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# CAREGIVERS' AND PARENTS' VIEWS ABOUT PRESCHOOL EDUCATION AS A SCHOOL READINESS PROGRAMME IN THE QUEENSTOWN EDUCATION DISTRICT

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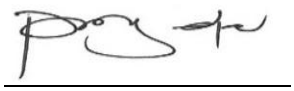
## DECLARATION

I, Mtyuda Pamela Nomonde Pettina, declare that an investigation into the caregivers' and parents' views about preschool education as a preschool readiness programme is my own work and that all sources used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

This thesis has not previously been submitted in full or partial fulfilment of the requirements for an equivalent or higher qualification at any other recognized educational institution.



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## ABSTRACT

The aim of this study was to uncover preschool caregivers' and parents' views about preschool education as a preschool readiness programme in the Queenstown education district. The research study addressed the following specific objectives, to determine: the caregivers' and parents' understanding of school readiness nature of preschool education; the extent to which the caregivers' practices can make children ready for formal schooling; the parents' assessment of the preschool centres as places that make children ready for formal schooling; caregivers' and parents' views on the challenges facing preschool centres against making children ready for formal schooling; and lastly, the possible solutions to the challenges facing preschool centres. In the present study, both qualitative and quantitative data were collected. Quantitative data were gathered through questionnaires from 40 preschool caregivers at preschools and 40 parents of the children in those preschools that were chosen by the caregivers on the basis of parents who are highly committed in the education of their children. The qualitative data were gathered through focus group discussions with 2 focus groups located in the Queenstown Education district. Twelve participants were interviewed, and these comprised 6 caregivers that formed the focus group discussion 1 and 6 parents that formed the focus group discussion 2, using the interview schedules as guides. Purposive sampling to select the participants was used. Triangulation design was used to gather both quantitative and qualitative data at the same time and to integrate the two forms of data in order to have a better understanding of the research objectives. The research findings indicated that the most frequently reported issues by the participants were the problems with some caregivers who had limited knowledge to make children ready for formal schooling. Some of the parents and caregivers do not understand the importance of the domains of development in making children fully ready for formal schooling. There is still lack of parental involvement in those centres; no effective communication between parents and staff; caregivers are not aware of the policies that govern the preschools; poverty and unemployment are factors that inhibit the right of young children to education; no proper resources in preschools and the unregistered preschools also still need to be helped by coordinated efforts from communities and the government bodies. It was concluded that the quality of early childhood development(ECD) programmes in Queenstown preschools was still compromised. The study recommended extensive investment in infrastructure and learning and teaching support materials is necessary; there should be sufficient staffing with ECD expertise; programmes should be designed in order to educate and encourage parents to actively involve themselves with preschool activities.




**Keywords:** Assessment, Preschool caregivers, Parents' views, Early childhood development, infrastructure.

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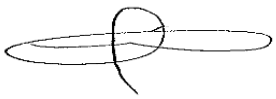
## DEDICATION

This study is dedicated to my family, my Dad and my Mom, my brothers and sisters, my son, Milani, who were all always encouraging me, giving me their love and care, which made it possible for me achieve this goal. May God bless you for all the support you have given me.

## SUPERVISOR'S STATEMENT

This thesis has been submitted under my supervision and with my approval.



Professor E.O. Adu (Supervisor)

25/03/19
Date

## ACRONYMS

CPD : Continuing Professional Development

CRPD : Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

DBE : Department of Basic Education

DoH : Department of Health

DSD : Department of Social Development

ECCE : Early childhood care and education

ECD : Early Childhood Development

ECE : Early Childhood Education

FMC : Family Maths Curriculum

Grade R : Reception Year



GRS : Getting Ready for School

NAEY : National Association for the Education of Young Children

NDP : National Development Plan

NGO : Non-Governmental Organization

NIPECD : National Integrated Plan for ECD

NPO : Non-Profit Organization

OBE : Outcomes-based Education

PPT : Project Preparation Trust

RNCS : Revised National Curriculum Statement

SPARC : Strengthening Partnerships and Resources in Communities

UNESCO : United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

US : United States of America.

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# CHAPTER ONE

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

The process of a child's development starts at conception. Children grow, develop and learn throughout their lives from birth and infancy to adulthood. A child's development can be measured through social, cognitive, physical and emotional developmental milestones (LeBel & Chafoule, 2010). The promotion of quality early childhood education in Africa, particularly for children who are vulnerable, faces many complex cultural, political, and economic challenges. In addition, poor environmental conditions, low family income and corruption in some African states have added to the overwhelming burden of barriers to early childhood development (ECD) and care. The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) defines "early childhood" as occurring before the age of eight, and it is during this period that a child goes through the most rapid phase of growth and development. Their brains develop faster than at any other point in their lives, so these years are critical. The foundations for their social skills, self-esteem, perception of the world and moral outlook in life are established during these years.



Marmot, Allen, Bell, Bloomer and Goldblatt (2012) discuss the importance of ensuring that all children receive an excellent foundation in life by addressing social inequality through early childhood care and education (ECCE). For instance, an audit report by the Department of Social Development (2014:13) quotes Bathabile Dlamini, Minister of Social Development, thus: 'We must ensure that our efforts to expand access to early childhood development (ECD) services, take into account the need to fight the triple challenge of poverty, inequality and unemployment

Atmore, Van Niekerk and Ashley-Cooper (2012a), similarly stress the importance of early childhood care and education in alleviating poverty and thus addressing social inequality.

In South Africa, these ideals are inscribed in the Constitution (Republic of South Africa, 1996), as well as in several other legislative documents that pertain to children and more specifically early childhood care; including the National Early Learning Development Standards, the National Programme of Action for Children, the *South African Children's*

*Act* No. 38 of 2008, the *Children's Amendment Act* No. 41 of 2007, Education White Paper 5, the National ECD Policy and Programme, and the National Curriculum Framework for Children from Birth to Four Years (Biersteker, 2010; UNICEF, 2014). This study focuses more on teachers' and parents' views on the school readiness development programmes for the children in preschools in the Queenstown Education District. There seems to be paucity of studies on the issue at the moment in the Queenstown District and the present study is not only crucial but also relevant to South Africa.

## 1.1 Background of the study

Previously the term *Educare* was used to refer to programmes for children in the 0 to 6 age group. This is now replaced by the term Early Childhood Development (ECD) that encompasses children from birth to at least nine years, depending on their age when entering formal education. ECD programmes include a variety of strategies and a wide range of services directed at helping families and communities to meet the needs of children in the above-mentioned age group. This development phase is particularly crucial and impoverished families are not able to meet the developmental needs of their children without assistance (Colker, 2008; Department of Social Development, 2014; Van der Vyver, 2012a). Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) is one component of ECD and relates specifically to the provision of daily care, education, stimulation for the emotional, cognitive, sensory, spiritual, moral, physical, social and communication development of infants and young children (Ebrahim, 2012).



The early years of the child are critical for the child's stimulation, education and there is emphasis on healthy practices which are culturally appropriate and community based (Excell & Linington, 2011:10; Soud, 2009:15). The concept of quality is dynamic and rights based. Education and human rights are essential components of the right to quality education of which teacher quality is a key element (Myers, 2004:14; Hyde & Kabiru, 2003). These rights for the ECD children are highlighted by The State of the World's Children (2001:1) as the provision of opportunities to develop fine motor skills. While the State of the World's children bases quality on rights, the Vygotsykian perspective notes that quality ECD programmes focus on the ECD child's competencies that are still under

construction (Bodrova & Leong, 2005:438). Thus the key to the Vygotsykian conception of quality amplifies the children's learning and development within the age and developmentally appropriate activities. On one hand the Vygotsykian perspective emphasizes the importance of scaffolding the child's developmentally based needs while on the other hand they acknowledge that underlying skills at the centre of development are taught through content.

**In Eastern Europe, Caucasus, and Central Asia,** under the educational system of former communist countries, the care and teaching of children 0-7 years was a service provided by governments in kindergarten financed and run by the state or by big enterprises. After the political and socio-economical system changed, many kindergartens either closed down or started charging parents significantly higher amounts for their services. All of the above has had the unfortunate effect of reducing access to child care and leaving it and school readiness in the hands of non-professionals in early childhood. The families that have been most affected by these changes are those with low socio-economic status, language differences, from rural areas, and with challenging personal issues. In an attempt to improve the situation, in some countries a compulsory preschool year has been introduced in primary schools. However it usually focuses largely on cognitive issues related to readiness for school. In recent years there is no quality early childhood practice; moreover, it is not always accessible to children from disadvantaged families. Other problems include the high number of children in classrooms, and the fact that in some cases, day care is viewed as a business and provided by private non-professional individuals (Sylva, Melhuish, Sammons, Siraj-Blatchford, & Taggart, 2004).



Sylva, et.al, further discuss that in **Denmark**, since 2004, it has been provided by the statute that every Daycare centre should work out teaching plans focusing on six themes: personal and social competences, language, body and motion, nature, and culture. In the teaching plans methods, activities and aims should be described. It is part of the work of documentation of 0-6-year-old children's learning and development. In 2005, the Ministry of Family and Consumer Affairs started an evaluation of the teaching plans. The first report from March 2006 shows high implementation. Seventy-four percent of all day care

centres have already worked out a teaching plan and 24% are in progress. Only 2% have not yet started. Most of the nursery teachers express satisfaction with the plans and say that the plans help increase educational quality and professional consciousness, create a common language among the staff, and focus more on learning. The trend is that the idea of learning has moved into the day care centres without having moved out play.

In **The Netherlands,** the government considers child care as an integral and essential part of economic growth, especially since a large part of the working population is middle-aged, thus making it necessary that mothers with young children get the opportunity to participate in the economy and increase the economic wealth of the nation and their own emancipation (Charikleia, Paraskevopoulos, & Pantis,. 2011). Child care is used as a route to children who suffer from cultural and educational deprivation by working with programs such as:

(i) Head start;

(ii) Sure Start; and

(iii) High/Scope.



(i) Head Start

Head Start is a publicly funded program. Developed in the 1960s for intervention with at-risk minority and low-income children, it is a comprehensive program that addresses the educational, nutritional and social needs of such children. It can be associated with public school districts or conducted as a separate program through a community agency. These programs are the largest publicly funded educational programs for infants and toddlers (Early Head Start) and preschool children. They include health and medical screening and treatment, required parent participation and involvement, and comprehensive services to families. “Today there are Head Start programs in every state and territory, in rural and urban sectors, on American Indian reservations, and in migrant areas” (Essa, 2003, p. 24).

From its inception in 1965, Head Start has sought to provide classroom-based and, most recently, home based comprehensive developmental services for children from low-

income families. An essential part of every Head Start program is the involvement of parents in parent education, program planning and operating activities. Many parents serve as members of policy councils and committees and have a voice in administrative and managerial decisions while others participate as volunteer or paid aides to teachers, social service personnel, and other staff members. Head Start programs have a low child-staff ratio, with 10 percent of the enrollment in each state available for children with special needs.

(ii) Sure Start

Sure Start is an exemplary, research-based preschool program that serves military children and families living overseas. In addition to offering a high-quality educational program that reflects best practices in the field, Sure Start also provides health and nutrition, social, and parent involvement services. Close collaboration between families, schools, and the installation community is viewed as essential and a required part of the program. This multipronged approach to the delivery of services distinguishes Sure Start from all other Departments of Defense Education Activity (DoDEA) programs. At the same time, Sure Start ensures that participating children receive the same uncompromisingly excellent education that all DoDEA children are guaranteed. Sure Start's comprehensive model, although appropriate for all preschool children, targets preschoolers who are "at risk" for later school failure because of economic circumstance or other health and/or family factors. Since this innovative, effective model is expensive to replicate, it is reserved for those children and families who will most benefit from participation in the program. As its name implies, Sure Start is dedicated to providing participating children with a sure start in school and later life.



The Sure Start preschool program is based on the premise that children's potential for learning is influenced by their early cultural, physical, social, emotional, linguistic, creative, and cognitive experiences. It incorporates the tenets of child growth and development and family systems theory that stem from the works of Piaget, Erikson, Vygotsky, Smilansky, Kolb, Bronfenbrenner, and Gardner, among others. Because children who are identified as being at risk for school failure may have limited access to opportunities that enhance development in all domains, Sure Start provides children and

families with an intensive curriculum that teaches requisite skills in a way that addresses children's unique learning styles and intelligences. The Sure Start program is wedded to the beliefs that risk is not destiny and that early intervention can ameliorate risk factors.

(iii) High/Scope

High scope is a cognitively oriented curriculum (Wortham, 2006). It was first developed to serve 3 and 4 years-old children from poor neighbours in Ypsilanti, Michigan, in 1962. It helps children to become independent thinkers and problem solvers (Peyton, 2005). However through the four decades of working, the curriculum has evolved to the model that is used today with principles of the curriculum (Morrison, 2008, pp.101-102) discussed below:

*Active learning:* Active learning is the most crucial way for children to make sense of their world because as they interact with the real world, as they have immediate first-hand experience, they are able to build their own understanding.



*Key experiences:* Interacting with people, materials and ideas through a creative and ongoing way helps children to enhance mentally, emotionally, socially and physically.

*Plan-do-review process:* Children have right and time to plan their own activities, perform them and at the end, reflect on what they had done.

*Parent component:* By offering ideas about child development and learning, teachers make home visits. Among those principles, active learning and key experiences form the core of the High Scope Model. In fact, the four elements, child-adult interaction, learning environment, daily routines and assessment are the ones support active learning.

*Child-adult interaction:* Adult is the supporter in High-Scope Preschool program. Positive interaction strategies such as focusing on children's strengths, sharing control with children, forming an authentic relationship with children are highly valued in High- Scope

classrooms. In other words, when dealing with every situation in the classroom, the teacher is the guider and supporter which creates a harmony in the classroom.

*Learning environment:* Environment is significant in this model and it is arranged into different areas to foster children's different developmental levels. Many kinds of activities can be carried out in a High-Scope classroom through a wide variety of materials.

*Daily routines:* Active learning is also supported by daily routines. Consistent routine is important. Plan- do- review session, small group and large group times when teachers also engages in, are crucial part of a typical High-Scope preschool classroom.

*Assessment:* There is a special observation record used for assessing the children's progress, The High/Scope Child Observation Record (COR) because observation is the major tool to understand children's development and learning. While observing and interacting with children, teachers also keep daily anecdotal records and planning sessions.



As early childhood curriculum models and guidelines were enhanced throughout time, countries' early education curriculum also affected by the innovations and developments in the field accordingly. Turkey also had gone through many ways regarding early childhood curriculum. These programs are financed by the government and aim at fighting or preventing segregation within the peer groups. The method here is evidence-based and proves that the child prospers from the education that is offered. Cooperation with the national educational system is essential(Charikleia,et. al.)

In **Turkey,** the significance being attached to early childhood education is increasing day by day, activities on family consciousness are being performed, and the studies on the elevation of teacher training quality and the expansion of early childhood education are being carried out as well. Since in Turkey particularly social purposes are influential in opening preschool education institutions, in regulations and acts by Ministries of Labor and Health (apart from Ministry of Education), it has been stated that preschool education is a special field. Thus in Turkey, Early Childhood Education General Management was

founded within the Ministry of Education in 1992 to actualize the early childhood education studies in a more organized way and to meet the increasing need in society. Throughout Turkey, the present preschool enrollment rate is 32% for 5- to 6-year-old children. There are currently 552 kindergartens and 13,305 preschools in service(Charikleia, et. al).

In **Nigeria** Early child care and development started in the '80s as part of the Survival strategy, and was linked to the Primary Health Care system, which was introduced to improve 1) the maternal health and wellbeing of mothers, and 2) the under-5 mortality rate in the country. With mass immunization and subsequent drop in the under-5 mortality rate, parents were sensitized to take proper care of the health of their children under 5. At the height of the Survival campaign was the call for early stimulation of the child to improve mental and physical development. To that end, with support from UNICEF, and the Bernard Van Leer Foundation in the Netherlands, a number of child care centres were established and linked to the Primary Health Care Centres in some communities in the country to take care of the need for early stimulation of the child aged 0-5 years (Kimaryo, 2011).



Early child care and development is now widely practiced in the country, and with the Dakar Declaration on Education for All (2000), Early Childcare and Development was to be expanded to make it universal. With the new National Policy on Education, early child care and development was no longer to be solely in private hands, but was to have the active participation of the government at all levels. Furthermore, active participation of NGOs and Community-Based Organizations universalize the delivery of Early Childhood Development in Nigeria and benefit many Nigerian children who hitherto could not benefit from early stimulation and learning (Kimaryo, 2011; Oniye and Durosaro, 2009:129).

Bukaliya & Mubika, 2012 state that in **Sub-Saharan Africa**, the major challenges to good child development are disease, severe malnutrition, and developmental delays. Wars, famine, poverty, migration, domestic violence, and a lack of basic social services have all taken their toll on vulnerable children. Increasingly, African nations are formulating ECD policies with strategies to develop integrated community-based programs that provide

parent education and support, child stimulation, preschool education, health care, nutritional supplements, community sanitation, potable water and protective services. Vulnerable children in Africa urgently require more intensive and higher quality services to reach their potential. For this reason, special attention must be paid to formulating and implementing ECD policies, increasing national and international investment in ECD, establishing effective national ECD resource centers, building pre- and in-service training systems, and forging public-private partnerships for children and parents.

ECE in **Chile** is a split system. The ECE level in Chile is considered by the General Law of Education (LGE) as the first level of the educational system. The LGE divides ECE into three levels, and, in turn, each level is subdivided into two-year cycles. First level: Nursery level (age 0–2), subdivided into junior nursery (age 0–1) and senior nursery (age 1–2). Second level: Middle level (age 2–4), subdivided into junior middle level (age 2–3 and senior middle level (age 3–4). Third level: Transition level (age 4–6), subdivided into first level of transition (or prekinder, age 4–5) and second level of transition (kinder, age 5–6). Children enter primary school at six years of age(Korjenvitch and Dunifon, 2010).



Chile has a wide range of policy aims for its ECE system which balance child care and early education priorities. These include providing child care to support parental employment and parental education and training, and providing early education to enhance children's socio-emotional skills; positive attitudes and dispositions; language and literacy competencies; basic mathematics skills; physical development; school preparation; and safeguarding. Governance and system management are centrally located, with responsibility for ECE being at national level, reflecting a single-level governance model. However, various national bodies are responsible for other strategic and operational aspects of the system, such as policy and legislation; quality; regulation, compliance and accountability; and funding and service delivery.

For children from birth to three years (ECED), responsibility is divided among four departments: Education, Health, Work and Employment, and Social Welfare. For children aged three to six years (PPE), responsibility is split among three departments: Education,

Health, and Social Welfare. Statutory entitlements for children and parents provide children with free, universal services from birth to six years of age, with the last year mandatory and a prerequisite to enter primary school at age six years. ECE is not considered compulsory, and there are no requirements for a child to enter ECE. In 2014, the second level of transition (for five to six year olds) became compulsory. For parents there is national statutory entitlement to parental leave; this is in the form of targeted paid maternity and targeted paid paternity leave. From 1999-2014, there have been policy changes across four key policy areas, including increased expenditure, enhanced statutory entitlements, improved staff: child ratios, and regulation and monitoring. Further policy changes are planned in relation to staff qualifications, ECE curriculum, quality assurance regulations and child assessment.

ECE in **Denmark** is both a split and unitary system with four different structures. Home-based care or *Dagpleje* is publicly funded and provides part-time and extended day places to children from birth to three years of age. Nurseries or *Vuggestuer* are regulated, publicly-funded, center-based settings providing part-time and extended day places to children from birth to three years of age. Integrated Centers or *Integreret dag institution* are publicly-funded centers that cater for children from birth to six years of age (Woolfork, 2010). They provide part-time and extended day places. Kindergartens or *Bornehaver* cater for children from three to six years of age. These settings are publicly funded and provide part-time and extended day places. Primary education starts at six years of age.



**Denmark** has a wide range of policy aims for its ECE services for children from birth to six years, which balance child care and early education priorities. These include providing child care to support parental employment, parent education and training, and parental work/life balance, and providing early education to enhance children's socio-emotional development, positive attitude and dispositions, language and literacy, basic mathematical skills, and physical development, preparedness for school, citizenship, special needs, safeguarding of vulnerable children; support for children where home language is different to the national language, and reductions in inequality. Further policy aims include the preparation of children for school and for citizenship, support for children

with special needs, safeguards for vulnerable children, reductions in inequality and social disadvantage, and support for children whose home language differs from the national language. Governance and system management in Denmark are distributed between national and subnational levels, reflecting a multilevel governance model with one integrated department with responsibility for ECE. Statutory entitlements for children and parents provide children with free, universal services from birth to six years of age, but this is not compulsory. Parents have a statutory entitlement to parental leave in the form of paid maternity and paid paternity leave.

Over the last five years, there have been policy changes in expenditure, staff qualifications and child assessments. There are also four different provider types and settings. For children under three years, there is home-based and center-based provision, and for three- to six-year olds there are nurseries and kindergartens. In addition, there are integrated centers that cater for children from birth to six years. All settings offer part and extended day services. All provision is publicly funded or subsidized. Funding mechanisms include supply-side funding through staff salary subsidies, resource grants and capital grants and demand-side funding through reduced fees.



In **New Zealand**, various Government bodies set a National Curriculum to ensure standards are maintained in every ECE centre and control teacher quality. Children are taught different aspects in life, to form friendships, play and explore, be courageous and try new things, sing, dance, play games, negotiate and share, just to mention a few. However, the promotion of quality early childhood education in Africa, particularly for children who are vulnerable, faces many complex cultural, political, and economic challenges. In addition, poor environmental conditions, low family income and chronic corruption in some African states have added to the overwhelming burden of barriers to early childhood development (ECD) and care. The 0-3 year olds' rights are expansive and include protection from harm, from physical dangers, to get adequate nutrition and health care, appropriate immunization, attachment to an adult who can understand and respond to their signals.

Presently, **South Africa** faces a critical question concerning the field of early childhood education, specifically preschool programmes. The question is to what extent are quality decisions about the appropriateness of preschool programmes controlled? ECD progammes include the provision made for the care and education of the young child throughout his or her life. Many different kinds of programmes exist in South Africa (Malmberg, Mwaura, & Sylva, 2010). These are full day-care centres, half-day preschool only, playgroups, and day-mothers. Malmberg, et al further argue that the issue is not whether one provides a better curriculum than the other, but whether teachers are successful in providing a stimulating set of possibilities for children within which to learn and grow from, during their daily experiences. Approaches to learning, including enthusiasm, curiosity, and persistence on tasks, are also critical to school readiness. The different types of provisioning have become a blur because of the diverse nature of children and their abilities that attend early childhood settings.

Early childhood education and care in the **United States** is largely decentralized(Wood, 2009). ISCED Level 0 within the United States includes children from birth through to their kindergarten year. Within the United States, the last year of ISCED 0 is children's kindergarten. ECE is described with different names, such as child care, day care, preschool and prekindergarten. It is delivered in different settings, from within a center, within a home, and within the local public or private school. Some programs are offered at little or no cost to parents, particularly for low-income parents. Other programs may cost a high proportion of a parent's income. The majority of ECE settings that serve children from birth through age of five (that is children not-yet-enrolled-in kindergarten) are private fee-based services. There are some notable state-funded or federally-funded programs as well, but currently the majority of these programs are not universally available to all age eligible children within the state. Below are examples of some of the programs and legislation in the United States that are designed to make ECE more accessible and affordable for all children:



• **Head Start and Early Head Start:** Head Start and Early Head Start are federally funded programs that promote the school readiness of young children from low income families through agencies in their local community. Head Start programs support the mental,

social and emotional development of eligible children aged three to five-but-not-yet-enrolled-in-kindergarten, while Early Head Start programs are available to eligible families from birth until the child turns three years old.

• **Title I:** Title I is a federal grant program designed to give educational assistance to students living in areas of high poverty. The Title I program originated in 1965, when Congress passed the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, and was reauthorized in 2001 with the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act. Over 600,000 children are served through preschool programs funded through federal Title I allocations to school districts and schools.

• **The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA):** IDEA ensures that all children with disabilities are entitled to a free appropriate public education to meet their unique needs and prepare them for further education, employment, and independent living. IDEA provides guidelines concerning the funding and services to children from birth to two years of age, and from age three to age twenty-one. For example, IDEA states that every family is entitled to appropriate and timely identification and intervention services for children aged birth to two years. For eligible children aged three to twenty-one, every child is entitled to a free and appropriate public education.



• **The Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG):** CCDBG helps low income families, families receiving public assistance, and those families transitioning from public assistance in obtaining early education and care.

• Two new programs began in 2015. The Preschool Development Grants program supports states to develop or enhance preschool programs and expand opportunities for high-quality preschool to children from low- to moderate-income families. The Early Head Start-Child Care Partnerships support local programs in improving the quality of child care.

• Currently, forty-four states and the District of Columbia have a state preschool program or are piloting one. During the 2013–2014 school year, 29% of four-year olds and 3% of three-year-olds were served in such programs; more than 1.3 million children attended state-funded preschool, including 1.1 million at age four (Barnet et al., 2015). Within the United States the final year of PPE for most children is kindergarten. In the United States, kindergarten is regulated by individual states. In 45 states and DC, school districts are

required to provide kindergarten programs, 11 states plus DC require school districts to offer full-day kindergarten and, in 15 states and DC, kindergarten attendance is mandatory.

Warren, & Haisken-DeNew, 2013 opine the **United States** has a wide range of policy aims for its ECE services, which balance child care and early education priorities. These include providing ECE to enhance children's socio-emotional skills, approaches to learning, language and literacy skills, cognitive skills such as early mathematics and science skills, and health and physical development. Further policy aims include the preparation of children for school, support for children with special needs, safeguarding vulnerable children, and reducing inequality and social disadvantage. Governance and system management in the United

States are largely at the state and local level, with some federal responsibilities, reflecting a multi-level governance model. Responsibility for ECE at the federal level is shared between such federal agencies as the Department of Education, the Department of Health and Human Services, the Department of Defense, and the Bureau of Indian Affairs. There are no statutory entitlements for children to ECE, but in the majority of states, school districts are obliged to offer kindergarten programs.



In the United States, there is no statutory entitlement to parental leave and pay, but the FMLA provides certain employees with up to 12 weeks of unpaid, job-protected leave per year. Policy changes in ECE in a number of areas are planned between 2014–1019, reflecting changes underway in the system. In the United States, a wide range of settings comprise the ECE system. Settings vary in terms of location, from private homes to more formalized settings such as centers or within schools. They vary in terms of hours of operation, with some more than covering the work day and others providing half-day services. ECE within the United States is described using different names, such as child care, day care, preschool, pre-kindergarten, and transitional kindergarten. Services are funded through private and public subsidy. Funding mechanisms include supply-side funding through funded places, staff salary subsidy, and capital and resource grants, through programs such as Head Start, Child Development Block Grants, and the Individuals with Disabilities Education vouchers and reduced fees.

### 1.1.1 International and US Styles of Early Childhood Education

Ichimi 2011, Taguma 2012, Vaughan, 1993 and Lindberg, 2006 explain in their studies that some of the top performing kids on the reading, math, and science Program for International Student Assessments, or PISA, come from Asian countries. Asian countries believe that starting off children with a strong education will lead to better outcomes when they grow older. Asian culture focuses on the different stages of education, early childhood and then formal education, but at the same time aims to provide a more continuous learning environment.

China, Japan and Korea implemented a common framework for early childhood education that equips children with the skills and knowledge they need for further learning. In these countries, early childhood education is for kids ages zero to six, and then kids continue in formal education. Early childhood education is generally split up in two different stages, nursery and then kindergarten. A nursery is for children under the age of three and is comprised of small groups with many caregivers. The primary goals of a nursery are physical care and nurturing, so the caregivers are trained as nurses rather than teachers. Kindergarten is a full day program with bigger classes for kids aged three to six that acts as childcare as well as educational preparation (Heckman, & Raut, 2013).



Teaching methods typically involve a lot of repetition and total group instruction, so that all children ideally do the same thing at the same time. The methods used in Asian countries are similar to instrumental or operant conditioning in the sense that kids do acts repetitively and are positively reinforced when they do them correctly. They are discouraged from falling behind with the threat of being embarrassed by the teacher in front of their classmates.

Since teaching is such a large focus, these Asian countries tend to have favourable teacher to child ratios. The main criticism of this style of early childhood education is the lack of alignment between initial education and primary education. However, their uniform early childhood education curriculum is very respectable because it combines academic subjects with the development of soft skills. As the government is realizing its importance,

early childhood education is becoming a greater focus in Asia(Schweinhart, Montie, Xiang, Barnett, Belfield, & Nores, 2005).

**Scandinavian Countries**

Scandinavian countries place in the top overall amongst other countries on the PISA. They expand upon Asian beliefs relating to early childhood education. Finland, Sweden, and Denmark all emphasize learning outside of the classroom and involving parents in the curriculum. The partnership between parents and educators is highly valued since the child-parent social interaction is so vital. Scandinavian countries base their curriculum off the idea that children are naturally curious and want to learn new things. This is directly related to Piaget's theory of development that looks at children as little scientists who desire to seek and share knowledge. These countries also use Vygotsky's belief that social interaction fosters cognitive functions. Scandinavian schools allow young children to learn through interaction and experience(Schweinhart et.al, 2005).



In **Finland**, formal schooling does not begin until age seven. Before this, children are not required to attend school. In Finland and Sweden, every child has the right to high quality and affordable childcare with the good student to teacher ratios and highly qualified teachers. **Denmark's** government does not guarantee early childhood education, but 98% of children aged one to six do take advantage of the schooling available

The format of schooling in these countries is similar to that in Asia, with nursery school followed by kindergarten before formal schooling. The curriculums in these three countries differ from those in Asia because they include a variety of playing, self-expression, exploration, religion, and orientation with academic subjects. Educators focus on each child's best interest and providing support and understanding for the child individually. The overall goal of early childhood education in Scandinavian countries is to help the children gain independence as they develop(Schweinhart, et. al, 2005).

### 1.1.2 Waldorf Schools

Schweinhart, et. al, 2005 & Woldehanna, T. 2011 opine that another type of non-traditional private school is the Waldorf School. Similar to Montessori schools, Waldorf schools follow Piaget's theory that the child is a scientist, and should be surrounded by a stimulating and inspiring school environment to facilitate learning. Hands-on learning is enabled in Waldorf schools through curricula full of art, gardening, dance and other less traditional classes that supplement academic ones. In early childhood, children are exposed to letters and books, but not required to start reading until the second or third grade. The main tenet of Waldorf schools that coincides with Piaget's theory is that Waldorf schools are divided into three stages that roughly overlap with Piaget's stages of development. The curriculum in each stage varies based on what Waldorf educators believe is appropriate for the child's strengths in each stage. Like Piaget, Waldorf theory dictates that each stage is concrete and inflexible. The first stage is the imagination stage and occurs in the first seven years of a child's life. In early childhood, Waldorf schools work within the framework of the stage by establishing routines, performing simple tasks such as art projects and simple gardening, and fostering imagination by reading the students stories and encouraging free fantasy play.



The teacher models these activities so that students can imitate them with minimal instruction. Activities in Waldorf schools reflect seasons, holidays, and other rhythms that occur during the year. This reinforces the notion of routine on a larger scale and directly connects children to the world around them more than other schools. Another distinctive feature of Waldorf schools is that teachers move up with the students, so children are in class with the same students and teacher for the duration of their time at the school. This provides children with consistent reinforcement, but narrows the amount of people to imitate and learn from. Recently, Waldorf schools have come under fire for the less traditional topics taught and lack of a strong science curriculum (Woldehanna, 2011).

Millions of children across South Africa returned to school last week and was joined by a whole new intake excited to be starting primary school for the first time. The sad fact is that many of these first-graders have already been short-changed as real learning starts

even earlier – with well-planned early childhood education, said Steph Bester, chairman of The Unlimited Child. “Internationally, educationists agree that a child’s ability to learn is shaped during the first six years of life. Those who miss out on early childhood education may never fully catch up on their cognitive and personal development and will probably battle with learning to read, write, spell or do maths,” she added.

The importance of preparing young children for school led to the launch of The Unlimited Child in 2008. This organisation now reaches over 800 crèches in six provinces: Gauteng, Eastern Cape, KwaZulu-Natal, Limpopo, Mpumalanga and Western Cape. More than 90 000 young children have benefitted so far from the initiative’s expert-developed practitioners’ guides, kits of educational toys and books, training for caregivers and ongoing monitoring. “Seeing the difference that these programmes make to young children, our aim is to reach 20 000 crèches,” said Bester.

South Africa’s National Development Plan placed high priority on early childhood education for four and five year olds but about three quarters of the country’s 7 million children under the age of six are not yet benefitting. Bester believes that corporates and individuals have to help fill this gap in order to positively impact South Africa’s future. “Studies by UNICEF, UCT, Wits and Stellenbosch University to name but a few, have shown that beyond better literacy and numeracy, good early childhood education programmes help prepare young children to learn more effectively through primary and high school. As a result, they also significantly improve grade promotion, repetition and dropout rates,” he said.



Providing children with a stimulating environment in which they can learn and grow is not only for their development – studies have also shown that high-quality early childhood programmes bring impressive returns on investment to the public. One of the most significant research papers published in this regard is a 20-year study that found toddlers from Jamaica’s capital Kingston who were exposed to high quality stimulation programmes were on average earning 25 percent more as adults than the children who didn’t get any intervention.

The public also saw returns in the form of reduced special education, welfare and crime costs (Geltler & Heckman, 2013). “In the longer term, early childhood stimulation

programmes will enable our country's future generations to transform their own opportunities in life and impact our economy for the better," said Bester. The Unlimited Child was founded after researchers encountered crèches where young children were left sleeping instead of being stimulated or where caregivers had no equipment to help them introduce early learning. Two leading South African educationists, Freda Wilkens, a renowned early childhood development specialist, and educational management specialist Ian Corbishley, created The Unlimited Child's stimulation programmes. The initiative now has four programmes, designed to provide age-appropriate stimulation for various age groups. The programmes and toolkits for babies, toddlers and pre-Grade R children are aligned to National Early Learning Development Standards (NELDS) whilst the Grade R programme is aligned to CAPS (Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement). Each of these programmes are now being rolled out to crèches participating in The Unlimited Child.

Putting purpose before profit, The Unlimited Child was founded and continues to be supported by The Unlimited Child, a Durban based financial services company. "We really welcome like-minded organisations to partner with us as together, we will be able to achieve a far greater impact on the future of South Africa than we ever could alone," Bester concludes.



In line with this, ECD is defined in South Africa as: 'an umbrella term that applies to the processes by which children from birth to at least 9 years grow and thrive, physically, mentally, emotionally, spiritually, morally and socially' (Department of Education 2001:9). Teachers need to understand the developmental realities of children in preschools, and especially appreciate that *what* children learn is as important as *how* children learn (Excell & Linington, 2011). School readiness is regarded as a multidimensional construct that includes children who are ready to learn; schools that are ready to accommodate learners with diverse needs; and parents and communities who support learners' development.

The Constitution of South Africa, Section 29 (Republic of South Africa, 1996) recognizes the rights of children, also their right to basic education. In order to give effect to the rights of children as contained in the Constitution, the Children's Act (No. 38 of 2005) was

passed. One of its aims was to define parent responsibilities and rights. It goes a step further to ensure the protection of children's rights, which would lead to a corresponding improvement in other aspects of their lives. It is neither desirable nor possible to protect children's rights in isolation from their parents and communities (Department of Justice, 2005). The Act notes that it is necessary to effect changes to existing laws, especially the ones relating to children, in order to give them the critical protection they need. One of the Act's general principles states that, "all proceedings, actions and decisions in a matter concerning a child must recognize a child's need for development and to engage in play and other recreational activities appropriate to the child's age" (Department of Justice, 2005:20). The Act, therefore is committed to providing structures, services and means for promoting and monitoring the physical, psychological, intellectual, emotional and social development of the child.

The researcher noted that the Children's Act does not state how parents should contribute to the development of South African children. Parents, on the other hand, believe that schools have professionals capable of providing a rich curriculum that will produce an all-rounded child which explains the inclusion of four to five year-olds in the primary schools (Kamerman, 2006:10; Bukaliya & Mubika, 2012: 28). Myers (2004:11) opines that parents who are happy with childcare facilities are less absent from work and are less likely to be stressed and therefore increase their production in the work place. Furthermore, parents want academic progress for their children and look up to public schools to provide quality ECD programmes that prepare their children for success later on in life (Excell & Linington, 2011:10). The current study sought to establish the quality of ECD programmes in Queenstown district preschools to make pre-schoolers ready for formal schooling.



Children's Amendment Act, No. 41 of 2007's (Republic of South Africa, 2007) purpose is to amend the Children's Act 2005, so as to include certain definitions, to make provision of care for children, to provide for early childhood development, to provide further protection of children, to make provision regarding prevention and early intervention. The Children's Amendment Act (2007) discussed partial care and it is provided when an individual takes care of more than six children, on behalf of their parents or care-givers, during the day or night for specific hours by agreement between parents or the care-

givers and the service provider, reinforce provisions in the Bill of Rights in the Constitution and provide details of the responsibilities of parents and guardians in realizing these rights.

Early childhood development in South Africa is an inter-sectoral responsibility, shared among the Department of Social Development (DSD), the Department of Health (DoH) and the Department of Basic Education (DBE), with the Ministry of Women, Children and People with Disabilities playing a monitoring role (Department of Basic Education, 2014). The policy framework for a national system of ECD rests on a series of White Papers. The Interim Policy for Early Childhood Development (Department of Education, 1996) established the broad framework for ECD.

In disadvantaged communities, children are exposed to multiple risk factors. When one of these factors is low, levels of stimulation, social and cognitive development is at risk and may result in a child not being able to develop his/her full educational potential (Grace, Bowes & Elcombe, 2014). The Department of Education (2001) stated that nearly forty (40) percent of young children in South Africa are raised in conditions of poverty and neglect. The White Paper explained that children who are raised in poor families are at risk of the following; infant death, poor growth, poor adjustment to school and school dropout. The Child Care Amendment Act, 1983 (Act 74 of 1983) provides for the regulation of day-care facilities for children and the payment of subsidies to day-care facilities. ECD programmes; prevention and early intervention services for vulnerable children; and protection services for children who have suffered abuse, neglect, abandonment or exploitation.



The department also includes a system for identification, reporting, referral and support of vulnerable children. The Children's Amendment Act (2007:28) defines early childhood development as, "the process of emotional, cognitive, sensory, spiritual, moral, physical, and social and communication development of children from birth to school-going age." The White Paper on Early Childhood Development No. 5 (Department of Education, 2001a) aimed at forging integration between various government departments in the field

of ECD over a five-year period from 2005–2010. The National Integrated Plan for ECD (NIPECD) (2005–2010) (Republic of South Africa, 2005b) is the only inter-sectoral policy for ECD and addresses programmes in health, nutrition, water and sanitation, early learning and psychosocial care. The plan aims to provide additional assistance to especially vulnerable children, such as orphans, children with disabilities, children in child-headed households, children affected by HIV and AIDS, and children from poor households and communities.

Children in poverty are most likely to be deficient of many types of basic needs such as food, housing, clothing and health care. Previous studies show that children who are nurtured within an appropriate environment with full access to proper basic needs are more likely to flourish in life than those who do not (CGECCD, 2013; UNESCO 2015). Access to proper nutrition, health as well as parental and community support constitute the basic elements that can boost sensory, emotional, cognitive, social and physical development of children from birth until they reach school-going age (UNESCO, 2015). With such resources, ECD can also positively impact on a child's readiness to enter into the schooling system. Poverty reduction should thereby be prioritized to ensure children are given the greatest potential to meet their early developmental and educational needs.



### 1.1.3 Poverty and the Intergenerational Issue

The foundation laid in the early years of a child's life determines the chance they have for a high quality life in adulthood. The stage of life from birth to the age of five years is regarded as crucial for human development. ECD is considered as the preparation period for a child to transition to primary school education (Atmore et al, 2012). Interventions of early childhood education are essential in enhancing a child's progression from childhood to adulthood. One of the key objectives of ECD programmes is to provide fundamental opportunities for a child's social, psychological and cognitive progress (Atmore et al, 2012). Few studies on the impacts of ECD in developing countries exist. Based on a 2011 research, there are 49 countries with official ECD policies and 40 other nations in the process of developing this information (Vargas-Baron, 2011).

Adequate government support in early childhood education can reduce grade repetition and school dropout rates, enhance social mobility within poor households and reduce the cost burden on welfare and the criminal justice system (Karoly et al, 2005). This government sup-port will further reduce the inequality gap within low income groups and hence reduce cyclical poverty (Heckman, 2006). Overall, quality ECD education brings about positive outcomes in a society; however, poverty reduces accessibility to quality early childhood education as will be explained in detail in the next section.

Poverty has had a considerable impact on children worldwide and governments all over the world are making considerable efforts to tackle child poverty. Poverty refers to poor living conditions as a result of lack of income and inadequate resources (Engle & Black, 2008). A child is considered poor when his or her household living standards are regarded as below a particular poverty line (in terms of lack of income and/or insufficient resources within the household).

#### **1.1.3.1** Concepts of poverty



Child poverty has long-term effects on human development (Engle & Black, 2008). Poverty also imposes serious consequences on households and societies (Magnuson, 2013). This can be best explained by looking at both current and cyclic poverty. Currently poverty serves as a barrier to opportunities and resources which are essential to enhance sustainable human development. For instance, poverty prevents children from accessing education, health, welfare, and future employment opportunities. In some cases, current poverty can be temporary and resolved once household adults gain employment or assistance. On the other hand, cyclical poverty is where poverty is passed on from one generation to the next and continues to worsen the status of children worldwide (Engle & Black, 2008). This cyclical poverty impacts on a child's crucial development stages from birth to adulthood (Engle & Black, 2008).

According to Moore et al. (2009) children who grow up poor are more likely to be poor as adults. The children of parents who have acquired a low education level, and are usually involved in low paying jobs for that reason, are most likely to lack access to certain

resources. This goes on to affect children's welfare and limits their development (Moore et al., 2009). In addition, poverty prevents a child's ability to access high quality education that would further develop their human potential and prepare them to be part of the future workforce. The inter-generational cycle of poverty is multi-dimensional. Early childhood development programs are regarded as one mechanism to prevent intergenerational poverty from passing on from parent to child.

### 1.1.4 Food Insecurity

Poverty can contribute to stunted growth among children mainly due to poor nutrition. Infant mortality is more likely to occur among poor households and children are more likely to be born with low birth weight (Moore et al., 2009). Children born to poor households are likely to experience circumstances where there is not enough food or where they have a poor diet. Although the government in South Africa has provided various means to address poverty and malnutrition, child poverty remains a major issue (Atmore et al., 2012). Child hunger varies between racial groups, with black Africans having the highest number of children who lack adequate food (Atmore et al., 2012).



At the moment, there is unevenness in resource provision to ECD centres and programmes which thereby compromises the full potential for early childhood development to influence human development change, especially for children in urban informal settlements. Parents are employed in order to meet their household needs, and they send their children to either individual child minders or ECD facilities during their work periods. In the case of ECD, parents leave their children with caregivers who have the facilities to ensure the safety and, in some cases, cognitive programming for children. Under current ECD policy, it is expected that adequate formal and informal learning materials are available to the children for stimulation in their learning experiences.

The current situation sees a gap as parents can afford a certain amount for ECD care, and the possibly low costs for care see current ECD facilities able to meet only certain infrastructural requirements. In other words, some of the facilities located in marginalized areas may be missing certain adequate conditions as well as programmes since they are limited with meagre resources only afforded by parents.

If ECD centres could find mechanisms to subsidize these funding gaps to operate their centres (i.e. meet the gap between the amounts received from parents and amounts needed to adequately run an ECD centre), such childhood interventions are shown to have long-term economic benefits, reduce childhood cognitive delays and deliver positive long-term labour out-comes such as a productive workforce in a country (Biersteker, 2012; Martin et al 2014). ECD programmes now have some interesting research on long-term economic outcomes, such as reducing inequality across the richest and poorest quintiles (Engel et al, 2011).

Proper investment in ECD also affects cognitive abilities and school readiness; for example, ECD can re-duce the number of times a child repeats classes in advanced levels as well as minimizes the school dropout rates (Young, 1996). Government benefits in increasing and strengthening their labour force participation, and citizens who engaged in early childhood development are more likely to become active, productive members, thereby providing funds towards the tax revenue base (Moore et al., 2009). ECD's provision show clear societal benefits and give a strong rationale for government, civil society, businesses and households to provide essential resources to ensure children have equitable economic and social opportunities in their early years.



The recently gazetted 'Draft Policy on Early Childhood Development' (RSA DSD 2015) stipulates that the Department of Health shall be responsible for providing health and nutrition programmes to pregnant mothers, infants and children under two years old. Furthermore, it is also responsible for implementing parenting support programmes and for providing learning opportunities for children less than two years of age. The DSD is responsible for "ensuring the universal availability and adequate quality of, and the DBE is to take responsibility for the development of the early-learning curriculum and the implementation of a pre-Grade R programme. The Department of Social Development funds partial care facilities and services, however the partial care facility should be registered equitable access to, opportunities for learning for children aged 0-5" (ibid: 104), whereas and meet certain norms and standards in order to receive assistance. In the Children's Amendment Act (2007), it was stated that funding of partial care facilities must

be prioritized in communities where families lack the means to provide proper shelter, food and other basic necessities for their children.

The Department of Social Development must maintain a record of ECD programmes that are registered in the province. A person or an organization providing an early childhood development programme must register the programme with the Department of Social Development in the province. A large number of other departments are also implicated in the draft policy, but to a lesser extent than the three departments mentioned above (RSA DSD, 2015). While guidelines specify the quality indicators, it has been noted that, poor quality ECD programmes are mushrooming all over the Eastern Cape.

Department of Education in South Africa has set out the norms and standards for ECD programmes. Some of the norms are:

1. The provision of appropriate developmental opportunities;
2. Programmes aimed at helping children realise their full potential;
3. Caring for children in a constructive manner and providing support and security;
4. Ensuring development of positive social behaviour; and
5. Respect for and nurturing of the culture, spirit, dignity, individuality, language and development each child and others (Berry, Jamieson & James, 2011).



The NDP proposes the introduction of a universally accessible pre-Grade R so that at least 75% of South Africa's four- and five-year-olds can participate in formal early childhood care and education (ECCE) by 2024. For this additional year of preschool education to have the intended outcomes, it is crucial to understand the binding constraints which will prevent the delivery of a high-quality, well-functioning pre-Grade R. Despite the large body of research in South Africa on ECD, local research neither provides much empirical insight on the current context in which the additional year of preschool will be rolled out, nor the demand for such a service. Identifying the binding constraints in the ECD sector will, therefore, require a systematic quantitative overview of the sector.

This means that the ECCE Centres are to prepare the children for further education and this is the readiness nature of ECCE programmes. School readiness, therefore, in this study is not just any ECD programme but to look deeper at ECCE Centres to make children ready for formal schooling.

In the US and Malawi, for example, the ECD policy seeks to promote a comprehensive approach to ECD programmes and practices for 0 to 8 year olds to fully develop their physical, emotional, social and cognitive potential (Kathyanga, 2011:18). In Turkey, the term ECD refers to interventions aimed at children between 0 and 72 months (0 to the child's 6th birthday which is usually the age of primary school entry). Nigeria's new National Policy on Education (Federal Republic of Nigeria 2013) has segmented preschool education 'into ages 0–4 years situated in day care or crèches fully in the hands of private sector and social development services' and ages 5-6 (i.e. 1 year of kindergarten), which is to be fully incorporated within the formal sector.



As observed by the researcher when visiting schools during the on-site monitoring and support visits, there are many caregivers and administrators in Queenstown Education District who teach preschool learners without specialized training and this, in turn, may affect the quality of education and care offered in these preschools. Another challenge is that other preschools are run by the non-profit sector without any state guarantee funding to achieve specific targets of coverage. Currently, there is no standard early childhood development program for children in these preschools and the way in which programme planners (caregivers) incorporate the different domains of development, differ from one preschool to the other. This implies that children attending preschools, nursery or day-care centres in the Queenstown district may not receive equal developmental opportunities, which may further lead to some basic developmental skills such as socio-emotional and physical skills not well developed as expected at primary level of education. The implication of the above is that children attending formal education (From Grade R) from these preschools, especially in the rural Queenstown District, are not all on the same developmental level and not well prepared for the formal education.

The challenge for the South African government is to help break the poverty cycle by increasing access to ECD programmes, especially for disadvantaged children and to enhance the quality of these programmes (Department of Education, 2001:5). Based on an analysis of the current nature, context and status of ECD provision in South Africa, the following are the five key areas that require attention; the extent of ECD provision, inequality in existing ECD provision, inequality of access to ECD services, variable quality of ECD services and an incomplete, fragmented, legislative and policy framework for ECD that results in service delivery that is not coordinated (Department of Education, 2001:5). The Department of Education (2001: 6) stated that, “In response to the challenge of ECD for children younger than four years, the Department of Education will, within the ECD priority group of the Government’s National Programme of Action for Children prioritize the development of a strategic plan for inter-sectorial collaboration.”

Children entering school currently are expected to come with the prerequisite skills for early literacy, maths and the social maturity to comply with school routines (Clasquin-Johnson, 2010). Research by Bukaliya and Mubika, (2012: 30) suggests that children who attend preschool programmes are highly motivated, perform better and get on better with their classmates and teachers. Furthermore, preschool programmes play a crucial role for parents, because preschool professionals promote the healthy development of the learners while their parents engage in industrial work (Hyde & Kabiru, 2003:24).



Parents also believe that schools have professionals capable of providing a rich curriculum that will produce an all-rounded child which explains the inclusion of four to five year-olds in the primary schools (Bukaliya & Mubika, 2012: 28). Parents want academic progress for their children and look up to public schools to provide quality ECD programmes that prepare their children for success later on in life (Excell & Linington, 2011:10). According to Harju (2013:12), obtaining new knowledge about parenting skills and child development enables parents to critically evaluate the impact of their experiences on their own development and their existing parenting practices, and to consider that there may be more effective ways of guiding and responding to their

children. UNICEF (2013) adds that optimal conditions at home greatly affect a child's wellbeing.

Responsible parenting further includes the close monitoring of children's activities, supervision of their behaviour, encouraging their socio-emotional and cognitive competencies and providing directions and guidance in daily life. Some of them enter school with all of these skills and the disposition to use them but on the other hand others do not, especially young children in rural Queenstown District. Most preschool curricula focus primarily on building the child's cognitive skills (Clasquin-Johnson, 2010). In fact, school readiness is typically defined in terms of a child's cognitive skills, but also includes the child's capacity to regulate emotions and be able to show positive social interactions and cooperation in the classroom. Children in preschool (three, four or five year olds) must acquire understanding of emotions, and become more capable of managing their feelings. Socio-emotional development includes the emergence of emotional self-regulation, empathy, effective communication, positive social interaction, and social independence (Clasquin-Johnson, 2010).



Moreover, these children should be exposed to activities that encourage language development such as talking, being read to and singing. Furthermore, opportunities to learn co-operation, helping and sharing as well as experimentation with pre-reading and pre-writing activities should be available to preschool children. Hands-on exploration for learning through action and opportunities for self-expression are among the requirements highlighted by the State of the World's Children (2001:1). A compelling body of evidence shows that if we are to give our children a better chance of successful schooling, the right foundations for learning must be laid in the period before formal schooling starts.

A larger proportion of the children fortunate enough to be enrolled, in rural Queenstown, are cared for in homes-or community-based facilities that are poorly structured and not properly equipped with quality physical resources and infrastructure and thus unsuited to providing quality education-oriented school readiness programmes. The literature reviewed demonstrates that, although extensive research has been conducted on

Preschool caregivers' and parents' views on preschool readiness programmes. This is largely in the context of developed countries and not much has been done on this in the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa. The views of the preschool caregivers about school readiness revealed the knowledge and practices of the caregivers towards the aims of preschool education. Likewise, the views of the parents, who are significant partners in the business of child development, revealed the extent to which they are satisfied with extent to which preschool education prepare their children for formal school education. It has been observed that many children from deep rural Queenstown enter formal schooling with their developmental potential significantly compromised. As government continues to grapple with the issues of how to improve foundation education, particularly literacy and numeracy, it has become increasingly important to understand how children learn, and to provide educators with tools necessary to facilitate reading. Reading is an essential skill for academic success, but current pedagogic practice is not answering the needs of learners, and teachers express frustration at not being able to succeed in the classroom (Lemmer, Meier & Van Wyk, 2012). If we can understand how children learn to read, and the most appropriate ways to facilitate learning, we can inform pedagogic practice.



In order to understand how best to serve the needs of our present ways of schooling, we must see child development as all encompassing (Rogoff, 1990). Therefore, we must take into account learners' cultural-historical background, their natural ways of learning, as suggested by Vygotsky, and the transformative nature of what we are trying to teach. By adopting the theory-practice-theory approach, as suggested by Stetsenko and Vianna (2009), we can begin to meet the needs of our learners through conscious evaluation of current pedagogic practices against a backdrop of socio-cultural theory. A theory which welcomes multiple points of view also welcomes developmental discontinuities and multiple representations as a natural consequence of the social construction of knowledge. Without falling into the trap of believing that knowledge is simply transmitted from one generation to another, a theory of cognitive change can see the powerful influence of cultural knowledge. The construction of knowledge in the ZPD remains open to creative changes which build on the culture's history. (Newman, Griffin & Cole, 1989, p. 136)

The Department of Social Development (2012) explained that urbanization has changed family patterns in South Africa and furthermore led to the increase of poverty especially among the African individuals. Some parents are not able to play essential roles such as nurturing, caring, protecting and socializing in an effective manner. Many children in South Africa lack access to an education programme at an early age because parents cannot afford the early education programmes (Allie, 2011). Atmore et al. (2012) discussed the issue of unemployment and that it hampers many parents from providing for their children. The South African government provides a Child Support Grant to children who are eligible and this helps mothers who are too poor so that they meet their children's basic needs, for instance food (Atmore et al., 2012). Parents who have low levels of education experience difficulties especially when it comes to assisting their children with school work. Atmore et al. (2012) mentioned that South Africa has the highest number of individuals living with HIV and that some children are infected prior to and during the birth process. Health issues can limit parents from being actively involved in their children's development. Harmful environments as a result of lack of access to adequate sanitation are some of the challenges faced by some parents and this can limit them from partaking in outdoor activities. It is against this background that the researcher investigated caregivers' and parents' views about preschool education as school readiness programme in Queenstown Education District.



## 1.2 Statement of the problem

In this study, it was anticipated that investigation into the caregivers' and parents' about preschool education as school readiness programme for pre-school children may provide answers to some of the questions surrounding the performance of, children from preschools in Grade R in the Queenstown Education District. This study, therefore, sought to highlight that the time has come to examine the critical preschool programmes in order to address any possible educational shortcomings early on. It is therefore important to focus on knowledge about child development when working with children, because there is a variety of influences that needs to be taken into consideration before

planning a daily program/activity, for example the child's age, the child as an individual, and the social and cultural background of the child, the child's level of development combined with the principles of child development

Three to four-year-old children are often called pre-schoolers. This is when children make the transition from toddlerhood to childhood. Preschool children make developmental strides and express an interest in the world around them. They want to touch, taste, smell, feel and hear things for themselves. Pre-schoolers are eager learners. They learn, experience and explore things through play. They are no longer babies but sturdy adventurers; they explore possibilities and develop capabilities of their own body and mind. They are busy developing skills, using language and struggling to gain inner control. The centres in the deep rural Queenstown operate as child-minding facilities only. A low quality provision of preschool education inevitably leads to very little gains and will most likely just perpetuate educational inequalities in the Eastern Cape and in South Africa. This leads to thousands of children entering school, experiencing difficulties due to developmental challenges that were not earlier identified. As mentioned in the background above, that, although research studies have been conducted on preschool caregivers, parents, and preschool readiness programmes, there is dearth of information of a research that studied views of caregivers and parents on the school readiness status of preschool education in Eastern Cape Province, especially in the rural areas of the province, hence this study.



## 1.3 Assumptions of the study

It is assumed that: The quality education and care of children under six years of age is given to children according to the Government legislation and policy, to ensure that quality education and care is maintained equally in all the Queenstown Education District pre-schools in this study.

## 1.4 Objectives of the study

**Main Objective**: The objective of this study was to investigate caregivers' and parents' views on preschool education as a readiness programme in Queenstown Education District. Specifically, the study determined:

i. the caregivers' understanding of school readiness nature of preschool education;
ii. the extent to which the caregivers' practices can make children ready for formal schooling;
iii. the parents' understanding of school readiness nature of preschool education;
iv. the parents' assessment of the preschool centres as places that make children ready for formal schooling;
v. caregivers' and parents' views of the challenges facing preschool centres against making children ready for formal schooling; and,
vi. possible solutions to the challenges facing preschool centres.

### 1.4.1 Main research question

The main research question of this study is: What are the caregivers' and parents' views about preschool education as a school readiness programme for children in Queenstown Education District?

### 1.4.2 Sub-research questions



i. What is the caregivers' understanding of school readiness nature of preschool education?
ii. To what extent do the caregivers' practices make children ready for formal schooling?
iii. What is the parents' understanding of school readiness nature of preschool education?
iv. How do parents assess preschool centres as places that make children ready for formal schooling?
v. What are caregivers' and parents' views of perceived challenges of preschool centres which hinder making children ready for formal schooling?
vi. What are the possible solutions to the challenges of preschool centres?

## 1.5 Delimitation of the study

The study took place in Queenstown Education District in the Eastern Cape Province. The focus was on preschool caregivers at preschools and parents of the children in those

preschools that were chosen by the caregivers on the basis of parents who are highly committed in the education of their children to answer questionnaires. The preschool caregivers and parents to the pre-schoolers from both rural and urban preschools in Queenstown were the main focus of this study.

## 1.6 Significance of the study

The researcher hopes that the study will benefit the teachers, parents, policy makers and ECD children. An investigation on caregivers' and parents' views about preschool education as a readiness programme in Queenstown education district would assist in helping policy makers not to depart from preschool education models that have proven highly effective. Municipalities and the Department of Social Department will be able to work together in order to improve infrastructure, the availability of emergency renovation will be undertaken through the use of the municipality infrastructure grant. The findings would guide in the development of intervention programmes by the policy makers to help teachers in preschools receive intensive supervision and coaching, and also that teachers should be involved in a continuous improvement process for teaching and learning.



Preschool programmes should regularly assess children's learning and development to monitor how well they are accomplishing their goals. Numerous researches also support that the earlier the intervention, the less likely children are to face challenges later on (Centre on the Developing Child, 2011; Chan, 2013; UNICEF, 2013). The researcher is of the opinion that for content and teaching strategies in preschools to be developmentally appropriate, the program must both be age and individually appropriate and the attitudes of the preschool teachers must respect the child's social and cultural background.

## 1.7 Definition of terms

The terms that were predominantly referred to in the present study are defined below for clarity and ease of the understanding of the content.

**Preschool education –** is also known as nursery school, pre-primary school, is an educational establishment or learning space offering early childhood education to children

before they begin compulsory education at primary school-it focuses on educating children from infancy until six years.

**Educare –** a specially designed place that nurtures early learning, also means to bring up and educate, preparing the young children for school.

**School readiness** - is a measure of how prepared a child is to succeed in school. But to this study, it refers to the extent to which preschool programmes make children ready for further education by developing in them, the physical, cognitive, social and emotionally skills needed to succeed in further education. With the new integrated approach to ECCE in South Africa, other aspect of child development such as children's health status, growth, nutrition, safety and protection are all part of what make children ready for basic level of education.

**Early Childhood Care and Education Programmes -** ECCE programmes are those that provide one form, or a collection, of daily care, development, and early learning services and support to children from birth until to nine years old. These programmes include, but are not limited to:



- Community-based play groups operating for specific hours;
- Outreach and support programmes for young children and their families/caregivers at household level;
- Parenting support and enrichment programmes;
- Support for the psychosocial needs of young children and their families;
- Early childhood development programmes provided at partial care facilities and child and youth care centres as contemplated in Section 93(5) of the Children's Act; and
- Any other programme that focuses on the care, development and early learning of children from birth to school-going age and/or their families.

**Early Learning Centre/Preschool/Early Childhood Development (ECD) Centre/Crèche -** A facility that provides an early childhood care and education

programme with an early learning and development focus for children from zero until nine years old.

**Early Childhood Development Services -** Services or support provided to infants and young children or to the child's parent or caregiver by a government department or civil society organisation with the intention of promoting the child's early emotional, cognitive, sensory, spiritual, moral, physical, social and communication development.

**Preschool Caregiver -** Caregivers/teachers work with infants and toddlers and, should be knowledgeable and demonstrate competency in tasks associated with caring for infants and toddlers:

- Providing warm, consistent, responsive caregiving and opportunities for child-initiated activities;
- Stimulating communication and language development and pre-literacy skills through play, shared reading, song, rhyme, and lots of talking; and
- Promoting cognitive, physical, and social emotional development.



## 1.8 Structure of the Research Study

The following chapters coincide with the content of the research.

**Chapter one**

Chapter one consists of the research context, background of the study, statement of the problem, assumptions of the study, objectives of the study, main research question and the sub-research questions, delimitations, significance of the study and the definition of the terms used in the study.

**Chapter two**

Chapter two is a review of the related literatures on caregivers' and parents' views about the preschool education as a readiness programme for formal schooling. The theoretical framework guiding the study was derived from Lev Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory. It

explores global and South Africa perspectives on the topic under consideration. The chapter reviewed among other topics such as, the National Integrated ECD Policy with reference to preschool curriculum; the concept of school readiness programmes; the Queenstown context-the state of the art; what studies and researchers say of the school readiness programs; importance of preschool education for children; disadvantages facing children without preschool experience during formal education; caregivers' and parents' perspectives on school readiness nature of preschool education; challenges facing preschool centres against making children ready for formal schooling; strategies that can enhance parent involvement in ECD centres. Lastly, the implications for the present study.

**Chapter three**

Chapter three explains the research design that used to investigate the problem. This gives a detailed description of the research approach, sample selection, data collection and analysis, as well as the ethical considerations.

**Chapter four**



Chapter four is devoted to presentation and analysis of data, interpretation and a comprehensive discussion of the empirical findings.

**Chapter five**

Chapter five makes a summary and the conclusion that include the recommendations for further research resulting from this study.

# CHAPTER TWO

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Introduction

This chapter section presents the review of literature towards determining the caregivers' and parent' views about preschool education as a preschool readiness programme in the Queenstown Education district. It is sub-divided into the following sub-sections: the theoretical framework underpinning this study; and preliminary presentation of some empirical studies on school readiness development programmes that attempt to give an idea of the structure of the literature review chapter. This chapter ends with a summary.

### 2.2 Theoretical framework: Lev Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory

Lev Semenovich Vygotsky, a Russian psychologist who lived during the Russian Revolution, developed a theory of development known as the Sociocultural Theory of Cognitive Development in the early twentieth century. Vygotsky's main assertion was that children are entrenched in different sociocultural contexts and their cognitive development is advanced through social interaction with more skilled individuals. The Vygotsky theory of cognitive development is mainly concerned with the more complex cognitive activities of children that are governed and influenced by several principles. Believing that children construct knowledge actively, Vygotsky's theory is also one of those responsible for laying the groundwork for constructivism (Williams & Burden, 1997).



Ellis (2000) claims that Vygotsky is most recognized for his concept of Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) pertaining to the learning of children. Children who are in the zone of proximal development for a specific task can almost perform the task independently, but not quite there yet. However, with an appropriate amount of assistance, these children can accomplish the task successfully. As children are verbally given instructions or shown how to perform certain tasks, they organize the new information received in their existing mental schemas in order to assist them in the ultimate goal of performing the task

independently. This emphasis on the concept of Zone of Proximal Development made by Vygotsky underscores his conviction that social influences, particularly instruction, are of immense importance on the cognitive development of children.

Children are entrenched in a sociocultural backdrop (e.g. at home) in which social interaction with significant adults, such as the parents, plays a crucial factor that affects their learning. These adults need to direct and organize the learning experiences to ensure that the children can master and internalize the learning (Williams & Burden, 1997). According to the Vygotsky theory(1978), any person who possesses a higher skill level than the learner with regard to a particular task or concept is called a More Knowledgeable Other or MKO. This person may be a teacher, parent, an older adult, a coach or even a peer. Vygotsky proposed a "socio-cultural learning theory" that emphasized the impact of social and cultural experiences on individual thinking and the development of mental processes. He perceived school readiness as being determined by the quality of interaction a child has with caregivers, parents and capable peers.



Wantolf (2002), Wertch (1985) and Shayer (2002) claim that the Vygotsky's concept of scaffolding is closely related to the concept of the zone of proximal development. Scaffolding refers to the temporary support given to a child by *More Knowledgeable Others*, usually parents or teachers that enable the child to perform a task until such time that the child can already perform the task independently. Scaffolding entails changing the quality and quantity of support provided to a child in the course of a teaching session. As the child gains more familiarity with the task and becomes more skilled at it, the instructor may then provide less guidance. Children who experience more difficulty in task performance are in need of greater assistance and guidance from an adult.

When the child has learned to complete the task independently, the scaffolds are removed by the adult, as they are no longer needed. A major contribution of Vygotsky's theory of cognitive development is the acknowledgement of the social component in both cognitive and psychosocial development. Vygotsky's theory likewise called attention to the variability of cultural realities, stating that the development of children who are in one culture or subculture, such as middle class Asian Americans, may be totally different from children who hail from other societies or subcultures. It would not be fitting, therefore, to

utilize the developmental experiences of children from one culture as a norm for children from other cultures. ZPD encourages preschool caregivers to adopt “scaffolding”, in which a caregiver adjusts support to fit a child’s learning needs. Vygotsky advocated that teachers facilitate rather than direct children learning. His approach calls for teachers to incorporate children’s needs and interests when developing curricula. The quality of interaction between caregivers and children would thus affect the children’s cognitive development (Castro, Samuels & Harman, 2013).

Regarding school readiness in terms of a child’s accomplishments and abilities, Vygotsky believed that mastery of certain developmental tools, self-regulation and the integration of emotions and cognition can assist a child in developing the “readiness” for school. For Vygotsky, it was the level of cognitive function rather than the quantity of skills and concepts that a child has that is more important for development for school readiness. In other words, it is the child’s ability to learn intentionally rather than the ability, for instance, to count to a hundred, that facilitates the child’s adaptation to school, because it is the cognitive abilities that facilitates the child’s learning process later.

The social constructionist approach views school readiness in terms of being socially ready (Woolfolk, 2010). Many researchers place emphasis on social readiness and hold the view that if children are socially ready, the transition into school will be a much easier process (Woolfolk, 2010). If learners are not socially ready when entering school, they are unable to participate in group work, or to follow instructions, and will lead to negative consequences such as peer rejection and grade retention (Eisenberg, Valiente & Eggum, 2010).

Vygotsky’s theory relates perfectly to this study as it emphasizes the role of a caregiver and a parent in cognitive development of a child, and the need for a child to have support from a more knowledgeable adult, like a parent, a teacher, or a capable peer. Scaffolding provides an effective way to reach potential levels of development, but only when different levels of assistance are given when required. Social and cultural tools are an important means of gaining intelligence. As another feature of this theory is scaffolding, it is when an adult provides support for a child, that such will acquire necessary skills to operate in the new level, and in this case, such a child that gain such scaffolding from the caregivers

will acquire all needed skills to be ready for basic level of education. For example, a child who enters into preschool at age 3 years is expected to be talking and playing. The ECCE centres are meant to develop these skills such that the child can now read the alphabet, numerals, telling and listening to stories, be free to play with friends, control his/her emotions to some extent which will make him/her operate well at the Grade R class.

A growing body of research connects Vygotskian-type socio-dramatic play to particular skills and abilities that relate to later success in school and life. Key studies described here demonstrate how mature, teacher-supported socio-dramatic play promotes desired learning and developmental outcomes in preschool children. Operating from a Vygotskian theoretical perspective, Bodrova and Leong (2001) developed a preschool-kindergarten curriculum model, Tools of the Mind, within which socio-dramatic play has a central place. The model focuses on the teacher's role in developing mature play among young children. Preschoolers spend 40 to 50 minutes per day in sustained socio-dramatic play, and teachers are trained in special instructional strategies, including strategies to introduce imaginary situations and props (that move from more realistic to less realistic to encourage symbolic thought) as well as strategies to expand the roles children take on.



The social constructionist approach views school readiness in terms of being socially ready (Woolfolk, 2010). Many researchers place emphasis on social readiness and hold the view that if children are socially ready, the transition into school will be a much easier process (Woolfolk, 2010). If learners are not socially ready when entering school, they are unable to participate in group work, or to follow instructions, and will lead to negative consequences such as peer rejection and grade retention (Eisenberg, Valiente & Eggum, 2010). Vygotsky proposed a "socio-cultural learning theory" that emphasized the impact of social and cultural experiences on individual thinking and the development of mental processes. He perceived school readiness as being determined by the quality of interaction a child has with caregivers, parents and capable peers

Vygotsky proposed that children should be taught materials that employ mental processes within the ZPD. Exploring the "creative changes" presented by Vygotsky's theory of the Zone of proximal development (ZPD), the distance between assisted and unassisted performance, presents an opportunity to find some solutions to the issue of how to improve literacy results in South African schools. It is here, in this space opened up by the teacher and student that mediation, structured guidance, can move a child developmentally. This is important if we are to bring about transformation at multiple levels as suggested by Stetsenko (2012) who posited that human education should no longer be seen as a way to triumph over nature or to achieve economic empowerment, but rather to acknowledge that teaching is a fundamentally transformative act and that it is within Vygotsky's ZPD that teachers can "co-author a common history" between themselves and their learners (p. 152). However before one can propose changes to pedagogic practices, it is important to study current practices to understand what is happening in classrooms. This is the basis of this project. Applying a Vygotskian framework to mediation of self-regulation in a preschool in the Western Cape, confirmed the efficacy of scaffolded collaborative learning (Harrison, 2011).



Emotional competency, problem-solving and organizational skills were the three areas of self-regulation that were tested in the context of a popular children's story. The premise of mediation is that children will learn more with structured, guided assistance, than they can learn on their own. Learners were given opportunities to practice and internalize new knowledge with the help of their peers and educator. The primary tool of mediation was language, with learners being given the language of self-regulation. This research demonstrated how implementing the theory of Vygotsky's ZPD can lead to improved practice on the part of an educator, effective internalization of new learning in learners, and evaluation of Vygotsky's theory with a view to determining ways of teaching more effectively.

A culturally appropriate and consciously mediated teaching and learning environment allowed learners to develop the motivation to tackle challenging tasks such as data capture and storytelling (Harrison 2011). Scaffolding activities into easily digestible steps

improved performance, and providing opportunities for constructive play enhanced development of language and social skills. It is clear, therefore, that this approach to teaching has potential to facilitate the establishment of a solid foundation in literacy.

ZPD encourages preschool caregivers to adopt “scaffolding”, in which a caregiver adjusts support to fit a child’s learning needs. Vygotsky advocated that teachers facilitate rather than direct children learning. His approach calls for teachers to incorporate children’s needs and interests when developing curricula. The quality of interaction between caregivers and children would thus affect the children’s cognitive development (Castro, Samuels & Harman, 2013).

## 2.3 The National Integrated ECD Policy with reference to the preschool curriculum



The Government of the Republic of South Africa has prioritized early childhood development within its *National Development Plan 2030: Our Future-make it work*. Overwhelming scientific evidence attests to the tremendous importance of the early years for human development and to the need for investing resources to support and promote optimal child development from conception. Lack of opportunities and interventions, or poor quality interventions, during early childhood can significantly disadvantage young children and diminish their potential for success (Department of Education, 2001:9). This national early childhood development policy is aimed at transforming early childhood development service delivery in South Africa, in particular to address critical gaps and to ensure the provision of a comprehensive, universally available and equitable early childhood development services.

The National Integrated Plan for ECD in South Africa aims at articulating the Government's intentions to ensure that a viable integrated system and mechanisms of service delivery to young children, particularly the vulnerable, is created and implemented

at national, provincial, and municipality levels. Through this plan, the Government promised to provide strategic leadership for young children's services through the key Departments of Health, Social Development and Education, and the Presidency. The vision of the National Integrated Plan for ECD is to create an environment and opportunities where all children have access to a range of safe, accessible and high quality ECD programmes that include a developmentally appropriate curriculum, knowledgeable and well-trained programme staff and educators and comprehensive services that support their health, nutrition, and social well-being in an environment that respects and supports diversity (Department of Education, 2007).

Some of the features of the plan ensure that:

**1. Vulnerable children** are identified and their state of vulnerability is clearly specified and contextualized in the integrated services being offered. Vulnerable children in this plan are amongst others:

- Orphaned children;
- Children with physical disabilities and incurable diseases;
- Children affected and infected by HIV;
- Children from dysfunctional families;
- Children in homes headed by other children; and
- Children from poor households and communities.



Children from high income families tend to receive high quality care while programmes from low earning families have high enrollment and poor quality education for some, but such programmes do not even reach all low income families (UNICEF, 2000:12). The persistent difficulties that many young children experience can have a detrimental effect on their physical, cognitive, social and mental well-being, even into adulthood. Thus, for these children who are at risk for developmental and cognitive delays and school failure as a result of growing up within poverty-stricken households (American Academy of Pediatrics 2012; Excell, 2011), quality ECD programmes can make a significant difference; not only in the early years of their schooling, but also later in life (Excell, 2011).

Taking this into consideration, the challenge that the South African education system faces is to develop and implement inclusive, quality ECD interventions, especially for children from under-resourced communities (Department of Education, 2001).

**2. All ECD practitioners** are supported as professionals with a career ladder, ongoing professional development opportunities and compensation that will attract and retain high quality educators.

**3. All families** are recognized as the first and main providers of early childhood care and stimulation and have access to ECD programmes that are affordable and of high-quality, and are participants in the education and well-being of their children through family involvement in programmes and schools, as well as opportunities to increase their educational attainment.

**4. All communities** are accountable for the quality of ECD offered to all children, backed by local, provincial and national funding needed to deliver quality programmes and services.



To achieve these goals at the national, provincial and local levels, our policies and decisions need to be guided by principles of excellence, access, equity, diversity and accountability and community-driven provision.

- **Excellence:** The design, funding, and implementation of systems necessary to support best practices in ECD;
- **Access:** All families have the opportunity to participate in ECD programmes that are not compromised by prohibitive financial costs or targeted eligibility requirements. Furthermore, no children are excluded, regardless of aptitudes, abilities, disabilities or geographic location. There are no barriers for children to attend high-quality programmes;
- **Equity:** Opportunities for all children, regardless of family status, income, disability, gender, national origin, ethnicity, religion, or race to attend high quality programmes, with an emphasis on targeted funding to ensure that those families with the fewest resources are served;

- **Diversity:** Flexibility in the ways in which programmes are provided and services tailored to the needs of families and children. Responsive and supportive programmes that recognize and respect the whole child and family, their cultural backgrounds and the community's culture;
- **Accountability:** Clearly defined standards for programme quality and personnel, with input from ECD practitioners, families and communities, with ongoing planning and evaluation processes, to ensure positive educational, health and social outcomes for children; and
- **Community-driven provision:** Communities are central to ECD provision.

Clearly, the National Integrated Plan for Early Childhood Development presented an integrated implementation plan for children between 0-4 years. It was a response to the 'fragmented and uncoordinated service provision in the ECD sector' where different departments addressed children's needs using sector-specific legislation (Department of Education, Department of Social Development, Department of Health and UNICEF, 2005:6). The aim and vision of the plan is to 'create an environment where all children in South Africa are able to access a range of safe and quality ECD programmes (Department of Education, Department of Social Development, Department of Health and UNICEF, 2005:11). It recognizes the role of the nonprofit sector in ECD as initiators of most early learning facilities and programmes in the country.



The NIP-ECD also recognizes the community and informal ECD settings as places of care, particularly for the "poor and vulnerable children from birth to four" (Department of Education, Department of Social Development, Department of Health and UNICEF, 2005:13). The main principles guiding the NIP-ECD are: redress and equity, holding that government should act as the "key agent for levelling the playing fields for the historically disadvantaged majority of children…by increasing access to ECD programmes … [and] improving the quality of such programmes…" (Department of Education, Department of Social Development, Department of Health and UNICEF, 2005:7). The document regards parents as 'the first and main providers' of children's care and stimulation. For this reason the plan advocates family programmes that will promote the participation of parents in their children's development and well-being.

The plan not only draws together divergent departments, but it also has a target of over 3 million poor children and promotes multi-service approach. It recognizes several approaches to developing young children including: direct services for children, training ECD teachers and educating parents, promoting community development and building public awareness (thesis, ECD JULY 1). Early childhood development is becoming a policy priority in many countries because it provides a broad range of social and economic benefits and better learning outcomes and this is a foundation for lifelong learning (Taguma, Litjens & Makowiecki, 2012). Children's learning and development takes place in a range of contexts and this includes ECD centres and at home with family. Parents have an important contribution to make in all kinds of settings (Kernan, 2012). Parent involvement in their children's education has been shown to be important variable that has a positive influence on children's education (Ondieki, 2012).

The quality of provision of ECD programmes differs considerably, with rural and informal settlements being predictably worse. A large proportion of children in SA, especially in the Queenstown district, under the age of four, live in poverty (Atmore, Van Niekerk and Ashley-Cooper (2012). Bieserk argues that for ECD to be a priority amongst people the key focus of policies and programmes must be translated in all sectors at national, provincial, district, as well as local levels. Other areas that are also affected are safety and security, housing, water and sanitation, social protection, poverty alleviation projects, employment and capacity building plans, access to information. The Department of Social Development (2012) developed a Green Paper on Families and this particular paper highlighted the issue that families in South Africa have been undermined for many centuries by forces emanating from economic and political arenas that contributed to marginalization and family erosion. The Green Paper discussed that some families are not able to play their fundamental role of nurturing, socializing and caring efficiently and this is partly because of family disintegration. This is a cause of concern because the early years are indeed bedrock on which future growth, learning and development depends.

Mothers, fathers, children and ECD teachers have a role to play in early learning, and attention therefore needs to be paid to parent-child relationships and parent teacher relationships. Parents and ECD teachers need support in order to make learning partnerships, and the same applies to families that are going through stressful circumstances such as unemployment, poverty and family breakdown (Kernan, 2012). In Kenya, management of the 3 to 6 year-olds' programme is regarded as an important component of the primary school programme and is headed by the head teacher (Ciumwari, 2010:7). However, due to lack of ECD specialisation, the preschool heads find it difficult to manage the ECD programmes, including: the ECD curriculum, content and infrastructure efficiently, which compromises the quality of ECD programmes given to the pre-schoolers in the Queenstown district.

While government stipulations on management and organization are available, the ECD programmes still suffer from mismanagement of the ecology hence the need for this study to investigate caregivers' and parents' views about preschool education as a school readiness programme in the Queenstown Education District. In ECD, a policy gives guidelines about how policy makers and implementers deal with ECD issues which gives ECD administrators and teachers a sense of confidence (Kathyanga, 2011:18). The ECD policies have a mandate to highlight interventions that integrate health, nutrition and education within the children's culture in accordance with the sociocultural theory. Education and human rights are essential components of the right to quality education of which teacher quality is a key element (Myers, 2004:14; Hyde & Kabiru, 2003). These rights for the ECD children are highlighted by The State of the World's Children (2001:1) as the provision of opportunities to develop fine motor skills. While the State of the World's children bases quality on rights, the Vygotsykian perspective notes that quality ECD programmes focus on the ECD child's competencies that are still under construction (Bodrova & Leong, 2005:438). Thus, the key to the Vygotsykian conception of quality amplifies the children's learning and development within the age and developmentally appropriate activities.

## 2.4 Concept of School Readiness Programmes

Early childhood is a crucial period during which pertinent development has the prospect of cultivating potential within individuals. The National Development Plan (NDP), released in 2012, recognises this and makes early childhood development (ECD) "a top priority among the measures to improve the quality of education and long-term prospects of future generations" (NPC 2013:71). The policy instrument put forward by the National Planning Commission (NPC) to improve early childhood development is to make two years of preschool education accessible to all children.

The NDP proposes the introduction of a universally accessible pre-Grade R, so that at least 75% of South Africa's four- and five-year-olds can participate in formal early childhood care and education (ECCE) by 2024. For this additional year of preschool education to have the intended outcomes, it is crucial to understand the binding constraints which will prevent the delivery of a high-quality, well-functioning pre-schooling. According to the Department of Education (2001:5-8), early childhood development is defined as the processes by which children from birth to nine years grow and thrive, physically, mentally, emotionally, spiritually, morally and socially. Early childhood development suggests a comprehensive approach with the active participation of parents and caregivers. This is a time of remarkable growth across all areas of development. The dependent infant grows and develops into a person who can largely take care of his or her own body and interact effectively with others. The early years are critical for developing concepts, skills and attitudes that lay the foundation for lifelong learning. These skills and attitudes include the acquisition of language, perception-motor skills required for learning to read and write, basic numeracy concepts and skills, problem-solving skills as well as a positive attitude and love for learning. Qadiri and Manhas (2009:23) also emphasized the significance this developmental phase plays in developing the character of a young child. On one hand, the Vygotsykian perspective emphasizes the importance of scaffolding the child's developmentally based needs while on the other hand they acknowledge that underlying skills at the centre of development are taught through content.

Vygotsky's theories stress the fundamental role of social interaction in the development of cognition (Vygotsky, 1978) as he believed strongly that community plays a central role in the process of "making meaning." Unlike Piaget's notion that children's development must necessarily precede their learning, Vygotsky argued, "learning is a necessary and universal aspect of the process of developing culturally organized, specifically human psychological function" (1978, p. 90). In other words, social learning tends to precede (i.e., come before) development.

A national survey by Witthaus (2014) at the end of 2012 was conducted regarding the positioning and curriculum of Grade 0/R in Independent Schools Association of Southern Africa (ISASA) schools. The results of the research indicated a need for common curriculum guidelines for Early Childhood Development (ECD). A national ECD workgroup was formed in early 2013. Over forty schools from across the country were involved in the project. A product of the workgroup's efforts was the initial set of Curriculum Guidelines, which was published in August 2013. In June 2015, a national review process was initiated and the Guidelines were revisited to ensure that the document remains current and in line with international best practice. These curriculum guidelines have been drawn up using extensive research into best practice both locally and internationally. However, they do not provide an exhaustive list of everything that a child should know or be able to do by the end of the Foundation Phase of learning.



She further added that our world has changed and research shows that children need more than the traditional 3 Rs (reading, writing and arithmetic) to prepare for future 21st century careers. Globalization means that children need to prepare academically for an increasingly competitive global landscape and at the same time learn to collaborate with others from all over the world. Technology has changed our access to information and knowledge. Children now need the skills to be able to sort, analyze and understand vast amounts of data. A dynamic world economy requires creativity and innovation. So how do we prepare children for tomorrow's knowledge-based, highly competitive, highly innovative careers in an increasingly complex and globalized world? The ECD Curriculum Development Model suggests that while maintaining a focus on traditional academics (literacy, numeracy and life skills); this model includes

additional knowledge and skills to prepare children for the future. This includes thinking skills, use of technology and interpersonal skills, such as collaboration, conflict resolution and problem solving.

### 2.4.1 The Core Developmental Areas


***Figure 1: A Curriculum Model: Enhancing Your Child's Development by Sonja Witthaus***

http://www.leapfrog.com/en-us/learning-path/articles/21st-century-skillspreparing-children-for-tomorrow.html

#### 2.4.1.1 Social and Emotional Development

This area of learning focuses on making the child to mature emotionally, developing a sense of self and self-worth. The child will learn to be more independent and able to take

responsibility for him or herself. He or she will develop an understanding of social interaction and relationships, as well as develop appropriate social behaviours and skills.

***Table 1: Social and Emotional Development***

| | |
|---|---|
| **SOCIAL INTERACTION/ PLAY** | • Demonstrates basic manners<br>• Verbalizes needs<br>• Beginning to understand the concept of sharing and taking turns<br>• Participates in parallel play<br>• Takes part in fantasy play |
| **RELATIONSHIPS** | • Seeks security and support less often from primary family figures<br>• Plays alongside others<br>• Forms strong bond with primary teacher/teaching assistant for comfort and security<br>• Is aware of others in the environment |
| **SELF-REGULATION** | • Separates from parents without distress<br>• Needs adult guidance in managing impulses and feelings<br>• Recognizes basic emotions<br>• Seeks and accepts comfort and guidance from adults without temper outbursts<br>• Participates willingly in activities and attempts new challenges with adult guidance<br>• Adapts to rules and routines |

| | |
|---|---|
| **EMPATHY & CARING** | • Shows progress in expressing feelings without harming self or others<br>• Demonstrates concern for the needs of other children<br>• Shows interest in other people<br>• Treats living things, property and environment with respect |
| **SELF** | • Demonstrates independence in selecting activities, personal hygiene and dressing<br>• Demonstrates growing responsibility, respect and confidence • Demonstrates gender awareness |
| **WORK ETHIC** | • Participates in activities |
| **RESILENCE** | • Tries different activities •<br>Explores the environment |
| **SOCIAL AWARENESS** | • Beginning to be tolerant towards others |



### 2.4.1.2 The Perceptual and Cognitive Development

The perceptual and cognitive development is integrated and demonstrated across all the other areas of learning. It is important that it is not viewed in isolation. As the child progresses from one grade to another his or her skills will increase in sophistication and maturity. The child will develop visual and auditory perceptual skills, as well as the ability to think and problem solve using a variety of strategies.

***Table 2:The Perceptual and Cognitive Development***

| **VISUAL PERCEPUTAL SKILLS** |
|---|

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Visual processing** | • Acquires and interprets information visually<br>• Gives meaning to what is seen | • Interprets pictures Able to describe objects<br>• |
| **Visual memory** | • Ability to recall and retain visual information | • Remembers where objects are put away<br>• Recognizes familiar people and remembers names<br>• Can remember at least 2 objects |
| **Visual discrimination** | • Sees similarities, differences and detail of objects accurately.<br>• Includes patterning | • Completes an irregular shape puzzle<br>• Identifies familiar pictures in a book<br>• Matching games |
| **Visual sequencing** | • Ability to put things in order visually | • Look at a sequence of objects and then put the objects in the same order |
| **Visual memory sequencing** | • Ability to retain and recall a visual pattern or sequence | • Recreate a pattern or sequence when the sequence he or she was shown is removed |
| **Visual closure** | • Ability to identify the whole object, picture or word when only a part is seen by mentally filling in the missing pieces | • Able to build a 3-to 10-piece puzzle<br>• Able to build a simple object with blocks |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Visual analysis & synthesis** | • Visual analysis is the ability to break up pictures, objects, forms and words<br>• Visual synthesis is the ability to assemble parts into a whole | • Able to build age appropriate puzzles |
| **Visual form constancy** | • Recognizes forms, shapes, symbols regardless of position, size, background | • Can recognize that objects are the same thing even if they are different sizes or in a different position |
| **Visual figure ground** | • Focuses attention on specific object or aspect while ignoring all other stimuli<br>• Differentiates between foreground and background<br>• Recognition of figures embedded within a general sensory background<br>• Ability to pay attention to detail | • Able to distinguish between objects in the foreground or background of a picture<br>• Able to locate objects within a picture<br>• Able to identify and describe specific detail in a picture |
| **Visual motor skills** | • Integration of visual, visual perceptual and motor skills.<br>• Includes visual tracking | • Able to visually follow an object around the room |
| **AUDITORY PERCEPTUAL SKILLS** | | |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Auditory processing** | • Acquires and interprets information aurally | • Able to follow a single instruction |
| **Auditory memory** | • Remembers what the ears have heard and correct sequence in which sounds are perceived | • Remember simple rhymes and songs<br>• Able to follow a simple instruction<br>• Able to remember up to 3 numbers |
| **Auditory discrimination** | • Hears similarities and differences in sounds | • Children listen to everyday sounds on CDs or audio clips and need to identify them<br>• Different percussion instruments, loud and soft, i.e.,<br>drums, bells, triangle – high |
| **Auditory sequencing** | • Ability to understand and recall the order of sounds and words | • Remembers and repeats nursery rhymes<br>• Remembers sequence of a familiar or basic story |
| **Auditory closure** | • Ability to fill in the missing or distorted parts of an auditory signal in order to recognize the whole message. | • Able to complete rhymes |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Auditory synthesis & analysis** | • Auditory analysis is the ability to break down what has been heard into smaller parts (includes syllabification)<br>• Auditory synthesis is the ability to blend sounds and syllables together to create meaningful words | • Clap out name |
| **Auditory figure ground** | • Focuses attention on specific object or aspect while ignoring all other stimuli<br> | • Able to listen to instructions in a noisy environment<br>• Able to ignore noises outside of the classroom e.g. traffic, other children |
| **Auditory localization** | • Ability to locate the source of a sound | • Blindfolded child is able to locate the sound of a percussion<br>instrument or other noise |

***Table 3: Physical Integration***

| **PHYSICAL INTEGRATION** | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Body awareness** | • Body awareness includes body image (self-image which is emotion based), body concept (knowledge of body parts) and body schema (how the body moves) | • Awareness of the body from the head to toes<br>• Identifies basic body parts<br>• Drawing of a person consists of at least 6-8 parts |
| **Spatial orientation** | • Understands space around the body or relationship between object and the observer | • Children place concrete objects in different positions |
| **Midline crossing** | • Crossing the midline refers to the ability to cross the middle of the body with the arms and legs crossing over to the other side | • Able to move arms across the midline<br>• Able to sit cross legged |
| **Directionality** | • Ability to know to begin at the top of the page and work toward the bottom, starting from the left and moving to the right.<br>• Knows left and right | (Not applicable) |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Visual motor integration** | • Ability to control hand movements guided by vision<br>• Involves the integration of visual perceptual and fine motor coordination and planning | • Able to copy vertical line, horizontal line, circle, crossing lines, diagonal line |
| **Bilateral integration** | • Refers to the ability to use both sides of the body together in a coordinated way<br>• Includes the development of dominance | • Kicking balls with right foot then left foot<br>• Rolling a ball with left hand then right hand,<br>• Standing on right leg only standing on left leg only<br>• Ride a tricycle |
| **Diadokinesis** | • Rapidly alternating movement of the articulators e.g. tongue | • Not applicable |
| **Gross & fine motor planning** | • Ability to conceive, plan and carry out a skilled, non-habitual motor act in the correct sequence from<br>beginning to end | • Able to follow instructions and complete a task<br>• Able to follow a sequence of instructions in order from<br>beginning to end |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | | |
| | | |
| **COGNITIVE SKILLS** | | |
| **Concrete to abstract** | • Progression from concrete to abstract | • Works with concrete apparatus |
| **Cognitive development** | • Able to draw on past/previous experiences and knowledge | • Shares experiences |
| **Planning** | • Plans and organizes thoughts and actions in logical manner | • Initiates and completes tasks in a logical sequence<br>• Completes tasks in the required time frame |
| **Task management** | • Ability to initiate, plan and complete tasks successfully within an appropriate time frame. | • Completes tasks in the required time frame<br>• Tasks are successfully completed in terms of what is required |
| **Thinking skills** | • Ability to use various and appropriate basic thinking skills and strategies to organize and compare information | • Asks questions |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | • Able to formulate questions<br>• Able to verbalize own thoughts and answers | |
| **Problem solving** | • Identifies, tackles and solves problems using traditional and innovative methods | • Answers questions<br>• Attempts to solve basic problems |

### 2.4.1.3 THE PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT

This learning area is divided into two components: fine motor and gross motor development. Gross motor development refers to the activities that stimulate and strengthen the development of large muscles to facilitate balance, coordination, locomotion and builds core strength. Fine motor development focuses on the small muscles required for manipulating small objects and tools. However, attention is also given to aspects of physical development that affect both gross and fine motor skills development, such as laterality, dominance, core strength and crossing the midline.



***Table 4: The Physical Development***

| **GROSS MOTOR** | | |
|---|---|---|
| **General health and vitality** | • Refers to a child demonstrating good health, physical strength, stamina and mental vigor | • Less than 3 days off school related to illness per term<br>• Able to complete physical tasks without |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | | needing to stop to rest or becoming breathless<br>• Energetic<br>• Well rested<br>• Demonstrates a good appetite |
| **Locomotion** | • Refers to a child's mastery of mobility and movement | • Moves forwards, backwards and sideways without falling: run, walk and crawl<br>• Jumps up and down landing on both feet<br>• Climbs stairs alternating both feet (does not apply to descending stairs necessarily)<br>• Rolling forwards and sideways<br>• Able to walk on tiptoes |
| **Non-locomotion (Anchored movements)** | • Movement in which the body remains anchored to one spot | • Stand, bends, swings arms, twisting |
| **Balance and stability** | • The ability to move or remain in a position without losing control or falling | • Stands and moves without falling<br>• Balances on one foot (3 seconds) |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | | • Crosses broad balance beam<br>• Rises from heels without using hands |
| **Eye-foot coordination** | • The ability of the visual system to coordinate the information received through the eyes to control, guide, and direct the feet in the accomplishment of a given task. | • Kicks a large ball forcibly without losing balance from standing<br>position |
| **Eye-hand coordination** | • The ability of the visual system to coordinate the information received through the eyes to control, guide, and direct the hands in the accomplishment of a given task. | • Throws a large ball over head<br>• Able to bounce a ball<br>• Catches bean bag or ball against the chest or with extended arms<br>• Throws into a large target from<br>1m<br>• Uses a big racket to hit a ball |
| **FINE MOTOR** | | |
| **Small manipulatives** | • Involves using or working with small objects | • Buttons 1 or 2 buttons<br>• Builds a tower with 10 big blocks<br>• Builds a simple construction using blocks/Duplo |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | | • Places large pegs into pegboards<br>• Squeezes, rolls, pinches play dough with no form<br>• Threads at least 6 large beads<br>• Threads around card<br>• Crumples paper into balls<br>• Exposed to tearing paper into big pieces |
| **Use of drawing, writing and painting tools** | • Specifically refers to use of drawing, writing or painting tools | • Paints with variety of media<br>• Uses thick (22) paint brush<br>• Draws with variety thick media<br>(e.g. crayons, kokis)<br>• Uses large surfaces or paper<br>• Tripod grip developing<br>• Demonstrates strength and control of media |
| **Cutting** | • Refers to the use of scissors to cut paper or objects | • Demonstrates correct grip, growing control and accuracy when using scissors<br>• Attempts to cut on a straight line |

| GENERAL | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Core strength** | • Refers to the underlying muscles of the torso, which stabilizes, align and move the trunk of the body | • Demonstrates good core strength in the sitting position (legs crossed and back upright)<br>• Demonstrates good posture (back straight, shoulders back and chin up) |
| **Body awareness** | • Body awareness includes body image (self-image which is emotion based), body concept (knowledge of body parts) and body schema (how the body moves) | • Demonstrates growing awareness of own body i.e. how it moves and functions<br>• Able to identify parts of the body<br>• Draws age appropriate picture of him or herself (Consists of at least 4 parts) |
| **Spatial awareness and body orientation** | • A child's awareness of his or her placement in relation to other things, as well as the ability to understand concepts such as distance, speed and placement (over, under, behind etc.) | • Moves forwards, backwards and sideways as directed<br>• Can follow instructions where he or she needs to orientate him or herself in relation to another object<br>• Understands the concept of "far away" and "close by" |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Laterality** | • Laterality is an internal awareness that there are two sides to the body and that these sides are different. Laterality is linked to directionality, lateral preference/dominance | • Demonstrates growing awareness of each side of the body<br>• Beginning to show preference to one hand or side of the body |
| **Crossing the midline** | • Crossing the midline refers to the ability to cross the middle of the body with the arms and legs crossing over to the other side | • Able to draw a horizontal line across a page without having to switch hands in the middle<br>• Able to sit cross-legged on the floor<br>• Reaches for objects in contralateral space |
| **Bilateral integration** | • Refers to the ability to use both sides of the body together in a coordinated way | • Hop on one foot<br>• Jump two feet together<br>• Gallop<br>• Beginning to skip |



### 2.4.1.4 Language and Literacy

As part of language development the child needs to cultivate strong communication skills, which includes listening and speaking skills. Pre-reading and reading skills develop progressively across the different grades. A child will also develop drawing and writing skills alongside reading skills.

***Table 5: Language and Literacy***

<table>
<tr><td colspan="2">LISTENING & SPEAKING</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">• Listens attentively and responds appropriately<br>• Understands and follows 2-step instructions<br>• Answers basic questions with one word answer<br>• Asks “why” and “how” questions<br>• Listens to and repeats rhythmic patterns<br>• Listens with enjoyment to oral text, songs, rhymes and stories<br>• Listens to a simple message and conveys it in his or her own words<br>• Speaks clearly enough to be understood, pronouncing most sounds correctly<br>• Speaks in sentences of three to four words<br>• Speaks about personal experiences and feelings<br>• Provides descriptions of objects, pictures etc. with prompting<br>• Participates in class discussions<br>• Uses enriched vocabulary and words correctly</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">PHONICS</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">• Separates words into syllables (2 syllables) by clapping them</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">READING & REVIEWING</td></tr>
<tr><td>Emergent Literacy</td><td>• Interested in books, rhymes, songs and stories<br>• Recognizes and points out common objects in pictures<br>• Recognizes difference between print and picture<br>• Uses visual cues to make meaning of text • Acts out parts of a story, song or rhyme<br>• “Reads” menus, signs, magazines etc.<br>• Makes up stories using visual prompts</td></tr>
</table>

| | |
|---|---|
| | • Holds the book the right way up and turns the pages correctly |
| **Shared Reading** | • Listens to stories and understands basic story line<br>• Enjoys familiar stories |
| **Independent/Paired Reading** | • Reads picture books<br>• Able to turn the pages of board books independently |
| **Group Reading** | • Teacher should read stories to the class on a daily basis<br>• Teachers should read or refers to theme related books during the relevant lessons |
| **PRE-WRITING SKILLS** | |
| • Strengthens back, shoulder and arm muscles through gross motor activities (posture)<br>• Develops small muscle and wrists through finger play<br>• Develops fine motor control using a pair of scissors to attempt to cut on bold straight lines<br>• Develops eye-hand co-ordination by playing games<br>• Develops midline crossing through appropriate activities<br>• Plays tracking games for eye development<br>• Traces simple outlines of pictures and patterns with his or her finger • Uses wide range of thick writing tools | |
| **DRAWING** | |
| • Draws or paints a picture to convey a message<br>• Draws basic body image<br>• Draws random patterns<br>• Follows patterns from left to right | |

| |
|---|
| • Practices “writing” skills using writing tools on boards/paper (A3 in size)<br>• Use of the whole body and sensory apparatus to form patterns and shapes |

### 2.4.1.5 Numeracy

Numeracy focuses on the development of the understanding of number and mathematical concepts. It incorporates patterns, functions and later algebra; as well as space and shape (geometry). A child will also develop an understanding of measurement and data handling.

***Table 6: Numeracy***

| **NUMBER CONCEPT DEVELOPMENT** | |
|---|---|
| **Counting** | • Estimates and concrete counts to at least 5 everyday objects reliably<br>• Rote counts forwards in 1s from 1 to 10<br>• Counts a wide range of different objects in different formations • Uses number rhymes and songs |
| **Number symbols & names** | • Recognizes and identifies number symbols 1-5 |
| **Describe, compare & order numbers** | • Compares objects in terms of big, small, bigger, smaller, the same<br>• Orders up to three objects in terms of size<br>• Sorts objects according to size and colour |
| **Problem solving** | • Experiments with using concrete apparatus to solve problems |
| **Money** | • Develops awareness of use of money through fantasy play |
| **PATTERNS, FUNCTIONS & ALGEBRA** | |

| | |
|---|---|
| **Geometric patterns** | • Copies and extends very basic (2) patterns made with shapes and colours |
| **SPACE & SHAPE (GEOMETRY)** | |
| **Position, orientation & views** | • Describes and understands the position of one object in relation to another<br>• Follows directions to move around the classroom |
| **2-D Shapes** | • Recognizes and names circles, triangles, squares, rectangles,<br>• Recognizes shapes within the environment |
| **MEASUREMENT** | |
| **Time** | • Distinguishes between day and night<br>• Talks about the passing of time<br>• Understands the daily routine at school |
| **Length** | • Understands comparative language e.g. longer, shorter, taller |
| **Mass** | • Understands comparative language e.g. light, heavy |
| **Capacity/Volume** | • Participates in water and sand play with various sized containers |
| **DATA HANDLING** | |
| **Collect & sort** | • Collects everyday physical objects<br>• Sorts objects according to size and colour |
| **Represent data** | • Exposed to simple graphs (concrete form) |

### 2.4.1.6 Knowledge and Skill

The purpose of this learning area is to broaden a child's knowledge of self and the world he or she lives in and to develop appropriate life skills.

***Table 7: Knowledge and Skill***

| | |
|---|---|
| **Personal Information** | • Knows full name |
| **Health and safety** | • Demonstrate awareness that certain foods can help bodies to grow and be healthy<br>• Indicates awareness that bodies need exercise and rest<br>• Recognizes everyday dangers at home and school<br>• Knows safety rules and procedures<br>• Knows when to call adult for assistance |
| **General knowledge** | • Demonstrates interest in new areas of learning and topics<br>• Demonstrates growing general knowledge |
| **Discovery areas/Thematic work** | • Explores areas related to:- o Nature and living creatures, energy and change, planet earth and beyond, matter and materials, and history<br>• Demonstrates knowledge and understanding of content covered under various themes e.g. seasons, insects, occupations etc. |
| **Social responsibility** | • Awareness of the world we live in and our obligation to act for the benefit of society as a whole and the environment |
| **Environmental awareness** | • Introduced to the concept of recycling<br>• Aware that littering is not acceptable |
| **Citizenship** | • Understands the rights and responsibilities of being a citizen |

| | |
|---|---|
| | • Demonstrates pride in the nation |
| **SKILLS** | |
| **Basic life skills** | • Takes care of personal hygiene<br>• Toilet trained with little assistance<br>• Dresses and undresses self with assistance- buttons, zippers • Packs own school bag |
| **Technological skills** | • Uses technology in play and to learn and discover e.g. computer, iPad<br>• Bakes- using variety of baking and cooking methods<br>• Plays with construction toys<br>• Invents and creates through box construction |
| **Process skills** | • Follows simple instructions with assistance<br>• Talks about what has been done (experiments/investigations) |
| **Thinking skills** | • Ability to use various and appropriate basic thinking skills and strategies to organize and compare information<br>• Able to formulate questions<br>• Able to verbalize own thoughts and answers |
| **Personal skills** | • Interacts and builds relationships with others<br>• Demonstrate self-regulation<br>• Demonstrate empathy and care for others<br>• Independent and confident<br>• Responsible and respectful<br>• Demonstrates resilience<br>• Tolerant towards others |

| | |
|---|---|
| | • Demonstrates enthusiasm and strong work ethic |

### 2.4.1.7 Creative Arts

This learning area encompasses the performing arts, such as music, movement and drama as well as the visual arts. A child is encouraged to participate in a variety of activities that promote creativity, imagination and originality. In addition, there is a section on art appreciation, which has been included to stimulate an interest and understanding of the various art forms.

***Table 8: Creative Arts***



| | |
|---|---|
| **PERFORMING ARTS** | |
| **Participation** | • Participates in rings and activities<br>• Demonstrates imagination in different activities<br>• Uses art to express self |
| **Music & Movement** | • Sings simple songs and rhymes<br>• Copies a basic rhythmic pattern (2 beats)<br>• Exposure to music vocabulary which includes fast/slow, loud/soft, high/low<br>• Participation in body percussion |
| **Drama** | • Recognizes familiar stories<br>• Dramatize a feeling<br>• Participate in Grade Concert/Performance |
| **VISUAL ARTS** | |

- Explores variety of media (e.g. poster paint, wax crayons, etc.)
- Explores variety of techniques (e.g. brush or sponge painting, stamping, free drawing, etc.) • Use of recycled materials
- Multi-sensory exploration (e.g. textured or scented paints etc.)
- Models and constructs in 3-D (e.g. salt dough, clay, box construction etc.)
- Uses large paper (A3+)

The inequalities in the South African education system are indisputable, with ability gaps between children from different socio-economic backgrounds already opening up at the early ages. The large majority of South African children are from low socio-economic backgrounds and live in households with adults who have very low literacy levels and other homes are child-headed homes because of HIV and AIDS pandemic. Typically, children from these homes are seldom exposed to books or regular literacy practices such as storybook reading (Pretorius, 2014). As certain emergent literacy practices are particularly effective in supporting children's development of higher cognitive functions, the lack of regular literacy practices could potentially have lasting detrimental effects on their development.



Given the lack of development of these critical skills during early childhood, remedial help later on in children's lives will prove to be prohibitively costly and highly ineffective. Given that many South African children enter formal schooling with their developmental potential significantly compromised, investment in ECD is arguably the most cost-efficient fiscal expenditure which will directly impact the equality gaps in South Africa. According to Vygotsky (1978), much important learning by the child occurs through social interaction with a skillful tutor. The tutor may model behaviours and/or provide verbal instructions for the child. Vygotsky refers to this as cooperative or collaborative dialogue. The child seeks to understand the actions or instructions provided by the tutor (often the parent or caregiver) then internalizes the information, using it to guide or regulate their own performance. Shaffer (1996) gives the example of a young girl who is given her first jigsaw. Alone, she performs poorly in attempting to solve the puzzle. The father then sits

with her and describes or demonstrates some basic strategies, such as finding all the corner/edge pieces and provides a couple of pieces for the child to put together herself and offers encouragement when she does so. As the child becomes more competent, the father allows the child to work more independently. According to Vygotsky, this type of social interaction involving cooperative or collaborative dialogue promotes cognitive development.

Merely attending a preschool does not necessarily mean that children will develop the required skills to prepare them for future learning. Often preschools lack the human and infrastructural resources to stimulate children cognitively and non-cognitively, and therefore rather function as child-minding facilities. International research unanimously agrees that high-quality preschools produce medium to large gains in cognitive and social skills, whereas poor-quality preschools produce very little to no gains (Currie 2000). Recognised indicators of quality at preschool level include physical resources, curriculum choices, school ethos and school management.

The most vital element to quality teaching and learning, however, remains the teacher (Christie, 2008; Wood, 2004). As the researcher mentioned in the background of this study, teachers need to understand the developmental realities of children in preschools, and especially appreciate that *what* children learn is as important as *how* children learn (Excell & Linington, 2011).



The risk in South Africa currently is that Grade R and preschool will merely take on the form of a watered-down Grade 1, with little focus on the importance of play and other non-cognitive skills development. A low-quality provisioning of preschool will inevitably lead to very little gains, and will most likely just perpetuate educational inequalities in South Africa. Vygotsky views interaction with peers as an effective way of developing skills and strategies. He suggests that teachers use cooperative learning exercises where less competent children develop with help from more skillful peers - within the zone of proximal development. The *zone of proximal development* (ZPD) has been defined as: "the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving

under adult guidance, or in collaboration with more capable peers" (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86). Family characteristics, ethnicity, social class, gender, emotional disability, physical and mental presence or absence will all affect the way a child develops. Influences can be seen as bidirectional. This implies that a child from the start, through the responses he evokes in others, molds his environment and then responds to the environment. Then again each and every child develops within a specific environment, and is bound by place and time, even culture.

We can, therefore, assume that historical and cultural context strongly influence development. A child born in South Africa is likely to have different experiences from a child born in Africa. Early experiences should be taken into consideration when looking at child development. Any form of trauma, poverty, violence, abuse, accidents or deprived childhood will have an emotional impact on the child, which will furthermore influence all other domains of development. Development in childhood is connected to development throughout the rest of the life span. Development does not end at adolescence. It goes on through life until we die.



This is a time of remarkable growth across all areas of development. The dependent infant grows and develops into a person who can largely take care of his or her own body and interact effectively with others. The early years are critical for developing concepts, skills and attitudes that lay the foundation for lifelong learning. These skills and attitudes include the acquisition of language, perception-motor skills required for learning to read and write, basic numeracy concepts and skills, problem-solving skills as well as a positive attitude and love for learning. Qadiri and Manhas (2009:23) also emphasized the significance this developmental phase plays in developing the character of a young child. In fact, this critical period of skill development also means that the lack of development of certain cognitive and non-cognitive functions can have permanent detrimental effects (Heckman et al., 2006).

Consequently, the lack of investment in the early years can result in the need for remedial help later in life, at which stage it will be costlier and less effective. The appeal for public investment in early childhood education therefore lies in that it is more effective for a

government to equalise initial endowments through ECD programmes than to compensate for differences in outcomes later in life (Cunha et al., 2006; Currie, 2000).

According to Papalia, Olds and Feldman (2006: 7), the process of development starts at conception. Children grow, develop and learn throughout their lives from birth and infancy to adulthood. A child's development can be measured through social, cognitive, physical and emotional developmental milestones. Berk (2003: 5) further opines that as children grow, all these different domains of development: social, cognitive, physical and emotional development is interrelated and the one domain has an influence on the other. An example would be that the physical mobility of a three to five year old helps him explore more and becoming familiar with his environment.

Head Start, the national preschool education program designed to prepare children from disadvantaged backgrounds for entrance into formal education in primary grades, tries to bridge the achievement gap (Bray, 2001). The program is based on a comprehensive view of the child that includes cognitive, social, emotional, and physical development, as well as the ability of the family to provide a supportive home environment. The ultimate goal of Head Start is "To bring about a greater degree of social competence in pre-school children from low-income families" (Bray, 2001). This approach is reflected in Head Start's program objectives, which are to:



1. Enhance children's growth and development;
2. Strengthen families as the primary nurturers of their children;
3. Provide children with educational, health, and nutritional services;
4. Link children and families to needed community services; and
5. Ensure well-managed programs that involve parents in decision making.

## 2.5 The Queenstown Context – The State of the Art

Queenstown is a small town situated in the middle of Eastern Cape, roughly halfway between smaller towns Cathcart and Sterkstroom. Most of the preschools in rural Queenstown District struggle to deal with issues relating to parents of children who are not always around because most of the young parents are away working in the cities

leaving their grandmothers to look after their children. Most homes are also child-headed homes caused by the HIV and AIDS pandemic (Statistics SA, 2014). This situation appears to be affecting the smooth running of preschools. There appear to be a number of factors that contribute to the economic hardships experienced, very few residents have completed formal schooling, and in general the educational levels of these communities are considered very low and poor (Mahajan, 2014; Statistics South Africa, 2014). Low socioeconomic townships and rural areas, community is plagued by unemployment and teenage pregnancies. Children are placed in poorly run centres that contribute little to the preparation and grooming of the country's youth for later growth and development in their social skills and educational capabilities.

Some of the ECD centres in the Queenstown Education District are not registered or even accredited (Statistics Department of Basic Education, Department of Social Development, 2015). This is contrary to section 30(2) of the Children's Act (Republic of South Africa, 2007) whereby it is defined that a place of care must be registered so as to ensure that quality in service is adhered to and maintained. As previously mentioned in the background to the study in chapter one, the South African Children's Act conceptualizes ECD as 'an umbrella term' that is applied to the processes by which children from birth to nine years of age grow and thrive, physically, mentally, emotionally, morally and socially ( DSD, 2006).



According to Statistics South Africa (2012:6-8), one of the most recent educational priorities in South Africa has been to reach children of the age group 0–4 years. Although the proportion of children attending pre-school programmes has increased since 2006, almost 52,2% of families still indicated that their only primary exposure to early childhood development was the home environment. In addition to the above mentioned survey, the summary report for Macro Indicator Trends in Schooling of the Department of Basic Education (2011) indicated that the percentage of learners enrolled in Grade 1 had previously attended a pre-school programme, has increased from 61% in 2006 to 71% in 2009. These statistics clearly show that attendance in early childhood programmes is increasing. Yet, in the light of my personal experience I felt a growing concern towards

these children from disadvantaged communities, like Queenstown, as many of them rely exclusively on their parents' stimulation and possible limited knowledge of providing enriching experiences during this highly crucial developmental phase. During my observation, I became intensely aware of the vital role these parents play and realized that the majority of them probably did not comprehend the importance of early learning experiences, from birth until entering formal school, and the impact these experiences have on the development and learning of their children. I, therefore, wished to explore whether they realized the significance of these early months and years in their children's lives and the dramatic consequences this holds for their future school readiness and entire school careers.

### 2.5.1 Exploration of the problem

Research in many countries (Burchinal, Nelson, Carlson & Brooks-Gunn, 2008) learners entering Grade 1 do not have the necessary knowledge, skills and attitude to engage effectively in formal schooling. They argue that factors such as poverty, television, lack of motor development, lack of opportunities to play, poor language usage by role-models, substance abuse by pregnant women, malnutrition, single-parent families, illiterate parents, lack of parent involvement in children's lives and lack of engagement with books before school entrance, attribute to this situation. The result of the above is that most of the learners are not ready for formal schooling when they enter Grade 1, the same situation applies to leaners in the Queenstown Education district. Paton (2011:1) claims that up to half of the five-year-olds in the United Kingdom, are not ready for school, as working parents increasingly abandon traditional games, nursery rhymes, bedtime stories and lullabies. Children are failing to develop vital physical and communication skills, because of the lack of sufficient interaction with mothers and fathers during the early years.



Strydom (2011:25) comments that the Annual National Assessment (ANA) results released by the Department of Basic Education (DBE) revealed low results across all primary schools, but highlighted a close correlation between poor levels of achievement and low socio-economic status. Paul Colditz, CEO of the Federation of Governing Bodies

of South African schools, argues that the starting point of a good quality education is parental support at home, not just assistance with homework, but parents also being good role models for their children. Learners need parental involvement, especially when they come from backgrounds where their parents have not completed Grade 12 and can only support them morally (Davids, 2010:4). Reid, Stoolmiller and Webster-Stratton (2008:471) point out that exposure to multiple poverty-related risks, unfortunately increases the odds that children will display increased emotional challenges, fewer social skills, less teacher/parent involvement and more behavioural problems.

As a result, intervention offered to socio-economically disadvantaged populations, includes a social and emotional school curriculum. This programme trains teachers in 'effective classroom management skills' and in the promotion of parent—school involvement, which is an effective strategy for improving young children's school readiness, leading up to later academic success and the prevention of the development of conduct disorder. Vygotsky was also interested in the role of social interaction on cognitive development and argued that development first takes place socially. That is, children observe parental behaviour, listen to parents' speech, and then try to imitate them. As children practice through imitation, parents will guide children, correct them, and provide challenges.



Through child-centered play, children take on different roles and try out different language uses, all of which help them on the journey from being externally regulated to being internally regulated in cognition. Through play, children become more competent in their language use and begin to regulate their own thought processes. This early period of development therefore lays the foundation for subsequent learning and development and affects all the future stages of human development. Although it is never too late for children to recover from poor health, to improve and learn new skills, to overcome fears or reflect on personal growth and development - the absence of a firm foundation in the early years often leads to many challenges causing them to never catch up or reach their full potential (Mustard, 2010:1; Berry, Biersteker, Dawes, Lake & Smith, 2013:7). Recently, Atmore (2014: 9) remarked that only seven main political parties that contested the 2014 national elections (20 parties registered for the elections) in South

Africa had proclaimed policies on Early Childhood Development (ECD). Atmore had the following to say on the content of these policies: “Clearly, none of the seven parties know anything about early childhood education. They seem to have hurriedly conjured up thoughts on early childhood development. All the responses are short in detail and make promises they cannot hope to keep”. Public trust in the education system and government integrity in dealing fairly with education remains at a low ebb (Faber, 2014a: 5; Jansen, 2012a: 39).

Dr Ramphele has asserted emphatically that the education system today is worse than it ever was, even under apartheid (Jones, 2012). Furthermore, remedial strategies involving classroom-based interventions appear to have little impact (O’Carroll & Hickmann, 2012), and the Department of Education notes that grade repetitions were the highest in Grade 1 due to serious deficiencies in school entrants’ learning abilities and unsuitable learning programmes beyond the reach of entrants’ capacity (Department of Education, 2007). A compelling body of evidence (Ebrahim, 2014; Faber, 2014b: 8; Grantham-McGregor et al., 2007; Snow et al., 1998) shows that if we are to give our children a better chance of successful schooling, the right foundations for learning must be laid in the period before formal schooling starts.



In fact, it has become widely current in recent times that the first 1000 days from conception to the second birthday are the most decisive for an individual’s entire life. This period before formal schooling is typified in South Africa as the Early Childhood Development (ECD) sector encompassing preschool/pre-Grade R for children from birth to four years, and Grade R for children aged five to six years (Richter, 2012: 3).
According to the 2011 General Household Survey released by Statistics South Africa (Statistics South Africa, 2011), only 34% of children in the group ranging from infancy to four years old, had the benefit of education in early childhood institutions while the rest were dependent on whatever school preparation was forthcoming from their home environment which is actually disturbing. The fact that only 34% of young children in South Africa in 2011 were receiving ECD preparation for a school career must be considered an impediment that South Africa can ill afford, given conditions prevailing in education today. The aim of this paper is to investigate the caregivers’ and parents views about

preschool education as a school readiness programme in the Queenstown Education district.

### 2.5.2 What is Early Childhood Development?

A number of models and theories on child development, for example, Maslow's needs hierarchy (1954), Erikson's psychosocial theory (1950), Bronfenbrenner's ecological model (1979) and Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory (1978) have stood the test of time in providing frameworks for understanding children's development and learning. This list of theories and models is by no means exhaustive but they do offer a critical point of departure towards understanding the young child and why ECD is indispensable. These theories of early child development underline the huge potential that every young child has for self-actualization which should be the focus for every caregiver's pedagogic enterprise.



Theories have long been used to inform and guide practice. There are however also recent research findings that put a different lens on the young child's development. Brain development is the growth of the main cellular components of the brain, called neurons. At birth, neurons are primed to organize themselves in response to the human individual's new environment, no matter the culture, climate, language, or lifestyle. The newly generated neurons migrate to different parts of the developing brain to self-organize into different brain structures Once the neurons have reached their regional positions, they extend axons and dendrites, which allow them to communicate with other neurons via synapses. Synaptic communication between neurons leads to the establishment of functional neural circuits that mediate sensory and motor processing, and underlie behaviour (Neural Development, 2013).

Throughout life, the neural network reorganizes and reinforces itself in response to new stimuli and learning experiences. The development of synapses occurs at an astounding rate in response to young children's experiences during the early formative years (Zero

to three, 2009). Researchers believe that there are periods during which the human organism is particularly susceptible to the development of certain capabilities (Neural development, 2013; Zero to three, 2009; Perry, 2001). These periods are referred to as 'windows of opportunity' in the developmental process. The period from birth to seven years is regarded as a special 'window of opportunity' during which the brain is most capable of forming permanent conditioning impressions from experiences to which it is exposed. As noted, if certain synapses and neural pathways are not repeatedly activated by stimulating experiences in this period, they may be discarded, and the capabilities they promised may be lost (Perry, 2001). This fact strongly underlines the need for early stimulation.

Early interventions that remediate the effects of adverse environments can reverse some of the harm of disadvantage and have a high economic return. Enriched interventions targeted towards children in disadvantaged environments are cost-effective remedies for reducing crime and the factors that breed crime, and this for raising productivity in schools and in the workplace. The later in life we attempt to repair early deficits, the more costly the remediation becomes (Heckman & Masterov, 2007). Seen against the background of child development theories as well as research findings regarding the influence of early stimulation. It would be cruel to deprive children of stimulation that could help them to develop their full potential; in fact, such deprivation would amount to a human rights violation. At the heart of this discussion is an approach which recognizes the right of children, including the very young, to quality education that will empower them to meet their own needs across board.



### 2.5.3 Right to Education

The Right to Education Project (RTE), established by the United Nations in 2000 proposes governments, as prime duty-bearers, to have respect, protect and fulfil the right to education by making education available, accessible, acceptable and adaptable to all children (Right to Education 2012: 19-20). The *National early learning and developments standards for children from birth to four years (NELDS)* was released in 2009 (Department

of Education and UNICEF, 2009). The NELDS and its purpose are to present a multi-dimensional transformatory vision for stakeholders in early childhood education. It is expected that the NELDS will improve children's learning and development through a focus on child-centered practices and holistic development. For policy makers, it is expected to be a tool to develop indicators for school readiness, and to monitor and evaluate progress of children on a national scale (Ebrahim, 2014: 70). Ebrahim (2014: 69) reports that the introduction of the NELDS in 2009 was seen as a critical curriculum initiative for the country's social and economic transformation and development; however endeavours to live to the full expectations awakened by the document do not seem to materialize. Ebrahim (2014: 70) postulates the following reasons for this failure: fragmentary field, lack of unified vision, absence of a critical mass, lack of capacity, reluctance to move out of the comfort zone of existing practices and resignation of lead people in the early childhood directorate.

The field of ECD in South Africa is currently highly fragmented, comprising of small interest groups without a unified voice or vision. A vast number of documents on the state of ECD in South Africa have been published since 2001. Amongst these are national policies and programmes, white papers, position papers and plans, audits and evaluations, overviews and proposals (Richter, 2012), but it is evident that only little impact was made in the provision of ECD for the young children of South Africa although the general core of each and every document on ECD reflects a commitment to the 'care', protection and well-being of children.



Harrison (2014) says in light of the above policy frameworks, the impression may be gained that adequate provision is being made for young children in line with international standards and expectations, but this picture needs to be adjusted substantially on closer scrutiny. According to the General household Survey of 2011, 69% of children between the ages of 0-4 are exposed to ECD in the Western Cape. Only a third of these children have attended formal centre based learning. Two thirds of children come from mostly the informal settlements with no form of ECD prior to enrolment at Grade R level (General household Survey 2011). As the researcher has also observed while visiting school with

multi-disciplinary teams, in the Queenstown Education district, to check on school readiness and school functionality, a lot of support and monitoring is still needed in the Queenstown Education district preschools.

## 2.6 What do Studies and Researchers Say of School Readiness Programmes?

Preschool experiences are designed to provide cognitive and social enrichment during early childhood development (Lee, 2011; Robinson, 2011; Smith, 2011). The goal of these experiences is to promote children's ability to successfully make the transition to school and to prevent poor school adjustment outcomes such a school failure, unemployment, and poverty. Studies of a wide variety of programs such as Head Start, Even Start, Follow Through, Learning to Learn and other model programs (Kitsantas, 2010; Neelon, 2011; Odogbo, 2011; Reidinger, 2001; Rose, 2011; Smith, 2010; Thompson, 2012; Zigler, 2011) have shown that one or two years of preschool can improve children's school readiness, early scholastic achievement and school competence such as lower grade retention and special education placement.



Research supports the effects of preschool programs on long term outcomes such as reduced school dropout rates and increased employment (Lascarides, 2012; Morgan, 2012; Smith, 2011; Yelland, 2011). Evidence indicates that once children's achievement patterns are established, there is a high degree of continuity from that point forward, and early attainment sets boundaries on later attainment (Belsky & MacKinnon, 1994; Bauman, 2012; Entwisle, Alexander, Cadigan, & Pallas, 1986; Savage, 2002). The academic difficulties experienced by many minority children are traceable to adjustment problems and patterns of underachievement that begin in the first few years of formal schooling (Howard, 2011; Paige, 2011; Wall, 2010).

A child who gets off to a slow beginning in the early school years carries a record of failure; and because of the cumulative nature of topics in the early curriculum such as reading and mathematics, a disadvantaged learner may be hindered by gaps in

understanding that may be difficult to overcome (Beauchat, 2011; Blankstein, 2010; Carroll, 2012; Darling-Hammond, 2010; Murphy, 2010; Teach for America, 2011).

After Norway expanded pre-school education for 3 - 6 year olds during the 1970s, researchers found that pre-school participation was associated with strong benefits for later educational and job outcomes (Havnes & Mogstad, 2009). Heckman (2006) found similar evidence of pre-school benefits in Asia, South America, and elsewhere, in her review of ECD. In Bangladesh, pre-school boosted primary school achievement (Duncan, Morris & Rodrigues, 2011), with similar results reported in 10 other countries (Approach, 2007). When Uruguay expanded its pre-school system, studies, comparing siblings with and without pre-school, revealed clear benefits for children attending pre-school into secondary school (Berlinski, Galiani & McEwan, 2009). Similar analyses in Argentina found that 1 year of pre-school was associated with improved primary school performance (Berlinski*et al.*, 2009).

In France, universal free pre-school is available to children from the age of 3 years and they have a 90% take up rate. State-collected data showed that pre-school had a sizeable and persistent positive effect on a child's ability to succeed in school and obtain higher salaries in the job market. Pre-school also appeared to reduce socio-economic inequalities, as children from less advantaged backgrounds, benefited more than those from more advantaged backgrounds (Engle *et al*., 2011). Another study of Gaza, Mozambique by Martinez, Naudeu and Pereira (2012:4) concluded that ECD programmes' emphasis on hand-washing and personal hygiene may be linked to the reduction of diarrhea and skin problems.



The USA president, in February 2013, acknowledged that more investment was needed in early education, to improve the American economy. He was quoted as saying: "…the lack of access to preschool, can shadow children for the rest of their lives" (Allie, 2015). The USA president also announced, in his February 2013 State of the Union address, that he would earmark seventy-five billion dollars ($75 billion) over the following ten years, to fund his 'Preschool for all' initiative (Allie, 2015). This suggests that the USA government realized that investing in the future of their children in the present, would

benefit the children economically, in the future. Unfortunately, there are numerous factors, which influence this early parental care and involvement, which are so vital for the development of the child. One of the most significant factors seems to be socio- economic status. Annually, more than 200 million children under the age of five, fail to reach their full cognitive and social potential (World Health Organisation, 2009).

According to the Multi-dimensional Poverty Index, most of these children live in South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa, which are the two poorest regions in the world (Alkire, Roche & Seth, 2013: 2). Paton (2011:1) claims that up to half of the five-year-olds in the United Kingdom, are not ready for school, as working parents increasingly abandon traditional games, nursery rhymes, bedtime stories and lullabies. Children are failing to develop vital physical and communication skills, because of the lack of sufficient interaction with mothers and fathers during the early years.

### 2.6.1 Children's Health and Education



Each child has a right to quality healthcare. The rate of infant and child mortality is often used as a measure of health status and socio-economic status (Atmore et al, 2012). "Early investments in children's health and education offer the greatest benefit" (Kibel et al., 2010: 84). According to SAHRC and UNICEF (2014), poor health among adults and children can have a major impact on the household, which leads to a poverty trap. As an illustration, a breadwinner who is in poor health is more likely to stay out of work, and the household income is thereby reduced (SAHRC & UNICEF, 2014). This situation can affect children through the inability to provide for child's basic needs, including proper healthcare. Children who cannot address their illnesses with medical interventions can, as a result, have it impact their learning. In addition, children residing in poorly sanitised environments can also lack access to proper sanitation toilets; hence, they use unsafe facilities (Atmore et al., 2012).

Poor health conditions have a long-term effect (Moore et al., 2009). Due to food insufficiency (food security) and resources, children experience various health issues

such as iron and calcium deficiency. Poor children are at higher risk of being exposed to contaminated water that causes diseases. This creates poor health conditions and increased numbers of children infected by the effects, which are likely to persist until they reach adulthood (Moore et al., 2009). People from poor households often live in unsafe environments that can have a negative influence on their health. They can be ex-posed to various risk factors such as violent environments and parental drug abuse that negatively affect health (Moore et al., 2009). They are also exposed to a high risk of being involved in accidents and injuries because of an unsafe environment.

### 2.6.2 Schooling and Cognitive Achievements

Education is one of the development measures in societies and is one of the indicators of progress amongst individuals (Atmore et al., 2012). Education can be an instrument that enhances an individuals' ability to reach their full potential. Various studies on the impact of poor living circumstances on early childhood development indicate that there is a strong correlation be-tween poverty and poor academic achievements (Moore et al., 2009). Poverty is also associated with higher chances of adolescents not completing secondary school level.



Compared with rich children, poor children are usually raised by caregivers who have not reached a high level of education (Moore et al., 2009). Some children can grow up in an environment within little educational stimulation, and this has a poor impact on children's cognitive skills and educational attainment. Poor children also are more likely to attend schools that are considered disadvantaged. These schools have few facilities, poor infrastructure and insufficient learning resources. In summary, children from poor families who have no access to, or cannot afford, adequate early childhood education are less likely to advance academically compared to children from well-off families (UNICEF, 2012).

### 2.6.3 Social and emotional development

Poverty affects children's emotional and social development. As mentioned earlier, children living in poor conditions are more likely to demonstrate behavioural and emotional issues (Moore et al., 2009). Children from poor households can find it difficult to relate with other children and can lack self-confidence. This implies that children from poor households can have lower chances of reaching their full human potential compared to children living in households with adequate income (Moore et al., 2009). Deprived children also experience change of location, and/or family structure compared to children who have never experienced poverty. A study by Moore et al. (2009) conducted in the United Sates maintains that children who grow up under poor living conditions have a higher risk of developing social, emotional and behavioural problems. For some, poorer children are likely to display aggressive behaviour and have low self-esteem, which may result in violent behaviour. Unstable living circumstances under-mine children's social and emotional development, resulting in high levels of insecurity (Moore et al., 2009).



Child poverty still remains a major issue in South Africa. Households with children under the age of 6 continue to live in under-resourced areas, such as informal settlements, which have insufficient housing, health, water and educational services for children to have a decent well-being. Child poverty can be seen as intergenerational, with poverty being passed on from adult to child. Major consequences arise from child poverty including poor nutrition, deficiencies in schooling and emotional problems.

Many of the childcare centers located in low-income neighbourhoods are not of good or high quality (Burchinal, Nelson, Carlson, & Brooks-Gunn, 2008). Raikes et al. (2012) noted that this may result in low-income parents sending their children to centers they believe as having good education opportunities that are actually most likely low in quality. Many of the foundational studies (Duncan, Ziol-Guest & Kalil, 2010) examining the impact of early childhood education programmes focused on African American children. These include the 1960s ground-breaking High Scope Perry Preschool Project, the Abecedarian Preschool program in the 1970s, and the Chicago Child-Parent Centers founded in 1967. While it is not possible to compare the impact of these programs across racial groupings,

the impact of these early learning programs on the low-income African American children who participated was pronounced and long term. For instance, children who participated in the Perry Preschool Project were more likely to complete high school, become employed, and avoid incarceration.

State preschool programmes also seem to have substantial benefits for African American children, along with children of other races and ethnicities. In Tulsa, Oklahoma, African American children made gains on tests measuring early literacy skills and problem-solving skills (Duncan et al., 2010). They further added that gains in early literacy were comparable to the gains made by white children, but gains in problem-solving skills were substantially higher for African American children than for their white peers. In problem solving, white children made a 6 percent gain throughout the preschool year, while African American children made a 21 percent gain. Similarly, a study of the Boston Public Schools' preschool program also found benefits for children from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds, including African American children. On 3 out of 12 developmental assessments, African American children made stronger gains than white children.



Several state and community preschool programmes have demonstrated particularly strong impacts for Hispanic children. A 2008 study of Oklahoma's universal preschool program conducted in Tulsa (Isaacs & Magnum, 2011, Evans, 2004) showed positive results for all racial and ethnic groups, but impacts were particularly strong for Hispanic children. On measures of early literacy skills and problem solving, Hispanic children made greater gains than any other subgroup. Similarly, an evaluation of Boston's universal preschool program found especially large gains for Hispanic children, even though all children there saw gains. Hispanic children showed higher gains in measures of vocabulary, early literacy skills, and problem solving. Importantly, Hispanic children made significant gains on measures of "inhibition" and "attention shifting." These skills, sometimes referred to as "executive functioning," are thought to provide the underpinnings for skills such as self-discipline and the ability to shift concentration between tasks.

Data from 2011 show that 48 percent of Asian American 3 and 4 year-olds do not attend preschool (Isaacs & Magnum, 2011). While this rate is better than the rates of Hispanic and African American children, this information reflects Asian American children in aggregate as a single group only and, due to limited data, does not take often into account variations among Asian subpopulations, such as Chinese, Japanese, and Korean, which often differ significantly. Few studies have examined the impact of preschool programmes on Asian Americans as a subgroup, often times due to low sample size. The study of Boston's public preschool programme did examine specific impacts on Asian Americans but noted that the sample size was small. In Boston, Asian American children made more gains than white children on several domains of child development. In particular, Asian American children made significant gains on applied problem solving.

Waldfogel and Washbrook, (2011) and Winship, Sawhill and Gold (2011) state that there is considerable overlap between English language learners and Hispanic children in the existing studies of state preschool programmes. Several state preschool evaluations, however, have specifically looked at the impact on children from homes where English is not the primary language or those children with limited English proficiency. In most cases, the vast majority of children spoke Spanish as their primary language. Every study that looked at this population found substantial benefits for children who participated in preschool. Spanish-speaking children in Tulsa's preschool program made substantial language gains but also made gains in early literacy and math skills.



Researchers estimate that the gains made by Spanish-speaking children are comparable to those made in the landmark Perry Preschool Project and the Abecedarian project, both of which have documented long-term gains for children throughout their life cycles, including reduced crime and teen pregnancy, higher earnings, and reduced participation in public assistance programmes. In comparison to other Hispanic children enrolled in Tulsa's preschool program, English language learners and children with at least one parent born in Mexico made the most significant gains.

In Georgia, Spanish-speaking children improved on a range of language and literacy, math, and general-knowledge assessments. On several domains, gains made by

Spanish-speaking children were much higher than in the full sample. Spanish-speaking children made particularly large gains in vocabulary—both receptive and expressive—and mathematical problem solving. In Tennessee, non-native English speakers made larger gains than English speakers. Non-native English speakers who attended preschool had 85 percent greater gains on measures of language development than did other non-native English speakers who did not attend preschool. Native English speakers who attended preschool also made gains when compared to those who did not attend, but those gains were 27 percent higher.

Parents place greater emphasis on quality child care now more than ever before (Chase & Valarose, 2010; Gamble, Ewing & Wilhelm, 2009; Harrist, Thompson, & Norris, 2007; Kim & Fram, 2007; NACCRRA, 2010; Rose & Elicker, 2008; Shlay, Tran, Weinraub & Harmon, 2005); however, there are both matches and mismatches in what parents and other stakeholders perceive as important. Continuing to support parents where they are in strong agreement about quality practices, all while continuing to build their awareness of family-sensitive and culturally-responsive caregiving practices, may be an initial step towards continuing to develop parents' understanding of quality caregiving for young children and families.



The definition of readiness is essential in order to take the next step which is constructing the dimensions of readiness. Vygotsky refers to readiness to learn in terms of his zone of proximal development (ZPD). In order to be ready to learn, there must be competence at higher levels, these levels change as the learner is able to independently perform each competence. Vygotsky suggests that —these functions could be called the buds rather than the fruits of development‖ (Vygotsky, 1978 as cited in Bransford et al, 2000). The important point is the current development stage that an individual has reached whereas the ZPD is concerned with the future (or potential) mental development.

Numerous studies have made an attempt to define their perception of school readiness. Mistry, Benner, Biesanz, Clark, and Howes (2010, p.433) and Welsh, Nix, Blair, Bierman and Nelson (2010, p.44) believe that cognitive skills and social-emotional competence of pre-school children play a significant role in their successful transition into formal schooling. It is agreed that socio-emotional competence is vital in a child's ability to cope

with the demands of the classroom. It enables children to make friends and communicate their emotions and needs effectively. Fitzpatrick (2012, p.334) further develops this by suggesting it refers to a child's maturity and their ability to negotiate the classroom demands. This definition recognises each child as an individual but does not recognise the evident age gap within the classroom which arguably affects a child's maturity. Meisels (1999, p.52) suggests that there are two perspectives by which to approach school readiness: the empiricist and the interactionist. The empiricist views readiness as factors that lie outside the child; Carlton and Winsler (1999, p.138) thus suggest that preschools are positioned to provide the children with the knowledge, skills and experiences needed to ensure their academic success. This is supported by Linder, Ramey and Zambak (2013: p.1) who discuss the concept of *school readiness* as encompassing the learning processes and expectations of what children should know and should do upon entry to school.

The interactionist approach believes readiness to be co-constructed by both the child and the school (Meisels, 1999, p.49). Research by Jeon, Buettner and Hur (2014, p.718) found that the family and the socioeconomic background had a direct correlation to the child's cognitive ability and increased risk of social-emotional problems. However, Dupere, Leventhal, Crosnoe, and Dion (2010, p.1228) recognise that there are vast international studies to support that family factors and social background are influential in a child's school-readiness and future academic success. Research carried out by Doyle, Finnegan and McNamara (2012, p.382) suggests that there is a significant difference between how teachers and care-givers measure a child's school readiness suggesting that parents rate children as more socially competent, more mature and with higher levels of cognitive and language skills.



Early childhood development is an emerging field of research and policy development in South Africa. The state of ECD in South Africa in terms of reporting on its progress was non-existent prior to the 1994 democratic elections. However, since the ratification of the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child on 16 June 1995, improved indicators and monitoring have been taken place, and from this data, the understanding on the situation of children has improved over time (Storbeck & Moodley, 2010; van der

Merwe, 2015). As a starting point in South Africa, a national audit to establish the status of both registered and unregistered ECD centres was conducted in 2013 (DSD, 2014). At present there are 20,442 registered ECD centres nationwide (UNICEF, 2015).

According to Richter et al. (2012), the General Household Survey demonstrates that 43 percent of children below the age of 5 had access to early childhood programmes in 2009. However, in 2010, the statistics improved and reached 63 percent (Richter et al., 2012). The national situation analysis also reveals the status of ECD centres and the children within their respective programme. In 1996, the enrolment of children in ECD centres stood at 22.5 percent. In 2007, the figure increased to 80.9 percent, which is most likely those registered into Grade R. Around 8 percent of ECD facilities lack proper infrastructure (Martin et al, 2014). Most of the registered ECD centres are inaccessible to most poor areas both in rural and informal urban areas (Martin et al, 2014; UNICEF, 2005).

Under informal ECD centres, there is also a lack of proper management structures and set monitoring and evaluation mechanisms, which guide the running ECD facilities. More specifically, there is a deficiency in proper nutrition programmes, trained personnel on ECD or there are experiences of high personnel turnover (UNICEF, 2005; Atmore et al., 2013). The national audit on ECD centres (2014) show most facilities remain unregistered with the Department of Social Development (DSD) because they fail to meet the standards presented by the department.



For an ECD to be registered, the infrastructural conditions should be ac-cording to the set DSD requirements. Standards range from location of the ECD centre, quality of infrastructure, management and running of ECD facilities. DSD guidelines require that ECD centres have quality infrastructure that provides children with a safe, healthy learning environment. This includes access to sufficient water, proper sanitation, electricity and a secured area away from hazards. Likewise, food must be cooked away from the children's play areas (At-more et al., 2012).

The structural conditions of ECD centres such as the roof, walls and plumbing should be in good condition. The centres' facilities should be functional in such a way that they can

accommodate people with disabilities. The lack of registration of operational child minding facilities remains an issue as facilities in under-resourced areas, and with low service charges to parents, do not meet governmental regulations. Their failure to register also does not give the centres an opportunity to apply for much needed subsidized funding from government.

## 2.7 Importance of Preschool Education for Children

School readiness is the foundation of equity and quality education. It is gaining global support as a viable means to help young children reach their full developmental potential and engage in lifelong learning. School readiness is linked to improved academic outcomes in primary and secondary school and positive social and behavioural competencies in adulthood (Sabol & Pianta, 2012). School readiness is regarded as a multidimensional construct that includes children who are ready to learn; schools that are ready to accommodate learners with diverse needs; and parents and communities who support learners' development. Preschool experiences are designed to provide cognitive and social enrichment during early childhood development (Lee, 2011; Robinson, 2011; Smith, 2011). The goal of these experiences is to promote children's ability to successfully make the transition to school and to prevent poor school adjustment outcomes such a school failure, unemployment, and poverty.



Abry, Latham, Bassok, LoCasale-Crouch (2015) state that early childhood education and care are on the reform agenda in many countries, including those in Africa. The aim of early childhood education and care is to provide developmental support and care for children in their formative years so that they can acquire the skills necessary for future learning and success in school. This success is expected to benefit the social and economic development of society at large. Although Africa has undergone remarkable transformations since its contact with Europeans and other foreign cultural elements, the promotion of universal access to quality early childhood education and care remains a significant challenge for educators and policymakers in Africa.

Boakye-Boaten (2010) provides insights into how Africa emerged from this contact with a "bruised cultural identity" that has impacted heavily on child development in Africa.

However, with this increase of children served through state funded preschool programs, more focus needs to be directed at evaluating the quality and effectiveness of the programs to meet the needs of young children (Mathis, 2012). There are serious concerns that there are not adequate resources available to ensure the quality and effectiveness of these state funded preschool programmes. Bukaliya and Mubika (2012: 30) suggest that children who attend ECD programmes are highly motivated, perform better and get on better with their classmates and teachers. Hyde and Kabiru (2003:22) state that ECD programmes lead to better employment records, increased family formation and a reduced likelihood of engaging in criminal activities in the long run. It is also further highlighted that ECD education and care has a positive impact on economic development and contributes towards the reduction of gender, income and cultural inequities (Andrew & Slate, 2001:42; UNESCO, 2005:5).

According to the Department of Education (2001:5-8), early childhood development is defined as the processes by which children from birth to nine years grow and thrive, physically, mentally, emotionally, spiritually, morally and socially. Early childhood development suggests a comprehensive approach with the active participation of parents and caregivers. This is a time of remarkable growth across all areas of development. The dependent infant grows and develops into a person who can largely take care of his or her own body and interact effectively with others. The early years are critical for developing concepts, skills and attitudes that lay the foundation for lifelong learning. These skills and attitudes include the acquisition of language, perception-motor skills required for learning to read and write, basic numeracy concepts and skills, problem-solving skills as well as a positive attitude and love for learning.



Qadiri and Manhas (2009:23) emphasized the significance this developmental phase plays in developing the character of a young child. The positive impact of the High/Scope or Perry Project in the United States of America was notable because it showed that children who attended ECD scored highly in IQ and language tests and more girls who attended ECD graduated in professional courses than those who had not (Hyde & Kabiru, 2003:23). A longitudinal benefit analysis of the Abecedarian Project that provided

intensive preschool programmes to children from low income families in North Carolina revealed that it had highly positive results in the children's future as few of them smoked and most of them saved substantial amounts of money (Hyde & Kabiru, 2003:98).

The expansion of these preschool programmes has created more opportunities to identify children with special needs and to serve children with disabilities in least restrictive environments (Barnett & Carolan, 2013). School readiness, or the development of the cognitive, social, and emotional skills necessary for children to enter school ready to learn, creates the foundation for academic success, physical and mental health, and general well-being (Isaacs, 2008). Unfortunately, socioeconomic disadvantage tends to lead to large gaps in the development of both the cognitive and socio-emotional skills underlying school readiness (Schmitt, McClelland, Tominey & Acock, 2010). Additionally, socio-economic disadvantage is associated with problems in children's self-regulation, including difficulties controlling impulses and regulating emotions. Disparities in cognitive and socio-emotional development are not ameliorated during the early elementary years. Indeed, gaps in achievement tend to increase with age, thereby having vast implications for future life achievement.



The advantage of this critical period of children's brain development is that some abilities are produced more effectively than they would during other life periods. Heckman et al (2006) argue that early investment in education therefore gives greater returns to society than investments later in life. Not only are certain skills obtained more effectively, but early educational experiences also prepare children to fully benefit from future educational experiences. A strong multiplier effect is associated with the public investment in early education, especially for disadvantaged children where early investment can make investment in later years more effective. Some of the expected characteristics that should be displayed by a child to show school readiness (Grieshaber, & McArdle, 2010) are:

- Independent in toileting;
- Able to dress themselves;
- Understands expected levels of behaviour;
- Confidence and self-esteem;

- Can take turns and share;
- Can sit still for a short period;
- Can separate from parents/carers;
- Communication and language skills needed to communicate needs and listen to others; and
- Can actively learn and creatively and critically think.

Some of these characteristics may be difficult for all children to achieve and this should not leave parents or caregivers concerned that a child is not school ready. The important thing is caregivers are aware of these characteristics and can put steps in place to ensure a child is developing the skills. Getting support and identifying any areas of weakness early is critical in ensuring the gaps are narrowed, and all children are given the opportunity to reach their full potential. Using documents such as progress summaries and tracking sheets will help identify any areas of weakness, as well as carrying out regular observations.

Since the 1960s, the evidence-base for preschool provision has grown, strengthened and broadened to include evidence from low- and middle-income countries, but with many significant evidence gaps remaining, especially for more integrated programmes, and programmes in low resource contexts. The strongest evidence is for preschool education programmes with 'school readiness' goals. Duncan et al (2011) reviewed the effects of formal centre-based preschools and non-formal community-based preschool provision. In eight of nine studies comparing preschool attendees with non-attendees, those who attended preschool had higher scores on measures of child development, including literacy, vocabulary, mathematics, quantitative reasoning and teacher assessments of performance.

Redding's (2011) studies that assessed the effects of preschools on social and behavioural development reported positive effects. The effects of non-formal provision were generally weaker than those of formal preschools. Greater benefits of preschool attendance were shown for higher risk or more disadvantaged children. In some reports,

preschool attendance was associated with improved school performance in Grades 2 and 3 and effects were shown into adolescence.

More recently, Rao et al. (2013) carried out a review for DFID of 32 studies of child-focused educational interventions in developing countries, most of which were conducted in preschool settings with children aged 3 or over, with specific focus on benefits to children's cognitive development. It is not just participation in preschool programmes that matters, but the quality of the interventions provided. Rao et al. (2013) found that child-focused interventions with higher quality of stimulation resulted in significantly higher levels of cognitive development for participating children. Quality was associated with the qualifications and training of change agents (early childhood educators, teachers and childcare workers), programme structure and child-appropriate curricula and instruction. Formal preschool programmes typically have better qualified educators.

Duncan et al.'s (2011) review also found that enrolment in higher quality or improved preschool programmes was associated with better learning outcomes than standard, non-improved programmes. Evidence on effective programmes also includes: structured pre-reading programmes in Bangladesh and Costa Rica (Rolla San Francisco et al., 2006); formal rather than informal preschools in China and Cambodia; child-centred and interactive instruction methods in Bangladesh and East Africa.

### 2.7.1 The Domains of School Readiness

These domains are separate and distinct, but interact with and reinforce each other.
The need for children to develop across all five domains is supported by pre- primary school teachers/caregivers.

2.7.1.1. Physical and Motor development and physical health;
2.7.1.2. Emotional and social development;

2.7.1.3. Approaches to learning;
2.7.1.4. Cognitive development; and
2.7.1.5. Language development.

### 2.7.1.1 Physical, Motor Development And Health

i. **Gross motor development**

Co-ordination should be well developed. The child should be able to perform a variety of gross motor acts including climbing, walking, running, skipping, catching a ball and standing on one leg.

ii. **Fine motor development**

The child should be comfortable to be able to use a pair of scissors, pencils, crayons, cutlery and simple implements.

iii. **Perceptual development**

This will enable them to interpret in a meaningful manner. The child must be able to perceive and reproduce correctly on a visual-motor level. They must be able to conceptualize and perceptualize. These perceptual abilities are extremely important. Visual perception is particularly important in writing, reading, copying, pasting etc. Auditory perception is important in listening; a child must not only be able to hear, but also to listen.



iv. **Self-care**

The basic self-care skills such as dressing oneself, tying shoelaces and buttoning up should be developed as should hygiene routines such as toileting, washing of hands and face.

v. **Physical health**

The child should be physically healthy in order to attend and perform within the school environment. The following should be carefully monitored and where applicable the necessary intervention should be implemented by a suitable or qualified person:

- Allergies;
- Attention deficit disorders with or without hyperactivity;
- Nutrition and growth deficiencies;
- Immunisations;
- Blood disorders; and
- Visual, dental and auditory problems.

### 2.7.1.2 Social and Emotional Development

Young children's social and emotional development is the foundation for their cognitive development. Children are more likely to do well in school when they have a positive sense of personal well-being, developed through consistent, caring relationships in their early years. Emotional support and secure relationships build a child's self-confidence and the ability to function as a member of a group. Research indicates that a child's emotional and social skills are linked to their early academic standing. Children who are emotionally well adjusted have a significantly greater chance of early school success, where children who experience serious emotional difficulty face grave risks of early school difficulty.

Emerging research on early schooling suggests that the relationships that children built with peers and teachers are based on children's ability to regulate emotions in pro-social versus antisocial ways and that those relationships then serve as a source of provision that either help or hurt children's chances of doing well academically. Children who have difficulty paying attention, following directions, getting along with others, and controlling negative emotions of anger and distress do less well in school.



i. **Social maturity** as a criterion for school readiness refers to a child's ability to adapt to social situations whether in a group or individual context. A child who is socially immature, irrespective of whether they have the cognitive abilities to cope with formal education, will experience considerable adaption problems that in turn will hamper scholastic performance.
The following are a few questions you can use to identify if your child is socially ready:

He/she likes to play with a friend.
He/she can easily integrate with a group.
He/she can easily carry on a conversation with a friend.
He/she is willing to share toys
He/she is willing to help a friend.

ii. **Emotional maturity** implies that a child has reasonable control over their emotions. Emotional maturity influences important aspects such as self-confidence, which are pre -requisites for learning. When a child is evaluated for school readiness it may become apparent that they are physically and cognitively ready but socially and emotionally not.

iii. School readiness depends just as much on emotional maturity than on scholastic ability. Therefore, it is one of the most important aspects of school readiness. This is partially influenced by parenting but also depends to a large extent on a natural development process and will increase with time.

### 2.7.1.3 Approaches to Learning

o Curiosity
o Enjoyment of learning
o Confidence
o Creativity
o Attention to task
o Reflection
o Interests and attitudes



These are manifested in all domains and curriculum areas, including music, dramatic play, and art.

### 2.7.1.4 Cognitive Development

This domain refers to thinking and problem solving, knowledge about particular objects and the way the world works. The cognitive skills that grow out of a child's everyday experiences are what help children to acquire new knowledge. From these experiences children learn to observe, recognize differences and similarities, ask questions, and solve problems. The best foundation for later learning is provided when children have multiple and varied opportunities to interact with their environment and are encouraged to learn from their experiences. Cognitive development encompasses mathematical knowledge, thinking, creative expression reasoning and problem solving.

**Creativity**

- The child should be able to use drawings, play, and various objects to express themselves creatively;
- The child should be able to actively involve him/hersef in role playing, drama and storytelling;
- They should be able to creatively express their understanding of the world around them.

## 2.7.1.5 Language Development

This includes communication and literacy. Communication includes listening, speaking, and vocabulary. Language proficiency is a key predictor of school success. Early literacy skills (size of vocabulary, recognizing letters, understanding letter and sound relationships) at nursery school are good predictors of children's reading abilities throughout their educational careers. Language and literacy skills enable children to develop cognitive skills and knowledge and to interact effectively with peers and adults.



Here are some indicators:

- The child should be conversant in their mother tongue;
- The child should be able to both comprehend and express themselves fluently and meaningfully;
- He/she should be able to remember details from stories in a logical sequence;
- The child should have an expansive vocabulary and be able to describe the attributes (size, shape and colour) of objects;
- The child should be able to recognize letters particularly those in their name. Comprehend concepts of time as before and after; and
- The child should be able to identify the differences and similarities between objects.

- **Why is it important to determine whether your child is ready for school or not?**

The demands placed on the Grade 1 child are high. A child who enters the Grade 1 classroom without the necessary skills is likely to develop problems emotionally, behaviourally or academically. Knowledge of the child's strengths and weaknesses when they enter grade 1 may be beneficial for understanding the academic performance of the child throughout their academic career. This knowledge may also be utilized to develop strategies to facilitate effective learning in the child (Atmore, & Michaela Ashley-Cooper. (2012).

## 2.8 Disadvantages Facing Children without Preschool Experience during Formal School

School readiness, or the development of the cognitive, social, and emotional skills necessary for children to enter school ready to learn, creates the foundation for academic success, physical and mental health, and general well-being (Robinson, 2011). Unfortunately, socioeconomic disadvantage tends to lead to large gaps in the development of both the cognitive and socio-emotional skills underlying school readiness (Robinson, 2011). By the time children enter school, disadvantaged children tend to score between one-half and one-full standard deviation lower than other children on reading and math achievement tests.



Additionally, socio-economic disadvantage is associated with problems in children's self-regulation, including difficulties controlling impulses and regulating stronger effects than home-based programmes. On one hand, this underscores the importance of the classroom environment. However, parents and teachers independently influence child development (Van Wyk, 2010), with parenting skills directly related to children's later cognitive development and academic achievement. In the following, two key domains of school readiness are outlined. Evidence regarding the means by which parents contribute to each is discussed below.

*a) Emergent Literacy and Parents:* Emergent literacy refers to the skills and reading-like behaviours that are developmental precursors to their more advanced counterparts. It is a key component of school readiness, and early disparities in emergent literacy in preschool tend to be exacerbated through the elementary years. Effective teaching of these skills requires active involvement of the child. For instance, shared book reading benefits oral language development most substantially when the adult actively engages the child in "dialogic reading," in which the adult asks questions and prompts the child to "become the storyteller" (Venter, 2013). Similarly, explicit teaching about print increases letter knowledge and later reading ability, while informal print exposure does not (Venter, 2013). The degree to which parents actively engage children in explicit practice with letters and sounds is related to children's understanding of printed words controlling for children's independent pursuit of these activities (Green, Walker, Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 2007). Randomized trials suggest that when disadvantaged parents are taught strategies to actively engage children in reading, children's emergent literacy skills improve (Gestwicki, 2012). Further, greater improvements are seen when children are engaged in such strategies both at home and school, relative to school alone.



*b) Emergent Mathematics Skills and Parents:* As with emergent literacy, disadvantaged children are less likely to exhibit well-developed mathematics skills and knowledge than their more advantaged counterparts (Venter, 2013). This achievement gap is measurable by preschool and continues throughout the school years. Prior to starting school, young children use math concepts in their play and daily lives (Venter, 2013), and a general learning path for the acquisition of these concepts has been identified for preschoolers. As with development, passive exposure to math is not enough; structured educational experiences are necessary. While children's everyday activities and play can be excellent vehicles, these activities may not suffice without scaffolding and guidance. Exposure to math concepts in the home can have a positive impact on school readiness. However, low income homes tend to provide less support for mathematical development relative to their middle-income counterparts (Heckman & Mosso, 2014).

Disadvantaged families are more likely to focus on simpler topics such as counting and shape recognition, rather than on more complex processes such as numerical or

geometric reasoning (Venter, 2013). Further, low-income parents frequently have different expectations about their role in teaching mathematics to their children. One program designed to address these disparities, the Family Mathematics Curriculum (FMC), provides low-income families with a structured mathematical intervention in which parents and children attend family mathematics classes and also have access to math materials for use at home ((Venter, 2013). In two small evaluations with Head Start families, researchers found that children who participated in FMC with their parents had significantly higher scores in the areas of enumeration, numerical reasoning, and an overall math composite relative to children in a control group (Venter, 2013). This supports the premise that, with adequate supports and materials, parents can have a significant impact on young children's mathematical skills, enhancing overall school readiness.

*c) The Getting Ready for School Intervention:* The Getting Ready for School (GRS) curriculum was originally designed as an intervention for parents in Central and Eastern Europe with limited or no access to preschool. The goal was to teach parents to create more effective home learning environments for their preschool-aged children, by supporting and expanding parents' ability to promote the literacy and math skills children need for success in school. Subsequently, the GRS curriculum has been implemented in parent groups in a small number of Head Start centers in the US. Translation of the materials into Spanish was completed by a team of bilingual, bicultural staff members at the Head Start where the present study took place, led by one of the lead authors on this study named Duch.



The GRS curriculum recently received national attention when it was selected by the National Head Start Family Literacy Center as part of their training for 96 Head Start programs participating in the SPARC (Strengthening Partnerships and Resources in Communities for Literacy) program. In addition, the materials were made available to any interested Head Start program. Since May 2010, over 600 Head Start programs around the country have requested the GRS materials and training. As wide dissemination of the materials began to take place, research examining the potential feasibility and efficacy of this intervention became critical. Children with disabilities experience stigma from birth

and are more prone to exclusion, concealment, abandonment, institutionalization and abuse. Mortality rates among children with disabilities are 80% even in countries where under-five mortality has declined below 20%. Strikingly, 98% of children with disabilities in developing countries do not attend
school" (UNESCO 2009: 1).

"A remarkable step towards recognizing people with disabilities as equal and active members of society has been made through the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), which came into force in May 2008. The CRPD calls for enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms by children and adults with disabilities, and points to the importance of early intervention as well as inclusion in the education system from an early age. This policy brief argues that early childhood care and education (ECCE) is a powerful means of nurturing diverse abilities and overcoming disadvantages and inequalities, and discusses main approaches to responding to developmental needs of young children with disabilities" (UNESCO 2009: 1).



Results of a research indicate that children who are ready for school are equipped by such positive characteristics as self-confidence, feeling of school comfort in spite of the absence of parents or a babysitter, curiosity about world, more intentions to study, and strong social skills to interact with other children and adults (PACEY, 2013). Furthermore, they are more likely to experience success throughout their lives by completing high school, finding employment, and making positive contributions to society as productive citizens (Doherty, 1997). On contrary, children who are not ready at school entry are more likely to repeat a grade, to require special education services, and leave school prior to graduation (Doherty, 1997). Moreover, they tend to find difficulties in school, such as problems dealing with behaviour and social skills (NICHD, 1999; Connell & Prinz, 2002).

"The early years offer a special opportunity to foster developmental gains in children as 80% of the brain's capacity develops before the age of three. The gains are shown to be highest for those with maximum disadvantage. Equally, early neglect has lasting disabling effects. Poor nutrition leads to early childhood stunting, and coupled with low stimulation, it contributes to the poor cognitive and educational performance of over 200 million under-

five children who are 'not fulfilling their developmental potential'" (UNESCO behaviour, 2009: 1). Education is considered a major contributing factor in transforming a country and adding to the progress and growth of a nation (Choudhary, 2012: p62).

According to an article by The World Bank, initiated by UNICEF (2007: p1), early childhood development is an element of children's growth, which is vital; and one that should take place in a nurturing, caring and safe environment, which enables children to live, be healthy – mentally and physically – and to be alert and emotionally secure with a high level of social skills and an ability to learn.

Luneta (2011: p16) states that there is evidence demonstrating that teachers who have been properly trained and prepared are more successful in enhancing children's developmental abilities, when compared with teachers that have little or no training. The Presidency of The Republic of South Africa issued a Situation Analysis of Children in South Africa in 2009 (xvi). This states that early childhood development *'encompasses all the processes that enable emotional, cognitive, sensory, spiritual, moral, physical, social and communication development of children from birth to school-going age'.*



According to Sahlberg (Ed. Darline-Hammond & Lieberman, 2012: p1), Finland is regarded as one of the world's most literate and well-educated countries, with considerable research and evidence indicating a nation of excellent teachers, resulting in a high level of education.

Pre-schooling is perceived as contributing positively to higher earnings and social attachment. Children growing up without early cognitive stimulation may have cumulative cognitive deficits polarizing educational attainment. The consequences of the deficit can be starkly shown by the widening achievement gap between the disadvantaged and advantaged children as they move from grade to grade (Heckman, 2006). Children from poor households are particularly vulnerable to poor performance at school. It is likely that they receive little cognitive stimulation from home, and may be exposed to few resources that promote development. Heckman further lists other non-cognitive factors as equally important in explaining success at school (2008). These factors include motivation, sociability, ability to work with others and focus on tasks, self-regulation and esteem, time

preference and health. This perspective is supported by Li and Poirier (2003) who claim that “family child-rearing environment has both structural and predictive effects on early childhood outcomes, it has a sizeable negative and positive effects on behavioural problems index and math/reading test scores.

Education in South Africa is, for the most part, hamstrung by poverty, illiteracy, unemployment and HIV/Aids (SSA, 2011). The effect of HIV/Aids on learners' progress in school - not only because of the disease itself, but also because of the death of their parents and grandparents - is also devastating in pedagogical terms (ibid). It is not surprising that Grade R has not yet addressed the needs of the majority of learners in this age group (SAHRC & UNICEF, 2014). In addition to these challenges, South Africa is also in need of more qualified teachers for the preschool years (Pandor, 2005). Well qualified teachers for five to six-year-olds are expected to lay a firm foundation for future learning success and contribute to the bridging of the existing achievement gap. There is currently a huge demand for qualified ECD teachers and accredited ECD practitioners to ensure quality learning.



"Comprehensive ECCE providing care, stimulation, parental support and access to relevant services enhances the effects of interventions for children with disabilities. Positive transition from home to pre-school is encouraged when the early childhood programme allows for child-centred pedagogy and necessary individualized support to effectively address the diverse learning needs and abilities of children with disabilities. Indeed, early childhood programmes that are responsive to individual needs and respectful of diversity benefit all children and contribute to building the foundations of an inclusive society" (UNESCO, 2009:1).

"For ECCE to deliver these benefits and 'be effective, accessible and equitable, a society must invest in it'. Key policy measures include investment in early assessment and intervention, universalizing access to early education and promoting inclusive, community based educational provision with reliable specialist support" (UNESCO, 2009: 1). "Initiated well before children become eligible for preschools and schools, early

assessment and intervention should be made available to identify young children at risk. It is most effective when families are closely involved in the process, enabling them to seek appropriate diagnostic and therapeutic services to support their child's well-being and development. Through early assessment coupled with intervention, families gain relevant information, especially about what their child can do and about interventions that will optimize his/her learning potential. This also increases the chances that children with disabilities can participate and flourish in inclusive mainstream educational settings. Evidence suggests that one in three infants and toddlers who receive early intervention services do not present later with a disability or require special education in a preschool" (UNESCO, 2009: 1). "The 2008 UNESCO International Conference on Education sent a strong message to the international community, calling for greater investment in early assessment and intervention, inclusive ECCE programmes, and for equipping teachers with appropriate skills and materials to teach diverse student populations. In essence, promotion of comprehensive, inclusive ECCE must become a priority for global development" (UNESCO, 2009: 2).



A Vygotskian perspective proposes that the social interactions and scaffolded learning experiences learners receive from the culture of early schooling are catalysts for their development (Brewer, 2007:30). Early childhood education should focus on providing young learners with social opportunities and scaffolding school experiences, which they need in order to develop the abilities required for coping with Grade 1 and beyond. During scaffolding, the teacher should keep the various tasks at an appropriately challenging level for the learners and use verbal problem-solving strategies, such as leading questions, to assist them with their tasks. School readiness is bidirectional (Brewer, 2007). A child does not merely 'grow' into readiness, but must be exposed to learning situations and carefully assisted by others to develop the necessary skills and ways of functioning. Teacher training should enable teachers to create scaffolded learning experiences that will allow learners to proceed to subsequent levels.

In the Nordic countries and many continental European countries, child-care is seen as a public responsibility and these countries have policies on the provision of preschool

education (Hyde & Kabiru, 2003:57; Waldfogel, 2006:586). In keeping with the Ecological theory, public responsibility by the microsystems, microsystems and ecosystems of child-care promotes quality ECD programmes. In the Nordic countries, ECD or preschool education is seen as a valuable end in itself, providing a social experience for children (Waldfogel, 2006:586). A study by Waldfogel (2006:587) of Denmark, Finland and Sweden on regulations and policy revealed that, there were variations of regulations and policy on teacher-pupil ratios and teacher training leading to varied quality ECD education and care. Variations in regulations and policies of child-care may compromise the quality of ECD education and care. In Australia, policy guidelines on quality assurance include meeting certain accreditation criteria to be eligible for a government subsidy. When children enter the formal learning environment, they must meet numerous expectations. They are expected to work independently, complete learning tasks, follow a strict class routine and acquire literacy and mathematics skills (Li-Grining, Votruba-Drzal, Maldonado-Carreño & Haas, 2010).



Criteria for the personal readiness of the learner at school entry, as proposed by the National Education Goals Panel in 1991, include physical well-being and motor development; social-emotional development; approaches to learning; language usage and communication skills; and cognitive skills and general knowledge (in Barbarin, Early, Clifford, Bryant, Frome, Burchinal, Howes & Pianta, 2008). School readiness has a long-term effect on the development of a learner, including academic progress, a successful school career, employment and the ability to contribute to society (Green et al., 2011; Lapointe, Ford & Zumbo, 2007).

The transition to the formal learning environment is seen as one of the most important changes in early childhood, which explains the worldwide emphasis that is placed on the transition from preschool to Grade R (Chan, 2012). Learners are expected to work independently, complete learning tasks, follow a strict class routine and acquire literacy and mathematics skills (Li-Grining, Votruba-Drzal, Maldonado-Carreño & Haas, 2010).

Emotional readiness at school entry implies that learners should be able to deal with, regulate, and appropriately express their own emotions, as well as respond appropriately to the feelings of others (Barbarin et al., 2008; Janus & Duku, 2007). McClelland and Morrison (2003) note independence, responsibility and self-regulation as important social-emotional skills for school readiness. Graziano, Reavis, Keane and Calkins (2007) claim that insufficient emotional readiness at school entry may directly affect learning negatively by limiting the learners' ability to pay attention, and indirectly by causing disruptive behaviour, either of which will add to the learners' inability to keep up with the pace and the requirements of the curriculum.

Bulotsky-Shearer, Fantuzzo and McDermott (2008) explain that the social skills needed for successful entrance into the formal learning environment in Grade 1 include the ability to obey class rules, form friendships and adhere to the social expectations of the learning situation. To this, Farver, Xu, Eppe and Lonigan (2006) add the ability to co-operate, communicate effectively and follow instructions. Learners should be able to remain seated when expected to, control their own behaviour, and not disrupt the learning process (Bierman, Domitrovich, Nix et al., 2008; Romano, Babchishin, Pagani & Kohen 2010).



Lack of social skills can lead to behaviour that disrupts the learning process and result in negative relationships with teachers and peers (Romano et al., 2010). Hindman, Skibbe, Miller and Zimmerman (2010) refer to a study where teachers indicated children's social competence, and more specifically the ability to control their own behaviour and attention, cooperate with teachers and peers, and learn from and with others, as the most important school readiness skills for children in the early grades. Hindman, Skibbe, Miller and Zimmerman (2010) refer to a study where teachers indicated children's social competence, and more specifically the ability to control their own behaviour and attention, cooperate with teachers and peers, and learn from and with others, as the most important school readiness skills for children in the early grades.

Cognitive and human development, according to Vygotsky, is a result of a “dynamic” interaction between the individual and the society. This dynamic relationship denotes a relationship of mutuality between the two. Just as society has an impact on the individual, the individual also has an impact on society. Children are unable to learn and develop if they are removed from society, or are forbidden to interact with it. Take a look at the typical development of a child: his first teachers were his parents, who taught him his first words and guided him as he took his first steps, or as he went “potty”. On play dates, he learned how to play with other kids his age, and slowly built a bond with one or two kids that he ended up being the closest to. On the first day of school, he met his teacher, and several other teachers in the following years. The process of learning also required him to work closely with other people besides his teachers, such as older students and classmates. Vygotsky claims that a child will not be able to develop unless he undergoes or experiences social learning first. He identified two areas, or levels, where the functions in a child’s cultural development, appear in:

**1. Social level, or inter-psychological:** where the person will have to interact, connect and reach out to other people; and.



**2. Individual level, or intra-psychological:** This is the area within the child or the individual; he has passed the social level where he acquired social learnings.

The foundation laid in the early years of a child’s life determines the chance they have for a high quality life in adulthood. The stage of life from birth to the age of five years is regarded as crucial for human development. ECD is considered as the preparation period for a child to transition to primary school education (Atmore et al, 2012). Interventions of early childhood education are essential in enhancing a child’s progression from childhood to adulthood. One of the key objectives of ECD programmes is to provide fundamental opportunities for a child’s social, psychological and cognitive progress (Atmore et al, 2012). Few studies on the impacts of ECD in developing countries exist.

## 2.9 Caregivers' perspectives on school readiness nature of preschool education

Papalia *et al.* (2006: 9-10) and Trawick-Smith (2006: 2-4) explain that from the start, teaching a child is unlike anybody else in the world, he is an individual. Some children are shy (introverts) and others outgoing (extroverts). Individual development, some of which is inborn, can also be influenced by experiences. Most of the time these two influences work together.

The researcher is of the opinion that if a child fails to develop properly, the child might be unable to reach his full potential. It is therefore important for caregivers to see the child as a holistic being, because as children grow, they master different milestones in every developmental domain at different times. According to Gordon and Brown (2000: 105) the child is often discussed separately, although the domains of development (cognitive, physical, emotional and social) cannot be isolated from one another. They each make a contribution to the whole child as a holistic being. Lindon (2006: 10) defines holistic or whole child approach by "… stressing the importance of thinking about and behaving towards children as entire individuals, that all their skills are important and support their whole development". It is therefore important to focus on all aspects of child development in the early years. To focus on all aspects of development, caregivers must know the child's level of development. The child as a holistic being includes the following: the age of the child, the child as an individual, and his level of development in each domain as well as the influences of his/her environment (culture, environment, community, broader society and educational settings) on him/her.



For caregivers to acknowledge and know the level of the child's development they must have knowledge about how children grow, develop and learn. According to Gestwicki (1999: 6) "Everything that has been learned through research and formulated into theory about how children develop and learn at various ages and stages and in particular contexts, is used to create learning environments that match their abilities and developmental tasks." This means or even implies that a programme should be based on what is presently known and understood of the child. Understanding of the way children

develop will make teachers/caregivers and parents aware of what to expect. Although different domains of development (physical, cognitive, social and emotional) should be considered, the goal is to treat a child as a holistic being who needs to develop in all the domains of development.

During these preschool years, preschoolers want to establish themselves as separate from their parents. They want to and become more independent than toddlers, they become part of a broader world outside the family (Rathus, 2006: 262). Their language is more established and they become more verbal in expressing their needs. According to Algate, Jones, Rose and Jeffery (2006: 189), two year olds produce multi word sentences and by the age of five years children are proficient speakers. The preschool child moves away from Erikson's second stage of development, from autonomy versus shame to initiative versus guilt. During these years, children move from being much attached to parents/caregivers to being more independent. This can lead to unrealistic fears.

The preschool child will test boundaries repeatedly. They will sometimes act very silly and use forbidden words. It is therefore important to have clear and simple boundaries so that they will know what the acceptable behaviour is and what is expected of them. At the age of three, children will have troubles getting along with other children and sharing is very difficult for them, although by the age of five they are more willing to share, cooperate and take turns. The five year olds also are friendlier towards friends and get along very well with them. Because of their developing imagination and rich fantasy lives, the three and four year olds have trouble telling fantasy from reality. The preschool child may also talk about having imaginary friends (Hughes 1995; Malley, 1995).



Only when caregivers have knowledge and understanding of the preschooler's growth and development, will they be able to guide preschoolers successfully through this stage and help them reach their full potential. Realizing the importance of childhood development in the early childhood years, the researcher will in the next section firstly focus on characteristics of the three, four and five-year-old and then on the domains of development. The reason for this is to emphasize the importance of each child as an

individual, considering his age, and also to respect and acknowledge the child's culture and social background when planning a programme, because this has an influence on each child's development, learning and reaching his potential. A child's development consists of different developmental domains namely, physical, cognitive, social and emotional development. Knowledge of child development is important when teaching children, because every child is an individual and his/her developmental level will differ from the child next to him due to influences of the environment.

For children to move from one stage of development to another, caregivers not only have to have knowledge about child development but also about how children learn and the interaction that occurs between learning and development. They also have to provide nurturing and empathetic interaction. Learning to read social and logical thinking, requires that they join with the child in interactive play and negotiations. Creative and logical thinking requires that teachers/caregivers become partners in pretend play, opinion-orientated discussions and debates. Therefore, for teachers/caregivers to hurry children, who develop at their own individual pace through the developmental stages, this can actually lead to slowing the child down (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997: 37-38; Cooper, 2005: 286-302).



The researcher is of the opinion that for content and teaching strategies to be developmentally appropriate, the program must both be age and individually appropriate and the attitudes of the caregivers must respect the child's social and cultural background. Developmentally Appropriate Practices (2007) refers to the concept of developmental appropriateness as providing an environment and offering content, materials, activities and methodologies that are coordinated with a child's level of development and for which the individual child is ready. Developmentally Appropriate Practices (2007) further distinguishes between three dimensions of appropriateness that must be considered: age appropriateness, individual appropriateness and appropriateness for the cultural and social context of the child.

### (i) Age appropriateness

According to Kostelnik, Soderman and Whiren (1999: 18), age is not an absolute measure of a child's understanding and capabilities, although it does help establish reasonable expectations of what might be interesting, achievable, challenging and safe for children to do. When addressing age appropriateness, we first need to think about what children are like within a general age-range. Secondly, we need to develop routines, activities and expectations that compliment and accommodate those characteristics. Taking into account everything we know about the way children develop and learn and matching that to strategies, planning and content for their early childhood programs, we need to realize that specialized knowledge about child development and learning is the cornerstone of professionalism in early childhood education. Such knowledge encompasses common recognized developmental threads among all children and leads to the significant understanding of the variations across cultures.



To better engage in developmentally appropriate practices, teachers/caregivers with child development knowledge are more equipped to plan early childhood programs. They are more likely to accurately recognize potential problems that may require specialized intervention, accept typical variations among children and more likely to understand the degree of developmental readiness children need to achieve their potential and particular goals (Eric Development Team, 2007). It is therefore important that teachers/caregivers have knowledge of typical child development for the age span served by the program. This knowledge provides a framework from which the teacher/caregivers prepare the learning environment and plan appropriate experiences.

### (ii) Individual appropriateness

All children within a given age group are not exactly alike. Some or certain children are more verbal and outgoing than others, some children are skillful readers at five years of age, and others may achieve proficiency two years later. Some enjoy solitude, and others

crave company. All of these variations must be considered in the planning, designing, application and assessment of activities, expectations and interaction (Kostelnik, *et al.,* 1999: 18). Individual appropriateness can be defined as each child is a unique person with individual patterns, rates of growth and potential. Together with individual personality, learning style, past experiences and family background, these individual differences should be reflected in adult-child relationships and interactions in a responsive curriculum or program.

Learning in young children is a result of the active interaction that occurs between the child and the environment, ideas, materials and people with which the child comes into contact. Experiences should match the child's developing and emerging abilities, while at the same time provide some challenges for continuing growth, expansion of interests and helping the child reach his/her own potential (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997: 2; Gestwicki 1999: 6; Developmentally Appropriate Practices, 2007).

Vygotsky states that cognitive development stems from social interactions from guided learning within the zone of proximal development as children and their partner's co-construct knowledge. The researcher is of the opinion that when planning a curriculum or program it is important to remember that both the programme and adult interactions with children should be responsive to individual differences. Each child is a unique person with an individual pattern and timing for growth. Experiences should match the child's developing abilities while challenging their interest and understanding.



**(iii) Social and cultural context appropriateness**

Kostelnik *et al.* (2007: 16) are of the opinion that to understand cultural and social contexts requires early childhood professionals to recognize differences among children as well as characteristics children have in common with others in a cultural group. Cultures are different groups of people developing common bonds based on their ethnic or linguistic heritage, geography, custom, social class, income, life style or particular life event. Children grow up as a members of a family or community; they learn the rules of their culture, through direct teaching and implicitly through the behaviour of those around them, children do not grow up in isolated little rooms. It is important that an adult working with

children have some knowledge of the social and cultural contexts in which the children live in order to ensure that learning experiences are meaningful, respectful and relevant for the participating children and their families (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997: 42; Kostelnik, *et al.,* 2007:16). For Vygotsky, the environment in which children grow up will influence how they think and what they think about, adults transmit their culture's tools of intellectual adaptation that children internalize. The first step seems to be for each of us to acknowledge that we are all influenced by our cultural experiences, as well as how to show respect, how to organize time and personal space, how to interact with people we know as compared to those we just met, what and how to eat, how to dress, how to respond to major life transitions or celebrations, how to worship and countless other behaviours that humans perform every day, with little apparent thought. Teachers/caregivers need to remember that just as they are largely products of their experience, children's development and learning is also influenced by the context within which they live. This recognition is the beginning of increased awareness, responsiveness and sensitivity to other cultures and their points of view (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997: 42-43).



It is therefore important to remember that every child is unique and that a child's unique personality is developed as a result of their own personal history and the experiences they have within the cultural group they belong to. Among the rules they learn are to show respect, how to organize time and personal space, how to interact with people they know well and those they just met. Therefore, decisions about how to care for and educate young children cannot be made without knowledge of the child's cultural and social context and respect from the teacher/caregivers and others (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997: 42; Kostelnik, *et al.,* 2007:16).

Bredekamp and Copple (1997:9) explain that: "Principles are generalizations that are sufficiently reliable that they should be taken into account when making decisions …" about the planning of learning for young children, whether it's in a curriculum, program of daily activity. Experiences for children, at whatever age, should be designed around the child's developmental needs and abilities. Support for this position comes from

international literature on how children develop and learn. A prerequisite for learning is biological maturation, although the child's interrelationship with his environment determines just what learning will take place. Factors in the child's physical and social world are shaped by inherited tendencies. Therefore, development and learning are effected by both biological and environmental influences and development is a result of the interaction between the two (Gestwicki, 1999: 10). Environmental influences include those that are physical and those that are socio-cultural. For example, at a certain developmental level, a child's fine motor abilities will enable him or her to manipulate building blocks by using their fingers to pick up the blocks and building a construction. Difficulty with this action may be due to immaturity of muscles needed in fine motor coordination. A child may also have trouble with reading due to a biological issue; cognitively the child cannot yet relate the abstract symbols to sounds and concepts, or it may be because of an environmental issue – no one has taught the child to read (Cooper, 2005: 290-291).



Vygotsky (1978: 131-133) explains that our culture not only provides us with information but teaches us how to understand that information. The link between concept and signifier, with words or icon, is arbitrary and governed by community choice. According to Cooper (2005: 290) "… a child brought up in an environment that is rich in the use of printed language and/or graphics will be more facile with these at an earlier age than a child who does not have these experiences". It is in fact a biological factor that is a prerequisite to readiness for learning. The environment determines just what direction development will take. It is therefore important to include the child's biological and environmental experiences and background when planning and conducting a developmentally appropriate programme or practice.

Bredekamp and Copple (1997: 12) defines culture as the customary beliefs and patterns of behaviour, both explicit and implicit that are passed on to future generations by the society they live in and/or by a social, ethnic or religious group within it. People fail to recognize the powerful role that culture plays in influencing the development of all children, because culture is often discussed in the context of multiculturalism or diversity.

Due to the diversity of the cultures in South Africa, every culture structures and interprets children's behaviour and development. The researcher is of the opinion that every early childhood teacher/caregiver needs to understand the influence of sociocultural contexts on every child's learning. They must be able to recognize children's developing competence, level of development and acceptance, and accept and respect that children will express their developmental achievements in a variety of ways. The researcher is of the opinion that it is important for teachers/caregivers to learn about the culture of the majority of the children they serve if that culture differs from their own. Recognizing that learning and development are influenced by cultural and social context, it would be an impossible task to expect teachers/caregivers to understand all the nuances of every cultural group they may encounter in their practice.

It is more important for teachers/caregivers to become sensitive to the knowledge of how their own cultural experience shapes their perspective and to realize that multiple perspectives must be considered in decisions about children's learning development, in addition to their own. Barnett, Friedman-Krauss, Gomez, Horowitz, Weisenfeld, Brown, Squires (2016) state that children have the learning ability and capability to function simultaneously in more than one cultural context. However, if teachers/caregivers set too low or too high expectations for children based on their home language and culture, children cannot learn and develop optimally and reach their full potential. The ideal would be, for example, that children whose primary language is not English should be able to learn English without forcing them to give up their home language and to get a teacher/caregiver to translate or teach in both languages (Sabol, Pianta, (2012).



Likewise, children who speak only English benefit from learning another language. The goal is that all children learn to function well in the society or even community as a whole and move comfortably among groups of people who come from both the same and different backgrounds (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997: 13). Furthermore, Gestwicki (1999: 10) explains that children's development is best understood within the context of the family, then their community and later the larger community. According to the researcher, this seems to indicate that children are capable of learning to function simultaneously in

more than one cultural context, when supported respectfully. According to NAEYC (in Bredekamp & Copple, 1997: 13), “Education should be an additive process”.

Social cultural theories view cognitive development as a socially mediated process that depends on the support the adults and more mature peers provide to the child (Rogoff,1988, cited in Berk, 1999). This premise reinforces the aspect of cooperative dialogue between the child and the caregiver as a critical determinant of later school readiness. Similarly, social-cultural theory recognizes the importance of ECD experiences in determining the child's behaviours and school readiness through guided participation and scaffolding (Berk, 1999). Within a pre-school setting, teachers influence the children's social emotional development through the reciprocal relationship that forms part of the children's internal working model.

Piaget's cognitive development theory stresses the importance of discovery learning (Mwamwenda, 1996), which is important when we visualize quality preschool to reflect a developmentally appropriate practice. In his study Nyarnwaya (1996) has identified readiness indicators of school for children including physical environment, quality of services, teachers' characteristics, learning teaching aids, social emotional climate and learners' behaviour.



Other variables include availability of the preschools, accessibility, quality and responsiveness to local needs and circumstances (Myers & Landers, 1989). Berk (1999) proposed a child-centred developmentally appropriate practice that has adequate and appropriate physical facilities, group size, appropriate caregiver-child ratio, activities that encourage children's explorative behaviour, appropriate caregiver qualifications and fostering a conducive relationship with the parents and community. Young (2002) has categorized the ingredients of quality to be embedded in the structural features, classroom dynamics and the characteristics of staff in the ECD centre. Mwamwenda (1996) postulates that a child will be pleased with behaviour or activity he or she is prepared for. Preventing a child from engaging in an activity he or she is prepared for results in frustration and, if the child is not ready to engage in certain behaviour, results in annoyance.

## 2.10 Parents' perspectives on preschool education as a school readiness programme

Schools and families have been described as partners in the education of their children (Epstein, 2011a, 2011b; Epstein & Associates, 2009; Lemmer, 2013). Both share the common goal of wanting to assist children to develop their full potential (Bray, 2001). Another view of quality ECD programmes by Johnson, Dyanda and Dzvimbo (1997:203) highlights that child health and survival are ecological concerns that influence parents' perception of quality ECD programmes. They further note that low, average and high income parents value teacher qualification, convenience and hygiene as quality indicators in ECD programmes. Anderson, Shinn, Fullilove, Fielding, Normand and Carande-Kulis (2003:37) found that ECD programmes have a positive impact on parental employment in that parents have breathing space and can go to work while children are under the care and supervision of ECD professionals. A large body of research in a variety of community and country settings strongly supports an argument for the benefits of family-school partnerships (Moles & Fege, 2011).



Positive parental involvement in schooling leads to learners' improved academic achievement and socio-emotional development (Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Jeynes, 2011; Redding, Murphy & Sheley, 2011). Parents and teachers enjoy reciprocal support and satisfaction in achieving positive changes in learners and in the school (Lemmer, 2013). Furthermore, Nobel Laureate and distinguished economist, James Heckman points out the broad developmental role played by parental involvement across developed and developing countries. Heckman and Mosso (2014) propose an economic model of human development, which emphasizes the positive impact of parents in education on a child's human capital accumulation. This in turn contributes to a country's long-term economic growth, through the rate of return on child human capital accumulation and skill development. This finding makes parental involvement a crucial topic for policy makers in the international arena. In most schools, little effort is made by the school staff to listen to important information parents have about their children, the home culture, and their views on education (Gestwicki, 2012). Although virtually, all schools usually invest time

and energy in communicating with parents, most communication between home and school tends to be one-way: from the school to the home. One-way communication predominates in the use of written circulars and general parent meetings, which schools use predominantly to communicate their expectations and requirements to parents. Individual parent-teacher interviews allow for greater two-way communication, but often end as brief exchanges (Lemmer, 2012).

However, research has found that many parents, and particularly, those from low-income backgrounds base their choice of childcare on cost, convenience, reliability, and external indicators of childcare quality, such as accreditation (Blau & Mocan, 2002; Dinehart, Manfra, Katz, & Hartman, 2012; Henly & Lyons, 2000; Johansen, Leibowitz, & Waite, 1996; Li-Grining & Coley, 2006; Peyton, Jacobs, O'Brien, & Roy, 2001; Raikes, Torquati, Wang & Shjegstad, 2012; Shlay, Tran, Weinraub, & Harmon, 2005). They further add that low, average and high income parents value teacher qualification, convenience and hygiene as quality indicators in ECD programmes. Larocque et al. (2011) explained that there are parents who feel excluded from the education system especially if they have not been successful academically. In this paper, it was mentioned that there are parents who have trust issues with the education system and that teachers can play a role in bringing back the trust of these parents.



Larocque et al., (2011) stated that parents with lack of education can feel inadequate to the task of supporting their children and that teachers need to encourage such parents and this include assuring parents that they can play role through non-academic tasks such as communicating with the teacher if the child is experiencing difficulties with homework. Physical barriers can be addressed by having parent-teacher conferences and meetings, and language barriers can be addressed by having translators in learning environments and parents who speak the same language can be of assistance (Larocque et al., 2011).

However, a report on Zimbabwean ECD programmes by Kanyongo (2005:69) reveals that quality is difficult to achieve in developing countries due to limitations in financial resources. On the other hand, since these methods do not always place children at a

childcare facility that will promote growth and learning for them, it is important to understand why parents make the decision they make and whether or not their perceptions about childcare quality might impact childcare enrollment decisions (Early & Burchinal, 2001; Fuller, Holloway, & Liang, 1996). Since 2002, there have been a significant number of published studies about parents' perceptions of childcare quality. These new studies provide a more complete understanding on why this topic is important to explore as well as how parents' perceive childcare quality. Reasons included: (a) the existing high reliance on childcare with approximately 75% of children under the age of 5 years in some form of childcare; (b) the wide variability in the quality of childcare centers in the U.S. with very few centers reaching "high" quality; (c) the misunderstandings among parents and other caregivers about childcare quality or the lack the education to know what childcare quality is; (d) the important implications for policy makers and legislators so they can make more informed policies regarding childcare regulations and subsidies by understanding the quality features; and (e) to provide multiple valid perspectives (that include parents as well as researchers and experts) that will inform and define childcare quality, especially since parents are the primary individuals making decisions regarding childcare placement for their children.



Many parents believe that childcare centers can offer developmental opportunities for their children that they cannot offer, including social opportunities (e.g., having their child around other children of the same age) and exposure to academic skills need prior to entering school (i.e., school readiness skills). The increased number of children attending childcare places a large burden on childcare providers to help children make the necessary and expected advances in all developmental domains (e.g., physical, social, emotional, cognitive, language, health) prior to entering elementary school in Kindergarten. In the United States, teachers emphasize children's emotional development as the most important goal of ECE.

Finnish teachers emphasize the child's social development, and Russian teachers emphasize supporting children's health as the most important goal of ECE. Only in the last cohort (in 2011) were there differences between teachers' and parents' views on the goals of ECE. Whereas Finnish parents in the last cohort had changed their views to

prefer emotional development as the most important ECE goal, more than to support the child's social development, teachers' opinions stayed the same. They still valued social education as the most important goal of ECE. In Russia, teachers have traditionally and consistently considered health education as the most important goal in childcare. However, in 2011, the emphasis changed among the Russian parents from health to the support of cognitive development as the most important goal of ECE. Only in the United States did the agreement in parents' and teachers' opinions concerning the most important goal remain consistent during the 20 years of the research period.

Despite these demands, many childcare centers can only afford to hire staff with limited education and experience. The ECD teacher has a highly responsible and demanding profession and hence the need for extensive training to equip the teacher to prepare ECD learners for a more structured learning (UNICEF, 2000:6; Govindasamy, 2010:24). The effective educator has extensive knowledge of how young children learn, the processes it involves and how human knowledge is structured (UNICEF, 2000:15). An effective teacher forms part of a positive microsystem (Ailwood, 2003). However, educators may lack knowledge of ECD children's developmental patterns, thus compromising the quality of ECD programmes. Teacher education strongly predicts the quality of teaching to ECD children (Espinosa, 2002:8).



A study in Britain by Walker (2008:10) of good ECD staff training as a quality indicator showed that children who had highly qualified teachers also had high educational and social outcomes whereas those whose teachers were paraprofessionals showed low educational and social outcomes. Teacher attitude also has an impact on the quality of service delivery in line with the Ecological theory. It is widely recognised that highly qualified personnel are an essential component of ECD programmes that result in improved quality of outcomes for young children (Pence, 2004:7; Myers, 2004:8; Ryan, Whitebook, Kipnis & Sakai, 2011:28).

ECD children who are taught by teachers with specialised ECD training have been found to be more sociable, exhibit a developed use of language and perform at a higher level on cognitive tasks than children who are cared for by less qualified teachers (Ackerman

& Barnett, 2009:334). Despite this, there is wide variation in state regulated teachers (Ackerman & Barnett, 2009:335; Kamerman, 2006:34). While ECD teaching is a highly responsible profession, a study by Govindasamy (2010:24) concludes that there is not enough emphasis on the training and qualification of ECD teachers.

The study further concludes that the lack of concern over training and qualifications for what are, in reality, highly responsible roles, reflect the out-moded public attitudes which commonly regard the care of young children as an extension of the mothering role, assuming that it all comes naturally to women. Such attitudes, in turn, reinforce the low status accorded to ECD teaching which keeps salaries low and limits government resources accorded to the training of ECD teachers (Govindasamy, 2010:25). The appropriate training of ECD teachers influences the quality of ECD provision (UNICEF, 2000:8; Govindasamy, 2010:25; Myers, 2004:12). A study on ECD policies by Kathyanga (2011:62) of Malawi shows that while there is a minimum pre-requisite for becoming a caregiver, ECD teachers need training in order to deal with ECD learners. Training of ECD teachers who are instrumental to the holistic development of the child and understand ZPD enhance effective curriculum planning and implementation in keeping with the socio-cultural theory. The current study sought to establish whether the teacher qualification was accorded the necessary emphasis in ECD programmes.



Personnel that are qualified and trained will be in a position to provide quality education and care (Govindasamy, 2010:25). It is ultimately the role of the government to enforce policies and legislations that guarantee the quality of ECD education in relation to teacher qualification (Kathyanga, 2011:30). Govindasamy (2010:115) established that there are variations in teacher qualifications in South Africa and that those with low qualifications are studying to increase their knowledge of ECD children. In line with the Ecological theory, the variations of teachers' qualifications have an effect on their understanding of their roles and functions and this affects their professionalism and consequently the quality of ECD education and care.

While researchers and experts include these factors as indicators of childcare quality, parents may not. If parents misjudge or overestimate childcare quality, they may be

inadvertently sending their children to childcare providers who offer less than optimal care and education, which may directly impact the school readiness skills children have when entering Kindergarten (Fenech et al., 2011). Parents also believe that schools have professionals capable of providing a rich curriculum that will produce an all-rounded child (Bukaliya & Mubika, 2012). Furthermore, parents want academic progress for their children and look up to public schools to provide quality ECD programmes that prepare their children for success later on in life (Excell & Linington, 2011:10).

Parent involvement in ECD has long been considered a key component for positive child development, positive attitude and behaviour and student achievement. This is because strong links between a child's home and the ECD centre promote developmental opportunities. Jones, White, Aeby and Benson (2010) argue that the nature and quality of home-ECD centre collaboration and the extent of parent involvement is determined by parents, ECD teachers and other adults. ECD teachers have both the ability and professional responsibility to facilitate ECD centre-home collaboration. In other words, teachers are central to supporting parent involvement in the development of young children. Kotaman (2008) in Şad and Gürbüztürk (2013) revealed that engaging parents in the education process of a child can lead to positive academic achievement, increased school attendance, better social adaptation and fewer disciplinary problems.



In South Africa, the National Integrated Plan for Early Childhood Development's holistic approach was strengthened by the Children's Act No 38 of 2005. In the National Integrated Plan for Early Childhood Development the term 'integration' is used to describe the approach 'where services and programmes are provided in a comprehensive and interwoven manner that aims at ensuring the holistic development of children' (Department of Education, Department of Social Development, Department of Health and UNICEF, 2005:7). Kernan (2012) discussed parent involvement in early learning in the Netherlands. Kernan (2012) explained that harmonization between child-rearing and education at home and in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) is lacking and there is need to enhance the communication between parents and ECD educators.

Families' social class, parents' level of education, health, single parent status influence the degree and form of parent engagement in early learning. Factors that strain relations between parents and practitioners include: lack of confidence, different understandings and expectations, and differences in views between parents and practitioners (Kernan, 2012). Mwirichia (2013) discussed the influence of parent involvement on academic performance of preschool children in Kangeta division in Kenya. Mwirichia (2013) concurred that parents face many challenges that inhibit them from playing an active role in their children's life and development.

The challenges that are mentioned in this paper include insufficient time, job type, rules at home, level of education, order of priority, view on voluntary work, home environment, time taken to attend to school activities, purchasing instructional materials, attending parent meetings, conferences, sports, discussing the child's performance and academic clinic day. Turning a blind eye to these needs has a negative impact on the child's performance and development (Mwirichia, 2013). Phippen (2010) also stated that single parents with full time jobs barely have time for their children's education. Larocque et al., (2011) stated that parents with lack of education can feel inadequate to the task of supporting their children and that teachers need to encourage such parents and this include assuring parents that they can play role through non-academic tasks such as communicating with the teacher if the child is experiencing difficulties with homework.



The Department of Social Development (2012) explained that urbanization has changed family patterns in South Africa and furthermore led to the increase of poverty especially among the African individuals. Some parents are not able to play essential roles such as nurturing, caring, protecting and socializing in an effective manner. Many children in South Africa lack access to an education programme at an early age because parents cannot afford the early education programmes (Allie, 2011). Atmore et al. (2012) discussed the issue of unemployment and that it hampers many parents from providing for their children. The South African government provides a Child Support Grant to children who are eligible and this helps mothers who are too poor so that they meet their children's basic needs, for instance food (Atmore et al., 2012). Parents who have low

levels of education experience difficulties especially when it comes to assisting their children with school work.

Atmore et al. (2012) mentioned that South Africa has the highest number of individuals living with HIV and that some children are infected prior to and during the birth process. Health issues can limit parents from being actively involved in their children's development. Harmful environments as a result of lack of access to adequate sanitation are some of the challenges faced by some parents, and this can limit them from partaking in outdoor activities. Three major barriers that were stated by Patrikakou (2008) that prevent parents from getting involved are: time and life demands, lack of knowledge and the school environment. Patrikakou (2008) explained that single-parent households have been increasing and that the change in the labour force with mothers entering in the work force has made time to be a valuable commodity for some parents.

Parents are vital stakeholders in early care and education, and the choices they make about early care and education have important ramifications for their children, their families, and the early care and education system. Among the many considerations that parents weigh when choosing an early care and education setting (e.g., cost, location, hours of care, etc.) is the quality of the care that their child will receive by the caregiver and in the physical setting. Quality of early care and education is of concern not only to parents, but also to policy makers, practitioners, and researchers. However, we know little about how parents' perceptions of quality compare to those of other stakeholders (Ceglowski & Bacigalupa, 2002).



Over time, there has been a shift in parental perceptions regarding child care quality. Convenience factors such as cost and location, as well as health, safety, warmth of the caregiver, and parent-caregiver communication have long been important to parents (Emlen, 1999; Rose & Elicker, 2008). Recently, however, parents are also indicating that the quality of the caregiving environment is important to them (Kim &Fram, 2009; Shlay, Tran, Weinraub, & Harmon, 2005; Chase & Valorose, 2010; Yamamoto & Li, 2012). Still, not much is known about how parents define the quality of care they value (Rose & Elicker, 2008).

Parents' values about these two constructs of early care and education quality mirror the public emphasis on children's development over the last 20 years, which has focused on promoting children's cognitive readiness for school throughout the majority of that time, and children's social-emotional readiness for school only more recently (Snow, 2011). While parent conceptions of school readiness are shifting towards a more integrative notion that recognizes the interdisciplinary nature of school readiness (Gamble, et al., 2009; Forry & Wessel, 2012), current parent perceptions of quality in this study are still reflective of a somewhat greater emphasis on practices to support learning than practices to support social-emotional development and behaviour, or the interplay between the two. However, while both of these constructs of quality were still strongly endorsed by parents, there was variation in how parents thought those practices should be enacted in a care setting. Parents differed on how easy or hard it was for providers to support developmentally appropriate practices and social-emotional development. For example, parents most highly valued developmentally appropriate practices, but did not rank highly the measurement of children's development with use of an assessment tool as part of developmentally appropriate practices (Snow, 2011).



Findings from other research indicate that parents do have a concept of child-centered/individualized care, but aside from suggesting that providers participate in training (Harrist et al., 2007), parents are less able to articulate clearly the practices or strategies providers might use to support individual children's developmental growth and transitions (Gamble et al., 2009). Further work is needed to understand parental reasoning about how they believe caregivers should learn about children's development and growth over time.

Parents place greater emphasis on quality child care now more than ever before (Chase & Valarose, 2010; Gamble, Ewing & Wilhelm, 2009; Harrist, Thompson, & Norris, 2007; Kim & Fram, 2007; NACCRRA, 2010; Rose & Elicker, 2008; Shlay, Tran, Weinraub & Harmon, 2005); however, there are both matches and mismatches in what parents and other stakeholders perceive as important. Continuing to support parents where they are in strong agreement about quality practices, while continuing to build their awareness of family-sensitive and culturally-responsive caregiving practices, may be an initial step

towards continuing to develop parents' understanding of quality caregiving for young children and families. Chase & Valarose, (2010) further emphasizes the importance of:

- **Watching the program with the child**; then discuss the program and its implications in simple lessons.
- **Knowing what kind of homework is expected from teachers, and make sure children complete it.** The more involved you are in your children's schoolwork, the more involved your children will be. Provide children with a regular, quiet place where they can do homework. Set up a place with few distractions, but close enough so they can ask you questions. Technology, through local and national service companies, now affords individual campuses the luxury of having homework hotlines, school announcements, and individualized teacher messages for parents to call.
- **Demonstrate-ing commitment to high standards.** Do not ask teachers to give children grades or promotions they have not earned. The goal is a good education, not a good report card. Have high expectations of children. Encourage them and tell them that —You can do it!ll Words can be strengthening or demoralizing.
- **Supporting school efforts to develop and maintain rules for student discipline.** Children thrive in an environment where they know what is expected of them. Children want a safe and supportive environment at school.
- **Helping interest children in learning outside of the school day.** Find out about after-school and summer programs in the community. School leaders need to avail parents of such programs or assist them in beginning a few for the children on their campuses.



Without education about what high quality care is, parents who are uninformed on the subject may mistakenly believe they have obtained high quality care for their children when in fact they have not (Raikes et al., 2012). Ryan, Johnson, Rigby, and Brooks-Gunn (2011) argue that in order for parents who receive subsidies for childcare to obtain higher quality childcare, they need to (a) spend their subsidy on high quality care, (b) be able to distinguish between high and low quality care, and (c) have high quality care available to them as a realistic option. While the first and third point are, on the surface, related to

personal decision making and market resources, respectively, the second point specifically draws attention to the importance of parents' knowledge about quality care as being central to parents utilizing higher quality childcare. According to Shlay et al. (2005), parents showed preference for childcare centers that are licensed and accredited and indicated that such centers are worth extra cost compared to childcare centers that are not licensed or accredited. While it is easy to rely on a single indicator for quality (e.g., *Is the childcare center accredited?* (Dinehart et al., 2013), doing so may not help parents find a childcare provider who offers the qualities the parent is looking for. Educating parents as to what the type of characteristics parents should look for is an important outcome of understanding parents' perceptions about childcare quality.

Policies regarding childcare can greatly benefit from understanding parents' perceptions about childcare quality. This is especially true with regards to childcare subsidies, in which many current policy considerations pertain. In most states that have childcare subsidies, parents are given the freedom to choose any legal childcare provider that they believe is suitable for their family's needs (Raikes et al., 2012). Despite this flexibility, most policies about childcare subsidies emphasize the importance of children receiving high quality childcare that will increase children's school readiness skills (Kim & Fram, 2009). If parents are unable to distinguish between high and low quality childcare, it is probable that the goal to increase growth and learning through early education is not being met because children attending childcare centers with subsidies (i.e., children from low-income families) are likely receiving low quality care and thus not reaping the benefits that high quality care promotes.



Therefore, it is important to understand parents' perceptions about childcare quality when creating policy and evaluating policy effectiveness. Knowing what parents perceive as high childcare quality provides information about whether parents are actively making the decision to send their children to high quality care, provided the subsidy is sufficient to cover the cost of high quality care and high quality care is available in the parents' communities (Ryan et al., 2011).

## 2.11 Challenges facing preschool centres which hinder making children ready for formal schooling

The national ECD norms and standards for service provision as laid out in the Children's Act, 2005 (Act No. 38 of 2005) is the yardstick against which compliance of individual ECD centres is measured. To this end, the National Department of Social Development (DSD) commissioned a national audit of registered ECD centres in 2013, later expanded to include centres with conditional registration and unregistered centres. The report makes a number of recommendations including the overarching recommendation that the remediation of the problem requires a significant increase in public investment in ECD funding, notably through an infrastructure grant to ECD centres. The report notes that many of the ECD sites needing funds to improve infrastructure are located in private homes. *Ilifa Labantwana* has commissioned research on the possibilities and options in this regard and will share the outcomes with the sector and the DSD and Treasury once available. ECD centres likely have to overstretch their resources in order to provide care to children in their centres, despite fees and subsidies received. The consequence of this sort of overstretching of resources is that the quality of care and learning provided to children may be compromised, which in turn will negatively impact the growth and development of the learners.



In order to reduce inequalities within education, it is imperative that ECD programmes should provide teaching curricula and learning environments that adequately prepare all children for formal schooling. Further investigation is required to adequately assess the quality of ECD education across South Africa due to the high variability of curricula, low levels of registration and approval, and the general lack of qualifications. Some provinces not providing reports is significantly lower in some provinces. These centres need to be assisted to ensure the parents are provided with adequate information. While end of year reports are useful, more frequent reports would be beneficial to child learning. Parents and guardians entrust the care of their children to ECD centres for a substantial portion of the day so they must have an assurance their children are being cared for in a safe environment. These include things such as having staff with first-aid training, a separate

area for children who shows signs of illness, detecting early signs of abuse or neglect, enforcing a hand-washing policy, and having a fence around the centre. Part of the management duties of a school head is to assess the ECD teaching and learning and to give demonstration lessons to ECD children for the benefit of newly qualified teachers or para-professionals.

ECD centres per province which suffer from infrastructural inadequacies. KwaZulu-Natal, the Eastern Cape and Limpopo are the three provinces with the largest percentage of ECD centres lacking adequate basic infrastructure. In Limpopo, 70% of ECD centres do not have adequate ablution facilities, whereas in KwaZulu-Natal, 60% of ECD centres are not connected to electricity. This means that more than half (52%) of ECD centres in KwaZulu-Natal have to cook the children's meals on open fires. In these three provinces, roughly half of ECD centres stated that they require urgent maintenance and repair, roughly a quarter do not meet the minimum requirements for being an ECD centre and about 10% are reported as not safe for children.

Over and above the infrastructural challenges faced by ECD centres, one in every four is overcrowded - a problem faced by registered and unregistered centres, both rural and urban. Moreover, many lack basic recreational equipment and resources such as jungle gyms, books, puzzles, tables, chairs and other educational toys. The minimum requirement for practising as an ECD practitioner is a Basic Certificate: ECD (NQF Level 1). This qualification was initially intended to provide existing unqualified ECD practitioners with basic training in the needs of the developing child, but has since expired (the last teachers were to graduate in 2013). The Further Education and Training Certificate: ECD (NQF level 4) replaced the Basic Certificate as the required qualification for entry, and is equivalent to a Grade 12 qualification (Atmore, Van Niekerk & Ashley-Cooper 2012). The entry requirement for this qualification is a Grade 9 certificate, which makes it accessible to any person who did not pass Grade 12 and has very few other options of employment. Formally, the Children's Act stipulates that staff working in ECD programmes should have a National Certificate in ECD at a NQF Level 1-6, or an appropriate ECD qualification, or a minimum of three years' experience implementing ECD programmes (Berry, Jamieson & James, 2011). The qualifications and

specialisations of ECD staff who are in teaching positions. Only 10% of practitioners and assistant practitioners have any qualification above that of a Grade 12, which is to be expected given that the Grade 12 requirements were only set in 2013. Principals and supervisors tend to be slightly more qualified, but still almost 80% do not have any qualification above that of Grade 12. When looking at the number of practitioners with qualifications specialising in ECD, however, it is evident that the minimum norms and standards do not apply in practice. Where one would expect to see the majority of practitioners to have at least the NQF basic certificate, it is shown that 74% of practitioners and 88% of assistant practitioners do not have any qualification in early childhood development.

Once again, principals and supervisors seem to have received slightly more training, with at least 35% of principals and 41% of supervisors having at least a certificate in ECD. Both international and local literature agree that there is an association between teacher qualification and the quality of care and learning provided, but that qualifications are not exclusively required for quality teaching (HSRC, 2010; Sylva, Melhuish, Sammons et al., 2014; Warren & Haisken-DeNew, 2013).

There is also research by (Berry, Jamieson & James, 2011). demonstrating that attributes of children's child-care environment directly affect a child's transition and adjustment to school. These effects appear even more pronounced among children exposed to high-risk conditions. Programs based on principles of quality care, higher caregiver training and smaller child-staff ratio all contribute positively to a child's readiness for school. Instructional needs and children's ability to profit from school depend on the types of instructional settings they encounter as they move from home to school and from grade to grade. Some of the prominent challenges and obstacles facing ECD facilities include absence of learning materials and resources, especially within the classroom setting, minimal funding, lack of qualified teachers, inadequate security for children whilst at the ECD facility, as well as poor toilet amenities (Department of Basic Education, Department of Social Development & UNICEF, 2010).

The challenges of ECD provisioning also include an under-skilled workforce with low pay and poor conditions of service (Biersteker, 2008). Inequalities include historical infrastructure backlogs, lack of uniformity in the design of ECD facilities, limited infrastructural support to NGOs, poor monitoring of infrastructure and weak planning, all of which have contributed to the enfeebled state of ECD infrastructure in South Africa (ECDLC, 2012). Due to lack of ECD specialization, the school heads find it difficult to manage the ecological systems including: the ECD curriculum, content and infrastructure efficiently which compromises the quality of ECD programmes. Even ECE centres that receive all the available subsidies, still struggle financially (Phatudi, Joubert & Botha, 2007), since official subsidies are inadequate to sustain centres of good practice for children of unemployed or low wage-earning parents.

Furthermore, the human resource capacity required to support, monitor and assure the quality of ECE programmes is variable and in many provinces, inadequate (DBSA, 2007). Many ECE teachers therefore have limited capacity to implement the official curriculum. Bailey (2000:116) notes that the disjuncture between policy assumptions and teachers' classroom realities can marginalize teachers, especially if it fails to take their working conditions or their core values into consideration. Despite the recognized benefits of ECD standards, teachers experience many challenges in implementing them in their classrooms. Intervention programmes gained momentum as a result of the rapidly growing interest in the needs of learners whose school progress and life chances are affected by social handicaps such as poverty and broken homes (Schweinhart & Weikart, 1997:117; Taylor, 2002:6-8).



Typically, these disadvantaged learners are said to exhibit some of the following problems: language inadequacies, not only in vocabulary but also in the organization of syntax and sentence structure. They struggle linguistically because of perceptual deficits both visual and auditory, largely as the result of a lack of appropriate experiences. Disadvantaged learners have an inability to sustain attention, particularly where they are faced with structured cognitive demands. They also have a poor self-image that results in early withdrawal from school. They lack motivation towards learning and are associated

with scholastic underachievement and behaviour problems, especially truancy and delinquency (De Witt & Booysen 1995:132-133; Pianta 1996:32-34; Jackman 2001:394).

There does, however, appear to be a lack of emphasis placed on children with special needs including those with disabilities and those impacted by HIV/Aids. The majority of registered ECD centres do not have intervention programmes to support children with disabilities. Parents of children with disabilities and learning impairments will face challenges finding suitable ECD centres that will meet their needs. To add to all these the researcher is of the opinion that also Learner Teacher Support materials (LTSM) is very important for the successful implementation of ECD programmes and Learning and they are inadequate in many centres to secure quality early learning and stimulation.

The DSD may need to do more to provide centres with these materials, encourage donations, or offer subsidies to better assist centres to acquire these materials themselves. ECD practitioners and principals are inadequately qualified and ECD centres are not following accredited curricula or standardized progress assessments for their children. Parents are not routinely provided with progress reports (Van Wyk, 2010). He further adds that ECD infrastructure, learning and teaching support materials and programmes do not cater for children with disabilities and other special needs.



The Constitution of South Africa emphasizes that the rights of all people, including children and people with disabilities, are important and should be respected (Republic of South Africa 1996a: 7-39). This new Constitution led to changes in South African education: education became the right of all people, even those with disabilities. The South African Schools Act 84 of 1996 was established to promote the ideals of the Constitution (Department of Education 1996b). The changes in South African politics and education led the way for research into ways to deliver free, fair and inclusive education. Education White Paper No. 6 (2001: 16) states that inclusive education and training:

- acknowledge that all children and youth can learn and that all children and youth need support;

- Accept and respect the fact that all learners are different in some way and have different learning needs which are equally valued and an ordinary part of our human experience;
- Enable education structures, systems and learning methodologies to meet the needs of all learners;
- Acknowledge and respect differences in learners, whether due to age, gender, ethnicity, language, class, disability or HIV status;
- Are broader than formal schooling and acknowledge that learning also occurs in the home and community, and within formal and informal modes and structures;
- Change attitudes, behaviour, teaching methodologies, curricula and the environment to meet the needs of all learners;
- Maximize the participation of all learners in the culture and the curricula of educational institutions, uncover and minimize barriers to learning; and
- Empower learners by developing their individual strengths and enabling them to participate critically in the process of learning".



Inclusive education is generally a new field of research, but researchers have already made valuable contributions that could be used for new or further research in this field. Alant and Harty (2011: 78) focus on early childhood intervention in the South African context, and include a case study of a local learner with learning disabilities. This makes it easy to relate their research to the South African context. They are in favour of Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological approach to early childhood intervention, because "it emphasizes that situations and actions of people in the child's environment significantly impact on child development - irrespective of whether the child has direct contact with the environment or not" (Alant & Harty, 2011: 80).

Research generally shows that South Africa lags behind the rest of the world in terms of research in early intervention in inclusive education (Walton, Hugo & Muller, 2009: 105). Still, we can learn from global research findings as we seek to address our unique South African challenges (Stofile & Green, 2007: 61). Alant and Harty (2011:79) and McKenzie and Loebenstein (2007: 200) state that we are moving in the right direction and that our post-apartheid policies promote early childhood education. As an illustration, Atmore et

al. (2012) point out that the centres', particularly pre-grade R, programmes registered community-based ECD and facilities themselves are listed under the Department of Social Development. It is mandatory that registered community-based ECD meet the programme and infrastructural requirements of the department. Upon registration, ECD centres become eligible for per child funding for specific items like feeding schemes, and staffing. However, the department does not currently provide any kind of funding for specific maintenance and upgrades of the facilities. They do conduct follow-ups or check whether the facilities are maintained properly (Atmore et al., 2012). Another party involved in ensuring that ECD centres meet DSD standards is a local government's Environment Health Office that inspects ECD community-based centres before they are approved to operate legally.

Currently, the owner of the registered community-based centre self-funds the facility up-dates and is responsible for maintenance and any kind of improvements (Atmore et al., 2012). The location for establishing an ECD facility must adhere to local government land use regulations and other infrastructural standards. For example, a government sponsored ECD centre is required to be situated within an area that meets the Department of Social Development's standards of being located in "local service points or community service locations", also referred to "Location Zoning" (PPT, 2014:7). These standards are in line with the Department of Human Settlements by regulations that require crèches to be built near community halls in or-der to reduce investment costs.



In addition, another setback faced by ECD centres located in informal settlements is lack of funds, which prevents them from registering their centres. For example, most ECD centres are not located in areas which allow for registration. Some ECD centres operate in association with NGOs that are well resourced. As a result they are of better quality and may be located in DSD compliant locations. However, these centres may not be affordable to people who reside in informal settlements (Republic of South Africa, 2013).

### 2.11.1 ECD centres within Informal Settlements

According to the Project Preparation Trust report, informal ECD centres play a crucial role in poor households (PPT, 2014). Informal centres are regarded to be based in an informal

settlement, be operating without formal registration or both. The informal ECD centres serve as the main care support for poor parents or caregivers who lack affordability and access to formal ECD services (PPT, 2014). The informal ECD centres serve those who are socially and economically marginalised, particularly the poor households that lack access to formal ECD services (PPT, 2014).

The informal ECD services themselves are under-resourced and face challenges such as poor community conditions and lack of basic infrastructure. Informal ECD centres are important for poor households who urgently need child minding services at an affordable rate. In this situation, ECD centres located within informal settlements operate as unrecognized day care facilities which assist with caring for children of, for example, working mothers (PPT, 2014). One of the main reasons that some ECD centres might be of poor quality is because they are under resourced. For example, they lack sufficient funding to provide professionally trained personnel, essential facilities or structured programmes to under-take ECD services (van der Merwe, 2015). Despite the lack of resources, parents may trust the caretaker to watch over their children. These services are provided to these parents with very few resources when compared to most ECD centres administered by private entities or, for the most part, NGOs which, in comparison, are relatively costly, well-resourced and are mostly located in safe areas (PPT, 2014).



Some of the identified research gaps around poverty reduction and ECD were highlighted in the 2014 PPT paper particularly around infrastructure. For example, many ECD centres are located within informal settlements where they lack proper registration and thereby do not meet the minimum standard requirements. The DSD request all ECD centres to be registered in or-der for them to be formalised and thereby access various government resources. There; how-ever, remains an unknown number of unregistered centres within poor areas. The PPT report also designed a categorisation framework which disaggregates the various physical conditions of the ECD centre infrastructure. The group uses three categories: Category ‘A’, ‘B’ and ‘C’. The first, Category ‘A’, consists of ECD centres which are either fully or partially registered. In the case of these partially registered entities, the ECD centre can benefit from some support to qualify them as fully-

fledged, recognised centres. ECD centres ranked within the Category 'B' require some level of 'emergency assistance' in, for example, improved health and safety. These centres may warrant immediate attention and assistance in facilitating their full registration. The third, Category 'C', consists of ECD centres that are in dire states, and according to PPT, they are regarded as 'low functioning.' These centres also require immediate attention to improve their ECD services.

At the moment, there is little information about ECDs located with-in poor communities such as informal settlements. The technical categories would be a start to give some descriptive information on the state of available ECD centres within the country's urban informal areas. Besides the paucity of information on ECD infrastructure, the PPT review had a dearth of information about poverty reduction. Within informal settlements, some infra-structure, such as sanitation and water, may not be readily available to ECD centres. Land and buildings may not be owned by the ECD caretaker, yet given the high demands for affordable child care; the centre will operate through informal rental agreements and be outside of formal zoning regulations. Despite these limitations, these child minders operate because parents prefer to leave their children with a responsible adult rather than unsupervised at home or left on the streets (van der Walt et al., 2014).



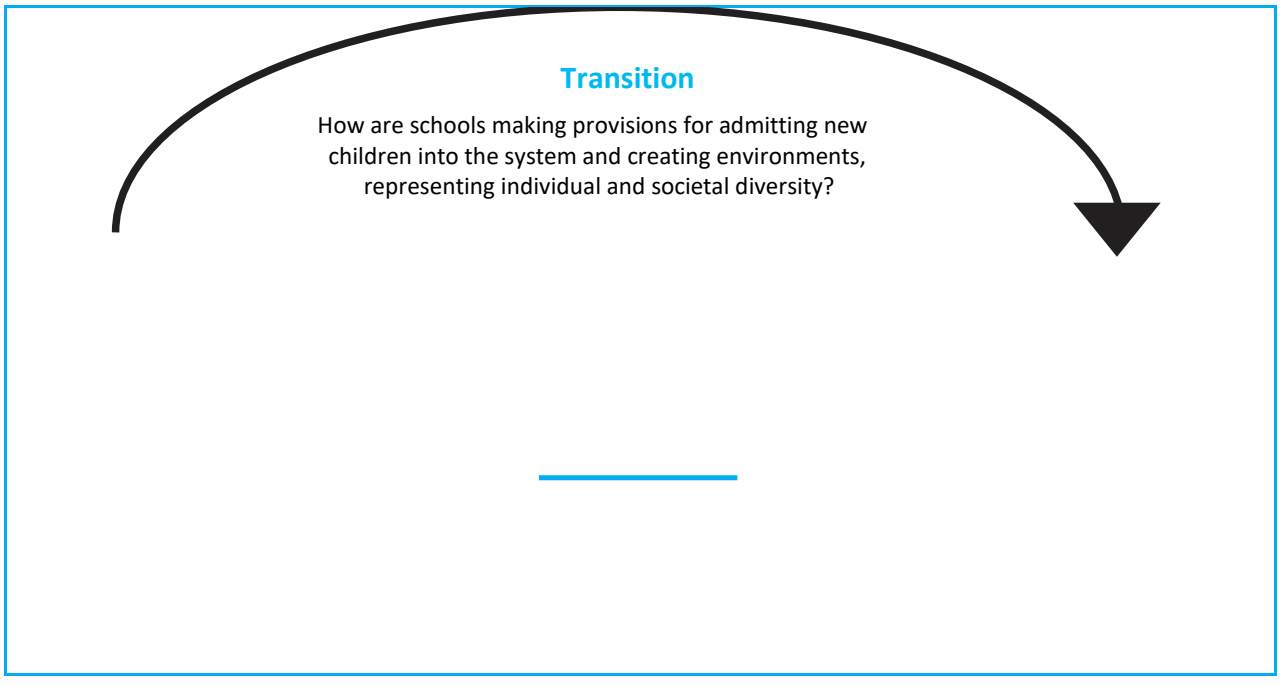
Consideration of flexibilities around these infrastructural resources would be beneficial to ECD caretakers within the settlement to still be able to provide the child care services. For example, the restrictions around certain aspects on the ECD formalization process could be relaxed or revised to fit the current living conditions, for example, the inadequate water and sanitation facilities within informal settlements. Given the South African government's recent interest to provide informal settlement upgrades, the parental preferences in accessing affordable and quality child care programmes and facilities would need to be considered. It would be in the interest of ECD policymakers to consider equity in resource allocation to the poorest facilities given the diverse set of ECD centres which currently exist within informal settlements. Consequently, support and funding are required to provide quality ECD and thereby promote human development in informal settlements. The support for ECD in informal areas is regarded by many as a valuable

investment for the country and community (PPT, 2014). This educational intervention can also be regarded as a way to break out of persistent poverty within poor communities (PPT, 2014).

The ‘ready schools’ dimension focuses on the school environment. It includes practices that: a) foster and support a smooth transition for children to primary school and beyond; and b) promote learning for all children. Ready schools characteristically create continuity and maintain learning expectations for children between early learning and primary school environments. Other important quality characteristics include the practices schools use to bridge the cultural divide between home and school (Shor, 2005: 5–14).

All three dimensions of school readiness are important and must work together to ensure that the time of transition for the child, family and school system is smooth. Interlinked, they support each other in building competencies and preparing for the transition from home to school. The three dimensions of school readiness are influenced by social, cultural, economic, policy and historic factors.





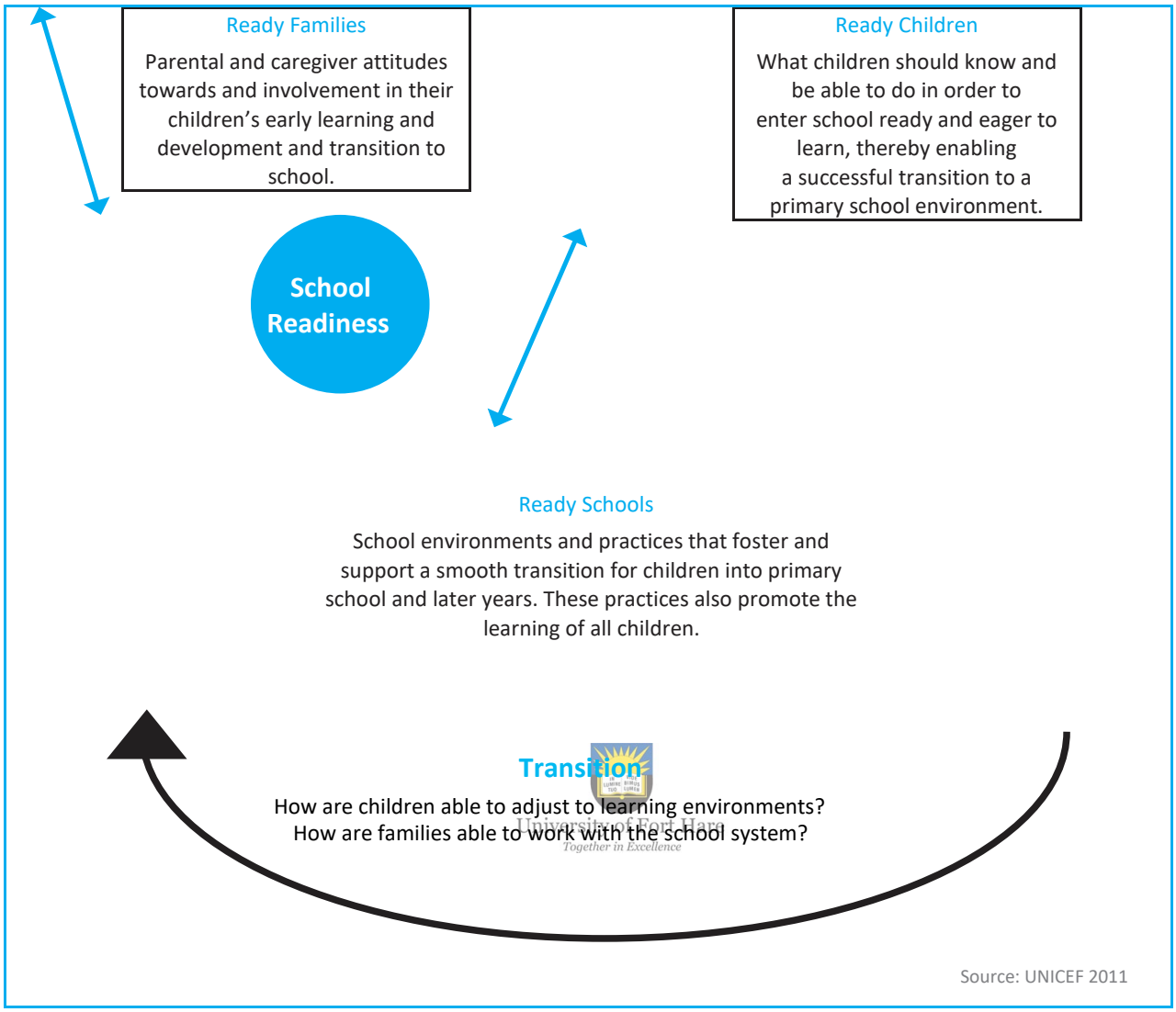



***Figure 2: The three dimensions of school readiness***

The South African government has recognised ECD as a critical area. Policy makers have made the effort to ensure appropriate, equitable ECD policy, particularly through supporting poor and vulnerable children (Biersteker, 2012). Of the latest available information on registered ECD centres in the country, there were reported 18 000 in South Africa [as of the 2013 Department of Social Development's (DSD) annual report]. The government, through the respective departments - the Department of Education (DoE), Department of Health (DoH) and the Department of Social Development - and their

relevant stakeholders, are addressing the existing policy gaps through the implementation of ECD programmes (Storbeck & Moodley, 2010).

The government of South Africa, through the DSD, presented a draft national ECD policy (13 March 2015), which is currently under public review prior to its final ratification (Republic of South Africa, 2015). This draft ECD policy falls under the DSD's 18 September 2013 mandate and is promoted through the South African integrated programme for Early Childhood Development – Moving Ahead (2013-2016). With this said, the government of South Africa would need to make some key financial allocations to ensure the implementation of ECD policy is cost effective and equitable, especially to ensure material and infrastructural resources reach the poorest of the poor.

A nation's progress depends on its capacity to produce the best possible human capital under equitable means (Department of Social Development, 2015). This involves significant government-funded initiatives which provide suitable educational conditions and essential resources required for child development. The provision of equitable and quality education is to ensure that each child within the country can reach his or her full potential. This section of the literature review will specifically address what policy exists in regards to ECD with specific focus on the policy content around infrastructure provision. Atmore et al., (2012) indicate the need to increase access to adequate ECD programmes in South Africa because of the currently inadequate provision for its highly demanded services particularly amongst disadvantaged households. Households lack resources to pay for ECD services and more specifically, parents and caregivers lack finances to send their children to traditional centre-based ECD centres. Traditional centre-based ECD facilities consist of diverse and established physical structures, sometimes within public schools, community-based and home-based facilities. In addition, the centres are run by both trained and untrained practitioners providing ECD care and education for a number of children from age 0 to 6 years (Atmore et al., 2012).

Presently, government departments (Health, Social Development and Basic Education) in partnership with stakeholders in the field of ECD, such as non-profit organizations and formal ECD centres, work together towards ensuring that ECD centres are operating efficiently. While the institutions work together, each government department has its own policy in undertaking their tasks on ECD. To begin with, all the departments (Health, Social Development and Basic Education) regulate some aspects of children within different age cohorts between 0 and 9 years old. With specific emphasis on ECD, the Department of Health (DoH) caters for children from the pre- and postnatal stages up to 5 years old around health issues; the Department of Social Development (DSD) is responsible for children between birth to 4 years old on ECD before Grade R; and lastly, the Department of Basic Education (DBE) focuses on children in Grade R or 5 years old.

With the above-mentioned departmental mandates in mind, the amended Children's Amendment Act (41 of 2007) and the National Integrated Plan (NIP) for ECD specifically inform policy for the ECD service delivery for children under the age of 6 years (Kibel et al., 2010). Both policies consider the provision of early childhood care and education within households, societies, departments or organizations. ECD centres play a pivotal role towards ensuring that the basic education needs of children are addressed (Richter et al., 2012).



### 2.11.2 Teaching Methods in ECD

Zembat and Zulfikar (2006:605) showed that stories and tales have important effects in mathematical concept development such as geometry, measurement and graphic abilities. The teaching methods and techniques have functional qualities that help children to be more attentive, develop memory capacity, get cues easily and join the learning process (Miranda, 2004:49). It is thus necessary to prepare the curriculum to include these different teaching methods and techniques so that children acquire learning skills and develop appropriately during the pre-school period when they are receptive to learning (Zembat & Zulfikar, 2006:603).

The approaches of ECD learning include recognising individual differences which in turn, lead to the active participation of children. A study by Rotumoi and Too (2012:4) agreed saying that it is necessary to implement teaching methods that involve activities based on senses and that instructional resources are influenced by the choice of teaching methods used in ECD (Zembat & Zulfikar, 2006: 604). If learners are to benefit from them, teaching methods must be determined by the child's level of conceptual development. However, there is a tendency by teachers to use teaching methods that are not effective (Rotumoi & Too, 2012:3). The current study sought to establish whether the teaching methods used by the ECD teachers were effective to prepare children for formal schooling.

Teaching methods used by the teachers strongly influence the quality of ECD programmes in that, children's early literacy mastery as well as their holistic development is enhanced (UNICEF, 2000:7; Excell & Linington, 2011:11). Teaching methods coupled with the choice of appropriate teaching content influences the quality of ECD children's learning positively or negatively (Myers, 2004:8). Research on pre-school children's learning has shown that children learn through play which leads to holistic development in goal-directed ECD centres (Kamerman, 2000:12; Johansson & Pramling-Samuelsson, 2006:50). For example, the University of North Carolina's Abecedarian early childhood intervention programme found that children, who received an enriched, play-oriented early childhood programme, had higher IQs at the age of five than a comparable group of children who did not get a play oriented programme (Johansson & Pramling-Samuelsson, 2006:53). In a play-oriented early childhood programme, there must be an osculation between fantasy and reality, the positions of the teacher and the child have both to be equally interested and curious, both teacher and child should be actively involved and there should be space for children's initiatives and ideas (Excell & Linington 2011:11).

Johansson and Pramling-Samuelsson (2006:56) suggest that play, work and love should be the three main criteria for an ECD model of education. Play, work and love enable the ECD children to adopt societal roles and policies in keeping with the socio-cultural theory resultantly enhancing their holistic development. The intention of this study was to establish whether the ECD programmes in the Queenstown district were using child-

centred methods of teaching as a quality measure of ECD programmes. Ailwood (2003:286) explains that play in ECD forms a significant nodal point at which understanding of childhood, motherhood, family, psychology and citizenship collide. Play enhances learning in ECD children. Play is viewed as progress and is assumed to always be a positive teaching method. Play is divided into physical, social, fantasy and games with rules describing each in developmental terms (Ailwood, 2003:289; Rotumoi & Too, 2012:10).

According to Mulford (2003:12), play behaviours are characterised by active participation, intrinsic motivation, attention to means rather than ends and freedom from external rules. Play is thus non-serious, enjoyable, social and often includes fantasy. Ailwood (2003:289) argues that, these play characteristics are not readily available in ECD settings which may be regulated by a timetable that often includes inside and outside activities. From a developmental perspective, play as a teaching method, is a primary vehicle and indicator for children's mental growth (Ailwood, 2003:290).



Child initiated, teacher-directed and child-directed play is an essential component of developmentally appropriate practice which links with the Vygotsykian notion of zone of proximal development (Miranda, 2004:48). Play is regulated by the physical space in which it occurs, the presence of adults and the availability of resources. In ECD, dramatic play marks the whole of play and involves song, dance, rhymes and roleplaying among others. It is widely accepted that play is an activity that leads to development in children (Rotumoi & Too, 2012:10). Children learn best when they act upon their environment and construct knowledge for themselves (Ailwood, 2003:290).

Children perform with concrete objects which are symbols for something they have experienced directly or indirectly. Children from three years onwards, through play, explore the world through physical actions to experiment with their movements and discover what they can do. According to Ailwood (2003:289), children become presenters of their experiences and doers of their activities. In representational play, preschool children use speech and language and become storytellers of pretend events. Dramatic

play is an imitation of reality of the microsystems and children create themes and act them out by participating in various roles (Myers, 2004:10). By so doing, they are able to imitate the physical world and human relationships through symbolic representations (Ackerman & Barnett, 2009:333; Ailwood, 2003:290). Dramatic play enables children to use toys, to say things they cannot verbalise, to do things they would otherwise feel uncomfortable doing and to express feelings and emotions they might be reprimanded for expressing in other contexts. As children act out relationships and experience, putting themselves in another person's shoes, they are led to sophisticated understanding of themselves and others.

## 2.12 Strategies that can enhance parent involvement in ECD centres

According to the National Planning Commission, National Development Plan (2011:264) “ECD is critical for ensuring that children reach their full potential and parents and teachers are the key stakeholders in ECD, especially at the implementation stage”. Parents are the primary caregivers of their children and central figures at the heart of their children’s lives (Faruhar, 2003 in Mukuna & Indoshi, 2012). There are steps that ECD centres can take to establish and maintain their relationship with parents, and there are responsibilities that parents can take to enhance this relationship with the ECD teachers. Parent involvement in ECD has long been considered a key component for positive child development, positive attitude and behaviour and student achievement. This is because strong links between a child’s home and the ECD centre promote developmental opportunities.



Jones, White, Aeby and Benson (2010) argue that the nature and quality of home-ECD centre collaboration and the extent of parent involvement is determined by parents, ECD teachers and other adults. ECD teachers have both the ability and professional responsibility to facilitate ECD centre-home collaboration. In other words, teachers are central to supporting parent involvement in the development of young children. Kotaman (2008) in Şad and Gűrbűztűrk (2013) revealed that engaging parents in the education process of a child can lead to positive academic achievement, increased school attendance, better social adaptation and fewer disciplinary problems. In spite of parent involvement being an important variable that has a positive influence on children’ education, parents are still not involved in their children’s education (Wanke, 2008).
Parent involvement enhances components of children’s education including daily attendance, cognitive and social skills, behaviour and attitude, confidence and motivation.

According to the Harvard Family Research Project (2006), parent involvement takes various forms and this includes good parenting at home, providing secure and stable environment, intellectual stimulation and contact with ECD centres. The Harvard Family

Research Project (HFRP, 2006) discussed that child-rearing is the family involvement process which includes the values, attitudes and practices of parents in raising young children. Participation of parents in child-centred activities, especially play is essential for social and emotional development of children. Parents' participation in arts and crafts, and other similar activities with their children is linked to children's literacy development. HFRP (2006) mentioned that social and cultural contexts have an influence on parenting styles. Parent participation in ECD centre-based activities and frequent communication between parents and teachers is linked to young children's academic outcomes. Examples of parent participation practices include attending parent-teacher conferences, assisting with class activities and partaking in extended class visits. The kind of participation stated above is associated with social, motor and basic school skills (HFRP, 2006). HFRP, (2006) further indicated other examples of how parents and child centres can work hand in hand;

**1. Partnership as a priority:** ECD centres with mission statements that highlight the importance of ECD centre-home relationships clearly communicate their commitment to including parents as collaborators in the development of their children. Patrikakou (2008) argues that effective implementation of the mission statement requires the necessary courses and training to support ECD teachers to put parent involvement into practice. She further strongly believes that ECD centres should find ways to systemically recognize and reward positive parent-teacher partnership efforts. Miksic (2015) gave examples of traditional understandings of parent involvement and the following were mentioned; attending parent-teacher conferences, supervising fieldtrips, volunteering in classroom and supervising children's work. Hanni and Phippen (2010) discussed parent involvement in the classroom. In their paper, it was stated that teachers and staff need to have positive attitude in order for parents to feel welcomed and wanted in classrooms. Hanni and Phippen (2010) also stated that single parents with full time jobs barely have time for their children's education.



**2. Planned effort:** Effective ECD centre-home partnerships need to be carefully planned and implemented. According to Patrikakou (2008), at the beginning of a child's ECD

years, a parent needs and views of their involvement within the ECD centres must be assessed. Such an assessment accomplishes two goals: (a) it helps teachers plan parent outreach efforts more effectively (b) it conveys to parents the important message that their perspective is valued and will be used within ECD centres.

**3. Proactive and persistent communication:** ECD centres should regularly inform parents about classroom routines (such as nap time, outdoor games, indoor activities, snack time, reading time and storytelling time) and provide parents with ideas on how they can participate effectively in the early years of the child. The Harvard Family Research Project (2006) believes that ECD teachers should approach parent involvement in 'overlapping and multiple way'. Using a variety of approaches and follow-up communications can increase the number of parents to reach. This maintains the flow of information that can lead to a child's improved academic and social performance (Patrikakou (2008).For example, ECD teachers can help promote parent workshops and parent-child groups within the ECD centre. In order to develop home-ECD centre relationships, teachers should communicate frequently with parents about their children's development and also provide opportunities for parents to visit the classrooms. Once ECD centres provide such openness to parents, parents are able to take responsibility for their children's learning outside the ECD centres by providing materials and ideas which parents can use at home and within the community.



**4**. **Programme monitoring:** Teacher-parent partnership activities can be improved when they are systematically evaluated. Throughout the school year, as part of the ECD centre plan teachers need to examine the effectiveness of the strategies and materials they use, ask for the parents' feedback and adjust their practices accordingly. In this way, activities can be fine-tuned continuously and will have greater potential for yielding positive results in ECD. Patrikakou (2008) suggests that an end-of-year evaluation will provide closure for the year's efforts and valuable insights for next year's planning. In a new study conducted by Ben-Gurion University of the Negev (Kantrowitz, 2011), researchers found that if parents had a more positive, supportive attitude and communicated the learning value as motivation, rather than focusing on completing assignments or getting higher

grades, then the child's attitude and motivation would improve. The study also showed that parents should investigate their own motivations, attitudes and competence before trying to influence children (Kantrowitz, 2011).

This concludes that the attitude and behaviour of parents towards learning are essential in the attitude and motivation of their children towards school and schoolwork. According to Harju (2013:12), obtaining new knowledge about parenting skills and child development enables parents to critically evaluate the impact of their experiences on their own development and their existing parenting practices, and to consider that there may be more effective ways of guiding and responding to their children. Valuable knowledge about the nature and importance of early childhood development especially early brain development enables parents to know what young children need most in order to flourish: nurturing, responsive, reliable and trusting relationships; regular, predictable and consistent routines; interactive language experiences; a physically and emotionally safe environment; and opportunities to explore and to learn by doing.



UNICEF (2013) adds that optimal conditions at home greatly affect a child's wellbeing. Responsible parenting further includes the close monitoring of children's activities, supervision of their behaviour, encouraging their socio-emotional and cognitive competencies and providing directions and guidance in daily life. Providing a safe and stimulating home environment, which allows children to play, explore and discover, forms a critical piece of this growth process and can increase a child's chances of thriving and attaining an optimal level of development, to later become a dependable and productive adult.

**5. Family Experience:** Evidence is growing that children's family experiences affect their readiness for school (Jeynes, 2010). Three of the most important parental influences on children's adjustment to school are parental expectations of school success, cognitive stimulation that the child receives at home, and parent-child interactions. Children whose parents expect them to do well in school tend to perform better than do children whose parents have low expectations, even taking the child's mental ability into consideration.

Evidence consistently indicates that the cognitive stimulation that the child experiences at home is also systematically related to children's school performance (Belsky & MacKinnon, 1994; Bloch, 2012). Families who engaged in more teaching at home and who provided more toys, games, and books had children who outperformed their age-mates in reading and writing early in their school years (Savage, 2002). The parenting styles of parents (e.g., their level of warmth in interacting with their children) and marital interaction styles (i.e., negative and positive interactions) significantly predicted children's kindergarten achievement. For example, conflict in the household in particular, whether between parent and child (Belsky& MacKinnon, 1994; Bloch, 2012; MacKinnon, 1989) or between spouses (Cummings, Iannotti, & Zahn-Waxler, 1985; Emery, 1982) has been consistently linked to children's academic and social functioning in kindergarten.

**Suggestions Educators Can Give to Parents**

Educators can offer some specific suggestions for parents to consider in the early childhood years to promote readiness to learn. A few suggestions follow (Bulach, Lunenburg, & Potter, 2012; Lunenburg & Irby, 2002).



- **Read to preschool children at least 20 minutes a day.** Regular reading to children is one of the most important activities parents can do with their children to improve their readiness for school, serve as their child's first teacher, and instill a love of books and reading.
- **Keep good books, magazines, and newspapers in the house; the home can mirror the school in this respect.** Make it easy – both for adults and children – to find something interesting to read in the home.
- **Add to children's enjoyment of reading by discussing each book they read.** Discussing the book familiarizes children with story components such as character, plot, action, and sequence and helps them associate language with printed text. Offer them computer-assisted games that promote language, writing, mathematics, and thinking.
- **Make sure children see parents or the caregiver read for at least 20 minutes a day.** Remember, parents are a child's first teacher. Children spend the majority of their time outside of school.

- **If a parent has difficulty reading, tell children stories.** Telling stories is another important way that parents can participate in shared literacy activities with their children. In some cultures, storytelling and oral traditions play a more central role than reading books aloud.
- **Limit children's television viewing to no more than two hours a day.** Studies indicate that while some television viewing every day is alright, excessive time watching television is directly linked to poor school performance. Watch the program with the child; then discuss the program and its implications in simple lessons.
- **Know what kind of homework is expected from teachers, and make sure children complete it.** The more involved you are in your children's schoolwork, the more involved your children will be. Provide children with a regular, quiet place where they can do homework. Set up a place with few distractions, but close enough so they can ask you questions. Technology, through local and national service companies, now affords individual campuses the luxury of having homework hotlines, school announcements, and individualized teacher messages for parents to call.



- **Demonstrate commitment to high standards.** Don't ask teachers to give children grades or promotions they have not earned. The goal is a good education, not a good report card. Have high expectations of children. Encourage them and tell them that —You can do it!‖ Words can be strengthening or demoralizing.
- **Support school efforts to develop and maintain rules for student discipline.** Children thrive in an environment where they know what is expected of them. Children want a safe and supportive environment at school.
- **Help interest children in learning outside of the school day.** Find out about after-school and summer programs in the community. School leaders need to avail parents of such programs or assist them in beginning a few for the children on their campuses.

Without education about what high quality care is, parents who are uninformed on the subject may mistakenly believe they have obtained high quality care for their children when in fact they have not (Raikes et al., 2012). Ryan, Johnson, Rigby, and Brooks-Gunn

(2011) argue that in order for parents who receive subsidies for childcare to obtain higher quality childcare, they need to (a) spend their subsidy on high quality care, (b) be able to distinguish between high and low quality care, and (c) have high quality care available to them as a realistic option. While the first and third point are, on the surface, related to personal decision making and market resources, respectively, the second point specifically draws attention to the importance of parents' knowledge about quality care as being central to parents utilizing higher quality childcare. According to Shlay et al. (2005), parents showed preference for childcare centers that are licensed and accredited and indicated that such centers are worth extra cost compared to childcare centers that are not licensed or accredited. While it is easy to rely on a single indicator for quality (e.g., *Is the childcare center accredited?* (Dinehart et al., 2013), doing so may not help parents find a childcare provider who offers the qualities the parent is looking for. Educating parents as to what the type of characteristics parents should look for is an important outcome of understanding parents' perceptions about childcare quality.



Parents should provide safe and secure surroundings where children can experience love, and where there is provision for most of their needs in order for them to fulfil their learning task as best they can (Prinsloo, 2011: 42; Bornman & Rose, 2010: 16). This statement emphasizes that any study in this field should not overlook the socio-economic factors that influence the learning experiences of parents and children. Prinsloo (2011: 33) also refers to a "general disintegration of family life" in the modern South African context. All these influential factors should be considered when one undertakes a study to explore the role of parents in the early intervention of pre-school children with learning and developmental difficulties.

"Many earlier psychologists, particularly those influenced by Freud, believed that early childhood experiences were critical, especially for emotional/social and cognitive development" (Woolfolk, 2010: 27). This statement is based on the fact that brain development is most favourable in the early years of a child's life. "By the time the child is born, they have all the neurons they will ever have, about 100 to 200 billion, and each neuron has 2,500 synapses. By age 2 to 3, each neuron has around 15,000 synapses; children this age have many more synapses than they will have as adults" (Woolfolk 2010:

29). Firstly, this suggests that a child is ready to receive early intervention in the preschool years, even if he or she has a learning or developmental difficulty. Secondly, this statement emphasizes that educational psychology should be seen as an important factor when doing research on early intervention in inclusive education. Stivers, Francis-Cropper and Straus (2008:10) also acknowledge the importance of early intervention in inclusive education and the important role that parents should play in this regard. They offer practical, step-by-step "strategies teachers can use throughout the year to help families of children with and without disabilities, and by extension, the broader community understand and appreciate inclusive education and their roles in ensuring its success". Their approach suggests that teachers should become facilitators in forming partnerships between themselves, families and the broader community.

Pang (2010: 183) states that teachers should strive to understand the needs and priorities of families. She emphasizes the benefits of family-orientated activities, and the usefulness of family resources in the design of early intervention processes. Pretis (2012: 7) describes early intervention as "any kind of support for children and parents in the early years". He points out that early intervention is successful when support is given to both children and parents. His demographic data help one to understand why early intervention appears to be a successful and "well established preventive service in Europe" (Pretis 2012: 7). This preliminary literature review emphasizes the importance of early intervention in inclusive education and gives insight into international, as well as South African research on early intervention in inclusive education. Parents are identified as the primary role players in the process of early intervention



Policies regarding childcare can greatly benefit from understanding parents' perceptions about childcare quality. This is especially true with regards to childcare subsidies, in which many current policy considerations pertain. In most states that have childcare subsidies, parents are given the freedom to choose any legal childcare provider that they believe is suitable for their family's needs (Raikes et al., 2012). Despite this flexibility, most policies about childcare subsidies emphasize the importance of children receiving high quality childcare that will increase children's school readiness skills (Kim & Fram, 2009). If

parents are unable to distinguish between high and low quality childcare, it is probable that the goal to increase growth and learning through early education is not being met because children attending childcare centers with subsidies (i.e., children from low-income families) are likely receiving low quality care and thus not reaping the benefits that high quality care promotes. Therefore, it is important to understand parents' perceptions about childcare quality when creating policy and evaluating policy effectiveness. Knowing what parents perceive as high childcare quality provides information about whether parents are actively making the decision to send their children to high quality care, provided the subsidy is sufficient to cover the cost of high quality care and high quality care is available in the parents' communities (Ryan et al., 2011).

## 2.13 Implications for the present study

In the national audit of registered ECD centres in 2013 commissioned by DSD, the report does not address the possible legal issues that may arise if public funds are paid to the mostly privately-run centres which are located in these homes, both in rural and urban areas. ECD programmes need the funding and guidance necessary to implement interventions that will maximize parent's involvement in their children's learning and build parent's skills in supporting the children's school readiness. In addition, significant professional development is needed to help caregivers to develop necessary skills to help parents support their children's early learning. This is a critical issue that needs to be addressed in the finalized ECD funding policy.



The researcher is of the opinion that a lack of emphasis placed on children with special needs including those with disabilities and those impacted by HIV/Aids may have the bad results for children with disabilities and disabilities. The majority of registered ECD centres do not have intervention programmes to support children with disabilities, no staff with first-aid training nor specialization in dealing with children's special needs and disabilities. Parents of children with disabilities and learning impairments will face challenges finding suitable ECD centres that will meet their needs. On the other hand preschools lack the human and infrastructural resources to stimulate children cognitively and non-cognitively, and therefore rather function as child-minding facilities, hence the researcher investigates

the views of caregivers and parents on preschool education as a readiness programme for the young children. A substantial number of centres do not take any concrete action when they identify malnourished children.

The implication of this study is further to also make us strive to understand how these programmes intersect with existing cultural practices, the home learning environment and the larger community. Vygotsky in his theory refers to refers to 'elementary mental functions', attention sensation, perception and memory. Eventually, through interaction within the sociocultural environment, these are developed into more sophisticated and effective mental processes/strategies which he refers to as 'higher mental functions.' For example, memory in young children is limited by biological factors. However, culture taking to aid memory, determines the type of memory strategy we develop. For example, in our Xhosa culture, we learn note-but in pre-literate societies, other strategies must be developed, such as tying knots in a string to remember, or carrying pebbles, or repetition of the names of ancestors until large numbers can be repeated.

Vygotsky refers to tools of intellectual adaptation-these allow children to use the basic mental functions more effectively/adaptively, and these are culturally determined (e.g., memory mnemonics, mind maps). He, therefore, sees cognitive functions, even those carried out alone, as affected by the beliefs, values, and tools of intellectual adaptation of the culture in which a person develops and therefore socio-culturally determined. The tools of intellectual adaptation, therefore, vary from culture to culture - as in the memory example.



## 2.14 Chapter summary

In this chapter, the review of literature related to caregivers' and parents' views about preschool education as a readiness programme has been presented. The literature studied revealed that the prospects of ECD in other countries, including South Africa, are vigorous when one looks at all the policy frameworks and commissions in place that monitor ECD. But on the other hand they reflect the discouraging findings of reports on the implementation and quality of ECD which mirrors gaps between policy and practice, inter-sectorial differences without a shared vision, goals and accountability, and

significant gaps in service delivery to poor communities, like those in the Queenstown district. Thus it can be concluded that the provision of ECD in South Africa, especially the rural part of it with illiterate parents and child-headed households, is not opening early learning opportunity for all young children, therefore there are very few opportunities to be benefited by young children in South Africa at large. Literature reviewed shows that government should urgently improve funding, infrastructure, the supply of learner support materials and equipment for ECD especially for children in poor circumstances, rural areas, and informal urban areas as well as for children with disabilities. In this regard, it can be concluded that school readiness is not being closely monitored enough and more essentially the enormous innate potential of young children may remain tragically, a closed book to the detriment of the population at large and the future social and economic welfare of the country.

Literature reviewed further revealed that effective parent support programmes should be introduced and promoted that acknowledges and reinforces the importance of early stimulation and positive parenting for young children. Parent support programmes should be considered the backbone of governments' efforts to ensure early stimulation of young children. A renewed focus on training in ECD principles and practices is crucial in an effort for ECD practitioners to know 'how' to have knowledge and understanding of the preschooler's growth and development. Overall, the section gives insight into the theoretical framework underpinning the present study; and preliminary presentation of some empirical studies on ECD education and care. This chapter also presented Lev Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory of Cognitive Development. The Vygotsky theory of cognitive development is mainly concerned with the more complex cognitive activities of children that are governed and influenced by several principles. Believing that children construct knowledge actively, Vygotsky's theory is also one of those responsible for laying the groundwork for constructivism. According to Vygotsky (1978), much important learning by the child occurs through social interaction with a skillful tutor. The tutor may model behaviours and/or provide verbal instructions for the child. He refers to this as cooperative or collaborative dialogue. The child seeks to understand the actions or instructions provided by the tutor (often the parent or caregiver) then internalizes the information, using it to guide or regulate their own performance.

Shaffer (1996) gives the example of a young girl who is given her first jigsaw. Alone, she performs poorly in attempting to solve the puzzle. The father then sits with her and describes or demonstrates some basic strategies, such as finding all the corner/edge pieces and provides a couple of pieces for the child to put together herself and offers encouragement when she does so. As the child becomes more competent, the father allows the child to work more independently. According to Vygotsky, this type of social interaction involving cooperative or collaborative dialogue promotes cognitive development. In order to gain an understanding of Vygotsky's theories on cognitive development, one must understand two of the main principles of Vygotsky's work: the More Knowledgeable Other (MKO) being his/her peers, parent or caregiver and the Zone of proximal Development (ZPD). There are quite a lot of issues that have been raised from the review of the related literature, including, The National Integrated ECD Policy with reference to the preschool curriculum, concept of school readiness programmes, the Queenstown context – the State of the Art, what studies and researchers say of school readiness programmes, importance of preschool education for children, disadvantages facing children without preschool experience during formal school, caregivers' perspectives on school readiness nature of preschool education, parents' perspectives on school readiness nature of preschool education, challenges facing preschool centres against making children ready for formal schooling, strategies to deal with the challenges facing preschool centres and the implications for the present study.

# CHAPTER THREE

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### 3.1 Introduction

This section presents the methodology t was used, which included the following sections: research paradigm, research approach, design of the study, study site, population of the study, sample size, sampling procedure, instrument for data collection, data collection procedure, data analysis procedure, validity and reliability of the instrument, pilot study and ethical considerations and requirements.

### 3.2 Research Paradigm



In this study, interpretive data and a descriptive survey data were looked at. The researcher believed that interpretive paradigm is more appropriate and effective in this study because it seeks an actual reality in a specific situation. Creswell (2013) state that interpretive approach allows the focus of the researcher to be on understanding what is happening in a given context. In this regard, the descriptive design was also considered appropriate as a means of achieving the main objective of the study. As the above discussion suggests, the researcher gained an in-depth understanding of the caregivers' and parents' views about preschool education as school readiness programme in the Queenstown Education District. A survey was used to collect original data for describing a population too large to observe directly (Polit & Hungler, 2009:178). According to McMillan and Schumacher (2010:489), research surveys involve the selection of a sample of respondents and administering questionnaires or conducting interviews to gather information on variables of interest.

## 3.3 Research approach

On the basis of the paradigm given above, the study followed a mixed methods research approach. Mixed methods research combines elements of qualitative and quantitative research approaches for the broad purpose of increasing the breadth and depth of understanding. The definition of mixed methods, from the first issue of the Journal of Mixed Methods Research, is “research in which the investigator collects and analyzes data, integrates the findings, and draws inferences using both qualitative and quantitative approaches and methods in a single study or program of inquiry” (Tashakkori & Creswell, 2007, p.4). In this study, the researcher was concerned with gaining entry into the opinions and feelings of teachers to obtain rich data (Lipshitz, 2012) from the caregivers and parents as participants.

## 3.4 Research design

This study adopted the triangulation design in which the researcher simultaneously gathered both qualitative and quantitative data, merged them using both the qualitative and quantitative data analysis methods, and then interpreted the results together to provide a better understanding of the caregivers’ and parents’ views about preschool education as a school readiness programme (Creswell, 2013; Denzil & Lincoln, 2011). This researcher is concerned with gaining entry into the opinions and feelings of teachers to obtain rich data (Lipshitz, 2012) from the teachers and parents as participants. Triangulation is broadly defined by Denzin (1978: 291) as "the combination of methodologies in the study of the same phenomenon."Triangulation means using more than one method to collect data on the same topic.



Migiro and Magangi (2011) note that triangulation refers to the use of different data collection methods within one study in order to ensure that the data are telling the researcher what he/she thinks they are telling him/her. Triangulation means that quantitative findings are compared to the qualitative results.

The researcher adopted this research approach because it is a way of assuring the validity of research through the use of a variety of methods to collect data on the same topic, which involves different types of samples as well as methods of data collection.

Bryman (2012) asserts that multiple perspectives on a phenomenon can increase validity or trustworthiness. Hence, multiple perspectives in data collection were used through triangulation of research instruments and data analysis. The data omitted in some of the research instruments was captured from the other quarters to enhance validity. Mouton (2005:277) emphasizes that “triangulation helps to achieve credibility in a study.”

A case study, on the other hand, is ideal when a holistic, in-depth investigation is required to understand a particular phenomenon or experience (Creswell. 2013). A case study entails a process in which the researcher engages in an “intensive study of a single unit for the purpose of understanding a larger class of (similar) units” (MacMillan & Schumacher, 2010). This process required the researcher to obtain data directly by asking people to answer questions, or by engaging them in discussion, and also by observing people in their natural settings.

## 3.5 Study site



Queenstown is situated in the middle of Eastern Cape, roughly half way between smaller towns Cathcart and Sterkstroom. Most of the preschools in rural Queenstown District struggle to deal with issues relating to parents of children who are not always around because most of the young parents are away working in the cities leaving their grandmothers to look after their children. This situation appears to be affecting the smooth running of preschools. There appear to be a number of factors that contribute to the economic hardships experienced, very few residents have completed formal schooling, and in general the educational outcomes of these communities are considered poor (Mahajan, 2014; Statistics South Africa, 2011).

## 3.6 Sample size, Population and sampling technique

The target population for the study was all caregivers teaching in the preschools in Queenstown Education District and also parents of the children in those preschools. The target group was selected from preschools from urban, semi-urban and rural preschools that have a cosmopolitan staff composition, various race groups, including both genders, the senior caregivers and anyone who voluntarily agreed to participate with varying years

of teaching experience in preschools. In cases where no-one volunteered, the researcher purposively selected any caregiver with the best information to address the purpose of this study. There are approximately 150 preschools in this District, with only 50 from those, funded by the DSD, according to Education Management Information System (EMIS) (2017). Classrooms are divided into a 0-2 age group class; a 2-3 age group class and a 3-4 age group class with 25 children in each class and 1 caregiver per class.

Qualitative sampling was done to increase the utility of information from small samples. The researcher then searched for information-rich key informants, groups, places or events to study (MacMillan & Schumacher, 2010). The sample size of the qualitative part of this study comprised caregivers and parents from the six Circuits in Queenstown District. Three preschool teachers and 3 parents for the preschoolers from the rural areas and 3 preschools teachers and 3 parents from the urban areas formed part of this study. Data was obtained through the semi-structured interviews and the two focus groups discussions for both caregivers and parents. The researcher further used the stratified random sampling. The stratified random sampling is used where the population is divided into subgroups or strata on the basis of variables chosen by the researcher, such as gender, age, location or level of education (MacMillan & Schumacher, 2010). On the basis of the researcher's knowledge of the sample of preschool caregivers in the Queenstown district, a judgment was made about which participants should be selected to provide the best information that would address the purpose of this research. Semi-structured interviews were used in this study, because of its flexibility (Creswell, 2013). They allow in-depth discussions to be achieved by providing the opportunity on the part of the interviewer to probe and expand interviewee's responses.



For the quantitative part of this study, questionnaires were used in an effort to reach as many respondents as possible. A questionnaire is a form prepared and distributed to respondents to secure responses to certain questions (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010:158). The two different questionnaires had questions that were similar and other questions were differently phrased for each of the two entities. This was done to determine the exact perceptions and opinions of the respondents.

The population refers to the whole group of individuals from which a sample is drawn and to which results can be generalized (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010:489). Thus, the target

population for this study were purposefully sampled caregivers, and parents who were chosen by the preschool caregivers, on the basis of parents who are highly committed in the education of their preschoolers. The sample was 40 caregivers, which comprised of 2 preschool caregivers from each of the preschools that were chosen by the researcher from each of the 6 Circuits for this research, in both the rural and urban Queenstown district. Co-operative parents (40) were chosen by the caregivers from those preschools in the 6 circuits, 3 parents per preschool, by choosing 1 parent from a 0-2 age group class, 1 parent from a 2-3 age group class and 1parent from a 3-4 age group class.

## 3.7 Instruments for data collection

The researcher used 4 types of instruments for data collection, namely:

1. Interview schedule for caregivers on school readiness (ISC_SR);
2. Interview schedule for parents on school readiness (ISP-SR);
3. Caregivers' Questionnaire on school readiness (CQSR) and;
4. Parents' Questionnaire on school readiness (PQSR).



Data were obtained through the semi-structured interviews and the two focus groups discussions for both caregivers and parents. Semi-structured interviews were used because of its flexibility (Creswell, 2013). They allow in-depth discussions to be achieved by providing the opportunity on the part of the interviewer to probe and expand interviewee's responses. A focus group discussion is an interview with a small group of people on specific topic (Patton, 2002). Members of each focus group should have something in common and characteristics which are important to the topic under investigation (ibid).

Questionnaires were used in this research in an effort to reach as many respondents as possible. A questionnaire is a form prepared and distributed to respondents to secure responses to certain questions (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010:158). According to Creswell, (2013) a questionnaire is a document containing questions designed to solicit information appropriate for analysis. Usually it is information from respondents about their attitudes, knowledge, beliefs and feelings. The two different questionnaires had questions that were similar and others which were differently phrased for each of the two entities. This was done to determine the exact perceptions and opinions of the respondents.

In other words, questionnaires had a series of carefully planned and appropriately worded 20 questions or items on a specific subject set down on paper and provided with spaces where the respondent can fill in the answers or select the answer by putting a mark in the appropriate space. In line with the above view, the questionnaire was deemed an appropriate tool of collecting data for this research because it was regarded as a data collection instrument that set out the questions to be asked in a formal way in order to produce the desired information about the caregivers' and parents' views on school readiness.

The questionnaire items for this study were in the form of a two to three point Likert Scale. The ratings scales were used to manage the degrees of response, intensity of response and the move away from dichotomous questions (Cohen et al, 2007:325). A Likert scale provides a range of responses to a given question or statement and the responses are used to register the extent of agreement or disagreement with statements of attitude, belief or judgment (for example, strongly agree, agree, unsure, disagree and strongly disagree (Vanderstoep & Johnston, 2009:54).



**Introduction in the questionnaires:** The introduction provided the goals of the research and clarified the ethical considerations with regard to this study.

**Section A** requested the biographical details of the participants for the purpose of compiling profiles of all participating caregivers and parents.

**Section B** were statements about caregivers' and parents' understanding of the school readiness nature of preschool education.

**Section C** were statements of what extent do caregivers' practices make children ready for formal school, then in PQSR **Section C** will have statements about how parents assess preschool centres as places that make children ready for formal schooling.

Since the questionnaire, as an instrument, has some limitations, it does not give the researcher the opportunity to probe deeper into the respondent's opinion and feelings. Respondents may give answers that are final and without any clarification, hence Section D open-ended questions to overcome that.

**Section D** requested:

**(i)** Caregivers' and parents' views about challenges/problems facing preschool centres against making children ready for formal schooling, and

**(ii)** Caregivers and parents' views on possible solutions to the challenges/problems facing preschool centres.

Both instruments attempted to obtain information on participants' perceptions, opinions, beliefs and attitudes towards the school readiness developmental programmes for children in preschools in the Queenstown Education District. Moreover, both instruments were carefully organised to enable the researcher to seek broader answers on caregivers' and parents' views about preschool education as a school readiness programme in the Queenstown Education District; questions provided opportunity for both the interviewer and the interviewees to discuss the topic in more detail. All questions were related to intensity of preschool education as readiness developmental programmes in preschools and factors that, currently, affect school readiness of preschool children.



## 3.8 Procedure for data collection

Qualitative research often seeks to illuminate the ways individuals interact to sustain or change social situations, as this study has, as one of its aims. This researcher was personally involved in the process of data collection. With the permission of the participants, tape-recording was used for all the sessions of the data collection procedure. It is envisaged that each interview lasted for 45 minutes and the focus group discussion were directed by the flow of the discussion and caution was applied to avoid constraining the participants' understanding of time and space. To ensure consistency across time, the same questions were asked at each focus group meeting. Caregivers distributed the parents' questionnaires, and parents were chosen by the preschool caregivers on the basis that those parents are highly committed in the education of their preschoolers. The questionnaires were returned to the preschool caregivers by the parents where the researcher collected them. The questionnaires were self-administered at the various preschools of abode. Items in the questionnaire were clearly explained to the respondents before they were made to provide any necessary responses to the items. This ensured

consistency and accuracy of responses of the preschool teachers. The questionnaires were administered and collected after 2 weeks. This was to ensure we get accurate and maximum return rate.

## 3.9 Instruments' trustworthiness

According to Rossman and Rallis (2012), qualitative validity entails achieving the truthfulness, correctness or accuracy of research data. It involves the extent to which the researcher will remain objective and also show adequate selection of the participants in the study. In this study issues of validity and reliability were addressed through instrument credibility (which replaces internal validity) and dependability (which replaces reliability of instrument) according to Shenton (2004).

### 3.9.1 Credibility of instrument

In qualitative research, instrument credibility simply entails a demonstration that the researcher through the use a particular instrument, accurately measured what he or she had intended to measure. To achieve this, Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2011) suggest that the researcher must adopt a research design that is well established and suited for the study. In achieving credibility, the researcher ensured that the appropriate informants were selected for the study. To further ensure credibility, all those interviews were conducted in participants' natural settings, using a tape-recorder to ensure verbatim transcription. Finally, when the first draft of report was compiled, informants who were interested were invited to read for accuracy of findings.



### 3.9.2 Dependability of instrument

In this qualitative research study, dependability replaces reliability. This process entailed effective documentation of the processes that will lead to the emerging data. It addresses the entire issue of research methodology. Effective documentation entails that this researcher will provide detailed, descriptive and unambiguous information on how the instruments for data collection have led to the emergent data. Again, Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2011) suggest that "in order to address the dependability issue more directly, the

processes within the study should be reported in detail, thereby enabling a future researcher to repeat the work, if not necessarily to gain the same results". These processes include a proper and detailed description of the research design and the rationale for its selection; a well-detailed description of the operational processes of data gathering; and a reflective evaluation of the effectiveness of the entire process leading to the production of a research report.

### 3.9.3 Validity and Reliability

Reliability and validity should be established for the standardisation of an instrument to be used in research (Babbie, 2009:146). In other words, the validity of data collection instruments refers to the extent to which the question items in the instruments adequately reflect the real meaning of the concepts under consideration (Babbie, 2009:146). It therefore implies that the researcher should be concerned about the extent to which the measurement tool and the items it contains are representative of the content domain the researcher intends to measure (LoBiondo-Wood & Haber, 2002:314).



Mixed methods research combines the benefits of both quantitative and qualitative strategies, but it also increases the complexity and difficulty of the process due to the need to address the threats to validity in the quantitative approaches and threats to credibility in the qualitative approaches. Prolonged engagement in the field, the use of peer debriefing, triangulation, and member checks in regards to credibility in the qualitative and internal validity in the quantitative were used to address possible threats throughout this study. Furthermore, a rich description was provided along with purposeful sampling in regards to transferability in the qualitative data and external validity in the quantitative data.

In addition, an extensive audit trail was generated, using the code-recode strategy, engaging in triangulation, and using a group of critical friends for peer examination to address dependability in the qualitative data and reliability in the quantitative data. The final rigor criteria was that of researcher reflexivity where notes were taken in both phases which were constantly referred to as another lens of confirmability in the qualitative data

and objectivity in the quantitative data. Reflexivity also allowed me to look at myself as I watched others throughout the research study. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), there are four conditions that contribute to the trustworthiness of qualitative research. These four conditions and questions are what Lincoln and Guba (1985) call "credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability." These terms are also known as internal validity, external validity, reliability, and objectivity in quantitative research. Consideration of each of these topics remained in the forefront throughout the completion of the study.

In this study, validity was improved through careful sampling, appropriate instrumentation and appropriate statistical treatments of data. Babbie (2009:143) states that the reliability of data collection instruments relates to the application of a valid measuring instrument to different groups of people under different situations to give the same results. To ensure reliability in this study, the researcher gave 20 copies of the questionnaires to a sample of people not in the population for this study. They comprised experts in quantitative studies; scholars of preschool education in the University of Fort Hare and specialists for statistical data analysis.



### 3.9.4 Instrument transferability

Transferability is applying research results to other context and settings in order to get at generalizability (Creswell, 2013). The researcher in the current study, studied additional cases about school readiness ECD development programmes and generalized findings to the new ones.

### 3.9.5 Instrument confirmability

Confirmability includes an audit trail that includes raw data, such as electronically recorded materials, written field notes, documents and records. It is achieved when findings of a study reflect from the participants of the study and make sure data speaks for itself and is not based on biases and assumptions of the researchers (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). This study will help other researchers to be able to verify everything in it when given the same data.

## 3.10 Field Testing

To ensure appropriateness of the research questions in this study, the researcher "field tested" both instruments, which involved taking the instruments into the field to identify problems that could be experienced by respondents during the actual study (Locke, Spirduso, & Silverman, 2013). For this study, the researcher strategically selected 2 experts in quantitative and qualitative studies, 2 scholars of preschool education in the University of Fort Hare and 1 specialist for statistical data analysis, as they have expert knowledge about the population and research topic to provide feedback on the appropriateness of the questions being asked and how the questions are being asked in relation to the study focus and with the proposed sample. They did not answer the questionnaires and interview questions but only helped the researcher refine and improve the questionnaire and interview questions. For this study, the field test led the researcher to revisions to avoid ambiguity and bias, reduce repetition of the questions, and adjust word choice to establish authenticity (Locke, Spirduso, & Silverman, 2013).

## 3.11 Data analysis



The researcher had to build patterns, categories and themes from the bottom up by organizing the data into increasingly more abstract units of information. This inductive process illustrates working back and forth between the themes and the database until the researcher has established a comprehensive set of themes. Then deductively, the researcher looked back at the data from the themes to determine if more evidence can support each theme or whether she would need to gather additional information. Thus, while the process begins inductively, deductive thinking also plays an important role as the analysis moves forward (Creswell, 2013; Rossman& Rallis, 2012).

The survey research employs applications of scientific method by critically analysing and examining the source materials, by analysing and interpreting data, and by arriving at generalization and prediction. Since the present study was undertaken to investigate the caregivers' and parents' views about preschool education as a school readiness programme, the descriptive survey research method was adopted. A quantitative approach is a formal, objective systematic and empirical process in which social

phenomena are investigated via statistical, mathematical or computational techniques (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010:489)

## 3.12 Ethical considerations and requirements

According to Creswell (2008), practicing ethics is a complex matter that involves more than just following a set of static guidelines such as those from professional association. Ethically, conducting research requires researchers to actively interpret these principles for their individual projects, tailoring these ethical guidelines to suit the unique contexts of their research. As McMillan and Schumacher (2010) noted, educational research focuses mainly on human beings. Consequently, the researcher is ethically responsible for protecting the rights and welfare of the participant, which involves issues such as physical and mental discomfort as well as harm and danger. In this section, ethical issues pertaining to the respondents in terms of gaining entry or permission, participants" rights, informed consent, confidentiality, protection from harm, achieving anonymity and maintaining professionalism are discussed.

### 3.12.1 Gaining entry



The researcher requested a recognition letter from the Faculty of Education, University of Fort Hare. This was taken to the Queenstown District where the schools chosen for this study are situated, for a written permission. The researcher also wrote letters to The School Governing Council (SGB's), Principals, Parents to the 0-4 year olds, School Management Teams (SMT's) and Head of Department at schools (HOD's) asking permission to conduct the interviews and the distribution of the questionnaires, which also informed them about the aim of the investigation.

### 3.12.2 Participants' right

Voluntary participation means that participants cannot be compelled, coerced or required to participate. No one should be forced to participate in a research (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). In this study, therefore, respondents were allowed to exercise their right to be part of the research or not.

### 3.12.3 Informed consent

Informed consent is achieved by providing participants with an explanation of the research, an opportunity to terminate their participation at any time with no penalty, purpose of the research, description of procedures and length of time needed, full disclosure of any risks associated with the study and description of benefits from the research (MacMillan & Schumacher, 2010). From all the schools that were selected for this investigation, the researcher emphasized that the respondents have a choice about whether to participate so as not to infringe on the ethical right of participants to make their own decisions. Obtaining informed consent implies that adequate information on the goal of the investigation and procedures were followed during investigation.

### 3.12.4 Confidentiality

Confidentiality means that no one has access to individual data or the names of the participants. All information obtained in this study will be treated confidentially and will not be divulged to anyone. The participants were assured that the collection of data from the interviews is for academic purposes only and no information will be revealed that may result in embarrassment or direct negative consequences.



### 3.12.5 Protection from harm

The researcher has to carefully anticipate risks such as humiliation or loss of trust, physical and mental discomfort, harm or injury to the participants. The researcher must do everything needed to do to minimize those (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). A sense of caring and fairness will be part of the researcher's thinking, actions and personal morality. No personal questions that can embarrass the respondents were asked during interviews in this study, as the interview questions were piloted first to ascertain such.

### 3.12.6 Achieving anonymity

Anonymity means that the researcher cannot identify the participants from information that has been gathered. When we say that data are anonymous, there is no way for the researchers to know who said or did what, even when inspecting data that are collected. This result in excellent privacy (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010).When conducting the

interviews, respondents were not asked for their personal information; therefore, their names were not disclosed.

### 3.12.7 Maintaining professionalism

This study met the requirements for research with human subjects and ensures that ethical and legal guidelines set by the National government are followed. As every researcher has an obligation to conduct his/her study in a manner that is consistent with professional guidelines, the researcher in this study was also obliged to conduct this study in the same manner. Rights and welfare of the participants were respected by the researcher.

# CHAPTER FOUR

## PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS OF DATA, INTERPRETATION OF FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### 4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents, analyses and discusses results of the data generated through semi-structured interviews and from surveys. Interviews were done in the focus group and composed of 20 open-ended questions, while surveys were for caregivers and parents and composed of 20 Likert scale questions and 10 open-ended questions. The researcher developed both the interview and survey instruments. The purpose of this mixed-methods study was to investigate the caregivers' and parents' views about preschool education as a school readiness programme in the Queenstown education district. Patton suggested that researchers use mixed-methods study because "they need to know and use a variety of methods to be responsive to the nuances of particular empirical questions and the idiosyncrasies of specific stakeholder needs" (2002, p. 585). In this context, a mixed-methods approach was used in this study to "build on the synergy and strength that exists between quantitative and qualitative research methods in order to understand a phenomenon more fully than is possible using either quantitative or qualitative methods alone" (Gay, Miles & Airasian, 2006, p. 490).



The data collected aimed to answer the following study questions:

The main research question the study sought to address was: What are the caregivers' and parents' views about preschool education as a school readiness programme in the Queenstown education district.

Sub-research questions were:

I. What is the caregivers' understanding of school readiness nature of preschool education?
II. To what extent do the caregivers' practices make children ready for formal schooling?
III. What is the parents' understanding of school readiness nature of preschool education?
IV. How do parents assess preschool centres as places that make children ready for formal schooling?
V. What are caregivers and parents' views of perceived challenges of preschool centres which hinder making children ready for formal schooling?
VI. What are the possible solutions to the challenges of preschool centres?



This study made use of the focus groups discussions and questionnaires. The researcher made use of 2 focus groups who participated in this research work. The participants were drawn from the population which involves parents, caregivers, from rural and urban schools in Queenstown. It is important to note that some of the questions were adapted during the interview whenever required. A copy of the interview guide was given to the interviewees beforehand to read in their own time, and an opportunity was given to ask questions if something was not clear before the interview started. All interviews were recorded after permission was granted. Verbal data were transcribed *verbatim* (meaning they were not edited/altered in order to preserve the richness of the responses) after each interview. Questions were open-ended, and interviewees were asked to speak freely and give their own opinions. Often, a follow-up question was asked whenever the researcher felt that more information was needed.

A key objective of the interviews was to obtain the caregivers' and parents' views about preschool education as a school readiness programme in the Queenstown education district. Each interview lasted roughly 30-40 minutes. Responses to interview questions were used to identify relevant themes that emerged from the answers and to identify patterns that may exist across responses from caregivers and parents. Questionnaires were used in this research in an effort to reach as many respondents as possible. A questionnaire is a form prepared and distributed to respondents to secure responses to certain questions (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010:158). According to Creswell (2013), a questionnaire is a document containing questions designed to solicit information appropriate for analysis. Usually, it is information from respondents about their attitudes, knowledge, beliefs and feelings.

The two different questionnaires had questions that were similar while other questions were differently phrased for each of the two entities. This was done to determine the exact perceptions and opinions of the respondents. The questionnaire items for this study were in the form of a three or four point Likert Scale. The ratings scales were used to manage the degrees of response, intensity of response and the move away from dichotomous questions (Cohen et al, 2007:325). A Likert scale provides a range of responses to a given question or statement and the responses are used to register the extent of agreement or disagreement with statements of attitude, belief or judgment (for example, strongly agree, agree, unsure, disagree and strongly disagree (Vanderstoep & Johnston, 2009:54).



## 4.2 Description of Study Sample

The target population for the qualitative section of this study was 6 caregivers teaching in the preschools in Queenstown Education District and also 6 parents of the children in those preschools. The target group was selected from preschools from urban, semi-urban and rural preschools that had a cosmopolitan staff composition, various race groups, female gender only, and the senior caregivers. The researcher purposively selected 3 caregivers from the rural areas and 3 caregivers from the urban areas in the 6 Circuits in the Queenstown Education District with best information to address the purpose of this study. Classrooms are divided into a 0-2 age group class; a 2-3 age group class and a 3-

4 age group class with 25 children in each class and 1 caregiver per class. Co-operative parents were chosen by the caregivers from those preschools in the 6 circuits, 3 parents per preschool, by choosing 1 parent from a 0-2 age group class, 1 parent from a 2-3 age group class and 1parent from a 3-4 age group class.

Caregivers distributed the parents' questionnaires and parents were chosen by the preschool caregivers on the basis that those parents are highly committed in the education of their preschoolers. The questionnaires were returned to the preschool caregivers by the parents where the researcher collected them.

***Table 9: Summary of the caregivers' profiles***

| **Schools** | **Gender** | **Qualification** | | | | | | | **AGE** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **FG1** Rural | Female | Diploma In Education | Degree in ECD Education | Hons+ in Education | Other | 1-10 | 11-20 | 21+ | |
| A | 1 (0-2 age group class) | 1 | | | | | ✓ | | 50 |
| B | 1 (2-3 age group class) | | | | Grade 9 | ✓ | | | 25 |
| C | 1 (3-4 age group class) | | | | Grade 12 | ✓ | | | 40 |
| Urban | | | | | | | | | |
| D | 1 (0-2 age group class) | | | | Grade 12 | ✓ | | | 29 |
| E | 1 (2-3 age | | 1 | | | | | ✓ | 52 |

| | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | group class) | | | | | | | | |
| F | 1 (3-4 age group class) | 1 | | | | | ✓ | | 51 |
| | **6** | **2** | **1** | | **3** | | | | |

In Table 4.2.1 above, for the purpose of this study the researcher refers to the first focus group of caregiver participants as Focus Group 1(FG 1) which comprised 3 caregivers from 3 rural preschools A, B and C and 3 caregivers from 3 urban preschools D, E, and F. The caregivers had different levels of qualifications and were 2 blacks, 2 coloureds and 2 white ladies with also 1 caregiver participant in each class in these preschools. They were selected according to those who were willing to participate in the study and the caregivers in this research were all females.

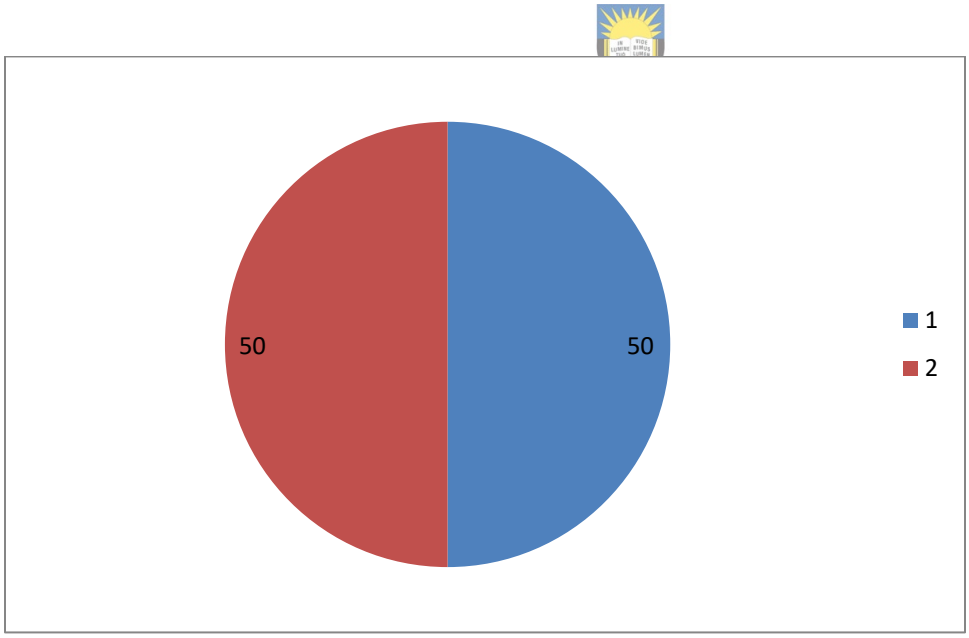



***Figure 3: Caregivers' qualifications***

Figure 4.2.1.1 above shows that 50 % of the participants had no Teaching Qualification at all; 50% have their qualifications in Education. These participants had varying levels of education, which proved they were expected to be motivated differently. With regards to

their educational qualifications, not all the caregiver participants possessed formal teaching qualification. Only 1 obtained an ECD teaching degree, 2 obtained a teaching qualification of Senior Secondary Teachers' Diploma (SSTD) and 3 of them with no teacher qualification at all, as reflected in figure 4.2.1.1.

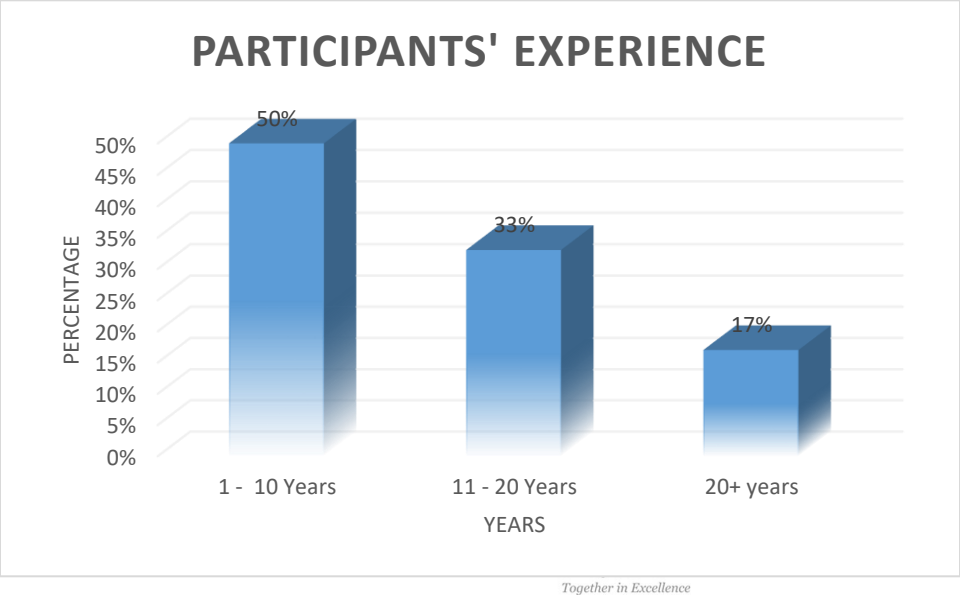



***Figure 4: Caregivers' teaching experience***

Figure 4.2.1.2 shows experiences of the caregivers in teaching at preschools, 3 had up to 10 years of experience; while 2 only had up to 20 years of experience; only 1 caregiver participant had more than 20 years of experience. Basing on the information on the table, most of the ECD caregivers had more teaching experience at preschools and could provide the best information that was used address the purpose of this research. They were also informative about the topic of interest for them to yield rich data about the process of their own development. They viewed their own roles and other aspects that constitute the preschool education as a school readiness programme. Personnel that are qualified and trained are in a position to provide quality education and care (Govindasamy, 2010:25).

There are several reasons for 33% of the caregivers to be between 20 and 30 years. The most probable is that this is the age group which may have finished secondary school (high school) long ago, but is still sitting at their homes with no hope of getting employed due to high unemployment rate in South Africa (Mayende, G., 2010). As a result, they opted to become caregivers so that they can gain some experience. The ECD policy is not clear on the age ranges of people to carry out such tasks. As such communities are at liberty to decide which age groups are capable of handling the ECD classes, as reflected in figure 4.2.1.3 below.

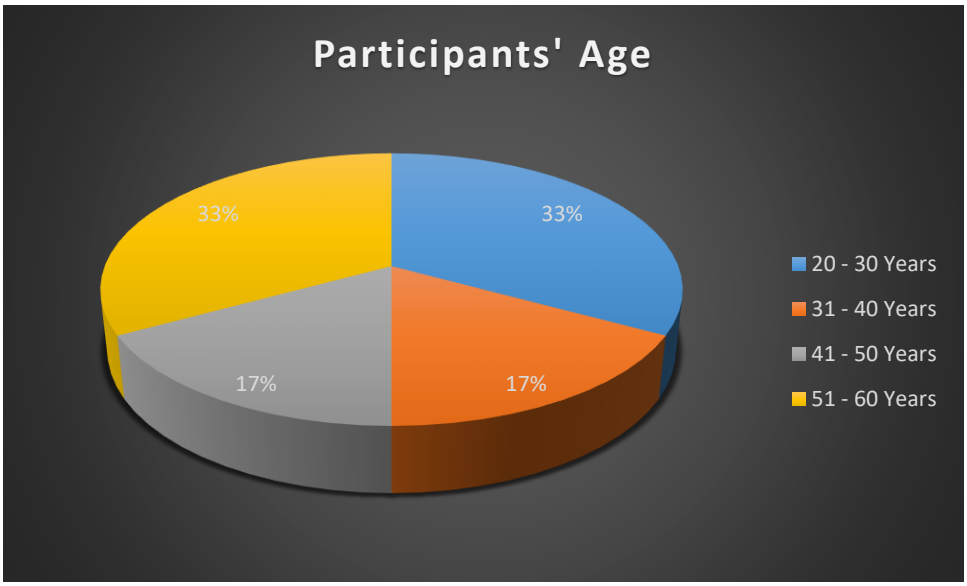



***Figure 5: Age of respondent caregivers***

***Table 10: Summary of parents' profiles***

| **Schools** | **Gender** | | | **Qualification** | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **FG2** Rural | F | M | | Diploma In Education | 1st Degree | Hons+ | Other |
| A | | 1 | | | 1 | | |
| B | | 1 | | | | 1 | |
| C | 1 | | | | | | Assistant nurse |
| Urban | | | | | | | |
| D | 1 | | | 1 | | | |
| E | 1 | | | | | | Financial advisor in bank |
| F | 1 | | | | 1 | | |
| | **4** | **2** | | **1** | **2** | **1** | **2** |

In Table 4.2.2 above, sample of this study further comprised parents that were interviewed from the 6 Circuits in Queenstown District. 3 parents of preschool children from the rural areas and 3 parents from the urban areas that would form part of this study. Sample was purposefully selected. The researcher refers to the second Focus Group as FG 2. There were also Schools A, B and C from the rural areas and D, E, and F from the urban areas with also 1 parent participant in each class in a preschool. The table also shows that the gender representation of the parents under study was higher numbers of females represented than males.



## 4.3 Biographical data of participants for the Quantitative section (Questionnaires)

The first section of both questionnaires sought to establish biographic information about the caregivers in terms of their gender, marital status, qualifications, teaching experience, area of specialization, school location, school ownership and age of children. This was done as a way of ensuring that gender, age, experience and qualifications were represented. This ensured the collection of views from different categories of people, hence, the results reflect the views of different participants. Correspondingly, the

biographic information about the parents in terms of their gender, marital status, qualifications, school location, school ownership and age of children.

***Table 11: Participants by gender (n=40)-Caregivers and Parents***

| CAREGIVERS | | Frequency | Percent |
|---|---|---|---|
| Valid | Male | 8 | 20.0 |
| | Female | 32 | 80.0 |
| | Total | 40 | 100.0 |
| **PARENTS** | | Frequency | Percent |
| | Male | 22 | 55.0 |
| | Female | 18 | 45.0 |
| | Total | 40 | 100.0 |

Table 4.3.1 shows participants by gender. Participants were 8 male caregivers (20%) and 32 female caregivers (80%) as reflected in table 4.1 above. Parents were 22 males (55%) and 18 females (45%).



***Table 12: Participants by Marital status***

| | | Frequency | Percent |
|---|---|---|---|
| **CAREGIVERS** | | | |
| Valid | Single | 9 | 22.5 |
| | Married | 9 | 22.5 |
| | Divorced | 16 | 40.0 |
| | Widowed | 6 | 15.0 |
| | Total | 40 | 100.0 |
| **PARENTS** | | Frequency | Percent |
| Valid | Single | 4 | 10.0 |
| | Married | 16 | 40.0 |
| | Divorced | 13 | 32.5 |
| | Widowed | 7 | 17.5 |
| | Total | 40 | 100.0 |

Table 4.3.2 shows the participants by their marital status, where 9 (22%) of the caregivers were single; 9 (22%) were married; 16 (40%) were divorced and 6 (15%) were widowed

***Table 13: Participants by qualifications***

| | | Frequency | Percent |
|---|---|---|---|
| **CAREGIVERS** | | | |
| Valid | Grade 7 | 2 | 5.0 |
| | Grade 9 | 5 | 12.5 |
| | Matric | 18 | 45.0 |
| | Certificate in Education | 8 | 20.0 |
| | Diploma in Education | 4 | 10.0 |
| | Bachelors in Education | 2 | 5.0 |
| | Honours degree in Education | 1 | 2.5 |
| | Total | 40 | 100.0 |
| **PARENTS** | | Frequency | Percent |
| Valid | No Formal schooling | 4 | 10.0 |
| | Grade 7 | 2 | 5.0 |
| | Grade 9 | 2 | 5.0 |
| | Matric | 17 | 42.5 |
| | Certificate | 9 | 22.5 |
| | Diploma | 4 | 10.0 |
| | Bachelors | 1 | 2.5 |
| | Masters | 1 | 2.5 |
| | Total | 40 | 100.0 |

In terms of qualifications evidence from the questionnaires and represented in table 4.3.3 shows that 62, 5% of the caregivers did not obtain any teaching qualification and 37,5 % had the teaching qualification. 10% of the parents had no formal schooling qualification; 10% at senior phase education level; 42% had matric; 22% with certificates in different fields; 10% with diplomas and 5% with university degrees. Research has shown that the level of qualification one has, has an impact on one's self-efficacy. The researcher believes qualifications have an impact on the way caregivers teach and guide the young ones in preschools.

***Table 14: Caregivers by experience (n=40)***

| | | Frequency | Percent |
|---|---|---|---|
| Valid | Less than 5 years | 10 | 25.0 |
| | 5-10 years | 17 | 42.5 |
| | 11-15 years | 10 | 25.0 |
| | Above 15 years | 3 | 7.5 |
| | Total | 40 | 100.0 |

Table 4.3.4 shows that the majority of caregivers (17=42.5%) had experience ranging from 5-10 years, followed by those with experience of 11-15 years (10=25%). The less than 5 years' experience group were also (10=25%) and above 15 years of experience was made up of only 3 caregivers (7,5%).

***Table 15: Caregivers by their field of specialization (n=15)***

| | | Frequency | Percent |
|---|---|---|---|
| Valid | Early Childhood and Care Education | 10 | 66,6. |
| | Grade R | 5 | 12.5 |
| | Total | 15 | 100.0 |

Table 4.3.5 shows caregivers by their field of specialization where 10 of them (66,6%) obtained the ECD qualification. To add, 12,5% obtained a qualification to teach Grade R.

***Table 16: School Ownership***

| CAREGIVERS | | Frequency | Percent |
|---|---|---|---|
| Valid | Private | 17 | 42.5 |
| | Government | 3 | 7.5 |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Community | 12 | 30.0 |
| | Religious | 8 | 20.0 |
| | Total | 40 | 100.0 |
| | PARENTS | Frequency | Percent |
| Valid | Govt owned | 17 | 42.5 |
| | Community owned | 21 | 52.5 |
| | Religious | 2 | 5.0 |
| | Total | 40 | 100.0 |

**Table 4.3.6** shows school ownership for the participants that responded, for caregivers 17(42, 5%) were from private-owned preschools, 3(7, 5%) were from the Government ones, 12(30%) were community owned and 8(20%) were from the religious preschools. The parent participants 17(42,5%) were from the Government preschools, while 21(52,5%) were from the community-owned and 2(5,0%) were from the religious preschools.



***Table 17: Participants' school location***

| CAREGIVERS | | Frequency | Percent |
|---|---|---|---|
| Valid | Rural | 13 | 32.5 |
| | Urban | 27 | 67.5 |
| | Total | 40 | 100.0 |
| PARENTS | | Frequency | Percent |
| Valid | Rural | 15 | 37.5 |
| | Urban | 25 | 62.5 |
| | Total | 40 | 100.0 |

**Table 4.3.7** shows that 13(32,5%) of the caregivers were from the preschools in rural Queenstown and 27(67,5%) were from the urban areas. 15(37,5%) of the parent were from the rural preschools, 25(62,5%) were from the urban preschools.

***Table 18: Age of children***

| | | Frequency | Percent |
|---|---|---|---|
| Valid | Less than 3 years | 31 | 77.5 |
| | 3 years and older | 9 | 22.5 |
| | Total | 40 | 100.0 |

In this particular study, qualitative data analysis consisted of an examination of caregivers' and parents' answers to open-ended interview questions as well. Quantitative data analysis consisted of examining the caregivers' and parents' answers to the 3-point Likert scales survey questions. According to Creswell and Plano Clark (2007), one of the procedures for mixed-methods data analysis is related to "concurrent data analysis" (p. 136), in which both qualitative and quantitative data are merged because they are analyzed separately. They also stated that this kind of data analysis "generally involves the concurrent, but separate, collection and analysis of quantitative and qualitative data so that the researcher may best understand the research problem" (p. 62). Triangulation design is one of the approaches used for concurrent data analysis, and it was used for the data analysis in this study.



The intention of the triangulation design was to gather both quantitative and qualitative data at the same time and to integrate the two forms of data in order to have a better understanding of the research questions being asked. This design typically gives equal priority to quantitative and qualitative data and analysis, involves concurrent or simultaneous collection of data, and integrates both quantitative and qualitative data in the results, interpretation, and conclusion phase (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007). In so doing, in Stage 1, the researcher conducted separate initial data analysis for each of the qualitative and quantitative databases (Creswell &Plano Clark, 2007), which included coding, theme development, and the interrelationship of analysis of qualitative data and descriptive analysis of quantitative data. In Stage 2, the researcher merged the two sets of data and used triangulation design in order to allow for a complete picture of the study. The researcher transformed the data by merging qualitative data into quantitative data. The transformation of data included counting codes and counting themes by using the procedure described by Creswell and Plano Clark (2007: 138), namely:

1. Qualitative data was analyzed for codes and themes;

2. The number of occurrences of codes and themes were counted and computed;

3. These numbers were entered on SPSS (Statistical Package of the Social Sciences) to generate data reports; and

4. A table, which is a matrix with data transformation, was generated to portray the results in order to compare *quantitized15*qualitative data with the quantitative data.

The researcher used copies of the transcribed interviews and the FGDs to do the unitising. Cohen *et al.* (2000) state that once the units of general meaning have been noted, they are then reduced to units of meaning relevant to the research question. The units were then refined to find a common theme that united several discrete units of relevant meaning, and subsequently grouped accordingly. This was done in order to find relationships and emerging patterns with regard to teachers' perspectives on causes of job dissatisfaction among senior secondary school teachers. At the end, the following themes emerged:



- Understanding the importance of school readiness;
- Purpose of school readiness;
- The effects of poverty and deprivation on school readiness;
- Understanding the domains of school readiness;
- Exploration of the problems in preschools;
- Resources for preschools; and
- Parental participation and support in preschools.

## 4.4 Part 1: Findings

### 4,4.1 Interviews With Focus Groups: Themes

#### 4.4.1.1 Understanding the importance of school readiness

The researcher wanted to find out what the views of the participants were, regarding understanding of school readiness nature of preschool education. Below was how a participant from school E in FG 1 responded to the issue:

*I wish I can reach all the young ones to help them as I studied early childhood education degree. Children in South Africa's Province of the Eastern Cape live in impoverished communities, and just a few children of ages 0 to 4 do attend daycare outside the home. Without early education that supports school readiness, most children from disadvantaged backgrounds arrive at formal schooling time, lacking the basic skills they need to succeed in school… For example, each child has unique characteristics, especially when they flare up emotion, angry about whatever, emotional control is important to minimize aggressive behaviours which harm other children, for examples, biting, punching, and kicking.*



The researcher, further wanted to hear more about the views about the understanding of school readiness nature of preschool education from the participants and thereafter all the other participants added their comments. 80% in both groups (FG 1 and FG 2) agreed that they observed the same problem of not every child is given a chance to attend a preschool. To control emotions, on the word of caregivers, is a support for children's school readiness, which is quite difficult to be achieved by other children until they start formal schooling. Participant from School A, in FG 1 noted:

> *A child who never attends early school years in preschool carries a record of failure nowadays, that's my view to early learning in preschools...*

In FG2 another parent participant A had a similar comment, where she added that:

> *Eh….I took my second child to the same preschool as the one that was attended by my first child because I was satisfied with what they taught these kids, that is, to think critically. But to my surprise they discovered that something was wrong*

*with her but they could not assist her when she showed signs of learning disabilities.*

A parent in School E said:

*Here in Queenstown, rural of urban, only 4 – 5% of the children with disabilities attend these preschools, teachers there just cannot take care of them, and there are neither proper facilities nor trained teachers who know how to treat them…*

In addition, Participant A from School B in FG2 further highlighted that:

*I fully agree that ECD prepares children to fully benefit from future educational experiences. But because of all the different family structures in our rural communities not all the young children get an opportunity to go to preschools.*

The researcher noted that the issues of quality preschool education services have risen to the top of everyone's agenda in all the societies. Schools and families have been described as partners in the education of their children (Epstein, 2011a, 2011b; Epstein & Associates, 2009; Lemmer, 2013). Both share the common goal of wanting to assist children to develop their full potential.



Similarly, a participant E from FG1 was more explicit in his descriptions of his understanding of the preschool education and said:

*Child development in preschool is very important, as a caregiver I make sure that I let the children develop academically and socially by letting them reason and learn to share and in harmony with others…*

Two parents stated that helping children to resolve conflicts was easy because "Kids get over things pretty quickly" and "Children argue and fight all day long and at the end of the day, they are best friends." Two other parents thought that none of these practices would be easy to do. One parent said, "All of them takes a strong provider." On the other hand, four parents thought that all would be easy to implement, citing reasons such as "Because if that's what you do for a living then it should just be instantly easy."

Fewer parents said that the remaining practices to support children's social-emotional development would be difficult for a caregiver to do.

#### 4.4.1.2 Purpose of school readiness

According to participant B from FG 1:

> *I am not sure of what is more important than the other between making the child talk clearly and express himself whenever asked by anyone other than the parent…I hope this is the purpose of school readiness.*

Another participant F in FG1 added that:

> *In my preschool we stimulate thought-provoking conversations and encourage critical thinking and how they can solve problems.*

Moreover, 80% of the participants both in FG1 and FG2 appeared to understand the link between the children's' social development, and the standards of the society, which help everyone to live normally within a society.

Another participant B in FG2 said:

> *I would say, the purpose of school readiness is there to make our children get used to staying away from home with parents only, whilst on the other hand they are trained on different aspects where we, as working adults, would never be able to do all that…*



However, when the participants were required to express their views on which different aspects are the children trained in, participant D in FG2 responded by saying:

> *We are only parents that are employed at our different corners, so we come back tired, so we cannot teach our children how to read, write and calculate or the correct way to play with others.*

#### 4.4.1.3 The effect of poverty and deprivation on school readiness

Children from disadvantaged backgrounds are often deprived of preschool stimulation at home and attending good quality preschools (Li-Grining et al., 2010). Children in rural areas do not have their constitutional right to education realized, and their rights within education or through education are also limited (Nelson Mandela Foundation, 2005:138).

In FG 2 one parent participant from school C said:

> *We, as parents, are different, there are children that are growing in extended families, and others staying with other children, no parents alive and also single parents who do not see the these schools necessary for children… Those at positions to look after preschools must look into this, because these kids are missing out a lot, free preschools need to be built by government.*

Additionally, 90% of the parents in support of the above claim of these types of families not seeing preschool as a necessity, participant E from FG 2 added:

> *Many of us in the townships don't earn any salary to pay for a crèche, most are unemployed so we look after our own kids, others their grandchildren.*

It was the response from FG 1 that appeared more detailed in this respect, the participant said:

> *As a caregiver in a preschool I feel very sad to see a child who had started coming to the school stop because of the parent not having money to pay because that child, in most cases is the one who suffers. How? Firstly, he/she has started socializing with other kids and made friends, secondly he/she starts staying in the house and not enjoy, the playing, singing and all the things we do at the preschool. Others come again the following year, and we start all over again to teach them because they forget everything*.



#### 4.4.1.4 Understanding of the domains of development

The researcher also noted that 60% of the caregivers in the rural Queenstown were only interested in making the children know the difference in genders; know their names and surnames; counting from 1-50; different colours which proved clearly that, this is their way of understanding the domains of development for children

. Participant D in FG 1 said:

> *With my 10-year experience working with children in preschools, all I know is that before a child turns 5, he/she must be able to understand the behaviour needed at school, how to respond when called by an adult, how to wear his clothes on his own and also to be able to speak up and solve basic little problems for himself and others.*

Participant E from FG 2 said:

*I am happy because my child is able to name colours, can count up to 10, speak English and retell stories with understanding…*

Most participating parents, (70%), were of the opinion that the domains of school readiness involve learning only about colours, counting and telling stories.

For instance, participant C in FG 2 responded by saying:

*My 4-year-old is confident enough to speak up when uncomfortable or needs help.*

Other explanations by the parent participants that appear to implicate the understanding of the domains of school readiness are presented below. These explanations seem to be important elements in the respondents' understanding of the domains of school readiness, some responses include:

*Your child separates easily from you when you drop them off in the morning or the good byes not long and teary. Some crying in the beginning few weeks are normal and even expected but should stop after a while (Participant F from FG 2).*

*Your child completes most tasks on his or her own, no constant running to their teachers' side for approval or assistance (Participant D from FG2).*



*They remember their jersey, school clothes etcetera and their teacher is no more constantly running after them with their belongings (Participant C from FG 1).*

*Playtime and* story time *important learning activities at preschool (Participant A in FG 1).*

The understanding of the domains of school readiness drew much deeper revelation from the participants in the study. The domains of development, for some of the participants, involves understanding the child as well as understanding the challenges confronting the child while growing from one stage to another.

### 4.4.2 Exploration of the problems in preschools

#### 4.4.2.1 Resources for preschools

According to the parent participant C in FG 2 she said:

*I am not happy with the state of the toilets, classrooms and the playgrounds at this centre and the school can manage it in a better manner than what is happening… or the problem is because this preschool is situated in a rural area.*

Most participating parents were of the opinion that only those privately own centres were better resourced than the public ones.

Another participant from FG1 said:

*The play equipment is not repaired promptly because we do not always have the finances required to do that, as we also don't get our salary monthly as we are supposed to.*

Furthermore, 60% of the caregivers agreed and indicated that, while the policies existed, the preschools found it difficult to adhere to policy requirements because they did not have the finance and the power to do so. For example, the preschool parents noted that the schools did not have adequate classrooms and outdoor space per child, toilets that are suitable as per the toilet-pupil ratio, also no acceptable teacher-to-pupil ratio, especially in the townships and rural Queenstown.



In FG 1, one participant had a similar comment to this one and said:

*I have heard about the ECD policies but I am not familiar with their contents*.

Moreover, 50 % of the participants all agreed to the need for staff development so that they can improve. Most of them had definite negative answers on what types of teaching methods were suitable to teach their children. This revelation may have serious implications for the preparation of children with respect to preschool based programs in which caregivers are themselves expected to follow when preparing these young ones. Furthermore, the participants' responses showed that the schools lack the resources to be able to help the child in need.

#### 4.4.2.2 Parental participation and support in preschools

Another response to the problems encountered by caregivers in preschools, participant F in FG 1 noted that some parents were not fully involved in ECD programmes and that

this compromised the quality of ECD programmes. The parents did not participate in fundraising, sports days, pay tuition fees and consult the teachers on their ECD children's progress.

Some of the parents (70%) who participated in the study indicated that:

> *I have no time to get involved in my child's preschool programmes because my work schedule is ever clashing with the time they call these meetings (participant B from FG 2).*

It was, therefore, obvious that some of the parent participants do not participate meaningfully in their children's education. Another parent participant from FG 2 added to the above comment by saying:

> *I doubt if the teacher is trained because the children are never engaged in serious work, when I go to the school I find them playing outside all the time. The classrooms only have flower pictures on the walls. As I cannot teach my stubborn three-year-old I hoped that the caregivers will be able to solve that problem for me.*

### 4.4.2 Part 2-Questionnaires



The study made use of semi-structured questionnaires to collect data from both caregivers and parents because of the need to collect pre-determined information as well as well as personal elaborations from these participants. Semi-structured questionnaires use a mixture of fixed questions and open questions (Tshuma & Mafa, 2013). The researcher is of the opinion that open questions or unstructured questionnaires allow the respondents to respond as they wish in their own words. This helps to understand the respondent's level of understanding of issues. The surveys focused specifically on the understanding of school readiness nature of preschool education and the practices done by the caregivers to make children ready for formal schooling.

**Question 1:** What do you understand by school readiness nature of preschool education? The reason for this research question was to find out from both the caregivers and parents whether they clearly understood what is entailed in the preschool education.

***Table 19: Care givers' Response to Section B***

| STATEMENT | TRUE | | FALSE | | NOT SURE | | % CORRECT |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | N | % of cases | N | % of cases | N | % of cases | |
| B1 Preschool is meant to develop diversity skills on children. | 23 | 76.7 | 10 | 41.7 | 7 | 20.6 | 76.7 |
| B2 Preschool helps with the development of cognitive skills only in children | 16 | 53.3 | 7 | 29.2 | 17 | 50.0 | 53.3 |
| B3 Pre-schooling should ensure of equal development of all developmental domains | 15 | 50.0 | 6 | 25.0 | 19 | 58.9 | 50.0 |
| B4 Preschool education ensures that the child develops socially only before attending formal school. | 10 | 33.3 | 10 | 41.7 | 20 | 58.8 | 41.7 |
| B5 Preschool education ensures that children develop early language skills only before attending formal school | 12 | 40.0 | 8 | 33.3 | 20 | 58.8 | 33.3 |
| B6 Attending preschool is an opportunity for a child to learn to share, follow instructions and begins a foundation to learn before his/her formal schooling | 15 | 50.0 | 9 | 37.5 | 16 | 47.1 | 50.0 |
| B7 Preschool education does not promote social and emotional development of a child | 13 | 43.3 | 9 | 37.5 | 18 | 52.9 | 37.5 |
| B8 Pre-school education helps children to have active imagination and learn through make-believe play | 15 | 50.0 | 9 | 37.5 | 16 | 47.1 | 37.5 |
| B9 Pre-school education gives all children opportunities that | 18 | 60.0 | 8 | 33.3 | 14 | 41.2 | 33.3 |

| | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| promote formal school success | | | | | | | |
| B10 Pre-school education does not recognise and support children's differences | 17 | 56.7 | 12 | 50.0 | 11 | 32.4 | 50.0 |
| B11 Pre-schooling is only about taking children to other environments without their families, to make them grow faster | 15 | 50.0 | 9 | 37.5 | 16 | 47.1 | 37.5 |
| B12 Preschool education involves developing self-help skills to a child that influence the long term development of the pre-schooler | 23 | 76.7 | 12 | 50.0 | 5 | 14.7 | 76.7 |
| B13 Preschool education states that all children are ready for formal schooling when they turn 5 | 15 | 50.0 | 11 | 45.8 | 14 | 41.2 | 45.8 |
| B14 The skills that need to be acquired by children in preschools in order to be ready for formal school, are the emotional and social coping skills only | 14 | 46.7 | 14 | 58.3 | 12 | 35.3 | 46.7 |
| B15 Preschool education helps children who display aggressive, noncompliant and disruptive behaviours | 11 | 36.7 | 9 | 37.5 | 20 | 58.8 | 37.5 |
| B16 In preschools children learn how to build relationships with peers and adults | 17 | 56.7 | 8 | 33.3 | 15 | 44.1 | 56.7 |
| B17 Preschool education should focus on literacy and numeracy interventions only, to help children count and communicate effectively | 12 | 40.0 | 7 | 29.2 | 21 | 61.8 | 29.2 |
| B18 Children's development and learning is | 13 | 43.3 | 9 | 37.5 | 17 | 50.0 | 43.3 |

| | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| influenced by the context within which they live | | | | | | | |
| B19 As the child's development encompasses several domains, preschool education offers toddlers learning experiences that benefit them throughout their educational careers | 15 | 50.0 | 13 | 54.2 | 12 | 35.3 | 50.0 |
| B20 To me, school readiness involves children, families, preschool caregivers as we as the school | 17 | 56.7 | 11 | 45.8 | 12 | 35.3 | 56.7 |
| **TOTAL** | **306** | **1020.0** | **191** | **795.8** | **302** | **888.2** | |

The findings of the study showed that 76, 7% of the caregivers understand the school readiness nature of preschool education where they showed the understanding and importance of the domains of development in preschool children. 47,7% showed no understanding of the importance of the domains of development while 20% were not sure what are the domains of development nor their importance in children. Furthermore, 60% were sure about the preschool education and its benefits, while 14% did not know about the preschool education and its benefits and 36% were not sure about their understanding of preschool education and its benefits.



**Question 2:** To what extent do the caregivers' practices make children ready for formal schooling?

This question was asked to get the full information whether the caregivers were fully equipped with the knowledge of dealing with the young children at preschools so as to make them ready for formal school.

***Table 20: Care Givers' response to section C***

| STATEMENTS | AGREE | | DISAGREE | | % CORRECT |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | N | % of case | N | % of case | |
| **C1** I expose preschool children to reading | 28 | 75.7 | 12 | 63.2 | 75.7 |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **C2** I expose preschool children to writing | 33 | 89.2 | 7 | 36.8 | 89.2 |
| **C3** I allow preschool children to play outside for 2 hours | 33 | 89.2 | 7 | 36.8 | 89.2 |
| **C4** I offer children to learn and implement proper social skills in play by letting them take turns and resolve conflicts | 30 | 81.1 | 10 | 52.6 | 81.1 |
| **C5** I encourage children to use more verbal language in dramatic plays | 35 | 94.6 | 5 | 26.3 | 94.6 |
| **C6** I make use of playground for movement activities to let children develop gross-motor skills | 29 | 78.4 | 11 | 57.9 | 78.4 |
| **C7** My motivation to work with young children in preschools is to make use of playground for movement activities to let children develop gross-motor skills | 31 | 83.8 | 9 | 47.4 | 47.4 |
| **C8** I never let preschool children sort their toys after playing, I sort the toys for them | 30 | 81.1 | 10 | 52.6 | 81.1 |
| **C9** I always remind children of the necessary steps when going to the toilet, to wipe, flush and wash hands | 30 | 81.1 | 10 | 52.6 | 52.6 |
| **C10** In my class I encourage children to teach each other how to take off and out on their clothes | 30 | 81.1 | 10 | 52.6 | 81.1 |
| **C11** I use the golden rule to show children the expected levels of behaviour in class | 29 | 78.4 | 11 | 57.9 | 57.9 |
| **C12** I am always the only one telling stories to the children in class | 31 | 83.8 | 9 | 47.4 | 83.8 |
| **C13** In my teaching, I always take each child as a unique person with an individual pattern and timing for growth | 29 | 78.4 | 11 | 57.9 | 78.4 |
| **C14** I decide on the theme of the week, when planning the daily programme | 33 | 89.2 | 7 | 36.8 | 36.8 |
| **C15** I do not always have any focus point when | 31 | 83.8 | 9 | 47.4 | 83.8 |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| presenting the activities in my class | | | | | |
| **C16** The daily programmes decided on, take the whole child into account, i.e. including the child's age, individuality, social and cultural backgrounds | 35 | 94.6 | 5 | 26.3 | 94.6 |
| **C17** From my experience as a caregiver I guide children in social skills and facilitation of possible interactions between peers and adults | 32 | 86.5 | 8 | 42.1 | 86.5 |
| **C18** I help the child to speak clearly enough to be understood, pronouncing most sounds correctly | 30 | 81.1 | 10 | 52.6 | 81.1 |
| **C19** To teach them safety rules and procedures and also to know when to call adult for assistance | 30 | 81.1 | 10 | 52.6 | 81.1 |
| **TOTAL** | **589** | **1591.9%** | **171** | **900.0%** | |

Data gathered indicated that some caregivers had a limited knowledge of, to what extent do their practices make children ready for formal schooling. 33 (89,2%) of the caregivers agreed on the statements that clearly explained to what extent their practices make young children ready for formal schooling, which clearly showed that they were clear about their practices to make the children ready for formal schooling, 7(36,8%) did not agree with those statements which clearly showed that they did not know the extent their practices can make children ready for formal schooling. Furthermore, some of the questions included the teaching methods used to teach the preschool children. Findings showed that 50% were clear about the correct methods to use, whereas another 50% was not clear.



## 4.5 Parents' Responses

### SECTION B

**QUESTION 1:** What do you understand by school readiness nature of preschool education?

***Table 21: Parents' Responses to Section B***

| STATEMENT | TRUE | | FALSE | | NOT SURE | | % CORRECT |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | N | % of case | N | % of case | N | % of case | |
| B1 Pre-school is meant to develop diversity skills on children. | 30 | 93.8 | 9 | 52.9 | 1 | 2.8 | 93.8 |
| B2 Pre-schooling should ensure of equal development of all developmental domains | 30 | 93.8 | 10 | 58.8 | 6 | 16.7 | 98.8 |
| B3 Preschool education ensures that the child develops socially only, before attending formal school. | 24 | 75.0 | 10 | 58.8 | 12 | 33.3 | 58.8 |
| B4 Preschool education ensures that children develop early language skills only before attending formal school. | 19 | 59.4 | 9 | 52.9 | 17 | 47.2 | 52.9 |
| B5 Attending preschool is an opportunity for a child to learn to share, follow instructions and begins a foundation to learn before his/her formal schooling. | 18 | 56.3 | 5 | 29.4 | 21 | 58.3 | 56.3 |
| B6 Preschool education does not promote social and emotional development of a child | 14 | 43.8 | 5 | 29.4 | 16 | 44.4 | 29.4 |
| B7 Preschool education helps children to have active imagination and learn through make-believe play | 19 | 59.4 | 5 | 29.4 | 9 | 25.0 | 59.4 |
| B8 Preschool education gives all children opportunities that promote formal school success. | 23 | 71.9 | 8 | 47.1 | 12 | 33.3 | 47.1 |
| B9 Preschool education does not | 20 | 62.5 | 8 | 47.1 | 13 | 36.1 | 47.1 |

| | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| recognize and support children's differences | | | | | | | |
| B10 Pre-schooling is only about taking children to other environments without their families, to make them grow faster. | 21 | 65.6 | 6 | 35.3 | 14 | 38.9 | 35.3 |
| B11 Preschool education involves developing self-help skills to a child that influence the long term development of the pre-schooler | 22 | 68.8 | 4 | 23.5 | 6 | 16.7 | 68.8 |
| B12 Preschool education states that all children are ready for formal schooling when they turn 5. | 28 | 87.5 | 6 | 35.6 | 10 | 27.8 | 35.6 |
| B13 The skills that need to be acquired by children in preschools in order to be ready for formal school, are the emotional and social coping skills only. | 25 | 78.1 | 5 | 29.4 | 16 | 44.4 | 29.4 |
| B14 Preschool education helps children who display aggressive, noncompliant and disruptive behaviours | 17 | 53.1 | 7 | 41.2 | 21 | 58.3 | 41.2 |
| B15 In preschools children learn how to build relationships with peers and adults | 15 | 46.9 | 4 | 23.5 | 15 | 41.7 | 46.9 |
| B16 Preschool education should focus on literacy and numeracy interventions only, to help children count and communicate effectively | 21 | 65.6 | 4 | 23.5 | 14 | 38.9 | 23.5 |
| B17 Children's development and learning is influenced by the context within which they live. | 18 | 56,3 | 8 | 47.1 | 12 | 33.3 | 56.3 |

| | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| b18 as the child's development encompasses several domains, preschool education offers toddlers learning experiences that benefit them throughout their educational careers. | 24 | 75.0 | 4 | 23.5 | 12 | 33.3 | 75.0 |
| B19 To me, school readiness involves children, families, preschool caregivers as well as the school and community support | 23 | 71.9 | 5 | 29,4 | 21 | 58.3 | 71.9 |
| B20 School readiness involves children, families, preschool caregivers as we as the school and community support | 15 | 46.9 | 4 | 23.5 | 15 | 41.7 | 46.9 |
| **TOTAL** | **426** | 1331.3% | 126 | 741.2% | 248 | 688.9% | |

Data gathered indicated that some parents up to had a more knowledge of school readiness and its benefits for their children. Up to 98,8% showed the understanding of school readiness nature while 2,8% were not sure.



## SECTION C

**Question 2-** How do parents assess preschool centres as places that make children ready for formal school?

***Table 22: Parents' Responses to Section C***

| STATEMENTS | AGREE | | DISAGREE | | % CORRECT |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | N | % of case | N | % of case | |
| **C1** I check if the facility is clean and safe to support good health in my child. | 28 | 75.7 | 12 | 63.2 | 75.7 |
| **C2** There must be an outdoor play area with enough space for gross motor skills development of our children. | 33 | 89.2 | 7 | 36.8 | 89.2 |
| **C3** Expected to have a school-parent partnership policy as an effort to provide parents with skills to contribute towards | 33 | 89.2 | 7 | 36.8 | 89.2 |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| helping the preschool children. | | | | | |
| **C4** Offer children to learn and implement proper social skills in play by letting them take turns and resolve conflicts. | 30 | 81.1 | 10 | 52.6 | 81.1 |
| **C5** Encourage children to use more verbal language in dramatic plays. | 35 | 94.6 | 5 | 26.3 | 94.6 |
| **C6**. Children work should be displayed on the hallways and around the classrooms | 29 | 78.4 | 11 | 57.9 | 78.4 |
| **C7** Classrooms with reading places, art stations and puzzle area with materials or shelves that kids can reach. | 31 | 83.8 | 9 | 47.4 | 47.4 |
| **C8** Always remind children of the necessary steps when going to the toilet, to wipe, flush and wash hands | 30 | 81.1 | 10 | 52.6 | 81.1 |
| **C9** A school-to-home and a home-to-school communication about school programmes and the children's progress. | 30 | 81.1 | 10 | 52.6 | 52.6 |
| **C10** Low child-caregiver ratio is very important since it allows caregivers to give more attention to all | 30 | 81.1 | 10 | 52.6 | 81.1 |
| **C11** Telling stories to the children in class, so that they should be able to creatively express their understanding of the world around them | 29 | 78.4 | 11 | 57.9 | 57.9 |
| **C12** Always take each child as a unique person with an individual pattern and timing for growth. | 31 | 83.8 | 9 | 47.4 | 83.8 |
| **C13** Decide on the theme of the week, when planning the daily programme in preschool. | 29 | 78.4 | 11 | 57.9 | 78.4 |
| **C14** A preschool with a daily routine that will be understandable to all children | 33 | 89.2 | 7 | 36.8 | 36.8 |
| **C15** The daily programmes decided on, must take the whole child into account, i.e. including the child's age, | 31 | 83.8 | 9 | 47.4 | 83.8 |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| individuality, social and cultural backgrounds | | | | | |
| **C16** Caregiver should guide children in social skills and facilitation of possible interactions between peers and adults | 35 | 94.6 | 5 | 26.3 | 94.6 |
| **C17** Preschool programmes should have lifelong outcomes for the learners. | 32 | 86.5 | 8 | 42.1 | 86.5 |
| **C18** Age appropriate and individual appropriate activities be constructed at preschools | 30 | 81.1 | 10 | 52.6 | 81.1 |
| **C19** The basic self-care skills such as dressing oneself, tying shoelaces and buttoning up should be developed. | 30 | 81.1 | 10 | 52.6 | 81.1 |
| **C20** Children attending preschool should display the prerequisite skills for early literacy, maths and the social maturity to comply with formal school routines. | 32 | 86.5 | 8 | 42.1 | 86.5 |
| **TOTAL** | **589** | **1591.9%** | **171** | **900.0%** | |



The questionnaires for, both, caregivers and parents had 2 questions in (Section D) that required the lecturers to,

(i) give a list of possible challenges/problems that hinder preschools in making children ready for formal school and

(ii) the possible solutions to the identified challenges/problems

These questions were answered with data from respondent's information on challenges/problems pre-school caregivers and parents face in making children ready for formal schooling and also their views on possible solutions to those challenges.

To this, 70% (28) of the caregivers both from the rural and urban preschools mentioned dealing with parents, some of whom may be quite demanding; they don't make a lot of money compared to other fields of work, yet on top of keeping an eye on children and managing their relationships with parents, they also have piles of paperwork to handle on a daily basis - attendance, records of children's activities, lesson planning, meal planning and more; no recognition for hard work as they play a huge role during the most important time of a child's life; lack of development opportunities and issues of inadequate

infrastructure, inadequate equipment and supplies. 30% were satisfied with the preschools. On the other hand, 80% parents rural, urban and community owned preschools mentioned problems like the lack of proper communication with caregivers; inadequate infrastructure; age appropriate toys and furniture; safety was an important preschool experience; no properly qualified preschool caregivers; workshops for parents on how to work hand in hand with caregivers to help their children; while 20%, especially those in religious preschools were satisfied with everything.

## 4.6 Discussions

The researcher presents the discussions of the research findings of the study. The discussions follow the major themes that emerged from data presentation and analysis of the interviews and the questionnaires.

**Objectives and methodology of the study followed were to determine:**

a) the caregivers' and parents' understanding of school readiness nature of preschool education;
b) the extent to which the caregivers' practices can make children ready for formal schooling;
c) the parents assessment of the preschool centres as places that make children ready for formal schooling;
d) caregivers' and parents' views of the challenges facing preschool centres against making children ready for formal schooling; and
e) the possible solutions to the challenges facing preschool centres.



Lidell and Rae (2001) found that cognitive ability and school readiness are significant predictors of later school progress. According to Tzanakis (2013), parents invest in their children, as the next generation of the family who will, in turn, support them in later life, by being physically present, giving them attention and developing an intense relationship

with them that involves meaningful talks about personal matters and expectations of their educational achievement.

School readiness, which indicates readiness of the individual child to enter school, is a condition in which a child is ready to engage in learning experiences at school. It is, however, different from readiness for learning. The nature of school readiness, however, more importantly refers to children's skills required to meet cognitive, physical, and social demands when a child enters school (Janus & Gaskin, 2013). In addition, it covers a broader concept related to minimum level of child's development to give response to school's demands through his cognitive, social, and emotional qualities

Vygotsky (1978) argues that since the process of human development is essentially cumulative in nature, investment in the programmes for young children (0-6) has begun to be accepted as the very foundation for basic education and lifelong learning and development. An important component of early childhood development is the home environment. Readiness in sociocultural terms involves not only the state of the child's existing knowledge but also his or her capacity to learn with help (Woods, 1988). Therefore, children are always ready to learn. This encourages research to examine the people in young children's immediate environments as they start school; caregivers and educators, those who interact with children as 'what the child is able to do in collaboration today he will be able to do independently tomorrow' (Vygotsky, 1987: 211).



## 4.7 Understanding the importance of school readiness

What can be inferred from the understanding of school readiness from focus group discussions is that, the caregivers feel that they are there to make young children gain confidence and independence, which is the social skill that supports children's school readiness to be able to face the school world. They further added to children's skills required to meet cognitive, physical, and social demands when a child enters school. As mentioned in the literature reviewed, preschool experiences are designed to provide cognitive and social enrichment during early childhood development (Lee, 2011;

Robinson, 2011; Smith, 2011). The goal of these experiences is to promote children's ability to successfully make the transition to school and to prevent poor school adjustment outcomes such a school failure, unemployment, and poverty.

Parents in their focus group discussion also understood the importance of school readiness as making their children independent away from the home environments which will make it easy for them to meet the social demands when entering formal schooling. Responses from surveys indicated that both the caregivers and parents understand what school readiness is and its importance. Caregivers' responses in questionnaires showed that only 76,7% understood the school readiness nature of preschool education. Responses from the parents showed that up to 98,8% showed the understanding of school readiness nature while 2,8% were not sure.

## 4.8 Purpose of school readiness

Data from the focus group discussions revealed that non-cognitive skill which influences children's school readiness is the ability to control emotions. This opinion is in line with parents' opinion that the ability to control emotions is a component of school readiness that is quite difficult to achieve by children. Based on the results of interviews with caregivers and parents, it is found that there are no different perspectives on the purpose of children's school readiness. Both caregivers and parents share similar views on the purpose of children's school readiness. On the other hand, results showed that parents consider the main characteristics of children's school readiness include the ability to understand and to follow instructions, as well as to interact with caregivers and their peers. On the contrary, caregivers believe that children need to grow fully in all aspects, emotionally, physically, socially and cognitively before they start formal school. 60% of caregivers showed a clear understanding of the purpose of school readiness in the questionnaire whereas the parents' responses showed a lack of clear understanding of this purpose.



All participants indicated varying activities being done in their centres. Some of the activities listed include; Playing, singing, dancing, sports, storytelling. It is important to ensure that these activities are done in a coordinated manner so that both children and caregivers benefit from them. Such methods or strategies were also reflected in a study

by Motitswe (2012) whose respondents indicated the following as some methods/strategies used to teach in inclusive classroom: storytelling, learning through play, songs, rhymes, group-work, individual work and co-operative learning. Similarly, Vygotsky's theory also allocates an important role to play, especially pretend play, as a significant element that facilitates language development.

It is thus logical, in my view, for Gordon and Browne (2011: 124) to assert that "it is in play that the child can practice operating the symbols and tools of culture". Additionally, since "pretend play is rich in private speech" (Berk 2009: 267), it supports children's thinking and enables them to integrate their thoughts and actions. Accordingly, the role of play in the child's language and, significantly, in learning and development cannot be sufficiently emphasized. It is clear that parents engage in a few activities to support children's growth and development because, they cited, being busy at places of employment. Bhise and Sonawat (2013) affirm the importance of early childhood education in laying a firm foundation for personality development of our young generation. In South Africa, qualifications are established on the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) by the South African Qualification Authority (SAQA). Training in these ECD qualifications is offered by a number of training facilities, including Further Education and Training (FET) colleges, private universities, as well as ECD non-profit organizations (NPOs). To provide a qualification, the service provider/institution must be accredited by the ETDP-SETA (Education, Training and Development Practices Sector Education and Training Authority). *Guidelines for Early Childhood Development Services* (2006). state that a practitioner who meets this minimum standard must be able to:



- Demonstrate how to facilitate growth and skills development in early childhood development programmes;
- Set up and manage a variety of active learning activities that are appropriate to the development needs of young children;
- Interact and communicate with young children in a way that supports all aspects of learning;

- Use an inclusive anti-bias approach that respects the cultural, religious and experiential background of the children and supports children with disabilities;
- Maintain a safe and healthy learning environment;
- Establish a supportive and caring environment that meets children's basic and social needs and helps them manage their own behaviour;
- Establish respectful and co-operative relationships with co-workers' families and community; and
- Contribute to programme planning and evaluation, the assessment of children's progress and administration of the learning programme (Department of Social Development & UNICEF, 2006: 66).

The original purpose of the Basic Certificate: ECD (Level 1) qualification was to provide access to training to teachers who work in an ECD setting in both home-based or centre-based, however, this qualification has expired in 2010. The NQF Further Education and Training Certificate: ECD (Level 4) qualification has become the entry-level qualification for ECD practitioners/caregivers. This qualification aims to provide ECD practitioners with the necessary skills to facilitate the holistic development of young children (including those children with special needs), and offer quality ECD services in a variety of settings (such as at ECD centres, home-based ECD centres, or within community-based services).



## 4.9 The effects of poverty and deprivation on school readiness

The researcher observed that participants were, in both focus groups, concerned about the number of children growing in extended families, and others staying with other children, no parents alive and also single parents that were not given the opportunity to attend preschools. The South African Constitution acknowledges that children have the right to social assistance when their families are unable to meet their basic needs. It is clear that income poverty is closely connected to poor health, limited access to education, nutrition, healthcare services and safe environments. Closely linked to this income poverty indicator is unemployment. Stats SA (2010) indicated that 36% of children reside

in households where no adults are employed. Government does provide financial support to children when their mothers are too poor to do so, in order for them to meet their basic needs. Every child has the right to an education, it is a human right recorded in our Constitution. Being educated is fundamental to building a foundation for life-long learning and economic opportunities.

The parents further added the deprivation of school readiness to children with disabilities because of lack of funds to create infrastructure that is user-friendly for those who are physically challenged, lack of trained personnel to train the preschool caregivers to be able to handle inclusive classrooms and negative attitudes. To this end, there is need to prepare teachers for inclusive education focusing on the strategies that are aimed at transforming teachers' practices which are largely influenced by their attitudes, attributes, beliefs and values (Chireshe, 2011).

Several factors influencing children's school readiness include external and internal factors. The former are sourced from outside of the individual, while the latter from inside. The external factors are frequently associated with ecological concepts which involve influence of family, community, school, service on children's school readiness. These factors include ready families, ready communities, ready services and ready early learning settings and schools. Ready families imply that family environment should be able to provide learning experiences for children, as well as to give opportunity for child's growth and development. However, except family factor, such external factors are mostly related to government's responsibility and policy, making them difficult to change or intervene.



Nowadays, demands of school readiness emphasize more on internal factors due to more possibilities to intervene (Ferreira, L, 2015). Mishra (2012) argues that the first six years of a child's life have been recognized as the most critical ones for optimal development. Mishra deduces that since the process of human development is essentially cumulative in nature, investment in the programmes for young children (0-6 years) has begun to be accepted as the very foundation for basic education and lifelong learning and development.

Pre-schooling is perceived as contributing positively to higher earnings and social attachment. Children growing up without early cognitive stimulation may have cumulative cognitive deficits polarizing educational attainment. The consequences of the deficit can be starkly shown by the widening achievement gap between the disadvantaged and advantaged children as they move from grade to grade (Heckman, 2006).

## 4.10 Understanding of the domains of school readiness

For caregivers, cognitive factors are important factors influencing children's school readiness because such skills are needed by children when entering primary school. Parents also shared the same assumption that cognitive factors exert an influence on children's school readiness. Caregivers assumed that the most important social skill that supports children's school readiness is their skill to socialize with the school environment. This ability can be seen through the interaction of children with peers and teachers at school. Parents had the same perception that the significant supporting factor of children's school readiness is their interaction with peers.



School readiness falls into several domains including child's physical health and well-being, social competence and emotional maturity, approaches to learning, language and cognitive development, and communication skills (Stainton R. 2011). The other opinion stated that these domains include 1) physical health and well-being which refers to children's physical preparedness for the school day, physical independence, and fine and gross motor skills, 2) social competence which covers such areas as all social competences, responsibility and respect, approaches to learning, and readiness explore new things, 3) emotional maturity which covers prosocial behaviour, cooperative behaviour, anxious behaviour and fear, aggression, as well as inattention and hyperactivity, 4) language and cognitive development which refers to basic literacy skills, interest and memory, more complex literacy, and basic numeracy skills, and 5) communication skills and general knowledge. All of the domains are required by children to be able to get ready to enter school and to learn at school (Janus & Offod, 2000). Children's school readiness has been conceptualized as the skills and knowledge

children need when they enter school in order to learn effectively in the school environment (Janus, 2007).

However, evidence gathered from the focus group discussions and the questionnaires showed that 47,7 of the caregivers were not clear about the domains of development for preschool children. Most preschools cited that they were not guided by any proper curriculum for activities in their classrooms. Parents only see maturity as the key factor for their children.

## 4.11 Exploration of the problems in preschools

Evidence gathered from the focus group discussions emphasized the lack of funds to create infrastructure that is user-friendly for those who are physically challenged, lack of trained personnel to train the pre-service teachers to be able to handle inclusive classrooms and negative attitudes. Parents and caregivers indicated the concern about deprivation of school readiness to children with disabilities.



Given the limited funding available to ECD centres to spend on infrastructure, as well as the lack of support from municipalities, it is necessary to consider the physical resource challenges that ECD centres face. From the Department of Social Development (2014:13) ECD audit targeted 19 971 ECD centres nationwide, registered and unregistered found out that 30.8% of ECD centres were built with the sole purpose of functioning as an ECD centre, 17% operate from houses, and more than 17% are operated from a house or part of a house, including a garage, and 10% operate from a shack. It also found that 42% required urgent maintenance. Most of the centres were in the Eastern Cape and KwaZulu-Natal. Another problem found by the analysis was that all ECD practitioners did not have a tertiary qualification. Over 43% of practitioners have below Grade 12 education, while about 40% have completed matric. To add, 49% of the centres' expenditure in all the provinces went to practitioners' salaries while 91% of the centres offered no recognized curriculum, and 40% did not have sufficient pupil support material.

The Eastern Cape is one of the provinces with the largest percentage of ECD centres lacking adequate basic infrastructure with the average monthly salary of an ECD

practitioner is unacceptably low. Delivering high-quality and effective early childhood care and education rely heavily on the quality of ECD practitioners, but also the quality of the structures supporting them. The big problem cited in the focus group interviews with caregivers is that unregistered centres do not qualify for these subsidies to help cover their costs, which include practitioner salaries, the children's meals, maintenance and infrastructure, and all other necessary resources.

The demographic controls in this analysis include the parents' level of education, marital status, and mother's age at birth, as well race/ethnicity, immigrant status, gender, and age in months. Parents' education is a large factor explaining why children from moderate and high income families enter school with higher reading and math skills—their parents are better educated. Children's early academic skills are higher, on average, when parents have more years of schooling, and this association persists even after controlling for parents' inherent abilities, according to evidence from welfare reform evaluations and sophisticated statistical analyses (Gennetian, Magnuson & Morris, 2008; Carneiro et al., 2007). In addition, the "education" effect also reflects underlying differences in parents' skills and preferences, which are often passed on to their children, by both inherited traits and upbringing.



The large number of poor children living with an unmarried mother also contributes to the poverty gap in school readiness. Children living with single and even cohabiting parents tend to have worse outcomes, particularly behavioural outcomes, than similar children living with married parents, according to several studies (Waldfogel, Craigie & Brooks-Gunn, 2010). Living with teen parents also may put children at additional risk, although researchers find little evidence regarding effects on early academic skills and mixed evidence regarding effects on behavioural outcomes (Levine et al., 2007).

## 4.12 Resources for preschools

Although much has been done to improve access and quality of early learning programmes in both ECD facilities and Grade R classrooms, there is a long way to go in the enhancement of service delivery (Department of Basic Education, Department of Social Development & UNICEF, 2010). Some of the prominent challenges and obstacles

facing ECD facilities include absence of learning materials and resources, especially within the classroom setting, minimal funding, lack of qualified teachers, inadequate security for children whilst at the ECD facility, as well as poor toilet amenities (Department of Basic Education, Department of Social Development & UNICEF, 2010).

Infrastructure in preschools, in both, registered community-based ECD facilities, and in unregistered community-based ECD facilities, is a particular problem in the South African context, often framed as the biggest challenge in ECD provisioning in the country (HSRC, 2010). Many ECD facilities function without basic infrastructure such as running water, access to electricity or suitable sanitation. About 8% of all ECD centres have none of these basic infrastructure requirements. Infrastructure in the ECD setting includes the building, grounds, learning equipment and learning materials.

ECD practitioners play a crucial role, they are in the unique position to provide the fundamental skills and opportunities for children. Often preschools lack the human and infrastructural resources to stimulate children cognitively and non-cognitively, and therefore rather function as child-minding facilities. Recognized indicators of quality at preschool level by most of the participants in the study include physical resources, teaching methods, school policy and caregiver-parent relations. The most vital element to quality teaching and learning, however, a lot remains with the teacher (Christie, 2008; Wood, 2004). Teachers need to understand the developmental realities of children in preschools, and especially appreciate that *what* children learn is as important as *how* children learn (Excell & Linington, 2011).



## 4.13 Parental participation and support in preschools

Parental involvement is vital for the child's school success. The Caregiver that communicates with parents regularly, bridges the gap between home life and the school world. However, the communication must be structured, purposeful, and of educational benefit to the parents. Entering school starting age is exhilarating not only for children, but also for their parents. Parents have positive expectations when their children enter

the school starting age and believe that school will contribute to better change in their future. Therefore, they formulate long-term plans, from types of school to financial preparedness, long before to ensure that children get the best education. However, regardless such matter, the fundamental thing needed by children when entering school is school readiness.

Based on the results of interviews with caregivers and parents, it is found that parents are unconcerned about their young children education at the preschool level. Majority of the preschool caregivers complained about the attitudes of parents towards early childhood education. According to the preschool caregivers, parents do not understand early childhood education, but most of them see it as time wasting when they are called to participate in preschool activities. Some parents' opinions about early childhood centres is that those are just a playing ground not a serious place for learning. Over time, there has been a shift in parental perceptions regarding child care quality. Convenience factors such as cost and location, as well as health, safety, warmth of the caregiver, and parent-caregiver communication have long been important to parents (Emlen, 1999; Rose & Elicker, 2008). Recently, however, parents are also indicating that the quality of the caregiving environment is important to them (Kim & Fram, 2009; Shlay, Tran, Weinraub, & Harmon, 2005; Chase & Valorose, 2010; Yamamoto & Li, 2012).



Parents were asked to rank all the practices of promoting children's social-emotional development. Parents' answers again varied. Six (15%) of the forty parents reported that it is most important that the care provider help children learn to control their behaviour. When asked which practice would be easy for a caregiver to implement, seven (18%) of the forty parents said that a provider helping children resolve conflicts with other children would be easy.

## 4.14 Summary Of The Findings

The findings from this research study validate some trends in the international literature. For example, many researchers (Abdullah *et al*., 2011) have come to the conclusion that parental involvement decreases as learners progress through the various learning phases. Both the Caregivers and Parents largely believed that their perceptions of what

school readiness is differ to each other, thereby creating uncertainties and doubt in how to prepare children for school. A partnership approach in preparing and supporting the children was advocated for ineffective communication and time prove to be barriers to this.

Lack of parental involvement is identified by many researchers (Mncube, 2009; Le Cordeur, 2015) as an obstacle to children's successful scholastic development. Caregivers are not aware of the policies that govern the preschools, where they can apply those to build a strong caregiver: parent relationships. These researchers list various possible barriers to effective parental involvement, including, among others:

- low socio-economic status;
- work-related commitments;
- lack of skills;
- Availability; and
- limited time.

Any school that seeks maximum parental involvement has to take these and other parental involvement barriers seriously and work to develop measures and strategies to counter the effects of these barriers. It is not surprising that conditionally registered centres or those not registered at all, have worse on the infrastructural problems than fully registered centres, since infrastructural inadequacies were the main reason provided by both caregivers and parents for being conditionally registered.



The study further revealed that preschools are battling with the ablution facilities that are not age appropriate for the young children. On the other hand, most of the preschools do not have proper playgrounds which deprives children to play as it is very crucial for their physical and gross motor skills. Some of the parents and caregivers do not understand the importance of the domains of development in making the children full ready for formal schooling.

# CHAPTER FIVE

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### 5.1 Conclusion

This chapter presents conclusions and recommendations of this study where the caregivers' and parents' views about preschool education as a school readiness programme in the Queenstown Education district. The study established that preschool education is a critical factor in school readiness of children; and also established the challenges of that level of education in the study area. The study also highlighted that the majority of the parents felt incompetent in helping ECD children. The recommendations are proposed as a means of motivation to caregivers in preschools as well as increasing their performance at work and also looking at how parents perceive the caregivers' practices in making young children ready for formal schooling despite challenges/problems that are encountered in preschools. Conclusions on the other hand, involve salient issues found out in the study. From the above, it is clear that the biggest challenge in early childhood development is to increase access to early childhood development programmes and to improve the quality of these programmes. Quality teaching and learning is essential for effective early development to take place. Regardless of the situation or the facility in which a child is placed, a quality caregiver can provide a learning environment in which a child can develop in a holistic manner.



### 5.2 Recommendations

Various recommendations can be drawn from the research findings but for the sake of this study here are the major recommendations made. The recommendations are drawn for the two focus group discussions/interviews and the responses of caregivers and parents in questionnaires.

1. Government authorities overseeing the pre-school programmes should organise frequent in-service training for both caregivers and parents with respect to early childhood education curriculum.

2. ECD programmes must provide appropriate developmental opportunities and care for our children, ensuring that their emotional, cognitive, and physical development needs are met throughout their early lives.

3. Extensive investment in infrastructure and learning and teaching support material is necessary, DBE and DSD should assist unregistered preschools to attain the required health and safety standards.

4. There should be coordinated efforts with community leaders to improve the standards and learning conditions of their centres.



5. There should be incentives to caregivers in the centres from the district office to recognize outstanding performance.

6. Capacity building is required among the national departments, provincial departments and districts.

7. Sufficient staffing and ECD expertise… In order to produce quality ECD teachers, various training and education opportunities are made available through short skills programmes, as well as through full ECD qualifications.

8. An entire teaching force will need to be trained and provided with the vital skills to be more effective in unlocking the untapped potential of young children.

9. Programmes focusing on schools, located in deep rural and impoverished communities as well as in semi-urban areas, have to be designed in order to

educate and encourage parents to actively involve themselves with preschool activities.

## 5.3 Recommendations and areas for further study

This study was conducted in only 6 preschools in the Queenstown Education District and only forty caregivers and forty parents returned the questionnaires with their responses; therefore, there is a need for further research to replicate these findings. It would be more appropriate if the research may include the district officials and community leaders because the researcher felt the problem with the high failure rate started below the senior secondary level. Therefore, community leaders' and district officials' views about the preschool education as a readiness programme need to be investigated.

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# LIST OF APPENCICES

## APPENDIX A: CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE

University of Fort Hare
*Together in Excellence*

**ETHICAL CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE**
**REC-270710-028-RA Level 01**

| | |
|---|---|
| Certificate Reference Number: | ADU201SMTY01 |
| Project title: | **The caregivers and parents' views about preschool education as a readiness programme in the Queenstown Education District.** |
| Nature of Project | PhD in Education |
| Principal Researcher: | Pamela Nomonde Pettina Mtyuda |
| Supervisor: | Prof E.O Adu |
| Co-supervisor: | N/A |

On behalf of the University of Fort Hare's Research Ethics Committee (UREC) I hereby give ethical approval in respect of the undertakings contained in the above-mentioned project and research instrument(s). Should any other instruments be used, these require separate authorization. The Researcher may therefore commence with the research as from the date of this certificate, using the reference number indicated above.

Please note that the UREC must be informed immediately of

- Any material change in the conditions or undertakings mentioned in the document
- Any material breaches of ethical undertakings or events that impact upon the ethical conduct of the research

**Special conditions:** Research that includes children as per the official regulations of the act must take the following into account:

Note: The UREC is aware of the provisions of s71 of the National Health Act 61 of 2003 and that matters pertaining to obtaining the Minister's consent are under discussion and remain unresolved. Nonetheless, as was decided at a meeting between the National Health Research Ethics Committee and stakeholders on 6 June 2013, university ethics committees may continue to grant ethical clearance for research involving children without the Minister's consent, provided that the prescripts of the previous rules have been met. This certificate is granted in terms of this agreement.

The UREC retains the right to

- Withdraw or amend this Ethical Clearance Certificate if
  - Any unethical principal or practices are revealed or suspected
  - Relevant information has been withheld or misrepresented
  - Regulatory changes of whatsoever nature so require
  - The conditions contained in the Certificate have not been adhered to

- Request access to any information or data at any time during the course or after completion of the project.

- In addition to the need to comply with the highest level of ethical conduct principle investigators must report back annually as an evaluation and monitoring mechanism on the progress being made by the research. Such a report must be sent to the Dean of Research's office

The Ethics Committee wished you well in your research.

Yours sincerely

**Professor Lindelwa Majova-Songca**
**Acting Dean of Research**

08 September 2017

# APPENDIX B: APPROVAL LETTER BY THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Province of the
EASTERN CAPE
EDUCATION

**STRATEGIC PLANNING POLICY RESEARCH AND SECRETARIAT SERVICES**
Steve Vukile Tshwete Complex • Zone 6 • Zwelitsha • Eastern Cape
Private Bag X0032 • Bhisho • 5605 • REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA
Tel: +27 (0)40 608 4773/4035/4537 • Fax: +27 (0)40 608 4574 • Website: www.ecdoe.gov.za

Enquiries: B Pamla Email: babalwa.pamla@ecdoe.gov.za Date: 04 December 2017

Ms Pamela Nomonde Mtyuda

13 Waterberg Road

Van Coller Park

**Queenstown**

**5319**

Dear Ms Mtyuda

**PERMISSION TO UNDERTAKE A DOCTORATE RESEARCH: CAREGIVERS AND PARENTS' VIEW ABOUT PRESCHOOL EDUCATION AS A SCHOOL READINESS PROGRAMME IN THE QUEENSTOWN EDUCATION DISTRICT.**

1. Thank you for your application to conduct research.
2. Your application to conduct the abovementioned research involving 6 caregivers for the focus group from Preschools in Queenstown Education District under the jurisdiction of the Eastern Cape Department of Education (ECDoE) is hereby approved based on the following conditions:
    a. there will be no financial implications for the Department;
    b. permission for independent preschools should be requested from relevant authorities;
    c. permission for parents should be requested from them personally or from relevant school governing bodies;
    d. institutions and respondents must not be identifiable in any way from the results of the investigation;
    e. you present a copy of the written approval letter of the Eastern Cape Department of Education (ECDoE) to the Cluster and District Directors before any research is undertaken at any institutions within that particular district;
    f. you will make all the arrangements concerning your research;

g. the research may not be conducted during official contact time;

h. should you wish to extend the period of research after approval has been granted, an application to do this must be directed to Chief Director: Strategic Management Monitoring and Evaluation;

i. your research will be limited to those institutions for which approval has been granted, should changes be effected written permission must be obtained from the Chief Director: Strategic Management Monitoring and Evaluation;

j. you present the Department with a copy of your final paper/report/dissertation/thesis free of charge in hard copy and electronic format. This must be accompanied by a separate synopsis (maximum 2 – 3 typed pages) of the most important findings and recommendations if it does not already contain a synopsis.

k. you present the findings to the Research Committee and/or Senior Management of the Department when and/or where necessary.

l. you are requested to provide the above to the Chief Director: Strategic Management Monitoring and Evaluation upon completion of your research.

m. you comply with all the requirements as completed in the Terms and Conditions to conduct Research in the ECDoE document duly completed by you.

n. you comply with your ethical undertaking (commitment form).

o. You submit on a six monthly basis, from the date of permission of the research, concise reports to the Chief Director: Strategic Management Monitoring and Evaluation

3. The Department reserves a right to withdraw the permission should there not be compliance to the approval letter and contract signed in the Terms and Conditions to conduct Research in the ECDoE.

4. The Department will publish the completed Research on its website.

5. The Department wishes you well in your undertaking. You can contact the Director, Ms. NY Kanjana on the numbers indicated in the letterhead or email nykanjana@live.co.za should you need any assistance.

**NY KANJANA**
**DIRECTOR: STRATEGIC PLANNING POLICY RESEARCH & SECRETARIAT SERVICES**

**FOR SUPERINTENDENT-GENERAL: EDUCATION**

# APPENDIX C: APPROVAL LETTER BY THE QUEENSTOWN DISTRICT DIRECTOR

Province of the
EASTERN CAPE
EDUCATION

THE DISTRICT DIRECTOR
HOMESTEAD SITE, 2 LIMPOPO DRIVE LAURIE DASHWOOD PARK QUEENSTOWN 5320. Private Bag X7053 QUEENSTOWN, 5320 REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA, Website: www.ecdoe.gov.za Ref: Tel. No. 045-858 8900 / 808 570,
email : nkosinathi.godlo@yahoo.com

23 October 2017

PNP. Mtyuda
The Homestead Building
Laurie Dashwood Park
Queenstown
5319

Sir/Madam

**REQUEST FOR PERMISION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN SCHOOLS.**

The above matter refers to:

Your correspondence dated the requesting permission to conduct research in our schools is hereby acknowledged. I wish to inform you that the research you intend to conduct in the department of education – Chris Hani West District Komani CMC, is highly appreciated and thereby granted.

The Department of Education- Chris Hani West District Komani CMC applauds initiatives like this in an attempt to uplift the standard of education not only in the Chris Hani West District Komani CMC but in South Africa. We therefore wish you every degree of success in your research and for any assistance you would want, the district will welcome you anytime and happily assist in that regard.

it would be highly appreciated that you could send timeframes that will suit the schools and will not interfere with their teaching and learning programme. Also send timeframes that will indicate the commencement date of the research to the district office and the schools in advance.

Yours in Education

**HN GODLO**
**DISTRICT DIRECTOR (Chris Hani West District Komani CMC)**

building blocks for growth

PGDP EASTERN CAPE
*Ikamva eliqaqambileyo!*

## APPENDIX D: LETTER TO THE QUEENSTOWN EDUCATION DISTRICT DIRECTOR

**TO:** The District Director
Department of Education
Queenstown

**FROM:** PNP MTYUDA (Ms.)
Homestead Building
Queenstown Education District
Private Bag X7053
Queenstown

Dear Sir

SUBJECT: REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

I hereby request permission to undertake research work at six selected preschools in the district, namely, 3 schools from the rural areas and 3 schools from the urban areas.



I am enrolled for a PhD Degree in Education Management at the University of Fort Hare. I am undertaking a study about "**THE CAREGIVERS' AND PARENTS' VIEWS ABOUT PRESCHOOL EDUCATION AS A SCHOOL READINESS PROGRAMME IN THE QUEENSTOWN EDUCATION DISTRICT**".

**(1)** I intend conducting two focus group interviews with 6 preschool caregivers and 6 parents with children in those preschools, and it is envisaged that each interview will last for 45 minutes for each group; and

**(2)** I also intend to distribute questionnaires to preschools for them to respond to only 4 questions therein.

The purpose of the study will be outlined at the beginning of each session, confidentiality discussed and informed consent obtained at the beginning of all interviews and focus group sessions.

I believe this study will be of benefit not only to me but to the preschools, district and province as well, through anticipated responses to some questions surrounding the quality of teaching and learning with particular reference to the Queenstown District preschools.

I promise that all information obtained from the study will be treated with strict confidentiality and will only be used for academic purpose of this study.

I am hoping for your kind consideration.

Yours sincerely
PNP MTYUDA (Ms.)

## APPENDIX E: LETTER TO THE PRINCIPALS, GOVERNING BODIES AND PARENTS

**TO:** The Principals

Governing Bodies

Parents

QUEENSTOWN DISTRICT

**FROM:** PNP MTYUDA (Ms.)

Homestead Building

Queenstown Education District

Private Bag X7053

Queenstown

Dear Sir

SUBJECT: REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH



I hereby request permission to undertake research work at six selected preschools in the district, namely, 3 schools from the rural areas and 3 schools from the urban areas.

I am enrolled for a PhD Degree in Education Management at the University of Fort Hare. I am undertaking a study about "**THE CAREGIVERS' AND PARENTS' VIEWS ABOUT PRESCHOOL EDUCATION AS A SCHOOL READINESS PROGRAMME IN THE QUEENSTOWN EDUCATION DISTRICT**".

**(1)** I intend conducting two focus group interviews with 6 preschool caregivers and 6 parents with children in those preschools, and it is envisaged that each interview will last for 45 minutes for each group; and

**(2)** I also intend to distribute questionnaires to preschools for them to respond to only 4 questions therein.

The purpose of the study will be outlined at the beginning of each session, confidentiality discussed and informed consent obtained at the beginning of all interviews and focus group sessions.

I believe this study will be of benefit not only to me but to the preschools, district and province as well, through anticipated responses to some questions surrounding the quality of teaching and learning with particular reference to the Queenstown District preschools.

The research findings and recommendations will be of benefit, not to me only, but to schools, district and province as well.

I am hoping for your kind consideration.

Yours sincerely
PNP MTYUDA (Ms)

Cell no.: 079 3729 833

## APPENDIX F: CONSENT FORM-CAREGIVERS

**Consent Form**

Ms Pamela Nomonde Pettina Mtyuda is hereby given consent to conduct an interview with preschool caregivers of ……...as the research site for the thesis that she is required to write for the completion of her PhD degree in Education.

It has come into our knowledge that the data will be collected from the focus group interviews. The information from these will then be used in the final report. Furthermore, I have received the assurance that the school teachers will remain anonymous in the report.

Principal's signature……

Date……...

Caregiver's signature……

Date……

## APPENDIX G: CONSENT FORM-PARENTS

**Consent Form**

Ms Pamela Nomonde Pettina Mtyuda is hereby given consent to conduct an interview with preschool parents of ……...as the research site for the thesis that she is required to write for the completion of her PhD degree in Education.

It has come into our knowledge that the data will be collected from the focus group interviews. The information from these will then be used in the final report. Furthermore, I have received the assurance that the parents will remain anonymous in the report.

Parent's signature……

Date……

## APPENDIX H: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

### INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR CAREGIVERS ON SCHOOL READINESS (ISC_SR)

### PART 1

(I) Number of caregivers for the interview……
(II) Centre where the interview is held……..
(III) Name of interviewees:

1……

2……

3……

4……

5……...

6……



### PART 2

1. What do you understand by saying a preschool is ready to make children ready for formal school education?

2. What are those things you are doing in your centre that will make children ready for formal schooling?

3. What are the challenges/problems encountered in your centres that will negatively influence the children readiness for formal schooling?

4. What do you think are the solutions to the problems identified earlier?

## APPENDIX I: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

### INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR PARENTS ON SCHOOL READINESS (ISP_SR)

### PART 1

(I) No of parents for the interview…….
(II) Centre where the interview is held……..
(III) Name of interviewees:
1……

2……

3……

4……

5……

6……



### PART 2

1. What do you understand by saying a preschool is ready to make children ready for formal school education?

2. What are those things you are doing in your centre that will make children ready for formal schooling?

3. What are the challenges/problems encountered in your centres that will negatively influence the children readiness for formal schooling?

4. What do you think are the solutions to the problems identified earlier?

## APPENDIX J: CAREGIVERS' QUESTIONNAIRE ON SCHOOL READINESS (CQSR)

This questionnaire seeks your opinion on preschool education as a formal school readiness programme. All information provided by you will be treated as strictly confidential. You are, therefore, kindly requested to complete the questionnaire as honestly as you can. Thank you for taking time to complete this survey.

### SECTION A: BIOGRAPHICAL DATA

Kindly fill in the blank spaces or tick (√) the appropriate box.

1. Gender:

| Male | Female |
|---|---|
| 1 | 2 |

2. Marital status:

| Single | Married | Divorced |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 |



3. Highest education qualification:

| | |
|---|---|
| Grade 7 | 1 |
| Grade 9 | 2 |
| Matric | 3 |
| Certificate in Education | 4 |
| Diploma in Education | 5 |
| Bachelor's Degree in Education | 6 |
| Honours Degree in Education | 7 |
| PhD | 8 |

4. Teaching experience:

| | |
|---|---|
| 0-3 years | 1 |

| | |
|---|---|
| 4-6 years | 2 |
| 7-10 years | 3 |
| Above 10 years | 4 |

5. Areas of specialization:

| | |
|---|---|
| Early Childhood and Care Education(ECCE) | 1 |
| Grade R or Early Childhood Education | 2 |
| Others (specify) | 3 |

6. School location:

| Rural | Urban |
|---|---|
| 1 | 2 |

7. Name of school……



8. School ownership

| | |
|---|---|
| Privately owned | 1 |
| Government owned | 2 |
| Community owned | 3 |
| Religious body owned | 4 |

9. Age of children:

| | |
|---|---|
| 0-2 years old | 1 |
| 2-3 years old | 2 |
| 3-4 years old | 3 |

**Section B:**

**Please tick (√) the appropriate box that best represents your opinion on what you understand by the school readiness nature of preschool education.**

| Serial no | Items | Not sure | True | False |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | Preschool is meant to develop diversity skills on children. | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 2. | Preschool helps with the development of cognitive skills only in children. | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 3. | Preschool education ensures equal development of all developmental domains | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 4. | Preschool education ensures that the child develops socially only, before attending formal school. | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 5. | Preschool education ensures that children develop early language skills only before attending formal school. | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 6. | Attending preschool is an opportunity for a child to learn to share, follow instructions and begin a foundation to learn before his/her formal schooling. | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 7. | Preschool education does not promote social and emotional development of a child. | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 8. | Preschool education helps children to have an active imagination and learn through make-believe play. | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 9. | Preschool education gives all children opportunities that promote formal school success. | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 10. | Preschool education recognises and support children's differences. | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 11. | Pre-schooling is only about taking children to other environments without their families to make them grow faster. | 1 | 2 | 3 |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 12. | Preschool education involves developing self-help skills to a child to influence the long-term development of the child. | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 13. | Preschool education states that all children are ready for formal schooling when they turn 5. | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 14. | The skills that need to be acquired by children in preschools in order to be ready for formal school are emotional and social coping skills only. | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 15. | Preschool education helps children who display aggressive, noncompliant and disruptive behaviours. | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 16. | In preschools children learn how to build relationships with peers and adults. | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 17. | Preschool education should focus on literacy and numeracy interventions only, to help children count and communicate effectively. | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 18. | Children's development and learning is influenced by the context within which they live. | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 19. | As the child's development encompasses several domains, preschool education offers toddlers learning experiences that benefit them throughout their educational careers. | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 20. | School readiness involves children, families, preschool caregivers as well as the school and community support. | 1 | 2 | 3 |

**SECTION C:**

**Please tick (√) the appropriate box that best represents your opinion on the extent in which caregivers' practices make children ready for formal schooling.**

| Serial no | Items | Agree | Disagree |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | I expose preschool children to reading, | 1 | 2 |
| 2. | I expose preschool children to writing. | 1 | 2 |
| 3. | I allow preschool children to play outside for 2 hours | 1 | 2 |
| 4. | I offer children an opportunity to learn and implement proper social skills in play by letting them take turns and resolve conflicts. | 1 | 2 |
| 5. | I encourage children to use more verbal language in dramatic plays. | 1 | 2 |
| 6. | I make use of playground for movement activities to let children develop gross-motor skills. | 1 | 3 |
| 7. | What motivates me to work with young children in preschools is letting children correct one another in words pronunciation. | 1 | 2 |
| 8. | I never let preschool children sort their toys after playing, I sort the toys for them. | 1 | 2 |
| 9. | I remind children of the necessary steps when going to the toilet, namely, to wipe, flush and wash hands. | 1 | 2 |
| 10. | In my class, I encourage children to teach one another how to take off and put on their clothes. | 1 | 2 |
| 11. | I use the golden rule to show children the expected levels of behaviour in class. | 1 | 2 |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 12. | I am the only one telling stories to the children in class. | 1 | 2 |
| 13. | In my teaching, I take each child as a unique person with an individual pattern and timing for growth. | 1 | 2 |
| 14. | I decide on the theme of the week when planning the daily programme. | 1 | 2 |
| 15. | Every activity has a focus point when presented in my class. | 1 | 2 |
| 16. | The daily programmes are decided on, take the whole child into account approach, i.e. including the child's age, individuality, social and cultural backgrounds. | 1 | 2 |
| 17. | From my experience as a caregiver, I guide children in social skills and facilitation of possible interactions between peers and adults. | 1 | 2 |
| 18. | As separation from parents is very difficult in the beginning, I create activities for children to adapt in this transition. | 1 | 2 |
| 19. | In class, I focus on "learning through play" by providing a hands-on, interactive atmosphere. | 1 | 2 |
| 20. | Children are guided to acquire understanding of emotions to become more capable for managing their feelings. | 1 | 2 |



**SECTION D:**

1. List possible challenges/problems facing your centre in making children ready for formal schooling.

(i)……..

(ii)…….....

(iii)…….....

(iv)……..

(v)……...

2. What are possible solutions to the identified challenges/problems?

(i)……..

(ii)……..

(iii)……

(iv)……..

(v)……

## APPENDIX K: PARENTS' QUESTIONNAIRE ON SCHOOL READINESS (PQSR)

This questionnaire seeks your opinion on preschool education as formal school readiness programme. All information provided by you will be treated as strictly confidential. You are, therefore, kindly requested to complete the questionnaire as honestly as you can. Thank you for taking time to complete this survey.

### SECTION A: BIOGRAPHICAL DATA

Kindly fill in the blank spaces or tick (√) the appropriate box.

1. Gender:

| Male | Female |
|---|---|
| 1 | 2 |

2. Marital status:

| Single | Married | Divorced |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 |



3. Highest education qualification:

| | |
|---|---|
| Grade 7 | 1 |
| Grade 9 | 2 |
| Matric | 3 |
| Other | 4 |

6. School location:

| Rural | Urban |
|---|---|
| 1 | 2 |

7. Name of school……

8. School ownership

| | |
|---|---|
| Privately owned | 1 |
| Government owned | 2 |
| Community owned | 3 |
| Religious body owned | 4 |

9. Age of children:

| | |
|---|---|
| 0-2 years old | 1 |
| 2-3 years old | 2 |
| 3-4 years old | 3 |

**Section B:**

**Please tick (√) the appropriate box that best represents your opinion on what you understand by school readiness nature of preschool education.**



| Serial no | Items | Not sure | True | False |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | Preschool is meant to develop diversity skills in children. | 1 | **2** | 3 |
| 2. | Preschool helps with the development of cognitive skills only in children. | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 3. | Preschool ensures equal development of all developmental domains in children. | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 4. | Preschool education ensures that the child develops socially only, before attending formal school. | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 5. | Preschool education ensures that children develop early language skills only before attending formal school. | 1 | 2 | 3 |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 6. | Attending preschool is an opportunity for a child to learn to share, follow instructions and begin a foundation to learn before his/her formal schooling. | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 7. | Preschool education does not promote social and emotional development of a child. | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 8. | Preschool education helps children to have active imagination and learn through make-believe play. | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 9. | Preschool education gives all children opportunities that promote formal school success. | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 10. | Preschool education does not recognise and support children's differences. | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 11. | Pre-schooling is only about taking children to other environments without their families to make them grow faster. | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 12. | Preschool education involves developing self-help skills to a child that influence the long-term development of the pre-schooler. | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 13. | Preschool education states that all children are ready for formal schooling when they turn 5. | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 14. | The skills that need to be acquired by children in preschools in order to be ready for formal school are the emotional and social coping skills only. | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 15. | Preschool education helps children who display aggressive, noncompliant and disruptive behaviours. | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 16. | In preschools children learn how to build relationships with peers and adults. | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 17. | Preschool education should focus on literacy and numeracy interventions only, to help children count and communicate effectively. | 1 | 2 | 3 |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 18. | Children's development and learning is influenced by the context within which they live. | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 19. | As the child's development encompasses several domains, preschool education offers toddlers learning experiences that benefit them throughout their educational careers. | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 20. | School readiness involves children, families, preschool caregivers as well as the school and community support. | 1 | 2 | 3 |

**SECTION C:**

**Please tick (√) the appropriate box that best represents your opinion on how you, as a parent, assess preschool centres as places that make children ready for formal schooling.**



| Serial No | Items | Disagree | Agree |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | I check if the facility is clean and safe to support good health in my child. | 1 | 2 |
| 2 | There must be an outdoor play area with enough space for gross motor skills development of our children. | 1 | 2 |
| 3 | I expect to have a school-parent partnership policy as an effort to provide parents with skills to contribute towards helping the preschool children. | 1 | 2 |
| 4 | Offer children an opportunity to learn and implement proper social skills in play by letting them take turns and resolve conflicts. | 1 | 2 |
| 5 | Encourage children to use more verbal language in dramatic plays. | 1 | 2 |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 6 | Children's work should be displayed on the hallways and around the classrooms. | 1 | 2 |
| 7 | Classrooms with reading places, art stations and puzzle area with materials or shelves that kids can reach. | 1 | 2 |
| 8 | Always remind children of the necessary steps when going to the toilet, to wipe, flush and wash hands. | 1 | 2 |
| 9 | School-to-home and a home-to-school communication about school programmes and the children's progress. | 1 | 2 |
| 10 | Low child-caregiver ratio is very important since it allows caregivers to give more attention to all. | 1 | 2 |
| 11 | Telling stories to the children in class so that they should be able to creatively express their understanding of the world around them. | 1 | 2 |
| 12 | Always take each child as a unique person with an individual pattern and timing for growth. | 1 | 2 |
| 13 | Decide on the theme of the week when planning the daily programme in preschool | 1 | 2 |
| 14 | A preschool with a daily routine that will be understandable to all children. | 1 | 2 |
| 15 | The daily programmes decided on must take the whole child into account, i.e including the child's age, individuality, social and cultural backgrounds. | 1 | 2 |
| 16 | The caregiver should guide children in social skills and facilitation of possible interactions between peers and adults. | 1 | 2 |
| 17 | Preschool programmes should have lifelong outcomes for the learners. | 1 | 2 |
| 18 | Age-appropriate and individual-appropriate activities should be constructed at preschools. | 1 | 2 |
| 19 | Basic self-care skills such as dressing oneself, tying shoelaces and buttoning up should be developed. | 1 | 2 |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 20 | Children attending preschool should display prerequisite skills for early literacy, maths and the social maturity to comply with formal school routines. | 1 | 2 |

**SECTION D:**

1. List possible challenges/problems facing your centre in making children ready for formal school.

(i)……..

(ii)…….....

(iii)…….....

(iv)……..

(v)……...

2. What are possible solutions to the identified challenges/problems?

(i)……..

(ii)……..

(iii)……

(iv)……..

(v)……

## APPENDIX L: CERTIFICATE OF EDITING

23 Elfin Glen Road, Nahoon Valley Heights, East London, 5200

Professional EDITORS Group

To whom it may concern:

This document certifies that the Phd thesis whose title appears below has been edited for proper English language, grammar, punctuation, spelling and overall style by Rose Masha, a member of the Professional Editors' Group whose qualifications are listed in the footer of this certificate.

Title:

THE CAREGIVERS' AND PARENTS' VIEWS ABOUT PRESCHOOL EDUCATION AS A SCHOOL READINESS PROGRAMME IN THE QUEENSTOWN EDUCATION DISTRICT

Author:

PAMELA NOMONDE PETTINA MTYUDA

Date Edited:

15 December 2018

Signed

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