of learners influence teachers' teaching method in the sense that the learners need to be supported and be given attention at all times to improve their academic performance:

> *"...so the underperformance of the learner will affect your teaching because that particular child need support, a thorough support. So I need to take my time away from teaching the other learners and focus only on one learner of which time is not on our side. Remember when children get to school in the morning the first thing they do is to have breakfast at 8am, from 8:30am I start with the lesson for the day and at 13:30pm is school out, so within that time range I am not able to complete the lesson planned for that day because I spend most of the time focusing on one learner. And this is disadvantaging other kids because they are not having the attention they supposed to have because their time is always used on one learner. The thing is I cannot ignore this particular child. I have to give her time and attention she needs to improve her academic performance. I sometimes opt for the child to remain with me after school to have one on one session but they are not able to focus and pay attention to what I am saying because their peers went home."* **(Teacher 16)**

Teachers finds that the concentration span of learners is less especially if there are no other peers around. She further elaborated that more attention is given to the underperforming learners and that results in them completing the tasks for the day.

Teachers further indicated that it is essential to have one-on-one interaction with the learners and guide them at all times to ensure that they improve their academic performance:

> *"It is disrupting the entire teaching I had planned for the day because the focus is now on that particular learner who is underperforming because I need to have one on one session with him to make him understand and for positive outcomes. The teacher must always be besides the learner to guide him every step of the way."* **(Teacher 19)**

The statement above indicates that for learners to achieve school readiness, the teacher needs to change the entire lesson plan just to accommodate that particular underperforming learner.

Having underperforming learners in a classroom is time-consuming as teachers spend more time re-doing work of the previous year just for the learners to be able to understand what is being taught and that hampers the teachers' and learners' progress. The underperformance of learners worries them because even after the attention and support they give to these learners, they are still not competent enough to complete their work and that discourages the teacher as they are unable finish the syllabus:

> *"When the learner underperforms it gives you… it time consuming because as a teacher you have to emphasise and re-do the work that has been done the previous year. That is a challenge because it is hampering the progress of the teacher as well as of other learners… I am unable to cover the whole syllabus on time, and I spend most of time focusing on specific learners and that results in other learners slagging behind on their school work… That learner will need an individual attention, most of the time you are going to group those learners according to their abilities, and then the focus will mainly will be on the learners with barriers. And those who are academically performing well end up not getting more attention."* **(Teacher 1)**

> *"It affects you because you spend most of the time concentrating on the same learners, and those perform well do not get similar attention. Even after getting so much attention from me, they still do not finish the work they are given and it becomes frustrating because you cannot reach out to all the learners. Some learners are fast, and some are slow, they also need your attention and in most cases you want to concentrate on this particular one because he/she does not finish her work. It is time consuming and sometimes the slowness of the learner results in the teacher not finishing the syllabus."* **(Teacher 4)**

The underperformance of learners hampers both the learners' and teachers' progress in the sense that the teacher is unable to reach out to all the learners, since the focus is always on the underperforming learners and that results in the well-performing learners to be left behind. Regardless of whether the child is a fast or slow learner, similar attention needs to be given to the learners so that they all achieve school readiness.

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It is evident that teachers modify their teaching methods to accommodate underperforming learners and they also go the extra mile of preparing activities for underperforming learners:

> *"I modify my teaching method in order for it to suit everybody. I change my teaching style, and my teaching methods and try to put things in a simpler manner for learners to understand. For the learner that is struggling I give him/her activities that is on a lower level because she is underperforming and cannot keep up with Grade 2 work. So I provide her with… let's say the other learners write work that is out of 20 marks, the one that is a lower performing I give her work that is out of 10 and for lower levels."* (**Teacher 12)**

Considering this theme, many challenges that impede the school readiness of Foundation Phase learners were revealed. The teachers addressed challenges such as overcrowded classrooms whereby they are unable to cope with the large number of learners they have in the classroom. Furthermore, teachers mentioned that they were unable to reach out to the learner because either there were no resources to be utilised by everyone or these are just limited. The post- Apartheid government provides all public schools with equal funding as part of the "pro-poor" policy, however, this does not address continuous inequalities of resources among black African and white schools (Ndimande, 2013). Black African learners, especially those enrolled in previously disadvantaged schools, are still racially segregated and the lack of educational resources persists (Jansen & Amsterdam, 2006; Ndimande, 2006). Furthermore, the language barrier is an issue for most learners, especially for those whose mother tongue is not the language of instruction used at school, but teachers make provisions to ensure that these learners learn. It is evident that teachers spend most of the time preparing for underperforming learners, however, some learners still do not improve academically. Teachers have tried to address some of these issues with the management, but due to unforeseen circumstances of the education system, there are still no changes as yet.

5.5.   Theme 5: Suggested Programmes for Improving Poor Scholastic Performance.

Improving school readiness of Foundation Phase learners should be made a priority by both the parents and teachers. The environment in which children spend time needs to be conducive to develop and improve children's skills and behaviour (Meyer & Warnich, 2010). Teachers have recognised the importance of children attaining pre-school of Grade R education to successfully achieve school readiness or cope with the demands of a formal learning environment. This theme further discusses the importance of parental involvement as one of the determinants for successful school achievement, and teachers encourage that children learn through play for them to be able to interact with their peers and learners must be supported at all times.

5.5.1. Parental Involvement

Parents should involve themselves in their children's education and they should find a means to always communicate with the teachers to ensure that they are updated on their children's learning progress. Furthermore, teachers emphasised that for learners to continue to perform to their full potential, parents need to communicate with the teachers and seek clarity on anything that they do not understand, and it is advisable that they also check their children's books:

"As they say charity begins at home so parents should give themselves time to assist their children with school work, if they struggle, they should make an effort to get assistance from other people. Parents should not throw their children at the teacher and expect the teacher to do everything. They should also make an effort to communicate with the teacher to say I have noticed that my child have these weaknesses and when the child moves to the next grade they should keep the communication going with other teachers until the learner reach their full potential." **(Teacher 10)**

"I would say open communication with parents because if we have an open communication or good communication with parents they will become free to ask you questions and they even develop interest to want to know more about the academic progress of their learners. To also ask parents to assist their children with school work and always check their children's books on daily basis." **(Teacher 17)**

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According to the Centre for Child Well-Being (2010), parental involvement in children's learning not only improves a child's morale, attitude, and academic achievement across all subject areas, but it also promotes better behaviour and social adjustment. Teachers emphasised that communication between parents and teachers is vital and explained that parents should make it their responsibility to have ongoing communication with teachers to ensure that they are aware of their children academic progress. Teacher-parent communication can result in better parental involvement and improved academic performance and achievement of learners (Authors, 2013; Bergman, 2012).

Teachers emphasised that parents should revise the work of the previous grade with their children as that will assist in preparing learners for the formal learning environment:

"By being more involved in their children's education. For instance, it is advisable that parents revise with their children the previous work that they were doing in previous grades. That will make learners to be ready for school." **(Teacher 3)**

Parents can provide support by reading with the learners, teaching them nursery rhymes and songs, playing with numbers and letters, taking children on adventure visits, and encourage them to play with their peers at home (Centre for Community Child Health, 2008). Such support can be provided by parents regardless of their educational or occupational level; what matters is what parents do with their children more than who they are (Sylva et al., 2010).

For learners to achieve school readiness, teachers mentioned that there should be parental involvement whereby parents make it their responsibility to ensure that learners have all their stationery and schoolwork packed:

"Okay, they must be….in the morning they must check the learner's bags to ensure that the books are in the bag, if they have done their homework, as well as, it is very important that they get support at home. So the parents obviously need to check if all the things are well packed, that they do not forget their books or assignments or any task that they had to do at home, so they must just be involved in their children's education." **(Teacher 6)**

"I can only recommend that they come to school just to see what the learners are on about when they are in class. We need to have constant meetings with the parents

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whereby they come to check their children school work, check their children's performance, and also be given advice on how to improve at home…… So I think it would be better if they constantly come to school and sit next to their children; have one on one with them to monitor their children's performance. Like at the present moment children are sitting alone on their tables due to Covid-19, so parents will be able to sit next to their children and it will be easier for them to identify the areas in which the child is struggling at, and that will assist them be able to develop strategies to assist learners with school work. Parents must have an input in their children's education and put more effort to assist children with their school work." **(Teacher 15)**

The study of Cheung and Pomerantz (2012) indicated that children whose parents are involved in their education are likely to stay motivated and reach the parents' academic expectations and score higher marks. For learners to be ready for school, every parent should make it their responsibility to check if learners did their homework and that they have everything packed for school. Teachers recommend that parents should follow up on their children's schoolwork and constantly have meetings with the teachers to be informed about their children's academic performance. Teacher-parent meetings are essential as they enable direct interaction regarding the behaviour and academic performance of the child, and this will also result in both parties having equal responsibility in ensuring that the child learn effectively (Bilton et al., 2017).

Teachers mentioned that parents should teach their children to learn independently at a very tender age so that they are used to the routine of learning:

"Parents should train their children to do school work from a young age so that children are used to the routine and they should always assist learners with homework… Parents should always be hands on their children's education and they must also make it their duty to schedule meeting with the parents to follow up on their learner's performance. They must also assist the children with homework rather than just giving those answers to the questions and have parents' meetings every now and then." (**Teacher 19)**

Parental involvement during homework sessions reinforces children's self-confidence, enable independent learning, and creates an opportunity to practice tabling gratification (Cooper et al, 2012). This teacher mentioned that instead of parents just giving answers to the learners, they should engage them when they are assisting them with their schoolwork.

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5.5.2. Attaining Pre-school or Grade R Education

Pre-school or Grade R is a crucial period of development for learners and it lays a foundation for children's education. This sub-theme points out the importance of pre-school or Grade R education in children's lives. It is recommended that children be enrolled at pre-school or Grade R prior to formal schooling to ensure that they acquire or gain knowledge of what is expected of them, and to easily learn new concepts that they are being taught at school:

> "Before learners come to Grade 1 they need to first go to ECD centres or Grade R, because I saw that it helps… For those who attended Grade R, it is easy to teach them new knowledge as compared to those who did not attend Grade R or crèche. Those who did not attend Grade R or crèche cannot sit still because it is something new to them… Those who cone from Grade R, most of the time you can see that they have a foundation, the way they hold their books and pencil, the way they follow instruction you can tell." **(Teacher 2)**

Pre-school education enables children to be more prepared for formal learning. It teaches children to acquire skills on how to overcome different scholastic, personal and social challenges (Bhise & Sonawat, 2015). Pre-school education focuses on assisting children to gain self-independence and have basic knowledge of Foundation Phase education and also take relevant steps towards preparing them to adapt to the requirements of mainstream.

It is evident that the quality of education that learners receives plays an important role in preparing learners for the formal learning environment:

> "What I also noticed is that the ECD centre that the learner attend plays a huge role in preparing learners for school. Some learners come to Grade 1 having the ability to write and with that you are able to tell that they received proper foundation in ECD or Grade R." (**Teacher 2**)

Lamy (2013) supports that pre-school attendance enables children to gain social capabilities for the smooth transition to the formal learning environment and enables them to acquire foundational academic skills. Teachers feels that attaining preschool education that is of high quality plays an important role as it enables children to acquire basic foundation skill such as writing, before they proceed to formal schooling.

Furthermore, the absence or lack of pre-school education might result in learning delays whereby children might not cope with the demands or the expectations of the classroom environment:

"Those who are from home and did not attend any crèche or Grade R, we have a challenge with them because they are from home, they know nothing. So you have to start teaching them how to grip a pen, teach them vowels, teaching them that when they start writing in the book they need to write from left to right." (**Teacher 4)**

There are still those who are unable to afford the fees, and this results in many children transitioning from home to Grade 1 classes without attaining Grade R education (Franklin & McLaren, 2015). Furthermore, there are no specific causes of low academic performance, however, learners who did not attend pre-school education show less academic capabilities and competencies compared to their peers who have attended (Ilyas et al., 2018). The lack of pre-school or Grade R education disadvantages children as they come to school clueless of what is expected of them. Furthermore, learners who did not attend pre-school or Grade R experience problems in conceptualising simple concepts such as vowels, consonants and holding a pencil.

Moreover, it is essential for learners to be enrolled at pre-school or Grade R to assist them to have a clear picture of what the formal learning environment is going to be like and also learn about its demands:

"Before learners are enrolled at school or start Grade 1, they must first start by attending Grade R or go to ECD centres to make sure that they are familiar with the school environment and its demands." (**Teacher 5)**

Access to high-quality pre-school programmes enables children to be ready for the formal learning environment and it is considered a promising way to improve learning outcomes (World Bank, 2018). Early childhood quality programmes are important and children who fail to access quality preschool education are often unable to cope with the demands of formal education (Workman & Ulrich, 2017). Pre-school or Grade R attendance

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assist in ensuring that learners become aware of the environment that they will be introduced in.

To achieve the school readiness of learners, it is proposed that the schools have at least two reception years before children are introduced to the actual learning environment. There was a proposal made within the National Development Plan (NDP) that an additional year of pre-school is added to schools prior to the current reception year or Grade R (Van der Berg & Hofmeyr, 2018):

> *"I would say… for school readiness starting from Grade R… there are some kids who are starting at Grade R and this kid was home most of their transition and then they didn't even experience preschool or Grade RR classes or education and then they come straight to the school environment, and the school environment is a very structured area. So I would recommend that we should have a class that is before Grade R because I think it is very important for a child that is coming from home going straight to the class, say Grade R class to have some skills… I think if our Grade R and Grade RR are taken serious, our school readiness can be adjusted so that by the time this child enter into Grade 1 they are ready… I think our school readiness should be prepared thoroughly from Grade R because I know that if I get a child who is well prepared entering Grade 1 they won't have a problem going forward…"* (**Teacher 14**)

> "*I would recommend that each and every child to attend Grade R because according to me Grade R… okay I was teaching Grade R before and I could differentiate between a child who attended crèche and a child who didn't attend crèche. I am here now teaching Grade 3 and I can tell between a child who attended crèche, Grade R and the one who came straight to school and didn't get the foundation. So I would recommend that each and every child to be enrolled at Grade R not crèche, because Grade R education is in conjunction with everything that you are doing in mainstream it is curriculum based. So that when the child enters Grade 1 then they are knowledgeable about some of the things and aspects that they need to learn about.*" (**Teacher 15**)

Hall et al (2013) support the notion that a quality pre-school education reduces the risk of poor academic performance and it promotes a sense of independence to learners. The school-based transition programmes are beneficial to learners as there is positive outcome of progressive academic achievements (Melhuish et al., 2008). The formal learning environment is a structured environment that most children are not familiar with, especially those who are transitioning from home to school. Thus, it is suggested that for those who do not have any experience of being in the formal learning environment, they should be introduced to a

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reception class before Grade R. In addition, the teachers further mentioned that ECD education needs to be made a priority to ensure that most learners achieve school readiness. The attendance of pre-school education has shown a positive impact in preparing children for primary school (Polat & Yavuz, 2016).

As much as Grade R education is of importance, it is necessary that children be screened thoroughly before they are enrolled to the formal learning environment as it will be easier for teachers to be able to identify the learning difficulties of children:

> "*I think it would be best for leaners to attend Grade R and also be screened very well when they start school. If learners are to be well screened in Grade R before they start with mainstream it would be easier for the teachers to identify learners with special needs and immediately when those learners start with Grade 1, the teachers are going to know each learner's strength and weaknesses and it will be easier for teaching to take place because already you would have seen the screening tool of each learner.*" (**Teacher 10**)

Children who fail to get developmental support during the early childhood period might lag in formal schooling (Hall et al., 2017). Disadvantaged children are marginalised from accessing pre-school education that is of high quality, and that negatively impact on their ability to comprehend new concepts taught to them. Teachers indicated that screening learners while still in Grade R will results in most children achieving school readiness and it will be easier for teachers to provide support to each learner.

From the teachers' responses, it has appeared that the term school readiness is easily defined and teachers have a strong meaning and application of it. Thus, most teachers appeared to have an implicit understanding of the term school readiness rather than an explicit definition. This is simply to say that teachers had an understanding of the concept school readiness, however, they did not have an explicit theoretical explanation for the term school readiness. Furthermore, teachers have stressed the fact that age determines if a child is ready for school

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and then they also highlighted that for children to achieve school readiness they need to either attend pre-school or Grade R.

5.5.3. Learning Through Play

Play enables children to engage with multiple areas of learning and children learn best through play. Teachers recommend that Foundation Phase learners learn best through play and they must be provided with resources such as toys to successfully learn:

"These learners need resources especially for practical tasks. Let's take life skills for instance, they play and learn through play so most of the time and they need toys and all kind of toys that you can think of such as skipping ropes, balls, tennis balls, rackets, and especially colourful resources that helps them grasp more quickly. Parents should buy children counting blocks so that they develop their math skill for instance if you are doing addition sums in class they will be able to count and give the correct answers even for bigger numbers. I realised that most children lack resources." **(Teacher 16)**

According to UNICEF (2018), children need to have regular access and experience to play-based learning materials. The child needs exposure to print, music, languages, and arts, and have daily readings of stories, and the government should ensure that they provide schools with relevant work schedules (Meyer & Warnich, 2010). Parents should invest in buying educational toys for their children as that might assist learners to learn faster or comprehend concepts even easier.

Teachers believe that children learn better when they are introduced to playing, and often teachers focus more on the theoretical part of things and forget about introducing play during the lessons.

"…I feel….after all Foundation Phase is all about play. When we play, they learn so much, but because of so much work that we have to do, we forget that play teaches children so much we focus on writing and all that so I feel like I would recommend that and I would also recommend a lot of play. I don't know how I will get the government to breakdown play with the curriculum but I've seen that it works, like I know it works because these learners don't even know why they go to school. They just go because they said you need to wake up, bath and go to school, so imagine how fun it would be for us to go sit in a circle and chat with a friend, but we busy doing a multiplication and busy doing idioms, like it would be so fun…" **(Teacher 20)**

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The study that was conducted by Bhise and Sonawat (2016) concurs with the findings of the study that learning through play is an important predictor in the ability of learners to comprehend math, reading and writing. Teacher 20 explained that the current curriculum that they are using at schools does not dwell much on play, instead, it focuses more on keeping learners in class rather than playing.

Teachers highlighted that parents should not purchase toys such as guns for their children, rather educational toys such as building blocks or puzzles to stimulate learning:

> *"Let me start from young kids like toddlers, when they buy toys, they shouldn't buy guns they should buy something that is educational like building blocks, puzzles or something that they can do with their hands because it will change their fine motor and puzzles will train their problem-solving skills and then just buy things that would be beneficial to the kids. If they would do that even if the child didn't attend Grade RR and they are coming straight from home to school you can see the difference, you can see that this child has been exposed to certain educational things. Even the colours, they can play around with colours, and have games where they will be identifying colours and the child will just know. Something that you should know is that when learning is exposed to kids at a very young age, you will be surprised what it can do to the mind, if they would do that. stop buying guns, yes meg believe does exist and you have to have toys for meg believe but not the guns maybe toys like cars and dolls and some of the toys should be like educational toys like blocks and toys that will enable you to create anything from those pieces."* **(Teacher 14)**

The different types of play enhance various developmental areas of children, mostly the intellectual, academic, social, and emotional well-being (Bubikova-Moan et al., 2019). It is indicated that child-led play enhances problem-solving skills and enable children to construct knowledge about the outside world (Fredriksen, 2012). This teacher stated that when children are at home, parents should make it a norm to introduce or expose them to educational games that will enable them to learn at a young age.

Teachers emphasised that children learn through play and that they should be introduced to play to enhance their level of thinking.

> *"Younger children learn through play and children should be introduced to plays that… enhance their knowledge."* **(Teacher 10)**

"These children learn through play, when we saying learning through play is not that they play all the time but there are children who still cannot not use building blocks just to make something out of it." **(Teacher 17)**

The findings of the study of Isaacs et al., (2019) confirms that learning through play improves the mood of learners to learn and enables them to acquire knowledge and develop their cognitive, social, emotional and physical development. In today's Foundation Phase classrooms, the concept of play is emphasised whilst also recognising academic standards (Pyle & Daniels, 2017).

5.5.4. Provide Support to Learners

Teachers have indicated that learners need to be supported to enhance their school performance. Some of the learners come from child-headed families where there is no academic support, and it is suggested that to improve the school performance of Foundation Phase learners, there should be remedial classes introduced to these learners:

"We must also have especially in black schools, there are no remedial classes, so the government must make a plan of having at least a special remedial class where we know that after school, we take that learner from the class to those remedial classes. We are from a poor environment, most of the learners, especially our learners at school are from Zenzele, an informal settlement, and most of them are orphans and others are raised by their siblings or live in child headed families." (**Teacher 4)**

Afterschool programmes offer support to families by safely keeping their children and offer academic support mainly for children who are not performing well at school and that enhance their emotional and social development (Smith & Bradshaw, 2017). These afterschool or educational programmes provide structured intervention in a supervised and supportive environment to learners who lack academic supervision when they get home (Jenson et al., 2018). Teacher 4 has highlighted the importance of having remedial classes, especially in disadvantaged communities to support learners to enhance their academic performance.

Furthermore, teachers have indicated that it is essential to come up with different teaching methods to ensure that learners receive the support they need to be able to adapt to the formal learning environment:

> *"So, then you try something different whether it's introducing a game, or something else just to help out that learner to get on board. The way we do that, or the way I do it is that I tend to create a game or think of a way in which to reach that child and up until that child performs or is able to grasp that concept I will not let go. If I feel like you know what maybe I am not explaining in a way that the child understands, then I will also ask the advice of other teachers or I will actually Google material, contact the parents to say this is where we at, please work on this. Whether it's like telling time and or something like that, but you have to find different methods."* **(Teacher 7)**

Teachers should be the primary facilitators to ensure that learning takes place effectively (Meyer & Warnich, 2010). Therefore, the government should provide support to teachers to enable them to integrate childcare and formal education by being responsive to cultural diversity, provide early literacy and mathematics skills, and provide emotional and regulatory school (Duncan et al., 2007). Learners have different levels of intelligence and they all do not learn at the same pace, therefore, teachers should introduce learners to different teaching styles.

Teachers must always engage the learners to ensure that they understand what they are being taught.

> *"I give them instruction and repeat them slowly, then what I then do is to go to the tables while the child is doing his or her work, I am looking and checking their books, communicate with them, ask them questions to see if they understood or they did not understand. They will tell me that ma'am here I did not understand because most of them do not say anything unless you ask them individually."* **(Teacher 2)**

There are multiple goals of teacher-learner interaction, which include the improvement of outcomes in school performance, stimulating positive development, and preventing delinquency, the use of substance use at a tender age, and other behavioural problems (Kremer et al., 2015). Although the teacher-learner interaction is diverse in other components, it provides a combination of academic instruction, leisure, mentoring, and social and emotional

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development (Jenson et al., 2018). This teacher highlighted the importance of communicating and interacting with the learners to ensure that they get instructions correctly.

It is also important for learners to receive support from their peers to enable independent learning and for them to gain confidence in their school work:

> *"So what I do is either peer assistance, where I put the weaker learner with the stronger learner but the stronger leaner must not overpower the weaker learner. It must become like a friendship where your job is to help this one and your job is to learn and also help the other one. I make it seem like you know the weaker learner is also helping the stronger learners but in a way that it is not intimidating."* **(Teacher 7)**

Peer assistance is essential in enabling learners to be open to learning. Teachers have recognised the importance of children attaining preschool, Grade R education promotes school readiness or coping with the demands of a formal learning environment.

In improving the poor scholastic performance of learners, teachers suggested that parental involvement as well as attaining pre-school education might be beneficial. Moreover, teachers highlighted that children learn best through play, therefore it is important for parents to get stimulating educational toys for learners. On-going support to learners, such as introducing remedial classes, should be considered especially in disadvantaged schools. Improving the quality of Grade R education in disadvantaged schools should be made a priority to ensure that inequality in the cognitive performance of learners is reduced (Van der Berg & Hofmeyr, 2018). It is important to invest resources in early childhood development education to ensure that children have access to quality education, develop to their full potential, and enhance their chances of performing better at school (Van Niekerk et al, 2017). Early childhood development education has shown a positive impact on school readiness and performance particularly amongst disadvantaged children (Van der Berg & Hofmeyr, 2018). Children from a disadvantaged background with access to an ECD programme that is well-resourced and of high quality and who grow up in a healthy and safe environment with

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supportive parents are likely to be prepared for school and be successful in life (Berry & Malek 2017; Ebrahim et al., 2013).

This section discussed cohesive results of which the findings of the study were conveyed relative to the employed methodology. Five themes were derived from the thematic analysis approach: understanding school readiness, the challenges of school readiness, challenges encountered in the classroom, consequences of poor school readiness, and suggestion of improving the poor scholastic performance of learners. The results of the study lead to the discussion section where the results are discussed relative to the literature reviewed and Bronfenbrenner's Bio-ecological Systems Theoretical framework applied to this research study.

DISCUSSION

This section entails of detailed discussion of the challenges that impede the school readiness of Foundation Phase learners. It also presents a discussion on the possible solutions that can be implemented to improve school readiness of Foundation Phase learners. Furthermore, the emerged themes from the participants' responses are extensively discussed, though there is limited data in the South African context regarding Foundation Phase teachers' understanding of school readiness. The current study contributes to limited literature by having explored Foundation Phase teachers' experiences and perceptions of the challenges that impede school readiness in the South African context.

Foundation Phase Teachers' Understanding of School Readiness

It was essential to have this theme explored as it provides detailed and clear understanding of school readiness as perceived by the teachers. This study indicates that the majority of Foundation Phase teachers in this study had an understanding of what school readiness entails, however, there is no clear definition of school readiness. Although there is

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no consensus definition for school readiness, most teachers associate it with domains such as physical development, emotional well-being, independence, and social competency. From the study of Peckham (2017), it is indicated that school readiness is perceived as the ability to develop social, emotional, and cognitive and independence at an early stage of development. However, Whitbread and Bingham (2012), (Ofsted, 2014) argue that there is no evidence of how this concept manifests itself in the lives of children, therefore, the term school readiness is ambiguous and not clearly defined. The findings of the study also discovered that the understanding of teachers is echoed in the literature where there is no stable definition of school readiness (Mohamed, 2013). However, the lack of clarity in term school readiness has implications on how school readiness is implemented by the researchers, teachers, and parents (Texas Early Learning Council, 2011). The findings of the study confirm that school readiness of children is influenced by several characteristics that children need to display, and it is indicated that the PPCT model is considered to be the primary mechanism for development (Tudge et al., 2009). Therefore, the Bio-ecological Systems Theory confirms the development of children within the ecosystem via PPCT model.

The findings of the study revealed that for learners to be considered ready for formal schooling, they must be emotionally ready and able to think and work independently. The study of Hatcher et al. (2012) concurs that there is a strong relationship between scholastic achievement and emotional readiness. Furthermore, the findings revealed that for children to achieve school readiness, they must be able to communicate or express themselves clearly and acquire early literacy. Referring back to the Bio-ecological Systems Theoretical framework elaborated in Chapter Two, the interpersonal skills found in the study were categorised in the microsystem level. The first level of Bronfenbrenner's theory is the microsystem and it refers to the immediate living environment in which an individual has direct contact to learn about the world this involves children in a formal education setting (Swick & Williams, 2006). At

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the microsystem level, the individuals that are in the child's setting greatly influence the development of the child.

Teachers highlighted several qualities that they thought will be suitable to have when helping children to achieve school readiness. Some of the qualities mentioned are linked to the traits of teachers and some are skills that teachers need to have to ensure that learners easily adapt to formal schooling. The findings show that teachers emphasised several qualities that they are supposed to have to assist children to adapt to the formal learning environment. The idea is confirmed in the study of Soulis (2009) that a virtuous teacher is the one that is able to effectively communicate and show affection towards the learners. It is important for foundation phase teachers to have the mentioned qualities to ensure that they guide the learners to achieve school readiness. The personal characteristics of individuals in social interaction are acknowledged in the study of Bronfenbrenner (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998). Personal demands refer to personal stimuli in which physical characteristics such as appearance are dominant (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998). The resource feature is associated with material needs, experiences, and the skills that an individual possesses (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998).

Foundation Phase Teachers' Perceptions of the Challenges that Impede School Readiness

This section highlights the first objective of the study, which explores Foundation Phase teachers' perception of the challenges that impede the school readiness of learners. The participants pointed out various challenges encountered by Foundation Phase teachers. The study further revealed that the challenges that impede school readiness of Foundation Phase learners range from age, lack of parental involvement, and the inability of parents to understand the curriculum. The challenges that were discovered in the study are different from the findings of the study by Mouton et al., (2013), which explored the critical challenges encountered by learners in the South African education system. This study has discovered that challenges such

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as insufficient development of learners and communication breakdown between teachers and parents were influential in the under-performance of learners. However, lack of parental involvement between these two studies has the same attributes as those of the challenges that impede school readiness in the recent study. The different interactions and experiences within the spheres of the Bio-ecological System Theory have a major influential role in the lives of individuals (Tudge et al., 2009).

It is difficult to identify the appropriate age for which children are supposed to enter the formal learning environment, as children do not develop at the same pace. Thus, age has a great influence on the school readiness of Foundation Phase learners. According to Michalska et al. (2018), children who are six years of age are not adequately mature to cope with the demands of the formal learning environment, and emphasis was put that due to the absence of socio-emotional competency younger children are not ready to take up the formal education. As explained, the theoretical framework points out that the chronosystem emphasises the impact of time on the development of humans. The study that was conducted by Stipek (2009) argues that the age difference amongst learners is not a strong determinant for school readiness because younger children tend to catch up with their old peers after few years of being at school. The development of children is shaped by society, the events that are happening around them, as well as the historical components (Hanniffy, 2017).

The lack of parental involvement is the main concern for most teachers and it can no longer be ignored. The study revealed that lack of parental involvement occurs due to the lack of interaction of the microsystem. Parents are the main source of development and they are known to be influential in preparing children for school (Bronfenbrenner, 2004), and the interactions between the parents and learners on this level are essential to ensure that children develop. In this discussion, the lack of parental involvement includes the lack of communication between the teachers and parents, parents knocking off late from work, as well

as lack of support with children's schoolwork. The participants elaborated that parents do not engage their children during their homework sessions, instead, they complete the school work on their children's behalf. Naicker (2013) emphasised to say parents do not have time to get involved in their children's education due to a busy schedule and trying to ensure that they provide for their families. It has been found that some parents do not attend parent meetings due to work commitments (Mbokodi & Singh, 2011). The literature confirms the lack of parental involvement in children's education as the results of various challenges, and parents from the disadvantaged background are likely to not be involved in their children's education.

The results of this study have indicated that parental education continues to impact the school achievement of learners. Parental education results from system levels, various structures, and interactions. The macrosystem level revealed that the beliefs of parents about the school readiness of children are informed by the past school experiences of parents and that might influence the delay in learning (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). The study further discovered that parents or guardians do not assist their children with their schoolwork due to limited knowledge of the new curriculum that has been implemented or due to illiteracy. The findings of the study further indicated that some parents are willing to assist their children with schoolwork, and they constantly communicate with the teacher to ensure that they provide academic support to the learner. The finding is comparable to a study conducted by Nirmala and Rao (2011) which found that parents who encouraged language and cognitive activities and showed interest in their children's homework positively correlate with the school readiness of children, compared to those who are not involved. The environment is the immediate factor that results in individuals engaging in certain practices. However, the components, as well as perception regarding the situation in the context, changes constantly based on the undefined continued progress of existence and the available knowledge (Bronfenbrenner, 1986).

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**Foundation Phase 'Consequences of Poor School Readiness on Learner's School
Performance**

Based on the second objective which intends to explore the consequences of poor
school readiness on learner's school performance, this section provided comprehensive
answers to the research question based on the findings of the study. It has been recognised that
the majority of children in South Africa do not have access to quality learning opportunities
before entering a formal learning environment (Bruwer et al., 2014), and this results in children
not reaching the required level of school readiness (Bruwer et al., 2014). The discussion
highlights the level of knowledge that Foundation Phase teachers have regarding the
consequences of poor school readiness on the performance of learners. Awareness of the
consequences that influence learners' performance was explored with the interviewed teachers
and some of the findings were found similar to existing literature. The discussion in the
following section gives clear picture of consequences of learners' performance.

The teachers in this study revealed that often children who are unable to adapt to the
formal learning environment become problematic in the classroom or they develop disruptive
behaviours. The study revealed that problematic behaviours occur due to the lack of interaction
of the microsystem, where the family is the primary socialiser of children and they have an
important role to play in the development of children, as well as the formal education setting
(Swick & Williams, 2006). Failure of learners to acquire the required skills from their
surroundings will either result in learners lacking independence, that will result in problematic
behaviours (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The findings of this study are similar to a previous study
that was conducted by Marais and Meier (2010) which found that in Foundation Phase
classrooms, disruptive behaviour is deemed to be the biggest challenge experienced by
teachers. It is unfortunate that on a daily basis teachers have to deal with these disruptive

behaviours and the majority of teachers in South Africa are concerned with the disciplinary issues encountered at schools since corporal punishment was banned (Marais & Meier, 2010).

Grade retention is used to assist under-performing learners to master the content and acquire knowledge and skills of the current grade. This study has found that learners who are unable to cope with the demands of the formal learning environment are likely to lose interest in their schoolwork and later be retained. However, there has been a controversial issue whereby some teachers defend it as a positive remedial practice to improve the academic performance of learners, while others believe that it has a negative impact (Peixoto et al., 2016). Furthermore, learners who did not acquire a strong basic foundation education are likely to encounter difficulties at school. The study revealed that grade retention is due to the lack of interaction of the exosystem level. In the exosystem level, children are indirectly affected by their environment and the findings of the previous study indicated that grade retention might be due failure of attaining pre-school education and as a result children might not be the direct subject of the situation and yet it has a direct impact on them; it includes curriculum and school policy (Swick & Williams, 2006).

In South Africa, school dropout has reached a national crisis, and to keep learners in the schooling system, different approaches need to be implemented to achieve school readiness. Based on the findings, teachers mentioned that children who are emotionally neglected are at a risk of dropping out of school. School dropout is another effect that is classified under the exosystem level, whereby children are indirectly affected by their environment. In the exosystem level, individuals are indirectly affected by their environment; the individual might not be the direct subject of the situation or the abuse that they encounter and yet it has a direct impact on them (Swick & Williams, 2006). The study revealed that it is rare for learners to dropout of school while they are still in the Foundation Phase, however, most learners dropout of school when they are older. In addition, children who fail to acquire the relevant skills

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needed to achieve school readiness are at a risk of dropping out of school. This differs from the various studies conducted to explore the school dropout of learners. As noted previously, when learners' progress to higher grades, the promotion rate decreases, and the dropout rate increases (Grossen et al., 2017). Another study has also indicated that school dropout is a complex phenomenon that should not only be based on poor school readiness, however, the economic and social circumstances, family and the community that learners belong to, play a crucial role in ensuring that learners stay at school (Andrei et al., 2011).

There are various reasons that result in the absenteeism of learners and most teachers have mentioned abuse to be one of the factors that contributes to school absenteeism. This was confirmed by the study results where the majority of teachers indicated that most of the under-performing learners lose interest in their schoolwork and they end up resenting school. The study discovered that the abuse that learners encounter either at home or school might result in learners being absent from school. Those who are struggling academically also end up not seeing the need for being at school at all times due to low self-image. The findings of the current study differ to that of Demir and Akman Karabeyoglu (2015), in that it indicates that under-performing learners usually do not feel safe at school due to the abuse they encounter from the peers, moreover, they find being in the classroom boring as they feel academically and socially inadequate. In this regard, there is nothing much that teachers can do to keep these learners in the system because they have already developed negative image towards school.

Foundation Phase Teachers' Classroom Challenges Regarding Learners with Poor School Readiness

Based on the third objective that seeks to explain the classroom challenges regarding learners with poor school readiness, this section conducts a discussion which provides informed answers to the research question based on the findings. There are four different indicators that show classroom challenges encountered by Foundation Phase teachers regarding the learners

with poor school performance. The social environment that children encounter at school is completely different from their home environment where they encounter new rules and new life experiences (Kartal & Guner, 2018). The discussion of this section will highlight the level of understanding regarding the challenges that teachers encounters in the classroom. Furthermore, there is a correlation between the findings of the study to the existing literature that was explored. The findings of the study are discussed below.

The issue of overcrowded classrooms was described by teachers as placing tremendous pressure on them. The findings of the study indicated that due to a large number of pupils in the classroom, learners are not getting the quality of education that they deserve. As a result, the school performance of most learners is hampered by overcrowded classrooms. Gustafsson (2011) elaborates that some of the challenges experienced by teachers include large classroom sizes, which impact with the quality of teaching, even for those committed teachers. The theoretical framework indicates that the microsystem refers to the immediate living environment in which an individual has direct contact to learn about the world (Swick & Williams, 2006). Overcrowded classrooms are one of the direct factors that Foundation Phase teachers encounter in the classroom with learners. Furthermore, the study revealed that there is lack of infrastructure, the issue of not having assistant teachers, and the inability to move freely when they are in the classroom. The majority of teachers in South Africa are complaining that schools do not have enough resources to be utilised in the classrooms to support learners to achieve school readiness. The study of Leepo (2015) indicated that the unsatisfactory distribution of resources at schools negatively impact on the learning outcomes of learners. The study discovered that teachers are unable to provide academic support to the learners due to limited available resources. The lack of study material results in a further decline in the standard of education that is provided in most communities.

The language barrier is another challenge that concerns Foundation Phase teachers as the majority of learners are unable to comprehend instructions given to them. The majority of learners in South Africa are learning in a language which they are not proficient in (Daniels, 2010). Hence, the language of learning and teaching (LoLT) can be viewed as being in the microsystem level. In this study the school, parents, teachers, home and members of the community are the immediate people who contribute to learners reaching their own potential. The quality of the microsystem is dependent on the sustainability and consistency of which can provide conducive environment to learners to learn and experience new challenges that will improve the development of learners (Landsberg, 2005).

The study revealed that learners do not understand the language of instruction that is used at school and it becomes difficult for them to learn. Furthermore, some of the under-performing learners were taught in a language that is not their mother tongue and that resulted in learners not understanding the instructions correctly. Language barrier is the main challenge that is encountered in the classroom between the learners and the teachers. On the contrary, it is concluded that learning achievement is attained when learners are taught in their first language for at least six years of their primary school before the second language or language of instruction is introduced (Ball, 2011).

Foundation Phase 'Programmes used to Assist Learners with Poor Scholastic Performance

Based on the fourth objective that seeks to identify programmes of improving poor scholastic performance, this section discusses detailed findings of the research question based on the findings. There are four indicators within programmes that might improve the poor scholastic performance of learners. They include parental involvement, attaining pre-school or Grade R education, learning through play, and provide a range of support to the learners. To ensure that children are prepared for formal learning, teachers, parents, and communities need

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to ensure that children have academic support during their childhood (Hu & Pattugalan, 2017). According to Bronfenbrenner and Morris (2006); Bronfenbrenner (1979) the interplay between multi-person has a great impact on the development of individuals. The findings of the study are discussed below.

Parental involvement has always been an important element of every teacher-learner school academic endeavour. The findings of this study discovered that parental involvement has a positive impact on the learners' academic performance and the under-performing learners tend to gain confidence in themselves to continue with their schoolwork. The findings share similarity with the study of the Centre for Child Well-Being (2010), which indicates that parental involvement in children's learning not only improves a child's morale, attitude, and academic achievement across all subject areas, but it also promotes better behaviour and social adjustment. In relation to the findings of the study, teachers, indicated the importance of communication between the child, parent, and the teacher. The current study encourages continuous communication and involvement of parents in children's education to contribute to their success.

Pre-school education enables children to be more prepared for formal learning. Children acquire skills on how to overcome different scholastic, personal and social challenges (Bhise & Sonawat, 2015). The study revealed that it is beneficial to enrol children at pre-school or Grade R before introduction to formal schooling to ensure that they aware of the expectations of the formal learning environment. Also, the study revealed that the benefits of attaining pre-school education leads to positive interaction of the mesosystem. The mesosytem is an interaction between two or more systems which involves the environment in which the child, parents and family lives, it is simply the interaction between teachers and parents (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). For instance, it is important for parents to expose their children to pre-school or Grade R education at a very young age to ensure that children develop the ability to

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cope with the demands of formal schooling. This requires parents to regularly communicate with the teachers to ensure that they are always updated with their children's academic progress. The study further discovered that the quality of education that learners receive plays an important role in preparing learners for formal schooling.

The study indicated that children learn best through play, therefore it is important for parents to introduce their children to educational activities that will stimulate their mind. According to Bhise and Sonawat (2016), the natural way of learning is through play. In the microsystem and mesosystem levels, individuals are both directly and indirectly affected by their immediate environment and this is reflected through their play. In the microsystem level, interaction and socialisation with peers allows learners to learn different skills of cooperating and role taking, these are important skills for school readiness (Lynn et al., 2015). Furthermore, the mesosystem encourages parents to invite children's parents over to their home to watch soccer games or play games, which will give children independence through parental approval (Lynn et al., 2015). The study discovered that instead of parents buying toy guns, they should buy educational toys for learners to assist them to develop their cognitive mind. Furthermore, play gives learners and opportunity to explore their own interest and be responsible for their own learning.

The following chapter is the final chapter of the study and it provides conclusion to the thesis. The strengths and limitations of the study were included as well as the recommendations.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

The challenges that Foundation Phase teachers encounter impede the academic performance of the learners, and also hampers the performance of the teacher. The current study aimed to explore Foundation Phase teachers' experiences and perceptions of the challenges that impede school readiness. Also, the four objectives of this study were addressed: (a) to explore the challenges that impede the school readiness of Foundation Phase learners of low- to middle- income background; (b) to explore the consequences of poor school readiness on learner's school performance; (c) to explain the challenges encountered in the classroom by teachers regarding learners with poor school readiness; (d) identify the available programmes used to assist children with poor scholastic performance.

The findings of the study revealed that the challenges that impede the school readiness of Foundation Phase learners is linked to the age of the learner, whereby teachers believed that age was the best determinant of school readiness, and that younger children have challenges adapting to the formal learning environment hence they preferred that learners be enrolled at school when they are at least seven years instead of six years. It was also found that the lack of parental involvement and communication between the teachers and parents also impedes the school readiness of learners and lastly, parents' education also plays a role in impeding the school readiness of learners.

The study has also sought to find out the consequences of poor school readiness on learners' school performance and it was discovered that often leaners develop problematic behaviours that might result in them stealing from their peers and bullying them. Also, it has been discovered that poor school readiness might result in learners to lose interest in their schoolwork and later be retained in a grade. Moreover, it has been observed that it is rare for learners to dropout out of school in the Foundation Phase, however, most learners' are likely to dropout of school when they are at an age to do so; adolescence. Very few teachers dwelled

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on absenteeism, which reflects that most Foundation Phase teachers might not be encountering it in their classrooms. Teachers feel incompetent when learners do not perform to their ability and they tend to blame themselves for the under-performance of learners.

In relation to the challenges encountered in the classroom by teachers regarding learners with poor school readiness, teachers are concerned about the teacher-pupil ratio whereby they have to deal with overcrowded classrooms daily. Furthermore, Foundation Phase teachers have mentioned that there is a lack of essential learning resources to accommodate all the learners, as well as limited infrastructure. The language of teaching and learning continues to be the biggest issue encountered in Foundation Phase classrooms, as most learners are unable to comprehend instructions. It has also been observed that more time and attention is given to under-performing learners and that results in all the other learners not getting attention.

The study has also sought to identify the available programmes to assist children with poor scholastic performance. It was found that parental involvement has a positive impact on the learners' academic performance and that under-performing learners tend to gain confidence in themselves to continue with their schoolwork. Teachers emphasised that attaining pre-school or Grade R education is beneficial to learners as it assists them to acquire relevant skills such as writing and holding a pen to assist them to cope with the demands of a formal learning environment. Moreover, it was emphasised that play stimulates the learners' minds and enhance their physical development, therefore, it is advisable that children be taught through play. Lastly, learners should be provided with support.

5.1. Strengths and Limitations of the Study

This study has contributed to expanding knowledge and gaining insight regarding the challenges that impede school readiness within the South African context. It has also created awareness of the challenges that Foundation Phase teachers encounter daily due to poor school readiness of learners. The emanating knowledge from this study could educate teachers,

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parents, and the community on challenges that impede school readiness and on the programmes that can be used to support learners who are poorly prepared for school. The findings of the study can also be used by various stakeholders or practitioners across all organisations, in particular, the Department of Basic Education, by providing further information regarding poor school readiness.

The study considered and anticipated the following limitations. Firstly, one of the barriers encountered was that the majority of participants who formed part of the study were teachers from the schools that are in the low-income areas (township in Randfontein). Only a few teachers from the schools that are in the middle-income area (Randfontein town) took part in the study; therefore, the number of participants were not equally distributed between the three schools. Moreover, some of the teachers did not have a recognised qualification such as a Bachelor of Education. These limitations do not in any way reduce the implication of the research study, however, it serves as considerations for future studies that might be undertaken on the same topic.

5.2. Recommendations

To ensure effective programmes to reduce the poor school readiness amongst learners, the following recommendations are deemed important for future researchers within the same field of study. The predominant concern of Foundation Phase teachers in this study is that they encounter several challenges with learners who are not well-prepared for mainstream schooling. To this end, this study recommends school readiness campaigns within the communities or at schools, whereby regular information sessions are held with both the parents and members of the communities to be educated on the benefits of preparing learners for mainstream schooling, and also to provide parents with different strategies to assist learners at home. Through these campaigns, parents and community members would be encouraged to be responsible for ensuring that learners are ready for mainstream schooling.

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Another way of educating parents about the importance of preparing children for mainstream schooling is through focus or support groups (include the district psychologist, social worker, or registered counsellor) where parents share the challenges they encounter at home with children who are under-performing. The support group should encourage knowledge-sharing amongst parents and practitioners should help in answering questions regarding school readiness. This would create a platform for practitioners to identify parents whose learners need serious intervention.

The study also recommends that assistant teachers be employed to assist Foundation Phase teachers with under-performing learners by giving them individual attention, whereby these learners can be grouped for activities or even taken outside for other activities. Also, both the teachers and curricula developers need to develop relevant study materials that will accommodate the under-performing learners. It is recommended that ECD centres liaise with Grade R classes, where the curricula for both ECD centres and Grade R be the same to ensure that there is no academic gap between the learners from ECD centres and Grade R. Furthermore, ECD practitioners should be empowered through training and workshops to be able to provide quality early childhood education, particularly to under-performing learners.

The study further recommends that learners and teachers should have access to free supportive counselling at schools, since the challenges they encounter hampers their academic progress and self-image. This could assist them to overcome the challenges they experience in their daily lives and will enable the learners, as well as teachers, to seek professional help. Therefore, it is recommended that registered counsellors be employed at schools to offer primary psychological intervention. Furthermore, it is recommended that a future research study be conducted on the supporting programmes that can be utilised by both the teachers and parents in assisting under-performing learners to achieve school readiness. This would result in improving the academic performance of learners.

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INFORMATION SHEET

Project Title: Exploring Foundation Phase teachers' experiences and perceptions of the challenges that impede school readiness.

What is this study about?

This is a research project being conducted by Keila Vilanculo, a masters Psychology student, under the supervision of Dr Athena Pedro at the University of the Western Cape. We are inviting you to participate in this study because your participation may provide us with a better understanding regarding the Foundation Phase teachers' experiences and perceptions of the challenges that impede school readiness of foundation phase learners. The purpose of this research project is allow you to explain your experiences relating the challenges encountered in the classroom with learners who are not ready for school and the programmes that can be used to assist these children.

What will I be asked to do if I agree to participate?

You will be asked to participate in an individual semi-structured interview through online video platforms such as Zoom, Skype, or WhatsApp to provide information about your experiences of having children who are not ready for school in your classroom, the challenges you encounter with these children, how the school performance of learners affect them at a later stage, and programmes that can be used in assisting children with poor performance. The study will be conducted in Randfontein, Gauteng Province, and the interviews will take a minimum of 25-30 minutes.

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Would my participation in this study be kept confidential?

The researchers undertake to protect your identity and the nature of your contribution. To ensure your anonymity, names will not be used and no one will know what you have shared during the interview. Only the researchers involved in the research study will have access to information for data collection and analysis purposes. To ensure your confidentiality, all data will be kept safe and stored in a well-protected cupboard. All of the participants are encouraged to maintain confidentiality. If we write a report or article about this research project, your identity will be protected by including pseudonyms instead of your real name.

All of the data will be stored on a password-protected computer. You have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without any negative consequences. We will do our best to reduce risks (if there are any) and act promptly to assist you if you experience any discomfort, psychological or otherwise during the process of your participation in this study. Your participation will be greatly appreciated.

What are the risks of this research?

All human interactions and talking about yourself or others carry some amount of risks. We will nevertheless reduce such risks and act promptly to assist you if you experience any discomfort, psychological or otherwise during the process of your participation in this study. Where necessary, an appropriate referral will be made to a suitable professional for further assistance or intervention.

What are the benefits of this research?

A benefit of your participation includes creating awareness to all practitioners and the Department of Basic Education and building on research literature on the significance of ensuring that children are ready for school in South Africa an in order for the Department of Basic Education to implement more policies and support programmes that can aid in school readiness of children. The results of this study aims to serve as a good base on which future studies can be conducted regarding the poor school performance that is due to poor school readiness.

Do I have to be in this research and may I stop participating at any time?

Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You may choose not to take part at all. If you decide to participate in this research, you may stop participating at any time. If

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you decide not to participate in this study or if you stop participating at any time, you will not be penalized or lose any benefits to which you otherwise qualify.

What if I have questions?

This research is being conducted by Keila Vilanculo, a master student in Psychology under the supervision of *Dr Athena Pedro* at the University of the Western Cape. If you have any questions about the research study itself, please contact Dr Athena Pedro at: 021 959 2825, email: aspedro@uwc.ac.za; 4078276@myuwc.ac.za. Should you have any questions regarding this study and your rights as a research participant or if you wish to report any problems you have experienced related to the study, please contact:

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This research has been approved by the University of the Western Cape's Human and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (Reference number: HS20/6/26)

APPENDIX B: CONSENT FORM

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CONSENT FORM

Title of Research Project: Exploring Foundation Phase teachers' experiences and perceptions of the challenges that impede school readiness.

The study has been described to me in a language that I understand. My questions about the study have been answered. I understand what my participation will involve and I agree to participate of my own choice and free will through online video platforms such as Zoom, Skype, or WhatsApp. I understand that my identity will not be disclosed to anyone. I understand that I may withdraw from the study at any time without giving a reason and without fear of negative consequences or loss of benefits.

___ I agree to be **[videotaped/audiotaped/photographed]** during my participation in this study.

___ I do not agree to be **[videotaped/audiotaped/photographed]** during my participation in this study.

Participant's name………………………..

Participant's signature……………………………….

Date………………………

APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW GUIDE

UNIVERSITY OF THE WESTERN CAPE

Private Bag X 17, Bellville 7535, South Africa

Tel: +27 21-9592819, Fax: 27 21-9593515

E-mail: aspedro@uwc.ac.za;
4078276@myuwc.ac.za

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Section A: Demographic information

Foundation Phase teachers demographic information					
Age:	**Gender:**		**Nationality:**		
Race (tick which option best describes you):					
African	**White**	**Coloured**	**Indian**	**South African born Chinese**	**Other**
Highest Qualification held:					
Years of teaching experience:					

Section B: Interview guide (English)

- **Explore the challenges that impede the school readiness of foundation phase learners of low-to-middle background.**

1. What do you understand by "school readiness"?
2. Explain how one is able to tell if a child is ready for mainstream school?
3. What would you consider a 'well prepared' child for school to be?

- **Explore the consequences of poor school readiness on learner's school performance.**

1. What are the long lasting consequences of children who are poorly prepared and unable to adapt to formal learning environment?

- **Explain the challenges encountered in the classroom by teachers regarding learners with poor school readiness.**

1. What are the common challenges you experience as a teacher when a child under performs academically?
2. How does a child's underperformance affect or influence your teaching methods for the whole class of learners?
3. How do you monitor or assess a learner's performance?
4. What are the skills needed by the teacher to understand how a learner may improve in the classroom alongside his or her peers?

- **Identify the available programmes used to assist children with poor scholastic performance**

1. What are the possible solutions that you can recommend to improve school readiness of foundation phase learners?
2. What support do you receive from the school and education department to assist you as a foundation phase teacher?
3. How would you guide or recommend children's parents or guardians to assist their children to achieve school readiness?
4. What should be implemented at early childhood development centres to assist children with meeting school readiness requirements?

APPENDIX D: SCHOOL PERMISSSION LETTER

UNIVERSITY OF THE WESTERN CAPE

Private Bag X 17, Bellville 7535, South Africa

Tel: +27 21-959 2825 Fax: 27 21-959 3515

E-mail: aspedro@uwc.ac.za;
4078276@myuwc.ac.za

Primary School Name

Date

Dear Principal

PERMISSION TO CONDUCT A RESEARCH STUDY AT YOUR SCHOOL

I, Keila Vilanculo, am a student from the University of the Western Cape. I would like to conduct a research study in the area of school readiness. The study is aimed at exploring Foundation Phase teachers' experiences and perceptions of the challenges that impede school readiness. The objectives are to (1) explore the challenges that impede the school readiness of foundation phase learners of low-to-middle income background; (2) explore the consequences of poor school readiness on learner's school performance; (3) explain the challenges encountered in the classroom by teachers regarding learners with poor school readiness; (4) identify the available programmes used to assist children with poor scholastic performance.

I would like to invite Foundation Phase teachers to participate in this study. This will include an interview of approximately 25-30 minutes via a video conference platform due to Covid-19 pandemic, with each participant who agrees to participate. I would like to conduct the interviews between August 2020 and October 2020.

The project has received ethics clearance from the Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee at the University of the Western Cape (Reg. No. HS20/6/26). Should you agree to participate, I will request permission from the Gauteng Department of Education (GDE) to conduct the study at your school. Information sheet and consent forms will be distributed to the participants, which provides information on the nature of the study and that their participation is entirely voluntary.

Please feel free to contact the details below should you have any queries in this regard.

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Sincerely,

Keila Vilanculo

Department of Psychology,

University of the Western Cape

Email: 4078276@myuwc.ac.za

Contact number: 021 959 2825