

**An exploration of educators' perceptions of social-emotional competencies  
in children beginning formal education**

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## Declaration

I, **Nokubonga Zondi**, declare that:

1. The research reported in this dissertation, except where otherwise indicated is my original work.
2. This dissertation has not been submitted for any degree or examination at any other university.
3. This dissertation does not contain another persons' data unless specifically acknowledged as being sourced from other persons.
4. This dissertation does not contain another persons' writing, unless specifically acknowledged as being sourced from other scholars. Where other written sources have been quoted, then
  - a. Their words have been re-written, but the general information attributed to them has been referenced
  - b. Where their exact words have been used, their writing has been placed inside quotation marks and referenced.

Signed.....  ..... Date.....07 December 2020.....

Supervisor

**Prof Mary van der Riet**

Signed.....Date.....

## **Acknowledgements**

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## **Abstract**

The social and emotional competence of many South African children is inadequate to begin formal education. Entry into formal education is a vital developmental milestone. Developing children's social-emotional skills provides a child with a better chance at succeeding in school. This study explored the often-neglected perspective of educators and what they think of children's social-emotional competence. A qualitative study design was employed for this research study. Eleven grade 1 educators were interviewed individually. These educators came from three primary schools in KwaZulu-Natal. Convenience sampling was used to sample the schools and purposive sampling was employed to sample educators. Thematic analysis was employed to analyse the data in this study.

The participants in this study argued that children's social-emotional competence has declined over time, with behavioural regulation being of particular concern. Differences between children depended on their home environments and the schools they attended. Educators argued that social-emotional development was affected by low socioeconomic status, poor parenting skills, language issues and financial difficulties. School-based differences depended on each school's socioeconomic background and pupil demographic factors. Further research on the decline in social-emotional competencies amongst children needs to be done to prevent further detriment to children's academic achievement. Research on protective and risk factors for each school context would be useful.

*Keywords:* social competence, emotional competence, school beginners, grade 1 educators

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## **Chapter One: Introduction**

### **1.1. Background of the study**

Social-emotional competence refers to an individual possessing many interrelated social, and emotional skills and behaviours required for optimal functioning (Denham et al., 2003).

Social-emotional competence is especially crucial for development, as a child's social life expands from the confines of the household to the broader community (Denham et al., 2012).

A child first interacts with the caregiver, their siblings, and then with their peers in the community. As a child grows, they are required to regulate their emotions to be able to adaptively interact with those around them (Denham et al., 2003). For instance, a child who is aggressive towards their peers (poor emotional regulation) may be rejected by their peers, leading to a poor social life.

One of the most important milestones of growing up includes entry into formal education, where social-emotional competence becomes more vital (Bruwer, Hartell & Steyn, 2014). A lack of the essential social-emotional skills can make it difficult for a child to achieve the required academic outcomes and to have a positive relationship with his/her peers (Vlachou, Andreou, Botsoglou, & Didaskalou, 2011). When a child begins school, they are required to be able to regulate their emotions, respond to other's behaviours and emotions appropriately, attend to given tasks in a group and individually, pay attention, follow instructions, and adhere to routines to be able to learn (Bruwer et al., 2014; Denham et al., 2012). When a child is unable to do the above, they become disruptive, interact with peers and teachers negatively, leading to poor academic outcomes and possible dropping out (Webster-Stratton & Reid, 2004). The consequences of inadequate social-emotional skills can thus have a long-term effect on a child's life since school provides a variety of skills one would need throughout life. Although there are many criteria for assessing a child's readiness for school, social-emotional competence is the strongest predictor of academic success (Denham et al., 2003; Denham et al., 2012). Social-emotional skills, therefore, should be prioritised and built above any other skills.

An assortment of issues prevents children from developing the required social-emotional skills that allow them to adjust to formal education. Low socioeconomic status, both on a global and national level, contributes to most of the issues that impact on school readiness (Bruwer et al., 2014; United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), 2012). Living in poverty

means that a child would be deprived of many opportunities to develop the skills required for school, due to several stressors, the social environment and a lack of resources (Bruwer et al., 2014). A recent report by UNICEF (2019) states that over 610 million school-age children in the world do not have the necessary academic skills due to a lack of developmental skills required before beginning formal education. In South Africa, 68% of children live in poverty, meaning they would also be behind on developmental domains for their age (Bruwer et al., 2014). Currently, South Africa has been attempting to bridge one of the gaps created by poverty, by introducing a grade (Grade R) before the first year of school (Grade 1) as a compulsory school year (Department of Basic Education, 2015).

## **1.2. Motivation for the study**

The South African government recognises that many children are not socially, emotionally and physically equipped to get into formal schooling, even though the national policy is dedicated to developing these skills (Meusel, 2010). Although the government may recognise this, educators are the ones who experience these children as they enter formal school. It might, therefore, be useful to find out what educators believe are the factors that contribute to this issue. The study explored Grade 1 educators' perceptions of children's social-emotional competence when they start formal school, this being when they are in grade 1. This study also explored what the educators believe are the factors that contribute to the differences in children's behaviour, once they transition into formal schooling. Educators spend most of the day with the children at school, they see children interacting with their peers, and they see different children in one environment. This makes educators a significant source of information on children's social-emotional behaviour when they transition into formal education. Researchers have done much research on school readiness and various issues that hinder learning. For instance, one study looks at inclusive education and its link to insufficient school readiness (Bruwer et al., 2014). Another case study explored the extent to which stakeholders assisted children with transitioning from pre-primary to grade 1 (Margetts & Phatudi, 2013). However, not much research has been done that focuses on the educator's perspective of children's social-emotional competence. This research aimed to explore this perspective on issues amongst grade 1 learners, and these findings may contribute to further knowledge about school readiness. This information may further assist the Department of Education with the implementation of interventions to address school readiness and adjustment issues amongst learners in South Africa.

## **Chapter Two: Literature Review**

### **2.1. Introduction**

Social-emotional competence is a set of skills and behaviours essential for children to do well academically (Denham et al., 2003; Denham et al., 2012). When children develop and transition from an informal to a formal school environment, specific social and emotional competencies are required for them to adjust to their new setting. A lack of the vital social-emotional skills can make it difficult for a child to adjust to school, achieve the required academic outcomes and to have a positive relationship with his/her peers (Denham, Bassett, Thayer, Mincic, Siroktin & Zinsser, 2012). Early intervention programs and parent training programs have been the proposed solution for prevention and remedy for children found to have difficulties adjusting to the formal school environment due to a lack of social-emotional skills (Meusel, 2010; Vlachou et al., 2011)

### **2.2. Defining social-emotional competence**

Social-emotional competence is defined using Rose-Krasnor's (1997) theory of social competence and social-emotional competence as defined by Denham et al. (2003). Rose-Krasnor (1997) conceptualised a prism model of social competence which is used as the conceptual framework for this study. The conceptual framework is explained later in chapter two. Denham et al. (2003) outlines components of social-emotional competence explicitly required for the school setting. Therefore, Rose-Krasnor (1997) provides a framework for assessment while Denham et al. (2003) provides specific skills needed for the assessment.

Social-emotional competence refers to a comprehensive set of (social and emotional) skills and knowledge used appropriately according to the child's context, culture, and circumstance (McLaughlin, Aspden & Clarke, 2007). Denham et al. (2012) group the comprehensive set of social-emotional skills under three categories: emotional expression and regulation; productive involvement in age-appropriate activities and relationship skills. Emotional expression and regulation refer to the way a child expresses and regulates negative and positive emotions. Productive involvement in age-appropriate activities refers to the child's focus on the material and social environment. Relationship skills are the child's ability to interact with other children in a prosocial rather than an aggressive manner.

According to Domitrovich, Cortes and Greenberg (2007), social-emotional skills are incorporated across cognitive, emotional and behavioural aspects of development. These authors add cognitive skills as another critical aspect of social-emotional competence. They assert that emotional competence (such as identifying one's own emotions and emotion regulation) aids cognitive skills (such as problem-solving and attention), and that self-regulation is vital for positive social behaviour (such as considering other's viewpoints). Therefore, successful incorporation of emotional, cognitive and social skills is imperative for social-emotional competence as the child would maintain positive relationships with peers and would behave in a socially acceptable manner. A lack of this integration of skills could lead to a child being rejected by peers, internalising behaviour (social withdrawal) and externalising behaviour (physical aggression) (Domitrovich et al., 2007). Although Denham et al. (2012) do not mention cognitive skills as a category for social-emotional skills, there is still congruence between their definition and that of Domitrovich et al. (2007). The category "productive involvement in age-appropriate activities" (Denham et al., 2012, p.247) denotes the use of cognitive skills such as paying attention.

Emotional and social skills depend on each other for each set of competencies to be acquired. The aspects of emotional competence that make it possible for a child to be socially competent are emotional expressiveness, emotion knowledge and emotion regulation (Denham et al., 2003).

### ***2.2.1. Emotional expressiveness***

Emotional expression is the fundamental attribute of emotional competence as it enables children to interact and form positive relationships with others, making them more pleasant in others' eyes (Denham et al., 2003). Denham et al. (2003) further explain that children that employ their knowledge on the appropriate expression of emotions during social interaction can regulate their emotions and respond appropriately.

### ***2.2.2. Emotion knowledge***

Emotion knowledge concerns the understanding of emotions. When a child can identify and comprehend emotions, they can respond to their peers prosocially and consequently become more likeable to peers (Denham et al., 2003).

### **2.2.3. *Emotion regulation***

Emotion regulation is needed when the intensity, length or limits of the emotional experience or expression are insufficient or excessive to meet the objectives of the child or social partner (Denham et al., 2003). Regulation, therefore, concerns the child's adjustment of emotions to meet the desired objective.

Although it is evident that social and emotional competencies are intertwined, it is also clear that emotional competence precedes social competence. In order to understand what allows a child to be socially competent, a thorough understanding of how the components of emotional competence collectively work to help a child become socially competent is required.

## **2.3. Defining regulation in relation to social-emotional competence**

Regulation refers to a variety of learned, purposeful skills needed in planning, holding and controlling the child's thoughts, emotions and behaviour (Morrison, Ponitz & McClelland, 2010). Regulatory activities are divided into physiological regulation, emotional regulation and behavioural regulation domains (Haskett, Stelter, Proffit & Nice, 2012).

### **2.3.1. *Physiological regulation***

Physiological regulation is concerned with temperament. Temperament refers to intensities of reactions and regulation of those reactions in early child development, which also indicates later personality traits (Morrison et al., 2010). Morrison et al. (2010) deduce that physiological and neurological processes work with psychological and experiential elements to control how a child regulates themselves in a particular situation. This aspect of regulation is the root of how a child will respond and regulate responses in situations.

### **2.3.2. *Emotion regulation***

Emotion regulation refers to the child's intentional adjustment and adaptation of their emotional reactions (Morrison et al., 2010). Emotion regulation influences social competence because it allows the child to decide whether it would be appropriate to interact with others or if they should ignore them (Graziano, Reavis, Keane & Calkins, 2007). The ability to regulate emotions, therefore, would make a child more desirable to their peers. In contrast, children who have poor emotion regulation would not be able to respect the views and wishes of others and would be aggressive, making them less desirable to peers (Morrison et al., 2010; Vlachou et al., 2011). Eisenberg, Sadovsky, and Spinrad (2005) highlight the importance of language

skills as a means to facilitate emotion regulation. Children use language to negotiate with peers, to express themselves and to learn about appropriate methods to control their emotions. The figure below (Figure 1) illustrates how, according to Eisenberg et al. (2005), emotion knowledge, language skills and emotion regulation assist a child in attaining emotion regulation over time.

Another form of emotion regulation is expressive suppression. Expressive suppression is a strategy whereby children suppress the overt expression of their emotions (Gross & Cassidy, 2019). Gross and Cassidy (2019) claim that suppressing emotions is something usual for children during social interaction. Expressive suppression can be both adaptive and maladaptive for a child. Suppressing emotions assists a child in meeting social expectations and maintaining positive social relationships (Zimmermann & Iwanski, 2014). Expressive suppression is, therefore, self-protective. In a society where people do not speak about domestic matters to outsiders, the child would also suppress expression about the matter. By suppressing this emotional expression, the child remains favoured by family members and maintains a positive social status. On the contrary, continuous expressive suppression can lead to poor emotion regulation, social competence and behavioural regulation in future (Cole & Deater-Deckard, 2009).

Studies done with 7 to 18-year old children in America, Korea and China found a positive correlation between emotion suppression and symptoms of depression and anxiety (Jacob, Suveg, & Whitehead, 2014; Lee, Kim, Park, & Park, 2017; Sai, Luo, Ward & Sang, 2016). Studies done in America found a relationship between continuous emotion suppression and harmful coping, loneliness, relational aggression and peer victimisation (Gardner, Betts, Stiller & Coates, 2017; Jacob et al., 2014; Sharp, Cohen, Kitzmann & Parra, 2016). Children between the ages of two and five develop self-conscious emotions such as shame and pride (Gross & Cassidy, 2019). It is the development of these self-conscious emotions that enable a child to decide on whether or not they should express their emotions. Cole and Jacobs (2018) further explain that this cognitive development aids children in understanding whatever emotions they display will affect other people as well. South African children in low socio-economic contexts are exposed to multiple stressors. Although there is no South African literature on expressive suppression, the nature of deprived children's lives may cause them to display this form of regulation.

### 2.3.3. Behavioural regulation

Behavioural regulation is the implementation and display of cognitive processes in overt behaviour which includes focusing on and understanding what others express, remembering and utilising information and staying focused on a goal (Morrison et al., 2010). Cognitive skills implicated in overt behavioural regulation are working memory, attentional flexibility and inhibitory control (Morrison et al., 2010). A child who can regulate their behaviour, therefore, can restrain automatic reactions that are not appropriate in a given situation and adapt their reaction to suit the given situation and can ignore distractions that would impact on the completion of a given goal or task.

Physiological, emotional and behavioural regulation are very interdependent. One form of regulation influences the other. Although one can differentiate between the different types of regulation, it is clear that one cannot speak of one type and not mention the others.

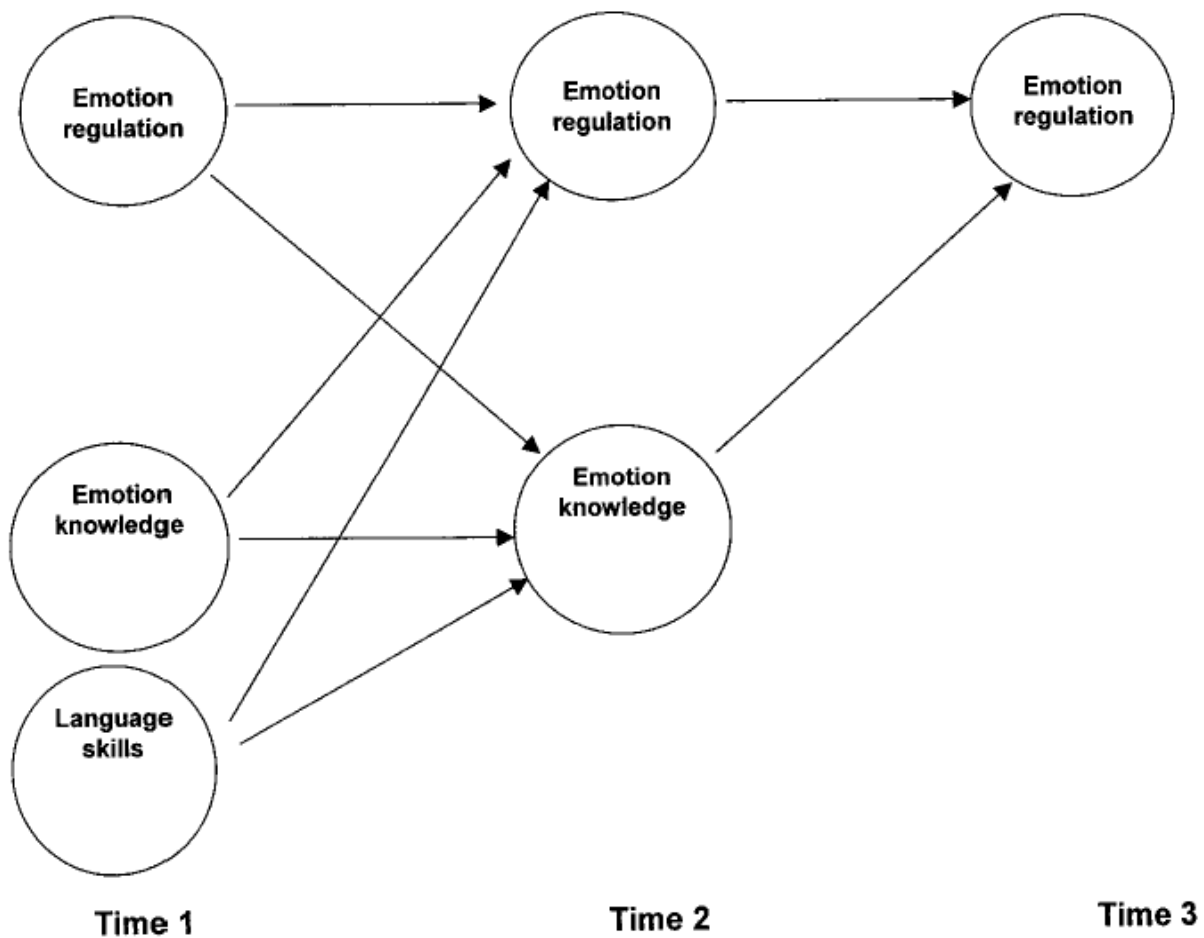


Figure 1. A hypothesized relationship between language skills, emotion knowledge and emotion regulation over time (Eisenberg, Sadovsky & Sprinrad, 2005, p. 8).

## **2.4. Defining relationship skills in relation to social-emotional competence**

### **2.4.1. Friendships**

Relationship skills in the context of young children and the context of this research are concerned about friendships between children. Friendships provide children with a context to learn positive social skills that are vital for development (Poulin & Chan, 2010). Young children are generally sociable and therefore, always seek the company of other children (Reohr, 1984). Younger children are more accepting of their non-social peers, but with age, the socially withdrawn children develop internalising issues (Rose-Krasnor, 1997). This means that as children get older, the possibility of social exclusion increases if social withdrawal persists.

As children grow and develop social skills, the expectations, features and understanding of friendships changes (Rose-Krasnor, 1997). Younger children's concerns about friendship are around sharing interests, coordinated play and mutual affection (Carter & Nutbrown, 2016). With older children in the adolescent stage, friendship concerns are around self-exploration, loyalty and intimacy (Carter & Nutbrown, 2016; Rose-Krasnor, 1997). A study done by Dunn (2004) showed that children between the age of five and six vary in terms of this development of social skills (Carter & Nutbrown, 2016). The change in the concerns around friendship also has an impact on the maintenance of friendships, where friendships become more stable as social skills develop with age (Poulin & Chan, 2010).

The way in which children interact with other children also impacts on the quality and maintenance of friendships. Since friendships are not forced relationships, they can quickly dissolve when not desirable (Poulin & Chan, 2010). Children who bully others are less likely to have quality relationships as their peers would reject them (Vlachou et al., 2011). Olweus (1993), as cited in Vlachou et al. (2011) proposes three criteria to define bullying: "(1) it is an aggressive behaviour of intentional 'harmdoing' (2) which is carried out repeatedly and over time (3) in an interpersonal relationship characterized by an imbalance of power" (p. 331). Olweus (1993), as cited in Vlachou et al. (2011) further explains that bullying includes physical aggression, verbal abuse and social exclusion, which tends to occur in the absence of any provocation. This definition, therefore, suggests that aggression is a form of bullying which consists of a stronger party who would be the perpetrator and a weaker party who would be a victim.

Children with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) particularly have difficulty with maintaining positive peer status (Pelham & Bender, 1982). These children tend to display aggressive and defiant behaviours which are not adaptive for group play (Pelham & Bender, 1982). Their friendships, therefore, are characterised by high conflict and a lack of reciprocity (Soucisse, Maisonneuve & Normand, 2015). Children with ADHD thus have difficulty maintaining friendships due to peer rejection (Soucisse, Maisonneuve & Normand, 2015).

#### **2.4.2. Gender differences**

Social competence in children is gender-specific as girls and boys interact with their peers differently (Rose-Krasnor, 1997). The phenomenon of gender segregation in children from the ages of three upwards reflects the different ways boys and girls socialise (Underwood, 2007). Boys tend to display more physical aggression towards other boys, while girls tend to display more relational aggression towards other girls (Rose-Krasnor, 1997; Vlachou et al., 2011). These differences show just how different girls and boys are in terms of their culture of social interaction. Rose-Krasnor (1997) cautions against using a generic criterion for assessing social competence as social competence manifests differently between genders. Also, there is no empirical evidence that shows gender-based differences in social competence (Rose-Krasnor, 1997). This, therefore, means that assessment outcomes of social competence should be based on an individual, but also consider how each gender socialises.

#### **2.5. The relationship between social-emotional competence and school success**

Social-emotional competence is specifically positively correlated with academic success in early formal education (Meusel, 2010; Pieterse, 2012). Denham et al. (2012) state that “emotional expressiveness and regulation, behavioural regulation, and relationship skills are important foundations for early success in school” (p.251). Regulation has been considered the most critical skill that predicts school success as dysregulation has been correlated with high expulsion rates, especially in preschool (Morrison et al., 2010). When children begin formal education, they are expected to be able to follow strict routines, work independently, complete given tasks, express emotions and needs appropriately, and attain math and literacy skills (Bruwer et al., 2014; UNICEF, 2012). School success, in this case, refers to academic achievement and successful adjustment to school. Therefore, assessing children’s social-emotional competence can give a good indication of whether or not a child is ready for school and their chances of succeeding.

### **2.5.1. Regulation and school success**

#### **2.5.1.1. Emotion regulation.**

Emotion regulation is concerned with the child's ability to express their emotions appropriately, adjust their emotional response to situations and to be able to identify the emotions of others. Emotion regulation is positively correlated with positive behavioural regulation, adjustment to school and academic achievement (Denham et al., 2012; Morrison et al., 2010). Conversely, children who are emotionally dysregulated will not have the personal means to focus on classroom tasks and learning (Denham, 2012). Moreover, children who encounter learning issues are at risk of having further learning difficulties, disruptive behaviour, and eventually dropping out of school (Bruwer et al., 2014). Bruwer et al. (2014) further highlight that this might be the situation in South Africa, where Foundation Phase educators receive learners who are not ready for formal education. Educators then have to assist the learners in overcoming various learning difficulties so they can cope in higher phases of learning.

Research has also noted that emotional regulation skills impact on teacher ratings. The children who express and display more positive emotions have been rated higher on friendliness, motivation to learn and assertiveness and lower on sadness and aggression dimensions (Denham et al., 2003; Denham et al., 2012). Emotion regulation skills also impact on how peers perceive the child in the school context. Their peers favour children that express and display more positive emotions as they can approach, regulate interaction, and communicate with peers, in an adaptive manner (Denham et al., 2012).

Eisenberg et al. (2005) establish the importance of language skills in assisting emotion regulation. They explain that language assists a child in learning about regulating their emotions and regulating their social interaction. In the school setting, language skills are associated with the ability to divert attention from an unpleasant situation (Eisenberg et al., 2005). They also hypothesise that language skills and emotion regulation influence each other because their educators may see children with good emotion regulation as more advanced in language skills and more attentive than their peers who are not as well-regulated. Eisenberg et al. (2005) provide a figure (figure 2) which illustrates the relationship between language and emotion knowledge, and other dimensions mentioned earlier, concerning school success.

### **2.5.1.2. Behaviour regulation.**

In the school context, behavioural regulation concerns task-related behaviours which allow a child to concentrate, complete tasks and to ask for assistance where required (Denham et al., 2012). The cognitive skills under the components: working memory, inhibitory control, and attentional flexibility have been associated with achievement before children enter formal school (Morrison et al., 2010). Four studies found the association between these cognitive skills and academic achievement. Two studies done in America by the NICHD Child Research Network on attentional flexibility revealed that kindergarteners with excellent attention skills scored higher on achievement tests and that better attention on a tiresome computer task predicted higher achievement in math and reading in 4.5-year-olds (Howse, Calkins, Anastopoulos, Keane & Shelton, 2003). A study by Blair and Razza (2007) revealed that inhibitory control at the preschool level predicted math and reading achievement. Another study by the NICHD Child Research Network of working memory revealed that children who could remember the number of dots on many cards achieved better in math (Howse et al., 2003). It becomes clear that these cognitive skills mentioned by Morrison et al. (2010) each encompass components that assist children with achievement in several school subjects.

Children with ADHD have behaviour regulation issues, putting them at risk for academic failure (Topkin, Roman & Mwaba, 2015). With persistent behaviours of hyperactivity, impulsivity and inattentiveness (American Psychiatric Association, 2013), children with ADHD do not have the required skills to be able to succeed academically. ADHD can be hereditary, caused by premature birth, brain injury or other harmful prenatal exposure (American Psychiatric Association, 2017). ADHD prevalence is on the rise in developing countries, with a prevalence rate of 6% to 10% in Africa (Topkin et al., 2015). There are no official statistics of children with ADHD in South Africa (Topkin et al., 2015). ADHD may be constructed by educators in this study as a factor in children's behavioural regulation skills.

Emotional and behavioural regulation are facets of regulation required together to help a child succeed academically. Emotional regulation releases personal resources that allow a child to be behaviourally regulated so they can focus on learning (Denham et al., 2012). Blair and Calkins (as cited in Morrison et al., 2010) concur that children who react with negative emotions (i.e. anger) would have difficulty paying attention to a given task as they

would not be able to regulate their emotions in order to persist on the given task. Morrison et al. (2010) further explain that behavioural regulation (such as shifting attention to something else) may improve the adverse effects of emotion dysregulation. A study was done in America by Belsky, Friedman, and Hsieh (2001) and found that children who had poor emotion regulation achieved better school readiness if they had proper behaviour regulation (paying attention). Therefore, behavioural regulation is a better predictor of school success when compared to emotional regulation.

### ***2.5.2. Social competence and school success***

Relationship skills facilitate the achievement of activities in school and assists school adjustment. Denham et al. (2012) acknowledge that social competence enables learning because school is a social environment where children learn in cooperation with teachers and peers, meaning that learning is a social activity. This link can also be seen in a diagram developed by Eisenberg et al. (2005) (Figure 2). The school environment is also the first time a child becomes part of a stable peer group and is required to participate in ordered team activities, making entry into formal education a critical development step for a child (Vlachou et al., 2011). Children who are rejected by peers or have difficulty making friends, tend to have issues adjusting to school (Reohr, 1984). Pairing a child with another to create friendship is one way to remedy issues with adjustment due to a lack of friendship (Carter & Nutbrown, 2016). Carter and Nutbrown (2016) further state that the initial transition at the beginning of school offers an opportunity for successful transitions in future. This suggests that first transitions at the beginning of school are suitable for a child's future development and their school career. Children also move through stages of development where they attain cognitive and language skills, which allow them to become more socially competent (Rose-Krasnor, 1997). Figure 2 illustrates the link between language and emotion knowledge (a cognitive skill) relate to social competence.

Friendships in the school context stabilise, and friendship networks grow bigger as the children move to higher grades (Poulin & Chan, 2010). Poulin and Chan (2010) further state that friendships are flexible, with friendship networks changing even within a three-week time frame, however, friendships are more stable if the friendship networks extend outside the school context. Therefore, children who know each other outside the school context are more likely to have a stable friendship than friendships formed only in school.

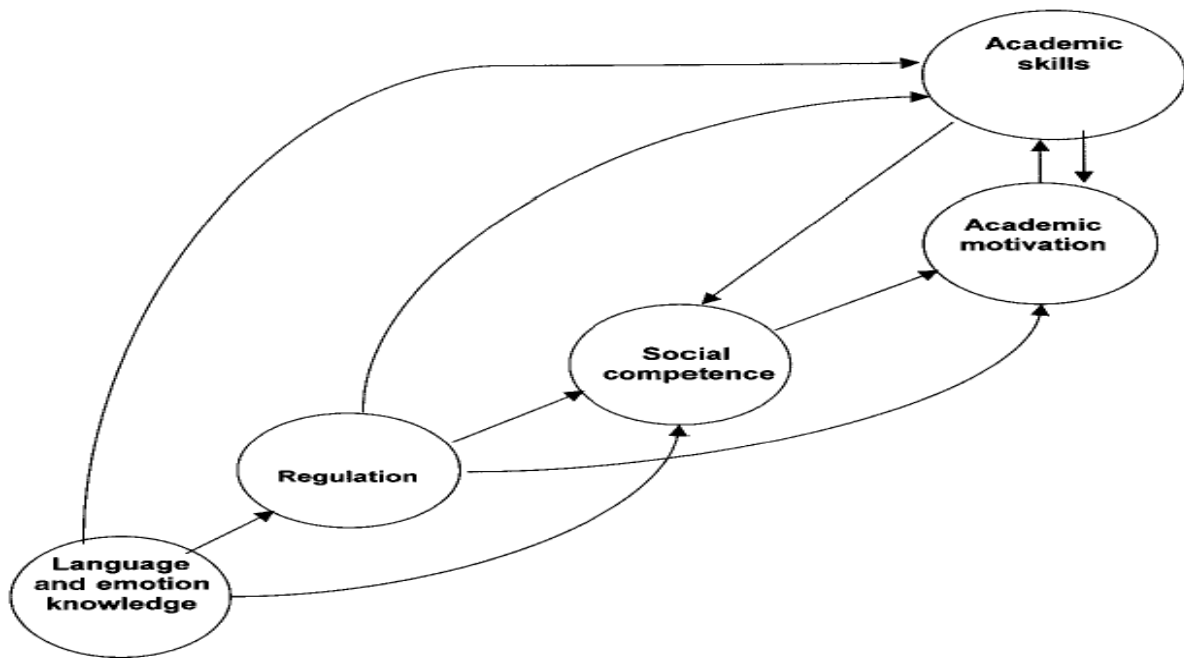


Figure 2. An empirical model of relationships between emotion regulation and language as predictors of social and academic success (Eisenberg, Sadovsky & Sprinrad, 2005, p. 8).

### 2.5.3. Play and school success

Play has been found to offer several opportunities for children to learn social-emotional skills independently (Bhise & Sonawat, 2016). One research study in America found a positive correlation between free playtime and self-regulation, social skills and perspective-taking (Veiga, Neto, & Reiffe, 2016). Veiga et al. (2016) further found that the development of these skills potentially decreases disruptive behaviours in the classroom setting. Another study in India found that play was a good predictor of achievement in mathematics, writing and reading (Bhise & Sonawat, 2016). Another study by Lewis, Boucher, Lupton and Watson, (2000) in the United Kingdom found that play helps with the acquisition of language and vocabulary. However, a study was done in South Africa by Moodley, Kritzinger and Vinck (2016), which found that formal instruction in English additional language significantly improved speaking and listening skills for learners who do not speak English as a first language. South Africa is a country with 11 official languages, so a large portion of the population of children do not speak English as a first language. Speaking and listening in the English language is required for many children in South Africa, so speaking and listening skills will assist children with their academic career (Moodley et al., 2016). Play may be beneficial for the acquisition of social and self-regulation skills but may not be as beneficial with the acquisition of listening and speaking skills in English.

Social-emotional competence has been increasingly acknowledged for its importance in cognitive development, learning and growth in academic and social performance (Denham et al., 2012). Children who struggle to focus on their given tasks, to socialise adaptively and to regulate their emotion tend to do less well academically, are rejected by peers and are rated more negatively by teachers (Bruwer et al., 2014). Bruwer et al. (2014) suggest that increasing social-emotional competence, especially in children with various life-stressors, may serve as prevention for issues related to school success. In conclusion, how socially and emotionally competent a child is, will influence how well or poorly they do in school and how well they can adjust to the school environment (Denham et al., 2012). This study will explore children's social and emotional competence in grade 1 and how their levels of competence impact on school adjustment and academic success.

## **2.6 Risk factors for poor social-emotional competence and school success**

A significant portion of the population of children in South Africa do not have secure emotional bonds, ideal cognitive skills and positive social relationships with their peers because they are deprived (Deacon & Van Rensburg, 2018). Statistics about the deprivation of South African are currently at 77% for living environment, 81% for family income, 25% for adequate care and 50% for employment deprivation (Barnes, Noble, Wright & Dawes, 2008). Deprivation exposes children to several risk factors for reduced social-emotional competence and school success. Risk factors that hinder school success and social-emotional competence are any internal or external factors that would hamper the child's chances of academic achievement and school adjustment. Many learners in South Africa enter grade 1 without the necessary skills required for them to cope in a formal school setting (Bruwer et al., 2014; Meusel, 2010). Therefore, these learners struggle to cope and learn right from the beginning of their school careers. Factors that contribute to this issue can range from biological and temperament factors (impulsivity, inattention, hyperactivity), family disadvantage (poverty), and other stressful life factors (Webster-Stratton & Reid, 2004). It would be worthwhile to explore the different factors that hinder social-emotional competence and school success in order to understand all the contributing factors and what impact they have on a child's life. Understanding all factors that hinder optimal social-emotional competence can provide the Department of Education with information about the areas that need intervention.

### **2.6.1 *Quality of care from caregivers and home environment***

There has been a notable change in children's primary caregivers in South African homes. There has been a development of primary caregiving roles shifting from mothers to grandmothers, fathers or other family members (Mathambo & Gibbs, 2008). Grandmothers account for the highest portion of primary caregivers due to reasons such as teenage pregnancy, unemployment and parental death (Makunga, Roman, Schenck & Spolander, 2017). This means that children do not get to create a bond with their mothers. A secure relationship between a parent and child supports emotion expression and behavioural regulation (Morrison et al., 2010). In infancy, the child uses their senses and motor experiences to process information, and during their years as a toddler, the child develops autonomy, motor skills and language skills (Meusel, 2010). These skills, as well as thought-processing, develop until a child reaches their preschool years, where they use them as tools to adapt to formal education (Meusel, 2010). Therefore, the quality of a mother's care influences how well the development of all these skills takes place.

One of the risk factors for a child's social-emotional development is a mother's age (Tremblay et al., 2004). With the rate of teenage pregnancy at 30% in South Africa (Willan, 2013), many children have young mothers. Research done by Aryani, Warsini and Haryanti (2018) in Indonesia found that young mothers are not as nurturing as older mothers; lacking in the level of stimulation, support and responsiveness towards a developing child. Young mothers are unable to give their children optimal care because they lack maternal education. Maternal education refers to educating mothers on child development, good parenting practices, and providing information on ways to support children's development (Ryan-Krause, Meadows-Oliver & Swartz, 2009). There is a strong correlation between maternal education and positive language, academic and cognitive outcomes (Bhise & Sonawat, 2016). Likewise, research done by Ryan-Krause, Meadows-Oliver, and Swartz (2009) in America revealed that young mothers' lack of knowledge and skills about child development, affect parenting as mothers would become frustrated and disappointed by the expected (objective) development of their child. Therefore, improving mothers' education can assist them in providing children with adequate stimulation and improving developmental outcomes.

Berg (2011) argues that an authoritative parenting style is the best parenting style for preschool-age children. Authoritative parenting consists of a mixture of demands and limits with warmth, collaborative decision-making (Berg, 2011; Zupancic, Podlesek & Kavcic,

2004). Authoritative parenting is associated with higher self-esteem, lower depression, adaptive psychological adjustment and less aggression (Milevsky, Schlechter, Netter & Keehn, 2007). These outcomes are all required for optimal social-emotional competence, aiding school adjustment and success. Adopting an authoritative parenting style, therefore, might be beneficial for young mothers and other caregivers who already need parenting education. The challenge with authoritative parenting is that it requires parents or caregivers to have time. A study done by Amos (2013) found that more South African mothers spend time away from home due to work commitments, when compared to mothers in previous years. These mothers might then lack the love and care required for optimal child-rearing to support development (Amos, 2013). Challenges arise when a parent or caregiver has the pressure of balancing work demands and providing for children financially, with offering their children sufficient stimulation and support at home.

Caregiver education also affects the level of care a child receives. Mathambo and Gibbs (2008) in a literature review of South African families found that caregivers in South Africa are unable to adequately support children's social and educational needs because they face challenges such as illiteracy, poverty and social exclusion. Makunga et al. (2017) found that many caregivers are illiterate and therefore, lack skills to assist children with their academic work. Makunga et al. (2017) further found that the caregivers in their study did not value education due to their lack of exposure, which results in children lacking interest in school. Also, social exclusion tends to cause low self-esteem in caregivers, making them lack the confidence required to motivate children to excel in their school careers (Makunga et al., 2017). A caregiver's personal and social challenges may end up impacting negatively on a child's educational outcomes.

The home environment is another factor that affects children's social-emotional competence and academic performance. Children with unstable home situations such as constant home moving, frequent change in caregivers and hostile relationships between family members are at risk of having social-emotional issues (Morrison et al., 2010; Tremblay et al., 2014). Children first learn about social interaction at home, by observing the behaviours and interactions between family members, and a lack of appropriate behavioural modelling and monitoring affects the child's ability to regulate themselves outside the home environment (van Zyl, 2011). Adequate social-emotional skills allow a child to have a positive outlook on school and potentially improve academic outcomes (Deacon & Van Rensburg, 2018). A home

environment that is unhealthy and unsupportive negatively impacts on children's health, motivation and success in school (Makunga et al., 2017).

Another issue related to the home environment concerns parents or caregivers, exposing children to too much screen time. Tamana et al. (2019) found that in Canada screen time is associated with inattention in preschool-aged children. This finding means that children who are left to watch screens for a long duration tend to battle with paying attention in school. Lissak (2018) found in literature from western and far eastern countries that there are several issues associated with screen exposure in children. Screen time was found to induce poor sleep which leads to both internalizing and externalizing behaviours. Internalising behaviours include depressive symptoms and reduced emotional regulation. Externalising behaviour includes reduced behaviour regulation such as antisocial behaviour, decreased prosocial behaviour and ADHD-associated behaviours. Lissak (2018) further stated that excessive screen time could lead to children being incorrectly diagnosed with ADHD. Research by Tamana et al. (2019) and Lissak (2018) show how screen time can put children at risk of poor social-emotional competence. The areas of social-emotional skills that are affected by screen time are vital for school adjustment and academic success.

Kalam et al. (2016) did a study in South Africa which explored educator's perceptions of issues affecting grade 1 learners. Kalam et al. (2016) found that educators felt the home environment has the most significant impact on learners' academic outcomes. In a study on the relationship between school readiness and school performance in South Africa, van Zyl (2011) found that children from disruptive home environments go into the school environment with insufficient social-emotional skills required for them to adapt to school. These studies emphasise the importance of caregivers creating an environment that is conducive to social-emotional development and school success. Kalam et al. (2016) found that caregivers do not give enough support that a child would need in grade 1. Due to illiteracy, caregivers unintentionally create environments that impede children's development of reading and writing skills (Weigel, Martin & Bennet, 2006). Illiteracy means that caregivers do not possess the knowledge and skills to respond to educators' written communication and to assist children with homework (Makunga et al., 2017). Makunga et al. (2017) further found that there is a shortage of literature in South Africa on caregivers' challenges in assisting children with homework, due to being illiterate. However, there is not much research on this matter and this means there is not enough understanding of the

challenges illiterate caregivers have with assisting their children. This impacts on how caregivers can be supported in their work with children.

### **2.6.2 Socio-economic factors**

South Africa has a history of apartheid where resources and opportunities were unfairly distributed in the society (Kalam et al., 2016). In the education system many schools still have insufficient resources and inadequately trained educators (Topkin et al., 2015). Also, poverty is a persistent result of apartheid, affecting a significant portion of the South African population even decades after the end of the apartheid regime (Kalam et al., 2016). Schools in disadvantaged areas are more affected by the legacy of apartheid (Olivier, Wood & De Lange, 2009). With the high rate of poverty, improvement in the education system would happen at a gradual pace because poverty affects many areas of a child's life. The paragraphs that follow will explore the multiple areas of a child's life that would be affected by poverty.

#### **2.6.2.1 Inadequate educational resources.**

Makunga et al.'s (2017) South African study found that schools in rural and village communities are hard for children to reach. Also, in Kalam et al.'s (2016) study in South Africa, educators commented that due to overcrowding, the educator-to-learner ratio is not conducive to learning and teaching in grade 1 (Kalam et al., 2016). This suggests that children from underprivileged backgrounds are at a disadvantage from the beginning of their schooling.

Children from disadvantaged backgrounds tend to also have poor social-emotional competence due to a lack of preschool stimulation at home and good preschool education (Bruwer et al., 2014). Preschool education prepares children for school by teaching them social skills, following rules, offering stimulatory resources and following routines (Bhise & Sonawat, 2016). In South Africa, studies looking into factors that impact on school readiness found that poverty accounts for most cases of children who are not adequately prepared for Grade 1, due to insufficient stimulation and resources in their preschool years (Bhise & Sonawat, 2016; Bruwer et al., 2014; Finlon et al., 2015; van Zyl, 2011). Children who have been exposed to quality preschool would consequently adapt better to formal education and be ready for formal school compared to those with no preschool experience.

### **2.6.2.2 Inadequate educator training.**

Educators in poor communities are not necessarily trained adequately to identify and accommodate children with several issues that affect learning (Olivier et al., 2009). One of the conditions that affect learning is Attention-Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). ADHD is characterised of symptoms such as lack of attention, hyperactivity and impulsivity (Kern, Amod, Seabi & Vorster, 2015). Due to the nature of the symptoms, ADHD would most likely be identified in the school setting, by the educator (Topkin et al., 2015). However, educators in disadvantaged schools in South Africa lack knowledge, training and acceptance for children with ADHD, often pretending the issue does not exist in their classrooms (Tokpkin et al., 2015). South African schools are also expected to implement early intervention strategies for learners with learning problems since the government implemented inclusive education (Bruwer et al., 2014).

Educators in South Africa do not only have to identify symptoms of ADHD but also have to manage these learners in the classroom due to the inclusive education system (Topkin et al., 2015). Also, once an educator has identified an issue, the government referral system only considers a child for assessment once they have failed a phase twice (Kalam et al., 2016). This issue suggests that children needing intervention are delayed in their academic progress, falling behind their peers. This also means that educators are expected to refer learners in order for them not to fall behind, yet, there are issues within the system that make it difficult for educators to fulfil expectations. Kos, Richdale and Jackson (2004) did a study in Australia which found that a lack of knowledge on ADHD leads to educators passing on erroneous information and advice to parents. This misinformation becomes problematic because parents already rely on educators to educate them about their child's issue. A study done by Kern and Seabi (2008) in South Africa found that educators perceive the incidence of ADHD is higher than the actual prevalence rate. This misperception reflects that educators have difficulty distinguishing between ADHD and other factors that present as ADHD symptoms. The issues around ADHD are complex, requiring a comprehensive approach to combating the issues around knowledge and intervention.

### **2.6.2.3 Environmental factors.**

Children from disadvantaged backgrounds have been found to display more behaviour problems and have less emotion regulation skills (Finlon et al., 2015; Domitrovich et al.,

2007), putting them at risk for issues adapting to school. Deprived children may be continuously exposed to unstable home environments, violence in their community and environments with few resources available to protect them from these stressors (Finlon et al., 2015). These children, therefore, are exposed to stressful situations at home and in the community. Belonging to a historically disadvantaged ethnic group is one factor that exposes children to stressful environments and situations (Morrison et al., 2010). Historically marginalised groups in South Africa come from societies where there is a low level of education, leading to a negative attitude towards education and a lack of parental involvement (Olivier et al., 2009). To bridge the gap between the negative orientation towards education and expectations from educators, caregivers and educators have to develop a partnership that would assist a child in attaining the best education (Makunga et al., 2017).

#### **2.6.2.4 Language issues.**

Research has found that grade 1 learners in South Africa that come from a low socioeconomic background have difficulties with language. South African children speak many languages across the school and home context, but the education system does not reflect this multilingualism (Moodley et al., 2016). Jordaan (2011) found that learners who speak African languages are particularly disadvantaged by the preference for English as a language of learning. Kalam et al. (2016) found that Afrikaans speaking learners battle with learning in English as a first language. This could be because the vocabulary of children who do not speak English as a first language may be smaller than first language peers (Moodley et al., 2016). Both Jordaan (2011) and Kalam et al. (2016) found that learners who do not speak English as a first language struggle when they have to learn and be assessed in English in school. Therefore, English as a language of instruction and assessments, only allows English speaking children to excel in their academics. Only 9.5 % of people in South Africa speak English as a first language (Moodley et al., 2016). This would mean that a large proportion of children are at a disadvantage when placed in English-medium schools. Kalam et al. (2016) found that non-English speaking parents, from a low socio-economic background, tend to place their children in English-medium schools because they consider English as a preferred language that would grant their children excellent opportunities. Kalam et al. (2016) further found that these parents consequently have difficulty assisting children with language due to their incompetence in English. This places further strain on a child's academic development because they do not

have the adequate support they need at home. With 7% of learners in South Africa repeating grade 1, there is a general concern about the underachievement of non-English speaking learners (Flynn, 2007). Since it can take a minimum of five years for a child to be academically competent in a second language, there is concern that children's English competency is low when they enter school and this compromises chances for academic success (Moodley et al., 2016).

#### **2.6.2.5 Financial issues.**

A final issue identified by Kalam et al. (2016) was school enrolment age. The South African Schools Act 84 of 1996 states that children from the age of seven are required to attend school (Republic of South Africa, 1996). Kalam et al. (2016) found that parents would often send children to grade 1 too young, due to primary school fees being more affordable than preschool. Kalam et al. (2016) further found that children younger than the age of six tend to struggle with tasks due to lower developmental skills, which leads to failure in grade 1. Failing in grade 1 was further associated with lowered self-esteem due to demotivation towards academic success. Sending children to grade 1 too early puts them at a considerable disadvantage because there is a high chance of failing.

One can see how the quality of care by caregivers, home environment and socio-economic factors are interconnected. Even though all of these factors have a different way of affecting how socially, emotionally and behaviorally competent a child may be, they all can pose a risk for issues in the school environment. Socioeconomic status accounts for a more significant part of these issues as it may impact on the quality of care from caregivers (lack of education) and the child's home environment (lack of resources). This is particularly true in South Africa where the population has a high rate of poverty, which impacts on other issues as well, such as availability of resources in the broader social context.

### **2.7 Suggested solutions for poor social-emotional competence in children**

Prevention and treatment intervention programs that target emotion regulation and behaviour regulation will prevent the obstruction of learning via teacher instruction and cognitive stimulation better than programs that target academic matter (Finlon et al., 2015). Intervention focussing on regulation will, therefore, yield better academic outcomes than academically focussed intervention programs. Intervention programs should not only concentrate on eliminating or reducing negative behaviours but also on developing positive skills and

behaviours in order to equip children with the necessary skills to transition to formal school (Domitrovich et al., 2007). Intervention programs in the preschool years would be most beneficial as research has found that children from preschool age act out bullying behaviours (Vlachou et al., 2011). It is also at this age that they would have started developing the ability to distinguish between their own emotions from other's emotions, enabling them to regulate their emotions and develop positive peer relationships (Denham et al., 2003). Developing these skills during preschool age would then allow children to learn to control physical aggression (Tremblay et al., 2004). It would then be more beneficial to introduce intervention programs as soon as children develop the ability to inhibit maladaptive and aggressive behaviours. Tremblay et al. (2004) and Webster-Stratton and Reid (2004) also add that children with high-risk profiles (i.e. young mothers, low socioeconomic status, disruptive home environment, temperamental factors) should be the focus when providing such programs. Without early intervention, the social, behavioural and emotional issues witnessed (which serve as warning signs) in the school setting could intensify and lead to dropping out and delinquency (Webster-Stratton & Reid, 2004). No practical interventions that improve social-emotional competence exist in South Africa (Deacon & Van Rensburg, 2018). Deacon and Van Rensburg (2018) proposed and tested an intervention for social-emotional competence of school beginners in the South African context. This intervention showed significant improvement in social skills, internalisation and practical reasoning, which paves a path for the development of a standardised intervention program.

Parent training programs are another suggested solution. Parent training programs are treatment programs that reduce overt behaviour problems by decreasing hostile, inconsistent parenting styles and strengthening home-school relationships (Webster-Stratton & Reid, 2004). These programs highlight the impact of the home environment and parenting on the behaviour of the child in the school setting and their ability to build positive peer relationships (Webster-Stratton & Reid, 2004). These programs, therefore, educate parents on their role in assisting their child in adapting and succeeding in school. Two group-based parenting programs have been empirically evaluated in South Africa. The first is the Positive Parenting Skills Training (PPST) for caregivers of children aged five to twelve (Wessels, Lester & Ward, 2016). The second programme is the Sinovuyo Caring Families Programme (SCFP) for caregivers of two to nine-year-olds with behaviour problems (Wessels et al., 2016). These two programmes aim to assist caregivers by targeting the areas mentioned by Webster-Stratton and Reid (2004) within the South African context.

A lot of research has been done around the diverse factors that impact on children's social-emotional competence. A few programmes have also been developed to help children and their caregivers to overcome the challenges that affect children's optimal development. In order to understand the social-emotional development of children that will be discussed in this study, a conceptual framework is required. This conceptual framework will guide the researcher on the expected level of development and how to assess the children's current level of social-emotional development.

## **2.8 Conceptual framework: Rose-Krasnor's theory of social competence**

### **2.8.1 *Defining social competence***

Rose-Krasnor's (1997) theory of social competence will be used to guide this research study. Rose-Krasnor's theory shows how social and emotional competence are constructs that are related yet separable (Denham et al., 2003). Rose-Krasnor (1997) uses 'social skills', 'sociometric status', 'relationships' and 'functional outcomes' approaches for creating a working definition of social competence. The assessors in this study are the educators that will be interviewed by the researcher.

#### **2.8.1.1 Social skills approach.**

This approach defines social competence as a child possessing a collection of skills (Rose-Krasnor, 1997). This approach lists skills that need to be targeted for intervention and assessment, but there is no universal agreement on criteria. This approach also looks at an individual's skills instead of a child's interaction with others (Rose-Krasnor, 1997). This would mean that a child could be deemed competent based on specific criteria but only to find that they are not so socially competent when they have to interact with their peers.

#### **2.8.1.2 Sociometric status approach.**

Sociometric assessments look at a child's peer status, specifically how popular and admired they are by their peers (Rose-Krasnor, 1997). This approach has the strength of looking at emotional and behavioural components; it can detect children who are not socially competent and peer status can be correlated with existing and predictive indicators of adjustment (Rose-Krasnor, 1997). The weakness of these assessments, however, is that they do not tell us the root of the child's lack of social competence and the child's skills in

initiation and maintenance of relationships, making it problematic to come up with interventions (Rose-Krasnor, 1997).

### **2.8.1.3 Relationships approach.**

A child's ability to maintain quality relationships is another way in which social competence is defined (Rose-Krasnor, 1997). Consistent with the theory of scaffolding by Vygotsky, this definition looks at the skills of both people in the relationship as the skills of one partner influencing the other (Rose-Krasnor, 1997). Research has shown the importance of friends for development as the "number of friends has been positively correlated with socio-emotional and academic adjustment" (Rose-Krasnor, 1997, p. 117). This approach, however, does not show the causal relationship between the quality of friendships and adaptive outcomes, lacks a universal definition of friendship and the measure of friendships does not always mean that developmental outcomes will be adaptive (Rose-Krasnor, 1997).

### **2.8.1.4 Functional outcomes approach.**

The functional approach looks at social tasks and outcomes within their contexts (Rose-Krasnor, 1997). The information processing model, which states that social competence develops from social-cognitive processes and the systems model, which highlights the interaction between a child and their environment, are used by the functional outcomes approach to defining social competence (Rose-Krasnor, 1997). The functional outcomes approach has issues in identifying success and failure since goals are so context-specific, and there is little guidance on what ideal success is (Rose-Krasnor, 1997).

## **2.8.2 *The prism model of social competence***

The four approaches to defining social competence have only a modest correlation as indices of social competence (Rose-Krasnor, 1997). There is also no universal agreement on what is social competence amongst different assessors (Rose-Krasnor, 1997). Also, the outcomes of social competence assessments may be contradictory even when using different approaches for one child (Rose-Krasnor, 1997). Due to these issues, Rose-Krasnor (1997) developed a prism model of social competence where social competence is depicted and built on three levels of analysis: theoretical, index and skills. At the simplest level, social competence is defined as effective interaction and at the most complex level includes cognitive, emotional and social behaviours, and skills required (Denham et al., 2003).

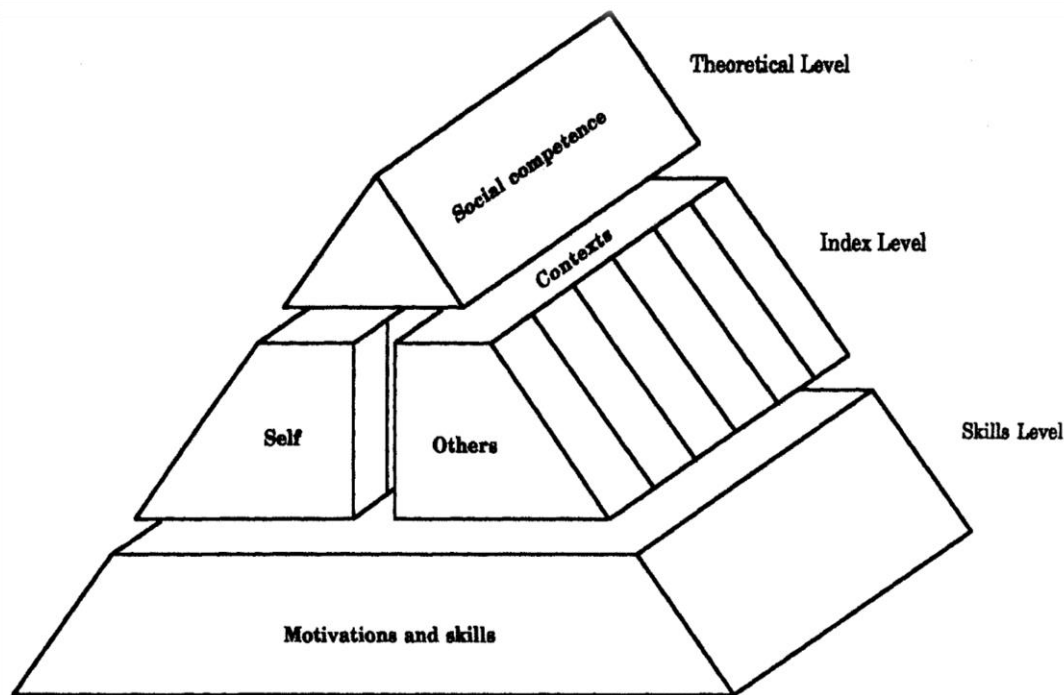


Figure 3. Rose-Krasnor's social competence prism (Rose-Krasnor, 1997, p.120).

### 2.8.2.1 Theoretical level.

The theoretical level is at the top of the hierarchy, comprised of the simplest level of analysis where social competence is defined as “effectiveness in interaction” (Rose-Krasnor, 1997, p. 119). Effective interaction would result in behaviours that would help the child meet their developmental needs on a long-term and short-term basis (Rose-Krasnor, 1997). Effective interaction suggests that interaction is transactional, rated on how others respond to the child. Interaction should also be context-dependent and goal-dependent (Rose-Krasnor, 1997).

### 2.8.2.2 Index level.

The index level is at the middle of the prism and defines social competence as “the ability to achieve personal goals while maintaining positive relationships” (Rose-Krasnor, 1997, p.121). Rose-Krasnor (1997) divides the index level into two domains that are each divided into contexts. The first domain is the “Self” where the child maintains autonomy by prioritising their own needs. The second domain is the “Other” where the child maintains healthy relationships with others by prioritising the needs and viewpoints of others. Rose-Krasnor (1997) divides the two domains into contexts (as seen in figure 3) because both

“self” and “other” indices of social competence are context-specific. Research states that a balance between autonomy (self) and communion (other) is essential for optimal social competence and development.

### **2.8.2.3 Skills level.**

The skills level is at the bottom of the prism, with the most complex definition of social competence (Rose-Krasnor, 1997). The theoretical and index levels are built upon the motivational and behavioural base represented by the skills level (Rose-Krasnor, 1997). At this level, social competence comprises of the cognitive, emotional and social motivations and skills that exist within the child (Rose-Krasnor, 1997). The skills mentioned in the social skills approach are included at this level, as well as the goals and values, which are the motivation for social behaviour (Rose-Krasnor, 1997). When skills and motivations work in harmony, the child has higher chances of performing well in assessments at the index level (Rose-Krasnor, 1997). The skills and motivations can be applicable across contexts, with some being more significant in some contexts than others (Rose-Krasnor, 1997).

## **2.9 Summation**

Social-emotional competence is vital in a child’s life as a lack of competence can lead to life-long consequences. Different skills that make a child gain social-emotional competence impact on a child’s adaptation and success in their school career. It is factors that are unfortunately out of the child’s control that impede on the development of these skills. It is, however encouraging to know that programs exist that tackle these issues both in the home and school environment. There is still much progress to be made in South Africa in terms of providing such programs in state schools where more at-risk children would be found.

Rose-Krasnor’s (1997) theory provides a comprehensive model for assessing children’s social-emotional competence. Competence can be assessed by looking at effectiveness at the top of the prism, to looking into specific skills at the bottom. By applying the top-down approach to assessing children’s social-emotional competence, one can assess how much competence a child has developed. This prism allows for an assessor to see how far a child has developed. Also, an assessor can understand the context in which behaviours occur and the goals for the behaviours. By knowing the context and goal, an assessor can come up with a more accurate assessment of competence.

Applying Rose-Krasnor's (1997) theory, guided by skills outlined by Denham et al. (2003) allows a comprehensive assessment of social-emotional competence. Rose-Krasnor (1997) provides a model while Denham et al. (2003) provides the skills and contexts that should be considered for assessment. Considering South Africa's diversity, both theories assist with the best way to understand children's social-emotional within the context of this study. The next chapter will outline this study's rationale and aims and research questions.

## **Chapter Three: Rationale and Aims of the Study**

### **3.1 Rationale of the study**

Social-emotional competence is the strongest predictor of academic success (Denham et al., 2003; Denham et al., 2012). Entry into formal education is an inevitable part of a child's life, rendering school entry an essential part of development. When a child possesses an adequate level of social-emotional skills, they are considered ready for school (Denham et al., 2012; Webster-Stratton & Reid, 2004). Conversely, a child who has not developed the required socio-emotional skills is less likely to succeed academically or adjust to the school setting (Morrison, Ponitz & McClelland, 2010). This possibility highlights the importance of social-emotional competence before the child attempts tasks that will be required to develop them on a cognitive and academic level.

The South African government acknowledges that a large number of children are not socially and emotionally skilled to begin formal education, even though policies are in place to address these matters (Meusel, 2010). This issue shows that policy alone is insufficient in addressing this issue that significantly impacts on a child's school career and future. This study aimed to explore educators' perceptions of children's socio-emotional competence. The focus was on the perceptions they had about on the children they are currently teaching and children they have previously taught in grade 1, in their current schools. This study looks at both the strength and weaknesses in children's competence.

This study targeted grade 1 educators since they spend most of the day with children, and this is where these issues would surface. In addition to this, South Africa is still phasing in grade R, so grade 1 is still where all children begin formal education. Focussing on the qualified foundation phase educators ensured that educators understood the skills and behaviours that were explored. Qualified educators know the skills and behaviours expected of children in grade 1. Research has been done on social-emotional competence in children beginning formal education, but the body of existing research lacks the perspective of the educators. Educators are a vital source of information because they spend most of their days with the children and therefore know the children better than another person that would assess a child once-off. Also, educators can see the changes that occur typically in grade 1 children and each specific child. The data of this research will hopefully assist the Department of Basic Education with different strategies to help children better prepare for formal education. The

Department of Education could implement an intervention that is relevant to each school's context, and most useful for each school.

### **3.2 Aims of the study**

This study aimed to explore educators' perceptions of social-emotional competencies of children beginning formal education. The study also aimed to explore the educators' perceptions of the factors contributing to children not being adequately prepared for formal education. Rose-Krasnor's (1997) theory of social competence was applied to assess children's social-emotional competence. This study aimed to interview grade 1 educators as they are the assessors of children's competence.

### **3.3 Objectives of the study**

The objectives of this study were to apply the theory of social Competence to:

1. Explore educators' perceptions of the social-emotional competencies of children beginning formal education
2. Explore educators' perceptions of the differences in social-emotional competencies among children in grade 1
3. Explore educator's perceptions of the contributing factors to children not being adequately prepared for formal education

### **3.4 Research Questions**

Research questions that were explored in this study were:

1. What are the educators' perceptions of social-emotional competence of learners beginning formal education?
2. According to the educators, how do the grade 1 learners differ in social-emotional competence?
3. What do educators think are the possible contributing factors to the differences in the level of social-emotional competencies of Grade 1 children?

## **Chapter Four: Research Methodology**

### **4.1 Introduction**

This chapter presents the research process that was implemented in order to carry out the aims and objectives of this research study. A comprehensive explanation of the research design, research setting, sampling technique, recruitment process, study sample, data collection, ethical considerations, data processing, reliability and validity, and data analysis will be given in this chapter.

### **4.2 Research design**

Qualitative research aims to understand phenomena in naturalistic, real-world settings (Golafshani, 2003). The research is not done by looking through a microscope but by creating a relationship between the participant and researcher (Coolican, 2014). The findings are not acquired by statistical procedures, but by the events unfolding naturally (Golafshani, 2003). Qualitative research was best for this study because it allowed the researcher to obtain in-depth information from each educator's context. Educators also had the opportunity to develop a relationship with the researcher, which created an opportunity for them to express themselves openly. An exploratory research design was employed, using one-on-one, face-to-face interviews to collect data. Exploratory research examines phenomena that are not well understood and develops groundwork for future research on the topic (Neuman, 2006). Social-emotional competence in grade 1 children in Pietermaritzburg has not been widely researched, especially from the educator's perspective. Many South African children struggle with the adaptation to formal education and consequently have poor academic outcomes.

### **4.3 Research setting**

The study took place in three government primary schools in the uMgungundlovu district, in KwaZulu-Natal. Two schools were quintile five schools, and one was a quintile three school. Schools in South Africa exist under different quintiles, which are poverty rankings based on the poverty level of households around the school (Department of Basic Education, 2017). Quintile 1 schools are the poorest, in the most impoverished areas and quintile five schools are the least poor schools, in the wealthier areas (Department of Basic Education, 2017). Schools from different quintiles were chosen because South African schools are diverse and school contexts could have a bearing on social and emotional regulation. Each of these schools has four grade 1 classes. However, the quintile five schools are better resourced, with

fewer learners per class, when compared to the quintile three schools. South Africa is diverse, therefore consisting of schools in different quintiles. Although the scope of this study did not allow for a representative sample of educators and schools, it was helpful to know the poverty ranking of each school to better understand the context of the phenomenon being explored. Knowing the quintile level of the school also assisted in the analysis of the data. The participants were the grade 1 educators from the three schools. These educators were qualified foundation phase educators. These educators had a relevant teaching qualification and had been teaching grade 1 in the same school, for at least a year. Alternatively, educators had no teaching qualification but five years of experience in teaching grade 1. Including only qualified foundation phase educators ensured that the educators understood which skills and behaviours would be expected of children in grade 1. The assumption was that these educators would have either the theoretical knowledge or experience required to answer the interview questions.

#### **4.4 Sampling technique**

Convenience sampling was used to sample the schools. Convenience sampling is a non-probability sampling method where subjects are selected based on availability (Neuman, 2006). The study sample came from three schools in Pietermaritzburg. These schools were chosen due to the availability and willingness of the principals to allow entry into their schools. These schools were also located in areas that were convenient for the researcher to reach. These schools were all government primary schools, with qualified foundation phase educators teaching the children in grade 1. These schools also had grade 1 educators with a foundation phase teaching qualification and who had been teaching in the school for more than a year.

A purposive sampling method was used to obtain the educator participants. Purposive sampling is used when the research does not aim to have a representative sample but instead is aimed at getting a sample for specific cases (Neuman, 2006). This form of sampling was used because the study aimed to explore grade 1 educators' perceptions of children's social-emotional competence. Sampling only grade 1 educators ensured the research questions were answered by the most reliable sample. Educators were the most reliable source of information because the children spend most of their day with their educators, and this is the setting where any social-emotional issues would surface. Schools are where children are required to show

social-emotional competence in order to adapt to school and fulfil the purpose of being in school.

#### **4.5 Recruitment process**

The Department of Education was first contacted to get permission to work in the schools (see appendix 1). After DoE permission was granted, the schools were approached, and permission to access the schools was granted by the principals. These letters are not attached for confidentiality purposes. The University of KwaZulu-Natal's Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee reviewed the proposed study and granted ethical clearance (HSS/0481/019) (see Appendix 2).

The grade 1 educators were then approached and told about the study in a manner that was suitable for each school. In one school, the educators were on lunch break when the researcher visited the school. The principal then introduced the researcher to the head of department (HOD) and the grade 1 educators and explained the researcher's intentions. The researcher then briefly explained the study to the head of the department privately. In the two other schools, the principals introduced the researcher to the HODs only. The researcher, principal and HOD of each school met in the principal's office to discuss the researcher's intentions. The HODs all exchanged contact details with the researcher for future communication. All HODs were supportive of the study and offered to tell the other educators about the study.

After receiving permission from the DoE, the researcher informed HODs of this progress. The HODs then communicated that some educators wanted to read the information sheets (Appendix 3) and interview questions (Appendix 4) to assist with time management. These documents were given to each school two to three days before their interviews. The information sheets helped them understand what the study entailed, any possible risks, and what was expected of them. Setting the interview questions potentially helped the educators become more prepared for the questions.

#### **4.6 Study sample**

The study sample consisted of eleven grade 1 educators. All the schools in the study have four grade 1 classes. There were twelve educators across all schools, with eleven agreeing to participate. Grade 1 educators were chosen because the study was interested in educators' perceptions of social-emotional competencies of children beginning formal education (grade

1). The educators were part of a short interview that aimed to explore their perceptions of the children’s social-emotional competencies when they begin formal school.

Only the grade 1 educators were asked to participate in the study. Only qualified or experienced foundation phase educators were interviewed to ensure adequate understanding of the concepts of social-emotional skills and behaviours in children. Qualified educators had either a relevant teaching qualification with at least one-year experience teaching grade 1, or 5 years’ experience in teaching grade 1 without a teaching qualification. Good understanding of the terms and concepts discussed in the interview would potentially increase the depth and quality of the information that the educators might provide. It was assumed that these educators would have a better idea of social-emotional skills and behaviours in children beginning formal education within that specific school setting. The demographic information of the educators who participated in this study is provided in table 1 below. Participant codes P1, P2 represent the pseudonyms given to participants. School A, B and C represent the three schools in the study. The school each participant is from is added to their code, as well as the school’s quintile. Each school’s quintile as well as each participant’s teaching experience is also provided.

*Table 1: Educator’s demographic information*

<b>Participant code</b>	<b>School</b>	<b>School quintile</b>	<b>Years of teaching experience in the current school</b>
P1A5	A	5	25
P2A5	A	5	5
P3B5	B	5	35
P4A5	A	5	5
P5A5	A	5	32
P6C3	C	3	2
P7C3	C	3	3
P8B5	B	5	15
P9B5	B	5	22
P10B5	B	5	9
P11C3	C	3	1

*Note.*

School quintile 3 = lower quintile, no fee-paying school, low socio-economic status surroundings, poorly resourced

School quintile 5 = highest quintile, fee-paying school, higher socio-economic status surroundings, well resourced

#### **4.7 Data collection**

A qualitative data collection method was employed. Qualitative interviews are “a way of finding out what others feel and think about their worlds. Through qualitative interviews you can understand experiences and reconstruct events in which you did not participate” (Rubin & Rubin, 1995, p. 3). Qualitative interviews were best for this research problem because they allowed educators to give an in-depth account of the children’s social-emotional competencies. These also offered rich data because each educator got an opportunity to give his/her individual account of what they observe, how they perceive this and what could contribute to differences in these skills. Getting an in-depth account allowed the researcher to understand various aspects of the behaviours that occur in the classroom and possible factors that have not been previously explored. The questions in the interviews were mainly generated from reviewing the studies by Denham et al. (2003) (see appendix 4 for interview schedule). Denham et al. (2003) outlines skills and behaviours expected for social-emotional competence in young children. Since social-emotional skills are said to be the strongest indicators of academic achievement, the questions were focused on behaviours that indicate the presence or absence of these skills. In drafting the interview schedule the researcher also drew on Denham et al. (2012), Domitrovich et al. (2007) and Morrison et al. (2010). Rose-Krasnor’s (1997) framework provided a framework for analysis of the interviews with the educators.

The grade 1 HODs were contacted to set up interview times for each educator. All HODs indicated that all educators were interested in the study and had communicated their availability to the HOD. All HODs gave the researcher information about each educator’s free-periods, in which the researcher could approach the educators. The researcher then had to approach each educator during their free-period and obtain informed consent to interview them for the study. The informed consent forms were signed after discussing the information sheet during each educator’s interview time. This was done before each interview commenced. All twelve educators were approached during their free-period. Eleven educators participated in the study and one declined due to time constraints.

The interviews were conducted on the school property, in a private room. The private room was used to avoid distraction from the children and other staff members. The interviews were conducted at a time that was convenient for the educators and the school. A digital recorder was used to record the interviews. The recording was done to keep an accurate record of what

was said in the interview and to help the researcher focus more on the interview. The recording was also done to minimise distractions, such as the researcher constantly writing notes while the participant is speaking. In addition to getting informed consent for the educators to participate in the study (attached in appendix 5), consent was also sought to record the interview (see appendix 6).

Participants were given the option to do the interview in either English or *IsiZulu*. Two educators chose to do their interviews in *IsiZulu* and nine used English. The information sheet, interview schedule and all consent forms were translated into *IsiZulu* (see appendix 3). Parallel translation was used to translate these documents. Parallel translation involves translators independently translating a source document to the target language, then a comparison of these translations is done by the translators and reviewer (Sutrisno, Nguyen & Tangen, 2014). This is the most appropriate procedure because the aim of parallel translation is the understanding of the content, by the translated language users (Sutrisno et al., 2014). The translators were an *IsiZulu* speaking educator independent of this study, and the researcher, both of whom were bilingual (*isiZulu* and English)

## **4.8 Data processing**

After data collection, the researcher did a verbatim transcription of the audio recordings. Jefferson's transcription was used to transcribe the audio data (see appendix 7 for transcription notation). Jefferson's transcription method captures aspects of speech such as the speaker's volume, pauses, tone, pace etc. (Hepburn & Bolden, 2017). The two interviews that were conducted in *IsiZulu* were transcribed in *IsiZulu*. The *IsiZulu* transcripts were then translated into English using Brislin's (1980) back translation. This means that the transcriptions were translated from *IsiZulu* to English by the first translator, then a second translator took the translated English version and translated it back into *IsiZulu*. Finally, the two *IsiZulu* (translated and original) versions were compared by the researcher. The first translator was the researcher who is a first language *IsiZulu* speaker. The second translator was an *IsiZulu* speaking educator.

## **4.9. Ethical considerations**

### ***4.9.1 Risk/ benefit ratio***

In any research the risk/benefit ratio should be favourable; the researcher should mention possible risks to participants and the efforts that will be made to minimize these risks

(Wassenaar & Mamotte, 2012). No risk was foreseen for the participants' lives as no risky actions were required. People in the Department of Education and in the school would be aware of the educators' identities but this study did not seek any of the educators' personal information. If educators identified children with problems, the researcher would have communicated this information with the principal. The principal would have then taken necessary action, as per the Department of Education protocol. No children with problems were identified in this study. There was no direct benefit for participants but they saw great value in their perceptions being obtained. Educators saw this research as an opportunity for them to inform the Department of Education about the assistance and support they require in successfully teaching children in grade 1. In addition, information from this research will assist children in future to get better support in preparation for formal education. The researcher will write a report for the Department of Education detailing findings of this study.

#### ***4.9.2 Fair participant selection***

Fair participant selection entails selecting participants who are relevant to the objectives of the research (Wassenaar & Mamotte, 2012). Only qualified grade 1 educators were sampled for this study. Educators with either a teaching qualification and teaching for at least one year, or no teaching qualification and at least five years teaching experience were sampled. This criterion ensured that educators provide information on children they observe in the classroom on a daily basis. Also, these educators have theoretical knowledge or practical experience to answer the interview questions.

#### ***4.9.3 Informed consent***

During the data collection process, informed consent was sought before each interview commenced. Educators were each provided with an information sheet that clearly stated their role in the study, the objectives and their rights (see appendix 3). The educators were also given a consent form to sign if they agreed to be part of the study (see appendix 5). An additional consent form was provided for each educator to sign if they agreed to the interview being recorded (see appendix 6). To ensure optimal understanding of the content, all informed consent documents were translated into *IsiZulu*. Also, educators were given the information sheets two to three days before their interviews to allow them adequate time to be informed about the study.

#### **4.9.4 Confidentiality**

Before data analysis, the audio data were transcribed in a manner that ensured participant information was confidential. The educators' identity was kept confidential by assigning a number to each participant, instead of using any identifying labels like names. Numbers assigned were 'P1' to 'P11' for the eleven educators. Any names of staff, parents or children that were mentioned were also changed and given pseudonyms. After all audio data were transcribed, the audio recordings were deleted. The interview transcripts have been stored in the study supervisor's office, locked in a filing cabinet for five years.

#### **4.10 Data analysis**

The qualitative interviews were analysed using thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is “a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns within data” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 79). This data analysis method was used because it has broad analytic options for transcripts and analysis allows the researcher to answer particular research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This research aimed to explore educators' perceptions of the social-emotional competence of children beginning formal education. To answer the research questions this study required a data analysis technique that allowed for a comprehensive analysis of the data.

Braun and Clarke's (2006) six steps for thematic analysis were followed during the data analysis process. The first two steps involve first familiarising yourself with the data; which includes transcribing and noting ideas for coding. The codes are then generated and data is organised according to each code. In this study the audio data was transcribed then the transcripts were read to obtain any ideas for coding. The researcher looked for any comments made regarding issues around emotional regulation and social skills, such as children's ability to separate from parents and peer relationships. Similarities between each educator's transcripts and any interesting features were noted then coded.

The third and fourth steps involves the organising codes and information for potential themes. The validity of themes is then checked and a thematic map of the analysis is produced (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In this study similar codes were organised into different categories then a theme was identified for each category. For example, 'unstable friendships' and 'turn-taking skills' formed the theme 'social competence'. Themes were then reviewed in the data analysis process. Some themes in the data overlapped so the researcher had to constantly refer back to

the transcripts to understand how the code was constructed. This was done to ensure validity of the themes. For example, 'issues around aggression' did not fit into one theme after the transcripts were revisited. Once transcripts were revisited 'issues around aggression' changed to 'increasing issues with aggression' and 'gender-based differences in aggression'.

The fifth step by Braun and Clarke (2006) involves the naming and defining of themes. The final step is production of the report which includes the selection of compelling extract examples, relating analysis back to literature and research question, and producing an academic report of the analysis. A total of eight main themes were identified in this study. The researcher then selected extracts as examples for the points discussed in the findings chapter of this dissertation. The data produced was compared with literature to see whether or not there were any consistencies. Finally, a conclusion of children's social-emotional competence was made with the guidance of Rose-Krasnor's (1997) theory of social competence.

#### **4.11. Credibility, dependability and transferability**

Silverman (2013) describes a number of strategies that can be used to improve rigour in qualitative research. Babbie and Mouton (2005) state that trustworthiness is achieved by ensuring credibility, dependability and transferability which are discussed below.

##### ***4.11.1. Credibility***

Credibility entails ensuring that findings are congruent with the data (Silverman, 2013). To ensure credibility in this study, semi-structured, individual interviews were employed to get each participant's perspective on the research topic. Seale and Silverman (1997) state that data should be recorded, transcribed and interpreted in the most detailed and accurate manner possible. A digital audio-recorder was used to record all interviews. This ensured that all that was said in the interview was retained. All audio-recordings were then transcribed verbatim, employing Jefferson's transcription notation (Hepburn & Bolden, 2017) which includes information on how things are said and other body language that was communicated.

Thematic analysis was employed by the researcher to analyse the transcribed data. Braun and Clarke (2006) state that thematic analysis enhances credibility because it assists with understanding issues in the study's context. The refutability principle was applied when codes and themes were generated. The refutability principle entails the researcher refuting their

assumed relationship between phenomena (Silverman, 2013). When applying the refutability principle, the researcher changed some codes and themes to suit the meaning of each educator's construction. For example, 'issues around aggression' did not fit into one theme, after the transcripts were revisited. Once transcripts were revisited 'issues around aggression' changed to 'increasing issues with aggression' and 'gender-based differences in aggression'.

Comprehensive data treatment (Silverman, 2013) was employed when reporting data. Seale and Silverman (1997) state that counting of events ensures that the data reported is not in support of the researcher's views or an imbalance between common and uncommon events. The researcher gave a count of the number of educators with certain views under each theme. Including both common and deviant cases. Cases that differ from the coding scheme assist the researcher in noticing deviant cases (Seale & Silverman, 1997). Doing deviant case analysis enhances the transferability of the findings in qualitative research (Seale & Silverman, 1997). Low-inference descriptors, which involves using each participant's data when analyzing data (Silverman, 2013) were also employed. In data analysis, the researcher included verbatim transcript extracts to make inferences based on each educator's words. Where applicable, the researcher presented different interpretations of the same phenomena. For instance, two educators felt that children were disrespectful towards adults. However, one was critical of the children choosing to be disrespectful while another was critical of their parents for not teaching respect. The constant comparative method (Silverman, 2013) was also employed. The researcher provided comparative information across each theme. For instance, the researcher mentioned that there is no aggression in school A, while there is in school B and C. However, school C did not construct the existing aggression as an issue, while school B constructed as an increasing issue. During the interpretation of findings, study data was compared across all transcripts in each category.

#### ***4.11.2. Dependability***

Dependability is enhanced when research findings are consistent if they were to be repeated (Babbie & Mouton, 2005). A comprehensive description of the methodologies used in a study enhances dependability. In chapter 4, the researcher provided a thorough description of the research design and sampling techniques for the schools and educators. The researcher explained the recruitment process, ethical guidelines, research setting and inclusion criterion. Information on data collection, data processing and data analysis was also provided.

Researchers hoping to pursue similar research would be guided on how to either replicate this study or research on a different aspect on a similar topic.

#### ***4.11.3. Transferability***

This study employed a purposive sampling method which enhances transferability.

Transferability is concerned with the extent the research results can be transferred to similar contexts with participants who are similar (Silverman, 2013). In this study, an inclusion criterion was employed to ensure only qualified grade 1 educators with at least 5 years' experience were interviewed. This criterion ensured that educators could understand the concepts in the interview schedule and therefore provide accurate information that could be transferable. Also, these educators spend most of their time with these children and observe them on a long-term basis. Sampling other educators or parents would have not helped me achieve the objectives of the study. Information of the research setting was also provided for transferability purposes. School quintiles were included in the research because South African schools have diverse backgrounds. Therefore, quintiles provide information on the context of the educators and the school backgrounds. There were findings for which the researcher had no theoretical explanation. These findings were also reported in the discussion section.

## **Chapter Five: Findings**

### **5.1. Introduction**

This chapter presents the analysis of data from eleven in-depth interviews with grade 1 educators from three schools in Pietermaritzburg. The study was a qualitative study that aimed to explore the educators' perceptions of the social-emotional skills of children beginning formal education. It also aimed to explore their perceptions of the contributing factors to the children not being adequately prepared for formal education.

In the data analysis process using thematic analysis, eight major themes were identified. Themes were data-driven, where similar data was grouped and a theme based on the similarities was identified. The first theme was 'social competence'. Any comments around social competence (such as the children's abilities to form friendships), were categorized under the first theme. The second theme was 'emotional competence', which consisted of any comments around emotional competence (such as separating from parents when coming into school). The third theme was 'poor parenting practices negatively impacting on children's social-emotional competence'. Any comments related to parenting (such as relationship between mothers and their children) was placed under this theme. The fourth theme was 'issues with language' which consisted of any comments about language skills. Another theme, 'decline in social-emotional skills over the years' was the fifth theme identified. This theme consisted of skills educators said were declining over time. The sixth theme was 'Screen exposure a source of social-emotional issues'. This theme was based on issues attributed to screen exposure. The seventh theme was 'socio-economic factors impacting on social emotional competence'. This theme contained data related to socioeconomic issues that affect children's development. Finally, 'diverse construction of maturity' was identified based on any expressions around maturity.

In the process of data analysis, the transcripts were first analysed and then examined in relation to the relevant theories on social-emotional competence. Rose-Krasnor's (1997) theory provides a framework for data analysis. Denham et al.'s (2003) work identifies the skills and behaviours expected for young children to succeed in school. Using these two theories assisted with the analysis of whether or not the educators perceived the children to have adequate social-emotional competence. All names were changed in the transcripts.

## 5.2. Transcription conventions

Jeffersonian transcription conventions (Hepburn & Bolden, 2017) were used to transcribe the data. The transcription conventions are attached in appendix 7. The letter 'P' followed by a number is each participant's speech. The school's code as well as the school's quintile is also added to the participant's. The letter 'R' indicates the researcher's speech in the conversation. Each extract has line numbers which are the line numbers used in the transcripts. The next section will present the themes identified and present supporting excerpts from the transcripts under each theme. An explanation of each extract will also be given and any similarities or contrasts between transcripts will also be identified.

## 5.3. Social competence

The first theme identified was social competence. The data showed that social competence is influenced by: fluid peer relationships; educators' perception of children as disrespectful, and conflict management and mediation issues.

### 5.3.1. Fluid peer relationships

Five of the educators said that the children make friendships with their peers easily.

#### Extract 1.

97. R: *Do they play or develop friendships ?easily*

98. P3B5: *I think they do but then again (.) they're influenced by the fact that they*

99. *know most of the children=*

100. R: *mhmm*

101. P3B5: *=that come from the pre-primary...*

The extract above suggests that the easy formation of friendships is aided by the fact that children know each other from pre-school and are therefore familiar with each other. The five educators that said friendships are formed easily due to familiarity, are all educators from the quintile 5 schools. These are the two schools where all learners have been exposed to grade R. Although familiarity is one factor in the development of friendships, four educators also claimed that the children's friendships are not firm at this stage. This view is presented in the extract below:

### **Extract 2.**

32. R: *Are they able to play and develop friendships easily*
33. P5A5: *They fickle at this age very fickle (.) they do have their friends but they are friends today*
34. *and not friends with that person tomorrow*
35. R: *Okay ahahaha*
36. P5A5: *It all boils down to if it's your birthday you're friends, if you have something nice to eat*
37. *you're friends (.) so they haven't built a strong bond friendship*
38. R: *Yes*
39. P5A5: *They tend to have stronger bonds with children who are their home friends, so perhaps*
40. *families know each other from church*
41. R: *Yes*
42. P5A5: *Or just home, those tend to be more where I see the friendships developing at this age*

The extract above shows the distinction between making friends and maintaining friendships. P5A5 says “very fickle at this age they do have their friends but they’re friends today and not friends with that person tomorrow” (lines 33-34). The educator suggests that the children are able to make friends but friendships are not maintained. The educators that commented on similar views to the extract above are all from school A. P5A5 further suggests that the school context does not provide a foundation for stable friendships but the social structures outside school do. This is evident in line 39 where she says “they tend to have stronger bonds with children who are their home friends”. This comment specifically suggests that friendships are stronger when built outside the school setting. One educator, on the contrary, said that the children take long to develop friendships because they come from different preschools. This comment is presented below:

### **Extract 3.**

81. *carpet activities and then you get your children that prefer to watch and observe (.) it does*
82. *take a long time for me to (.) uh (3) watch the friendships build=*
83. R: *mhmm*
84. P4A5: *=at the beginning of the year this class is coming from a WHOLE different feed of*
85. *school groups=*
86. R: *mhmm*
87. P4A5: *=so you have your children that are familiar with each other and they gravitate towards*
88. *each other=*
89. R: *mhmm*

90. *P4A5: = and then you get your children that come from a school where there are no other*  
91. *children*

Extract 3 is in contrast to the view expressed in extract 1, which states that children make friends easily because they are familiar with each other from their preschool period. This is evident in line 81 to 82 where she says “it does take a long time for me to uh watch the friendships build” and lines 84 to 85 where she says “at the beginning of the year this class is coming from a whole different feed of school groups”. However, these contrasting views suggest agreement on the view that familiarity is a factor in the development of friendships.

Three educators commented that some children have shy personalities and require assistance and encouragement with interaction with other peers, regardless of whether or not they are familiar with their peers. This is presented in the extract below:

**Extract 4.**

82. *P10B5: =what we usually do we have a buddy system where we pair them up with someone*  
83. *else and that's their buddy and that buddy looks AFTER them=*  
84. *R: mhmm*  
85. *P10B5: =make sure that they're part of a GROUP even when they go to top field you remind*  
86. *them okay so and so this is your buddy remember when you're on the field...*

The educator above commented that a buddy system is used to assist children who are shy. In the buddy system a child is paired with another child who will become their friend and participate with them in all activities (lines 82-83). Three other educators, across all three schools expressed similar views to P10B5.

One educator from school C expressed the view that some children battle to form friendships because they are physically aggressive and bully their peers. In the extract below P11C3 says “they hit others so they struggle to make friendships so other children do not want to be friends with them because they hit them” (lines 3-4). This comment suggests that bullying behaviour leads to peer rejection.

**Extract 5.**

81. *P11C3: Mhmm yea some do they do make friends easily but some are bullies and they hit so*

82. *they are unable to (.) maybe it's something they pick up from home but bullying is*

83. *something that exists so they are unable to be friends with them because they hit them*

1

Although there are varying responses to the children's abilities to initiate and maintain friendships, two educators commented that children by nature are kind and friendly (extract 6). She says "I think that children basically are kind" (line 50) and "They want to play they want to help" (line 52). This view suggests that they see a form of innocence in children's nature and how they interact with others.

#### **Extract 6.**

50. P9B5: *Yes I do (.) I think that children basically (.) are kind*
51. R: *mhmm*
52. P9B5: *They want to play they want to help*
53. R: *mhmm*
54. P9B5: *Uhm (.) they want to have a friend and they want to be a friend...*

The responses by educators suggest that the children generally do not battle when it comes to forming friendships as they do not really have set friendships. The responses suggest that friendships do not seem to have any emotional attachment but are rather based on temporal playmates; convenience; the other child having something in common with them or the child having something they like.

#### **5.3.2. Educators' perception of children as disrespectful**

When it comes to children's relationship skills with adults, most of the educators perceived children as disrespectful. Ten educators said the children initiate interaction with them. However, they saw this interaction as disrespectful. Nine educators said that children are disrespectful but they had different views about what behaviours portrayed disrespect towards them. These different opinions were mostly linked to how the children interact with educators. These views will be discussed in the extracts below:

#### **Extract 7.**

349. *it's terrifying but I'm actually surprised how outspoken children are these days=*
350. R: *mmh*
351. P8B5: *=with adults >and there again it comes to the beginning it's almost disrespectful<*
352. R: *yah*
353. P8B5: *almost too confident with adults=*
354. R: *mhh*

355. P8B5: = they do not treat them as adults they treat them in such a disrespectful manner uh  
356. yah even coming into the classroom if it's a parent walking around they would shout out  
357. there's no sort of that? respect=

Extract 7 suggests that children have become more confident in approaching adults, compared to previous years. She says "I'm actually surprised how outspoken children are these days with adults" (lines 349 and 351). She further says "they do not treat them as adults" (line 355), which suggests that the children seem to not know that they should treat adults differently to their peers. P8B5 further suggests that children should be more reserved when interacting with adults. P8B5's view is very critical of the children's interaction with adults. This is also evident in lines 356 and 357 where she says "if it's a parent walking around they would shout out there's no sort of that respect".

In contrast to the above view that children are confident when interacting with adults; one educator commented that children only interact when the educator is familiar to them. P11C3 says "when a new teacher comes in or their teacher is absent they do not behave the same they become withdrawn" (lines 144-146).

#### **Extract 8.**

144. P11C3: mhh::h oh no they (1) when they are used to seeing the same face every day so when  
145. a new teacher comes in or their teacher is absent (1) they do not behave the same they  
146. become withdrawn

Some educators constructed turn-taking and voice modulation as behaviours that display respect towards adults. Extract 9 shows an example of the views expressed. In lines 352 to 353 the educator says "so often you find a child that's talking to you is talking in such a high volume it's l- almost like they're screaming at you". This comment suggests that voice modulation when speaking to adults, is a show of respect. Two educators perceived the behavior of children talking to them in loud volumes as a display of disrespect. The educator further says "those basic manners haven't come forth from home or from wherever they're just being allowed to just talk over people" (lines 359-560). This comment suggests that allowing others a turn when speaking is a display of respect. Six educators perceived the children's inability to wait for their turn to talk as a display of disrespect towards adults.

### **Extract 9.**

352. P1A5: *so often you find a child that's talking to you is talking in such a high volume it's l-*

353. *almost like they're screaming at you=*

354. R: *uh huh*

355. P1A5: *=so you have to bring them down umh and here again I think their::: when you when*

356. *you look at respect to them they're not feeling like if they're interrupting you they're being*

357. *disrespectful=*

358. R: *mmhmm*

359. P1A5: *=because they haven't been taught that (.) that those basic manners haven't come*

360. *forth from home or from wherever they're just being allowed to just talk over people [and so*

361. *it's very difficult that's the one thing we're battling with=*

The educators in Extracts 9 and 10 put the blame on parents for not instilling the correct skills of interacting with adults. Lines 8 and 9 from extract 9 express this view by saying “they haven't been taught that that those basic manners haven't come forth from home”. In extract 10 this view is expressed by the educator saying “basic manners which I feel reflect respect but then are they being taught at home” (lines 278-283). These educators, seem to feel that the children do not disrespect them intentionally but because the skills are not taught at home. P9B5 in extract 10 further expresses that the onus is on the educators to demand and teach respect since it's not instilled at home. This is evident where she says “Ummh I find that if you demand it from the children you'll eventually get it I feel at school we're teaching it” (lines 285 -287).

### **Extract 10.**

278. *say where are you going they'll say I'm going to the toilet and keep walking ummh basic*

279. *manners*

280. R: *Mhhm*

281. P9B5: *Which I feel reflect respect*

282. R: *Mhhm*

283. P9B5: *But then are they being taught at home?*

284. R: *That's the question*

285. P9B5: *Ummh I find that if you demand it from the children*

286. R: *Mhhm*

287. P9B5: *Eventually you'll get it so I feel at school we teaching it*

288. R: *Instead of them coming with it*

289. P9B5: *Instead of it coming from home*

In extract 11, P8B5 puts the blame on the children themselves. Educator P8B5 emphasizes that the children are taught respect but they do not practice it. This is evident where she says “they have no respect and we talk about this everyday” (lines 366 to 367). Lines 10 and 11 show how the educator portrays the parents as the victims in the situation of disrespectful children. This is seen by the educator’s use of the word ‘poor’ (line 374) to describe the parents. In addition to this, words such as ‘bulldoze’ in line 374 and the emphasis on the word ‘flung’ (line 374) to describe children pushing their way through the corridor shows how critical this educator is of the children. P8B5 also describes the children as self-centered as they put their needs above others and ignore the respect they have been taught. She says “their needs are more important than yours” (lines 371-372) to express this view.

**Extract 11.**

366. P8B5: *=the children they’ll just rush past you they’ll just not [do- they have no respect and*

367. *we talk about this everyday visitors to school parents teachers if you see them coming you*

368. *move aside and you greet them. morning mam morning sir=*

369. R: *[yes*

370. R: *mhmm*

371. P8B5: *=you do not have to know their name they do not do that their*

372. *needs are more important than yours=*

373. R: *yes*

374. P8B5: *=and they’ll just bulldoze their way so the poor parents would get f:::lung off the*

375. *corridor before they even get to your classroom=*

Two educators commented that they do not have issues with disrespect because of their age. One educator was from school A and the other from school B. These educators perceive that maturity is a factor in how much children respect adults. Extract 12 is an example of one of the two educators’ comments. P5A5 says “I am at an advantage I would say to the younger staff because I’d say I’m at their granny age... they do tend to have a little bit more respect than maybe the younger staff” (lines 193-197). This comment suggests that older educators receive more respect from the children than younger educators.

### **Extract 12.**

193. *P5A5: Generally, if they have a good grounding they speak to you respectfully, I::: am at an*  
194. *advantage I would say (.) maybe to the younger staff because I'm more in their granny age*  
195. *group*  
196. *R: Yes*  
197. *P5A5: They do tend to have a little bit more respect than maybe the younger staff*  
198. *R: Yes*  
199. *P5A5: I don't know if that's just because I'm old, I'm older*  
200. *R: Mmh*  
201. *P5A5: But I am a granny so yah they DEFINITELY see me as that generation*

Two educators from school C (P6C3 and P11C3) said that there is no disrespect. They said all their learners interact with them respectfully. P11C3 in extract 13 said “yes they are respectful because they talk to you nicely they approach you and they do not shout” (lines 155-156) and “they give you your chance to speak and when you ask something “ (lines 158-159). This educator also constructs voice modulation and turn-taking behaviours as a display of respect.

### **Extract 13.**

155. *P11C3: yes they are respectful because they talk to you nicely they approach you and they do*  
156. *not shout*  
157. *R: mhmm*  
158. *P11C3: =they come to you and say mam there's this and that and they listen to you they give*  
159. *you your chance to speak and when you ask something they do not know they would be quiet*  
160. *about it*

The next section will discuss the theme around conflict management and mediation and educators' perspectives on this skill.

#### **5.3.3. Conflict management and mediation issues**

When it comes to conflict management and mediation all educators expressed the view that the children battle in this area. However, the way the educators framed the issue varied. Extract 14 is an example of the view expressed that children are unable to resolve conflict themselves.

#### **Extract 14.**

224. R: *yah and when it comes to uh resolving conflict with their peers are they able to resolve it*  
225. *on their own?*  
226. P4A5: no ((smiles and shakes head)) [no no no no  
227. R: [hm hm hm  
228. P4A5: *they are very quick (.) again to (.) to feel hurt and they are very quick to feel (.)*  
229. *disheartened by (.) when something's gone wrong and ?when it comes to peer conflict they*  
230. *often need to tell me before they tell the other child and I I always want this particular skill*  
231. *uh f- I always want the children to learn this particular skill (.) of umh (.) something as silly as*  
232. *umh (.) so and so's book is on my side he's not moving over I say have you asked them to*  
233. *move over no so I say to them how can you fix this problem if you haven't even spoken to*  
234. *them you're just moaning at me and telling me this is the problem so I do feel this age*  
235. *absolutely needs a lot of help and a lot of guidance when they're resolving any conflict*  
236. *obviously if it's conflict where it has become dangerous like umh (.) bullying in the form of*  
237. *just being really mean and=*

The extract above stresses how much children are unable to resolve conflict on their own. This can be seen by the repetitive “no” response in line 226 and the emphasis on ‘absolutely’ in line 235. In addition, P4A5 says “when it comes to peer conflict they often need to tell me before they tell the other child” (lines 229-230). This comment suggests that children seek intervention rather than solving it themselves. Eight educators said that students often seek adult intervention when conflict arises. This educator constructs herself as a caring educator that would like the children to learn conflict management skills. This is evident in line 231 when she says “I always want the children to learn this particular skill”. P4A5 in extract 14 and P8B5 in extract 15 both express the view that conflict management is something for them to teach the children. This is evident in extract 14 where P4A5 says “I do feel this age absolutely needs a lot of help and a lot of guidance when they’re resolving any conflict” (lines 234-235) and extract 15 where P8B5 says “They have to be taught” (line 159). This view further suggests that conflict management is a skill that children learn as they develop. Four educators across all 3 schools said that children often need adult mediation when there is conflict.

#### **Extract 15.**

159. P8B5: *They have to be taught and that for me is stopping straight away and dealing with it*

160. *getting the two parties (.) because they forever run and tell-tale but obviously bullying and*  
161. *stuff like that we intervene...*

Another view expressed by educators was that children do solve conflict but their methods are wrong. The educator in extract 16 states that physical aggression is used as a means to resolve conflict. This is evident in lines 151 to 153 when she says “so and so will come and say because this one took your thing hit her so that one was trying to resolve the conflict by saying because you took my lunch *wena* (you) you have to hit her they were solving but wrongly”. One other educator expressed the view that children resolve their own conflicts through physical aggression.

#### **Extract 16.**

150. *P7C3: They do solve on their own but in a wrong way (.) because now they come back they*  
151. *hit each other during break time (.) eh so and so will come and say because this one took your*  
152. *thing (.) hit her (.) so that one was trying to resolve the conflict by saying because you took*  
153. *my lunch you have to hit her (.) they were solving but wrongly...*

The educator in extract 17 gives a more detailed construction of aggression as a means of resolving conflict.

#### **Extract 17.**

114. *P5A5: Ummh boys tend to be the physical ones (.) girls are the nasty words*  
115. *R: Mhmm*  
116. *P5A5: >YOU ARE NOT MY FRIEND<(.) that's a girl thing (.) boys will just lash out punch,*  
117. *kick, push*  
118. *R: Mhmm*  
119. *P5A5: So yeah, a gender wise you see ..*  
120. *R: The differences*  
121. *P5A5: The differences at this age*  
122. *R: Is it, do you get that a lot though?*  
123. *P5A5: No, a lot of hitting...*  
124. *R: Aggression in general?*  
125. *P5A5: No no (.) sometimes if there's unrest in their private lives*  
126. *R: Yes*

127. P5A5: *Then some of those days you'll see them (.) they don't like people in their space then*  
128. *that's when I see a lot of them , I'll say what has happened , what's the change (.) oh no, dad*

P5A5 in extract 17 constructs a gender-based distinction of the different types of aggression by saying “boys tend to be the physical ones girls are the nasty\_words” (line 114). Two other educators. When the researcher asked if there is a lot of aggression, the educator said it is not something that happens a lot. All four educators in school A said that physical aggression is not an issue in their school. In contrast, all educators in school B said physical aggression is a problem. School A and school B are both quintile 5 schools, which is the highest socioeconomic level. Educators in school C had mixed responses, with some saying aggression is an issue and others saying it is not. School C is a quintile 3 school, which is schools at the lowest socioeconomic level.

#### **Extract 18.**

200. P10B5: *=because then I'm going to have to write a letter and sort out the matter (.) so literally*  
201. *on a daily basis children are brought to me for fighting on the top field (.) ?oh he was looking*  
202. *at me sideways or ?he said something that I didn't like or ?he called me out of my name then*  
203. *instead of talking about it or going to a teacher they just (.) fight*  
204. R: *mmh*  
205. P10B5: *or play these aggressive games pulling each other kicking shoving and its just (.) chaos*  
206. R: *yho ahahaha*  
207. P10B5: *ahaha it's a jungle*  
208. R: *uhh ahaha*  
209. P10B5: *((sigh)) yah it's getting worse and worse with each passing year...*

Extract 18 is the commentary of one of the educators in school B, where there are complaints that physical aggression is increasingly a problem. P10B5 in extract 18 says “it's getting worse and worse with each passing year” (line 209). P8B5 in extract 19, from school B, gives an account of one of the factors that contribute to children resorting to aggression when there is conflict. She explains the conflict between expectations between the home and school environment. She says “it is quite sad because now you call parents in and they will say but you do not know where we come from you do not know where we come from and what is happening where my child is playing” (lines 199-201) and “you get other parents who will say it's fine at school we do this but at home we fight back because of our environment...” (lines 204-205).

### **Extract 19.**

193. P8B5: *So for me it's quite sad because now you call parents in and they'll say but you do not*  
194. *know where we come from you do not know what's happening on the streets where my*  
195. *child's playing=*

...

203. P8B5: *=and here you are as a teacher telling a parent that we resolve with words we do not*  
204. *hit so you get other parents who will say it's fine at school we do this but at home we fight*  
205. *back (.) because of our environment...*

One educator provided a reason for why the children battle with conflict resolution (extract 20).

### **Extract 20.**

122. *intervening I feel like a lot of their conflicts are resolved by their parents they're not learning*

...

128. P9B5: *= and everything in its place and I feel a lot of responsibilities at home are given to the*

129. *carers and they are doing all that and the child is not learning how to put things away (.) how*

130. *to pack up after a game*

131. R: *mhmm*

132. P9B5: *it's done for them which doesn't help them at school...*

P9B5 in extract 20 feels that a lack of responsibility at home contributes to children's lack in conflict resolution skills. She says "I feel a lot of responsibilities at home are given to the carers and they are doing all that and the child is not learning how to put things away how to pack up after a game" (lines 128 – 130). The blame is put on the parents for not allowing the children to resolve their own conflicts (line 122), which impacts on their ability to learn conflict resolution. There is a conflict between P9B5 in extract 20 and the response given by P8B5 in extract 19. While P9B5 constructs the parent as a problem, P8B5 does not. P8B5 gives the parent's perspective of matters as something that is beyond the parent's control.

#### **5.3.4. Prosocial behaviour**

When it comes to empathy, there were varying perceptions of children's empathy at this age. Three educators feel that empathy has to be taught so the children that have been taught, have empathy towards others. Educator P11C3 in the extract below (extract 21) suggests that grade R

education teaches children prosocial skills. This is evident in lines 102 to 103 when she says “others get that foundation from R”.

**Extract 21.**

100. *R: okay and when it comes to showing empathy(.) towards others are they able to show it to*  
101. *each other*  
102. *P11C3: mhh::: others show it, but others do not know how to treat others (1) others get that*  
103. *foundation from grade R*  
104. *R: mhmm*  
105. *P11C3: = how to treat others well*

Educator P8B5 in extract 22 seems to have the perception that empathy is something innate in children. She says “most of my little ones are so caring for each other it’s too sweet to see and they really take their friend’s pain upon themselves” (lines 117-119). She further emphasises this view by saying “you will find one or two where umh it’s obviously very deep rooted as to why they won’t have empathy” (lines 121-122). P8B5 suggests that children would only lack empathy when there is a deep-rooted issue. Five educators perceive empathy as something that would naturally occur in children.

**Extract 22.**

117. *P8B5: I think a lot of them are very caring (.) I’ve been quite surprised (.) most of my little*  
118. *ones are so caring for each other it’s too sweet to see and they really take their friend’s pain*  
119. *upon themselves=*  
120. *R: mhmm*  
121. *P8B5: = they’ll find a teacher and come along, so you’ll find one or two where umh it’s*  
122. *obviously very deep rooted as to why they won’t have empathy you’ve gotta really look into*  
123. *that but majority definitely (.) they’re very dear with each other*

Another aspect of prosocial behaviour that was identified was respect for other’s rights. In extract 23, educator P11C3 states that the children that went to grade R know how they are expected to treat others. However, the ones who did not go to grade R do not understand what is expected of them because they have no knowledge of how to treat others. She says “The ones that went to R know what is expected but those who did not go to R get confused” (lines 108-109). P11C3 sympathises with the children that did not go to grade R. This is evident where she

says “so honestly how do you criticize someone that doesn’t know any better” in lines 109 to 110. This educator constructs this social skill as one that should be taught in school.

**Extract 23.**

108. *P11C3: The ones that went to R know what is expected but those who did not go to R get*  
109. *confused (.) they do not know right from wrong and how they should treat others so honestly*  
110. *how do you criticize someone that doesn’t know any better*

Eight educators stated that children understand the concept once taught but application is an issue. Extract 24 constructs knowledge of other’s rights as something which precedes the ability to apply this knowledge. This is evident when she says “yes they’ve got all the answers if you talk about it but in reality it’s not there” in lines 133 to 134. This skill develops with maturity, as stated when the educator says “grade 1 is very little it’s umh a whole life skill issue” (line 130) which is not a skill that has been mastered by children yet at this age. The educator is not critical of this inability to apply the skill yet but show that she understands it is something that has to be taught repeatedly. This is evident in lines 129 to 130 where she says “You have to keep repeating it it’s not something that you can say and they run with it no”.

**Extract 24.**

129. *P8B5: You have to keep repeating it (.) it’s not something that you can say, and they run with*  
130. *it no (1) grade 1 is very little it’s umh a whole life skill issue=*  
131. *R: yes*  
132. *P8B5: =responsibility rights and things you’ve got to repeat over and over and over again and*  
133. *remind ourselves because >YES they’ve got all the answers< if you talk about it but in reality*  
134. *it’s not there ((smiles)) so that’s been challenging=*  
135. *R: mhh*  
136. *P8B5: =of having to actually being able to apply it*

Some children are reported to be egocentric, taking care of their own interests first but doing so without being mean to others. Educator P1A5 in extract 25 says “they will respect other people’s rights other children’s rights but they come first (lines 181-182). This educator is not critical of children being egocentric but sees it as something that is developmental. This is evident in the words “at the moment” in line 177. One other educator in the study expressed a similar view.

### **Extract 25.**

171. P1A5: *Uhm they do::: however their rights supersede everybody else's ((smiles))*  
172. R: *hmh*  
173. P1A5: *So if its infringing on theirs they will fight for themselves (.) rather than respect your*  
174. *rights*  
175. R: *mhmm*  
176. P1A5: *So it's me first it's very- they're egocentric at the moment*  
177. R: *Yes the age*  
178. P1A5: *Yes*  
179. R: *Yah*  
180. P1A5: *So in that sense they will respect other people's rights other children's rights but they*  
181. *come first*

Educator P4A5 in extract 26 comments on children protecting others as a prosocial act. She says “it can be Lucy’s best friend (.) and they will sit there and they will tell me that this child is doing something wrong” (lines 199-200). This comment suggests that children act as advocates for others, even if it means they tell on their own friend. By alerting the educator of another child’s wrongdoing, they are behaving in a prosocial manner.

### **Extract 26.**

190. R: *okay and uhm when it comes to respecting each other's rights do you feel like they*  
191. *understand the concept and they are able to=*  
192. P4A5: *Absolutely (.) they are the first ones (.) first ones to tell me when someone is doing*  
193. *something wrong when it comes to personal rights (.) human rights any rights (.) rights*  
194. *between right and wrong rights between my body her body rights between my belongings*  
195. *outside=*  
196. R: *mhmm*  
197. P4A5: *=this ages loves to tell on (.) so (I) the minute (.) and it can be their friend it doesn't*  
198. *have to be (.) Joe over there (.) it's not that I do not have know or I do not have to know or*  
199. *I do not care it can be Lucy's best friend (.) and they will sit there and they will tell me that*  
200. *this child is doing something wrong*

#### **5.3.5 Respect for social norms**

Respect for social norms is the final subtheme identified under social skills. The areas identified under respect for social norms are respect for school resources and property; accepting consequences of negative behavior, and adhering to the school rules and routine.

All the educators stated that appropriate use of resources is something that is taught and reinforced constantly. While some emphasized the importance of this skill being taught in school, others emphasized this should also be carried out at home. In extract 27, educator P1A5 explains that social norms on how to treat academic resources are instilled from the time learners come into school. This can be seen in lines “in the very beginning of the year the first initial lessons are how do you treat this” (lines 541-542). In addition to this, learners are also taught social norms in terms of hygiene, where they are taught how to use the toilets. This is evident in lines 545 to 546 where she says “we show them how to use the toilets and how to look after the toilets”.

**Extract 27.**

541. P1A5: *no they are taught that so when they go into the library in the very*

542. *beginning of the year the first initial lessons are how do you treat this*

543. R: *mhmm*

544. P1A5: *how do how do you look after the books (.) umh when they come into the*

545. *school we teach them we go into the toilets and we show them how to use the*

546. *toilets and how to look after the [toilets so it's pre::: taught=*

547. R: *[?oh okay*

548. R: *yes*

549. P1A5: *=right from when they come in the beginning of the year we teach them how*

550. *to look after their stuff so [yah it is i-] it does help umh with their own belongings I wouldn't*

The educator in extract 28 suggests that children understand and respect resources within the school property. She says “they do use them properly” (line 340). P10B5 further says “you’d find library books with food stains when it comes from home or it’s been torn” (line 341-342). This suggests that the lack of care happens at home rather than in the school setting.

**Extract 28.**

340. P10B5: *Mhh (1) they do use them properly but do not take care of them (1) so they're able to*

341. *use their resources properly but like with their books library books you'd find library books*

342. *with food stains when it comes from home or it's been torn or it's been highlighted or with*  
343. *their pencil crayons they've broken them...*

Extract 29 is in contrast to extract 28. The children in the school where P6C3 teaches seem to lack respect and understanding of resources. This is evident when she says “They tear books and draw on them” (line 270). The other 2 educators in school C also mentioned that the children destroy property.

**Extract 29.**

270. *P6C3: They tear books and draw on them ((throwing hands in the air)) or when you look up*  
271. *you find that books have been cut*

There appears to be a difference amongst the learners between the understanding of the use and need of resources and property. When it comes to respect for school resources, there seems to be a contrast between schools A and B with school C. The children in schools A and B do not destroy school resources and property in school but they lack care at home. The children in school C however, destroy school resources and property in the school setting.

The second aspect of social norms is the acceptance of consequences of negative behavior. All of the educators in this study said the children battle with accepting consequences of negative behaviour. The extracts below outline how the children battle with accepting consequences.

**Extract 30.**

336. *R: Mhmm and when it comes to accepting consequences of their behavior, do you feel like they*  
337. *are able to*  
338. *P5A5: Hahaha no (.) no ((shakes head)) they are very quick to blame others*  
339. *R: Mhmm*  
340. *P5A5: Who's humming so and so (.)they never never will say sorry it was me (.) it's always*  
341. *lashing out at someone else, calling out someone else's name for that, so they don't like it to*  
342. *accept responsibility*

In extract 30, the educator P5A5 constructs the children as blame-shifting. The children do not take responsibility for what they have done but blame others for something they have done. She says “they are very quick to blame others” (line 338). This educator is critical of the children as

deliberately dishonest. This is evident in lines 340 to 341 when she says “they never never will say sorry it was me it’s always lashing out at someone else”.

Like P5A5, P4A5 in extract 31 also expressed the view that the children do not take responsibility for their actions. P4A5 however, comments on a different manner children behave when avoiding responsibility for their actions.

### **Extract 31.**

567. P4A5: *no not all the time they for example will break a rule and when its consequence of*  
568. *staying in at break or they haven't finished their work it's taken them an hour to write 4*  
569. *sentences because they have been playing they have been enjoying they've been messing*  
570. *around so they KNOW that the consequence is that they need to finish their work before they*  
571. *go to break they BATTLE >even though they know that the consequence is that they do not*  
572. *go to break< they battle to accept it so even if you have Tim that will be very very sad*  
573. *because oh wowiz me now I can't go to break because I have four sentences to write but he*  
574. *knew fully well that for the last hour >and everyone else has finished< now he has to wait*  
575. *behind and they BATTLE with that=*  
576. R: *mhmm*  
577. P4A5: *=because they just can't accept that now they are in trouble and it's it's it's all children*

Extract 31 explains that children may be aware of the consequences they will get for a certain behavior but will still sulk when the consequence is given. P4A5 says “even though they know that the consequence is that they don’t do not go to break they battle to accept it so even if you have Tim that will be very very sad because oh wowiz me now I can’t go to break” (lines 571-573). P4A5 further constructs this issue as one that all children struggle with. This is evident in line 577 when she says “it’s all children”. Like P4A5 in extract 31, P6C3 in extract 32 also says that the children react to consequences emotionally.

### **Extract 32.**

248. P6C3: *they don't refuse as such but they just cry grade ones just cry shame (.) but no they are*  
249. *not defiant*  
250. R: *but do they understand that this is a consequence of my behavior therefore I must change it*  
251. P6C3: *Oh these little ones forget very quickly (.) no matter what the consequence is you'll find*  
252. *them right back to where they were doing the same thing but they are not defiant*

P6C3 constructs the children as forgetful, leading them to repeat their negative behavior. She says “you’ll find them right back to where they were doing the same thing” (lines 251-252) and “these little ones forget very quickly” (line 251). This educator constructs the inability to modify behavior as an inability to accept consequences. This is evident when she says “no matter what the consequence” (line 251). Although P4A5 and P6C3 mention that the children react emotionally, P6C3 is less critical of the children’s difficulty in accepting consequences. P6C3 says the children are “not defiant” (line 249) which suggests innocence or that this is unintentional.

In contrast to P6C3 who constructs forgetfulness as the reason for children repeating behaviours; P1A5 in extract 33 constructs the repetition of negative behavior as an attitude of indifference towards the consequences. P1A5 says “some kids nothing actually phases them they can role with the punches whatever you do” (lines 503-504). This comment further suggests that no consequence works for some children and therefore negative behavior persists. One other educator from school B said that there are children whose behavior cannot be changed through consequences.

**Extract 33.**

501. P1A5: *=or I’ll do it for maybe five minutes of the lesson just so that they can see*  
502. *that it’s going to impact on them eventually and someti... most of the time it*  
503. *works, umh yah but some kids nothing actually phases them, they can role with*  
504. *the punches whatever you do it’s fine*

The final aspect of social norms is adhering to the school routine. All educators in school A said that the children enjoy the school routine. An example of this view is seen in line 551 of extract 34 when she says “they love the school routine”. The educators in school A further stated that routine offers children “security of knowing what’s happening” (line 554) because they know what to “expect” (line 552).

**Extract 34.**

548. R: *so uh:::m in terms of the school routine are they able to [accept it]*  
549. P4A5: *[follow] yes*  
550. R: *Mhm*

551. P4A5: *yes they love the school routine absolutely my children know every single day what to*

552. *expect*

553. R: *mhmm*

554. P4A5: *that security of knowing what's happening in the day makes them feel comfortable*

In contrast to educators in school A, all seven educators in school B and C all said that it takes time for children to follow and grasp the school routine. Therefore, the educators' comments suggest that the school routine is helpful for children in school A but problematic for children in school B and C. Extract 35 illustrates a comment by one of the educators from school B while extract 36 illustrates a comment by one of the educators from school C.

P8B5 said that she is "quite shocked" (line 542) that children still have difficulty with following the school routine "in third term" (line 543). The blame is put on the parent. This is evident when she says "again when we call parents in we say please give your children responsibility" (lines 546-547). The emphasis on "again" in line 546 suggests that this is an ongoing issue where parents are asked repeatedly to give their children more responsibility.

### **Extract 35.**

541. P8B5: *I think obviously maturity levels are different in grade 1 (.) some learn quicker the*

542. *routine than others (.) I'm actually in general quite shocked (.) at (.) umh learning their*

543. *school routine we're in third term now I still have children like every morning since first term*

544. *(.) they come into the classroom in the morning they take out their homework book their*

545. *readers inside their books and they put it in their little reading group basket (2) I still have*

546. *children third term*

547. *that cannot remember to do that (.) now that's shocking actually and there again when we*

548. *call parents in we say please give your children responsibility=*

P11C3, like P8B5 expresses the view that children have difficulty with the school routine.

P11C3 in extract 36 said that children follow the school routine "after some months" (line 48).

This educator constructs the lack of exposure to grade R as the contributing issue to issues with routine. This is evident where she says "you can see the difference when a child has been to grade R because some would cry in class and want to go home" (lines 48-49). Even though this educator mentions that they "follow up" (line 50) with parents, P11C3 does not blame the parent like P8B5.

**Extract 36.**

48. *P11C3: After (.) let's say after some months it's just that you can see the difference when a*  
49. *child has been to grade R (.) because some would cry in class and want to go home (.) then*  
50. *when you follow up you find that they didn't go to grade R (.) eh (.) you find that it's their*  
51. *first time in a classroom (.) so you find that even if you tell them we do this at this time they*  
52. *do not understand that and you find that at any time they want to leave class (.) they want to*  
53. *eat at any time*

Children's age was another factor that was constructed as a contributing factor to routine issues. P10B5 in extract 37 said "some of them are 5 turning 6 instead of 6 turning 7 and it does impact on the behavior in the classroom so they are struggling to sit and concentrate because they are struggling with the more formal routine of grade 1" (lines 14-16). This comment suggests that the children are too young to be able to cope with the school routine in grade 1.

**Extract 37.**

13. *P10B5: well generally (.) uhm this year is difficult year in terms of behavior because I've got*  
14. *quite a few young children (.) so some of them are 5 turning 6 instead of 6 turning 7 and it*  
15. *does impact on the behavior in the classroom so they (.) are struggling to sit and concentrate*  
16. *because they are struggling with the more formal routine of grade 1 basically because at the*  
17. *preprimary they play more than they have a formal routine where they are sitting at the desk*  
18. *and doing work =*

A final aspect on social norms in the school setting concerns following a code of conduct or school rules. Educator P6C3 from school C (extract 38) mentioned that some parents disregard school rules.

**Extract 38.**

215. *you wearing pink leggings and they would say my mother said I should wear them because I*  
216. *am feeling cold so in other instances uh the rules (.) school rules are broken by the parents*  
217. *because it's their child*  
218. *R: mhmm*  
219. *P6C3: They would say this is my child (.) one parent once said I told her children are not*  
220. *allowed to carry chips to school (.) we only eat fruit (.) it's a school rule right*

221. R: *mhmm*

222. P6C3: *She said if you are saying my child can't carry chips then that means it should be*

223. *illegal for chips to be sold in South Africa*

Educator P6C3 commented that a child would respond by saying “because I am feeling cold” (lines 215-216) when asked why they are wearing incorrect uniform. The educator constructs the issue as the parent choosing to do this because they have authority over their child. This can be seen in lines 216 to 217 where she says “school rules are broken by the parents because it’s their child” and in line 219 where she says “They would say this is my child”. In lines 222 to 223 the educator said a parent responded by saying “if you are saying my child can’t carry chips then that means it should be illegal for chips to be sold in South Africa” when asked to not pack chips for children. This comment suggests a clash between norms in the school and outside school. The parent opposes this rule by stating that chips are legal for children to eat.

### **5.3.6 Factors hindering children from participating in activities**

The educators all stated that some children are able to participate in activities but various factors hinder some children from participating in activities. These activities are classroom-based or outdoor activities.

#### **Extract 39.**

358. *at the beginning of the year which I find quite interesting I find that with participation*

359. *because they have to get changed into a sports kit or they have to change out of their uniform*

360. *or they have to get changed back into their uniform=*

361. R: *mhmm*

362. P4A5: *=a lot of them coming from preprime they do not want to participate purely because*

363. *they cannot (.) they're avoiding it they can't get changed they do not want to do their*

364. *shoelaces [that's based on for me an immaturity from preprime to (.) to here ?children know*

365. *that when they get to Princewood they gonna have to tie their shoe laces=*

...

376. *a very small amount of time to do that so it's not as frequent as the other activities when I*

377. *put some of them on the spot (.) I do find that they close up (.) they withdraw (.) and they*

378. *show me an adverse effect of how they would naturally be...*

The educator in extract 39 constructs participation in activities as behavior that is dependent on a child's perception of their abilities to participate. In lines 362 to 363 she says "they do not want to participate purely because they cannot". This is reflective of their low self-esteem hindering them from participating, which is an emotional component that is still developing. The educator further states that "that's based on for me an immaturity from preprime to to here" (line 364) which suggests that the children's self-esteem develops as they learn to do certain tasks independently. P4A5 further says "when I put some of them on the spot (.) I do find that they close up (.) they withdraw" (lines 376-377). This suggests that children don't participate as well when there is attention focused on them. Five other educators also said that children tend to withdraw when put in front of the class, even though they show the ability when doing the work at their desks.

The educator in extract 40 constructs participation in activities as a skill that is age-dependent, where younger children are less mature and therefore struggle to participate in activities.

#### **Extract 40.**

294. *do activities focus and some children >it's so developmental< grade 1 it's... some will come in*  
295. *and they're totally prepared and others are such babies when they come in we do have 5 year*  
296. *old's that come in and they're such babies they fall asleep [they can't sit straight on the table*  
297. *they're hungry they just want to play on the jungle gym and then you get the older ones the 6*  
298. *year old's sort of turning 7 and they're like READY for this and that and get involved with*  
299. *whatever is given to them...*

P8B5 says the 5-year old children battle to adjust to a more structured routine than grade R where they "fall asleep" (line 296), "can't sit straight on the table" (line 296) and "just want to play on the jungle gym" (line 297). She constructs the 6-year olds as "ready" (line 298) which suggests that the 5-year olds are not ready for grade 1. Like P8B5 in extract 40, P6C3 in extract 41 also constructs an age-dependent difference in the children's ability to participate in activities.

#### **Extract 41.**

166. *P6C3: We try to take children that are turning 7 years ((interruption from another*  
167. *staff member)) if they come in too young that does have an impact...*

...

170. *P6C3: Yes it's not that easily to do group work it would be that odd child that participate but*  
171. *most of them do not understand what is expected it's YOU as the teacher that has to maintain*  
172. *control and tell them to do this*  
...  
180. *always saying haibo so and so but that's not what we are doing right now but they also just*  
181. *do not care (.) they do not care about learning*

P6C3 suggests that age is an important factor in children's participation in activities. This is evident in line 167 when she says "if they come in too young that does have an impact". Educator P6C3 also says the children "do not understand what is expected" (line 171) of them, hence they would do other things instead of what the educator expects. This suggests that the children are not mature enough to understand what is expected in the classroom since they do not do what is expected; they need constant monitoring. The educator shifts from an understanding stance to being critical of the children where she says "but they also just do not care they do not care about learning" (lines 180-181). This suggests that she feels the children may not understand what is expected but they also do not have a concern for their education. One educator constructed the school curriculum as the factor that hinders children from adequate participation in activities. This view is illustrated in extract 42.

#### **Extract 42.**

205. *P7C3: Our activities now (.) due to our curriculum they are trying but I think the work is*  
206. *overload there is too much work for them (.) like especially in math's where they are supposed*  
207. *to do like sums only to find that there are 8 sums to finish and they are young and you find that*  
208. *there are lots of things to do maybe the sum they have to count (.) solve it then they have to*  
209. *write number sentence that means 8 times 2 (.) their work is doubled so you find that work you*  
210. *have to start at 8 to 9 and some of them you find that they do not finish on time (.) then you*  
211. *have to hold the work then at break time you have to call them say come and finish your work*

Educator P7C3 said "they are trying but I think the work is overload there is too much work for them" (lines 205-206) and "they do not finish on time" (line 210). This comment suggests that the workload given or expected from the children is excessive. This educator further said that the children "are young" (line 207) which suggests that the workload is too much for their age. In extract 43, the educator constructs grade R exposure as the factor that affects participation in activities.

### **Extract 43.**

90. P11C3: *Mhmm first of all as I said grade R is very important*
91. R: *Mhmm*
92. P11C3: *The one that participates the most is the one that has been to grade R*
93. R: *Mhmm*
94. P11C3: *Some are even able to write their names*
95. R: *Mhmm*
96. P11C3: *The one that has never been to grade R cannot even write and they cry(.) when you*
97. *ask them to write they just hold the pen and keep quiet*
98. R: *Mhmm*
99. P11C3: *But the ones that participate a lot are those that come from grade R*

Educator P11C3 in extract 43 constructs a difference between the children with grade R exposure and those who have not done grade R. She says that those who did not go to grade R do not know how to do basics such as writing so they would not participate because they do not have the skills to do so. This is evident when she says “the one has never been to grade R cannot even write” (line 96). She further says “when you ask them to write at most they would just hold the pen and keep quiet” (lines 96-97) which suggests that the children are intimidated by the new environment.

### **5.3.7. Turn-taking**

The educator in extract 44 constructs the skill of taking turns as one that is lacking amongst most of the grade 1 children. This can be seen by her use of the words “definitely not” (line 113) when asked if the children can take turns. This choice of words emphasises how much the children cannot take turns. The use of words like “always” (line 117) and “every single time” (line 117) also emphasise how often the issue presents in the classroom. The educator constructs the children as “impatient and impulsive” (line 118) while also constructing herself as the person that should repeatedly teach this skill.

### **Extract 44.**

113. P10B5: *Definitely not it's a daily struggle everybody wants to be first (.) if you're not first*
114. *you can't wait your turn (.) it's it's a daily struggle (.) there are those who always remember*
115. *their manners (.) that okay I wanted to be first but Miss Allison chose someone else or*

116. *whatever the case is (.) umh and they wait their turn BUT even if we're lining up (.) they have*  
117. *an assembly order (.) but there's always pushing and shoving (.) everyday every single time*  
118. *we line up (.) so they are very impatient and impulsive and they just (.) it's something that*  
119. *you have to keep teaching them daily that we all have turns and if it's not your turn just be*  
120. *respectful...*

In extract 45 the educator constructs the ability to take turns as a skill that is task-dependent.

#### **Extract 45.**

140. *R: okay (.) and when they participate in activities(.) do they take turns?*  
141. *PIA5: I think it's easier for them to do that when they're playing their games (.) coz they*  
142. *know how their games work (.) but in a formal situation like I said (.) they battle to wait=*  
143. *R: [oh yes*  
144. *PIA5: =[for their turn, they do (1) even (.) but I have noticed even in a game(.) if the person*  
145. *in front of them is a lot slower than them (.) and it depends also on the child's personality coz*  
146. *there are some children that are so impatient (.) they'll want to just override*

PIA5 says that the children take turn better “when they’re playing their games” (line 141) but in a formal setting “they battle to wait” (lines 142). This comment suggest that game time is more self-directed and allows children to exercise more freedom in the classroom setting. This comment further suggests that a formal setting is when there is less freedom, the children are required to follow much stricter rules.

The educator in extract 46 differentiates between mature and immature children.

#### **Extract 46.**

177. *P2A5: In ?terms of uh things like umh you'll have a situation where like those quiet ones*  
178. *would step back and you get those that would ADVOCATE the children and they would be*  
179. *like HEY it's Mark's turn or whatever so that's nice (.) umh in terms of their oral*  
180. *performance of turn taking that's a WHOLE other level (.) they talk over each other they talk*  
181. *over me it's [hehe THAT'S the noise they're loud and boisterous] (.) yah they're very free*  
182. *spirited umh there's a lot of reason for that in terms of their boundaries and discipline and*  
183. *those kinds of things and self-regulation and self-control*

Educator P2A5 states that the mature children “advocate” (line 178) for the quieter children when they are playing games. However, she also constructs the skill as task-dependent, like P1A5. P2A5 says that the children lack turn-taking skills when it comes to oral activities. The children would “talk over each other” (line 180). One educator from school B and another from school C also said that turn-taking is an issue during oral tasks. P2A5 also says that this skill lacks due to issues around “boundaries and discipline” (line 182) and “self-regulation and self-control” (line 183).

The educator in extract 47 constructs turn-taking as a skill that depends on a child’s family structure.

**Extract 47.**

88. *P6C3: NO (.) oh no they can't they have to be controlled by the teacher (1) eh they can't okay*  
89. *it depends because with others it's because they are the only child at home or the last born (.)*

Another aspect of turn-taking seemed to be dependent on children’s exposure at home. Two other educators; one from school B and one from school A, stated that children’s ability to take turns depended on whether they were exposed to this at home. For instance, in extract 47 the educator says “it depends because with others it’s because they are the only child at home or the last born” (line 89). This comment suggests that children with no siblings or children who are the youngest lack exposure to turn-taking. P4A5 in extract 48 constructs turn-taking as a developmental skill.

**Extract 48.**

105. *R: oh okay and when it comes to taking turns when they participating in activities do you feel*  
106. *like they are able to do so?*  
107. *P4A5: (.hhh) It's a tough one because taking turns is a mature thing to understand (.) for a*  
108. *child it's an aspect where they know taking turns is the right way but they do not want to take*  
109. *turns...*

She says that the children understand the concept of turn-taking and that it is what they should do but they have issues implementing it. This is evident when she says “taking turns is a mature thing to understand” (line 107) and “they know taking turns is the right way but they don’t do

not want to take turns” (lines 108-109). This suggests that the educator believes that children learn about the concept first then implementation comes later with development.

#### **5.4. Emotional competence**

The second theme identified was emotional competence. Emotional competence was influenced by: difference of expression between positive and negative emotions, and emotional regulation.

##### **5.4.1. Difference of expression between positive and negative emotions**

The responses from the educators revealed a clear distinction between the children’s ability to express their emotions when they are negative and when they are positive. This distinction can be seen in the extracts 49 and 50 below:

#### **Extract 49.**

618. PIA5: *a lot of children just keep that inside and they won't talk about it umh even*  
619. *if there's something upsetting them it will come ?out in the classroom but not*  
620. *directly from them so they do not express what they're feeling*  
621. R: *mmh*  
622. PIA5: *it comes out in other ways then you know there's something wrong [then I*  
623. *need to investigate umh I find that children are more umh (.) are more prone to*  
624. *keeping their feelings hidden (1) for some reason*  
625. R: *[yah*  
626. R: *uh huh*  
627. PIA5: *Umh they're not as open about their feelings as they used to be*  
628. R: *mhmm*  
629. PIA5: *Umh (.) I do not know why but I feel like children are just (.) keeping*  
630. *a lot I think they've got so much to deal with [AND*  
631. R: *[yes, it's probably the generational thing you were*  
632. *saying again*  
633. PIA5: *yes (.) yah*  
634. R: *children obviously now have more to [deal with*  
635. PIA5: *[to deal with yah (.) and you'll find lots of broken*  
636. *homes lots of (.) u:::mh families that are not intact*  
637. R: *mmhmm*  
638. PIA5: *and then they they've learned that there are some things you do not*

639. *talk to other people about because this is personal=*

640. *R: yes*

641. *P1A5: =this is private and so a lot of children will go through a lot of traumatic*

642. *events at home and they come and do not want to express it*

P1A5 and P2A5 say that children do not express emotions related to issues happening at home. Two other educators also said that children do not express emotions related to issues in the home environment. P1A5 in extract 49 constructs the lack of verbal expression as something the child does intentionally; “they’re not as open about their feelings as they used to be” (line 627). She suggests that they act out in other ways when she says “if there’s something upsetting them it will come out in the classroom but not directly from them” (lines 619-620). This phrase suggests the child behaves negatively in the classroom as a means of dealing with the negative emotions they feel. P1A5 in extract 49 however, is not critical of the children’s internalization, instead she feels children are overwhelmed by their situations at home. She says “they’ve got so much to deal with” (line 630), with an emphasis on the word “deal” and “they’ve learned that there are some things you do not talk to other people about” (lines 635 and 636), which shows she is not blaming the child but their situations at home. She further constructs the children’s homes as “broken” (line 632) and “traumatic” (line 641). Finally, P1A5 expresses that there is change in children’s openness and if there are issues the children “do not want to express it” (line 642).

P2A5 in extract 50 on the other hand constructs the lack of expression as a developmental issue by saying “they’re still kind of learning” (line 443). P2A5 also constructs the educator’s role as being the one that should identify if a child has an issue by saying “you’ll just be able as a teacher be able to see it” (line 440). The other two educators that also commented that children do not express issues from home, also said that educators have to identify negative emotions.

#### **Extract 50.**

432. *P2A5: umh more likely than not they will be quite expressive they will be quite (1) umh able*

433. *to tell you oh no I’m not feeling too happy today or umh uh I::: YAH you’ll see in a child that*

434. *they’re not having a good DAY uh in terms of their body language=*

435. *R: mhmm*

436. *P2A5: =and just their general umh self-expression in the day that they are a bit not quite*

437. *themselves and then you’ll need see that they need a bit of support but that’s more often more*

438. *the emotional maybe they could be tired or maybe they had a bit of a fight with mom and dad*

439. *beforehand and whatever and that THOSE obviously they won't really say that something*  
440. *bad has happened at home you'll just be able as a teacher be able to see it=*  
441. *R: yes*  
442. *P2A5: =that they're not quite themselves and they need the bit of extra support umh but in*  
443. *terms of so those kind of expressive expressing your needs they're still kind of learning=*

P2A5 also states that children “will be quite expressive” (line 432) when they are “not feeling too happy” (line 433) in the school setting. P1A5 in extract 51 is in agreement with P2A5 that children express their personal emotions at school where she says “school wise umh I’ve got to a stage now where yes if they are getting something wrong they are able to come to me and they say I can’t do this or I can’t understand this can you help me” (lines 666-668). P1A5 says that the children can now express these emotions but it took “a long time” (line 670), which suggests that the skill to express the need for help and trusting the teacher develops with time. Furthermore, P1A5 in extract 51 constructs pressure from parents as the contributing factor for children’s issues with expressing their need for help. This is evident when she says “I do feel like children are so pressurized to do well” (line 675) and “so if a child doesn’t or can’t do something they feel aah I can’t admit to not being able to do this” (line 682-683). She further constructs the change in the report system, from a written description of a child’s capabilities to percentages, as the cause for the parents to put pressure on their children. This suggests that children do not express emotions linked to issues around academic work.

### **Extract 51.**

666. *P1A5: ... school wi:::se (.) umh I've got to a stage now wh:::ere yes if they are getting*  
667. *something wrong they are able to come to me and they say I can't do this or I can't*  
668. *understand this can you help me=*  
669. *R: mhmm*  
670. *P1A5: =they've gotten to that stage but it took me a long time (.) to get them to do that umh I*  
671. *do not know whether they see it as failure if they can't do something [and they have to come*  
672. *for help*  
673. *R: [mhmm*  
674. *R: yes*  
675. *P1A5: but they do I feel like children are so pressurized (2) to do well [especially now since*  
676. *the department's asking us to put marks and percentages=*  
677. *R: [yes*

678. R: *mmhmm*

679. P1A5: *=and parents are seeing marks and percentages I feel like parents might be*

680. *pressurizing their kids and saying you've got to achieve this and you've got to achieve that=*

681. R: *mmhmm*

682. P1A5: *=and so if a child doesn't or can't do something they feel aah I can't admit to not*

683. *being able to do this*

When it comes to expressing positive emotions such as pride, all educators said the children excel in doing so. The extract below shows one of the educator's responses:

### **Extract 52.**

132. R: *Yeah, and ummh when it comes to expressing pride when they have achieved something (.)*

133. *do you feel like they are able to express that?*

134. P5A5: *Ummh, yes they're not that humble at this age ahaha (.) they believe in themselves a lot*

135. *and that is a really good trait so they are proud of what they do...*

...

146. P5A5: *Okay(.) how do they show it? They like to pin their work on the board (.) they like to go*

147. *show their friends, they love to go to other teachers around the school...*

Extract 52 shows and highlights just how well the children express emotions when they are positive. She says they “like to pin their work on the board” (line 146) and “they like to go show their friends” (lines 146-147).

### **5.4.2. Emotional regulation**

The educator P in extract 53 constructs the parents as the problem when it comes to children regulating their emotions when they come into school. She says “you might get the parents hovering at the door” in line 46 and “which creates that platform for the child to feel anxious” in line 49. The children themselves don't do not have an issue separating from their parents. She expresses this in lines 56 to 58 when she says “they are able to say goodbye to their parents and they are able to calm down and enjoy their school so absolutely I do not feel separation is a thing in my class”. One other educator who also constructed the parents as the problem. This educator further constructs herself as the attachment object for the children when they are in school. She says “I would often get on a Friday afternoon have a hug and they'd say aah I'm gonna miss you this weekend” (lines 52-53).

**Extract 53.**

46. P4A5: =it's the first week you come in you know you might get the parents hovering at the  
47. door  
48. R: mhmm  
49. P4A5: which creates that platform for the child to feel anxious=  
50. R: mhmm  
51. P4A5: =but the minute the parent is gone the children are fine but now up until July I haven't  
52. had any children having separation anxiety I would often get on a Friday afternoon have a  
53. hug and they'd say aah I'm gonna miss you this weekend  
54. R: mhmm  
55. P4A5: so it's nice to build that relationship with the children where umh yah they  
56. are comfortable they feel safe and secure in the classroom and they are able to say goodbye  
57. to their parents and they are able to calm down and enjoy the day at school so absolutely I do  
58. not feel separation is a thing in my class yah

Educator P11C3 in extract 54 constructs a difference between children that went to grade R and those who did not. This is evident in line 65 where she says “you can just see the difference”. She constructs the children that have grade R exposure as those who have better emotion regulation skills. She expresses this in lines 65 to 66 by saying “the others that are used to school in grade R you can just see the difference they come into class without issues and they sit and wait to do work”. She constructs the children with no grade R exposure as those who lack in emotion regulation skills. This is evident in lines 63 to 65 when she says “they battle to separate because the minute they drop them off they cry and follow the parent out of school wanting to go with them”. The other two educators from school C also made a similar comment about the difference between children who did grade R and those who did not. Therefore, all educators in school C feel that children with grade R exposure regulate their emotions better when they have to separate from parents.

**Extract 54.**

59. P11C3: mhh (.)as I was saying those that did not do R are not able to separate from their  
60. parents to a point where their parents have to constantly accompany them to class to a point  
61. where we intervene and ask them to stop accompanying the child=  
62. R: mhmm

63. *P11C3: =the child must get used to coming to school alone (.) so they battle to separate*  
 64. *because the minute they drop them off they cry and follow the parent out of school wanting to*  
 65. *go with them but the others that are used to school in grade R you can just see the difference*  
 66. *they come into class without issues and they sit and wait to do work*

The educator in extract 55 expresses similar views to all other educators in schools A and B, this being that all their children have preschool exposure. Schools A and B only have children that have grade R exposure. One school (school C) in the study consists of some learners that have no preschool exposure.

**Extract 55.**

15. *R: Okay, and mmh when you're looking at the separation in the morning from their parents, do*  
 16. *you feel like they are able to do that effectively?*  
 17. *P5A5: You know, most of these children have been at some sort of day care, crèche or pre-*  
 18. *primary since birth*  
 19. *R: Mhmm*  
 20. *P5A5: So that separation tends to have ironed itself out in past years and I'm talking when I*  
 21. *first started teaching, it was a problem but now, it does, it's not, you might get the odd one but*  
 22. *rarely nowadays*

Extract 56 further constructs emotion regulation as a developmental skill. At this age some children are able to move past emotional issues without it affecting their entire day. This is seen in the day-to-day lives of the children where an emotionally mature child is able to have an upsetting event in the morning but still able to have a good day. This is evident when P5A5 says “some are are learning to cope with those sort of disruptions or whatever you want to say hiccups during their day it's definitely coming I can see it especially with your more mature as opposed to your less mature” (lines 521-523). The emotionally immature children have one hiccup in the day and have a bad day. This is evident when she says “If in the morning they couldn't find their school shoes they day is a disaster (.) it can be something as small as that” (lines 497-498).

**Extract 56.**

491. *R: It's okay ahaha what uhm factors do you feel contribute to the differences, when I mean*  
 492. *differences, I mean when you're looking at all the social-emotional, with the children that are*

493. *more capable compared to the ones that are least capable(.)what do you feel are the major factor*  
494. *or factors*

...

497. *P5A5: If in the morning they couldn't find their school shoes the day is a disaster (.) it can be*  
498. *something as small as that(.) where to US as adults its small stuff (.) to them it's the big stuff, they*  
499. *couldn't find the dog to lock it up their day is a disaster*

...

520. *P5A5: Some when there is a small change, it's a disaster, some are (.) the skill is developing (.)*  
521. *some are learning to cope with those sort of disruptions or whatever you want to say (.) hiccups*  
522. *during their day (.) there's definitely coming (.) its (.) I can see it and especially your more*  
523. *mature as oppose to your less mature*

## **5.5. Poor parenting practices negatively impacting on children's social-emotional competence**

This theme was identified through educator's responses, where they constructed the lack of social-emotional skills as a result of poor parenting practices. All educators commented on a number of negative parenting behaviours. These behaviours will be outlined in the 3 subthemes: 'young mothers lack parenting skills', 'parenting roles shifted to other guardians' and 'a lack of emotional reciprocation between parents and their children'

The first theme identified under 'poor parenting practices negatively impacting on children's social-emotional competence' is 'young mothers lack parenting skills. The extract below illustrates the view on young mothers and their parenting skills.

### **5.5.1. Young mothers lack parenting skills**

Extract 57 illustrates the perspective of one educator who constructed the age that women have children as a factor in children not participating in school activities as well as they should. She highlights that parents do not provide children with the items required for school when she says "if the child has lost a pen for instance the parent won't buy another pen" in lines 191 to 192 and "they still won't bring something that is not required to be bought" in line 185. This suggests that these mothers don't do not support their children in their education, which is a part of a child's development. She constructs the mothers as parents that are not concerned about their children's education. This is evident in line 181 when she says "they don't care" and lines 181 to 182 when she says "they don't have time for their children". Furthermore, when she says

“meanwhile the child receives social grant” (line 193), this shows further criticism of the parent where the lack of stationery is not a matter of financial issues but due to issues such as neglect for the child’s needs.

**Extract 57.**

181. *do not care (.) they do not care about learning because the homework does not get done they*  
182. *do not have time for their children because even if you ask them to bring an old empty*  
183. *container because we have a project where we teach the children to brush their teeth*  
184. *R: mhmm*  
185. *P6C3: They still won’t bring something that is not required to be bought and when you ask*  
186. *the child they would say my mother said we don’t have it*  
187. *R: so you do have a problem when it comes to parents*  
188. *P6C3: Oh we have a huge problem with parents (.) because most of our children have*  
189. *mothers who are still young so they don’t care for school related matters (.) even if you ask*  
190. *them to come to school for a meeting they don’t (.) and you know at certain times in the year*  
191. *we give children some stationery but if the child has lost a pen for instance (.) the parent*  
192. *won’t buy another pen and the child would tell you mom said she doesn’t have money to buy*  
193. *me a pen (.) meanwhile the child receives social grant...*

In addition to educators having the perspective that young mother lack parenting skills, others had the perspective that parenting roles have been shifted to other guardians. Extract 58 in the subtheme ‘parenting roles shifted to other guardians’ illustrates this perspective.

**5.5.2. Parenting roles shifted to other guardians**

Two educators from school B highlighted that a lot of the children are cared for by some form of guardian instead of their biological parents. Extract 58 illustrates an example of one of the educator’s views. The parenting role has shifted to the helper, grandmothers or other relatives (extract 58). This is evident in lines 942 to 943 where she says “I feel that the response- the parenting role has fallen on other people and mostly grannies”. The use of the word “fallen” (line 942) suggests a form of neglect from the parents and the guardians not volunteering to take care of the children. This educator empathizes with the guardians who are left with the children and constructs the guardians as people that are left to care for the children and do so the best way they can. She says “the aunty that is caring for them and doing the homework is not educated so there’s no help the aunty is unable” in lines 929 to 930 and “the aunty is unable to really help” in

line 932. There is a subtle criticism of the parents for putting guardians in a position where they are unable to assist a child.

**Extract 58.**

927. P9B5: *I think (.) a lot of children are being cared for as you said by grannies and aunties*

928. R: *mmh*

929. P9B5: *and it came up in our meeting (.) where the aunty that is caring for them and doing the*

930. *homework (.) is not educated (.) so there is no help*

931. R: *mmh*

932. P89B5: *(.) the aunty is unable to really help*

...

942. P9B5: *(inaudible) so I feel like the responsibility the parenting ROLE has fallen on other*

943. *people and mostly grannies*

The final aspect of poor parenting practices identified as the third subtheme is ‘a lack of emotional reciprocation between parents and their children’. Extract 59 illustrates this perspective of poor parenting skills.

**5.5.3. A lack of emotional reciprocation between parents and their children**

Educator P2A5 in extract 59 claimed that the children that have self-regulation issues are the children that have very busy parents.

**Extract 59.**

496. P2A5: *I do find that due to our rushed routine (.) due to everything just being go go go go it's*

497. *for families these days especially our school with the working-class kind of uhm (.) families=*

498. R: *mhmm*

499. P2A5: *=where mom and dad ARE working full days to make ends meet...*

...

505. *sadly has an effect on their learning capacity in the classroom because I feel that if a child has*

506. *emotional instabilities (.) umh (1) they won't learn as much as a child that IS their emotional*

507. *needs are being met*

508. R: *mhmm*

509. P2A5: *Uhm It is also very tough(hhh) but also at the same time NOT a parent's fault it's a*

510. *reflection of our times sadly (.) and umh (.) the demands of daily living and umh economic*

511. *playing field that's really tough out there...*

This educator says “I do find that due to our rushed routine... especially our school with the working class kind of umh families where mom and dad are working full days to make ends meet” (line 496-499). This educator constructs family life as one that is busy and rushed due to the pressures of work. This educator takes on a protective stance where she states that “and also not a parent’s fault” (line 509), with an emphasis on the word “not”. This educator shifts the blame from parents not being able to meet children’s emotional needs to external factors related to having a career and having to meet financial demands. This is evident when she says “it’s a reflection of our times sadly and umh the demands of daily living and umh the economic playing field that’s really tough out there” (line 510-511). This educator highlights the positive relationship between emotional competence and successful learning. This is evident in lines 505 to 506 when she says “if a child has emotional instabilities umh they won’t learn as much as a child that is their emotional needs are being met”.

### **5.6. Issues with language**

Issues with language have been linked to their impact on children’s social-emotional skills. Language issues have been found to occur in a variety of contexts.

When P8B5 was asked about how well children participate in activities she mentioned that children with language issues battle with classroom activities (extract 40, lines 310-313). When further asked whether this was an issue for children who speak English as a second language in extract 60, she constructs a contrast between language skills required for academic work and those required for auditory tasks. In lines 310 to 313 she explains that the language issue is due to barriers to learning and this issue applies to both first language and second language English speaking children. Whereas in lines 315 to 316 she says that children who speak English as a second language have issues with following instructions because “it is an auditory thing”. One educator also commented that language skills are different, there is expressive language where children are doing well and receptive language where they generally have issues. Another educator also said that children who speak English as a second language have issues with following instructions.

#### **Extract 60.**

308. R: *Do you feel like it's the second language children that are (.) struggling more (.) where*

309. *English is a second language for them*
310. *P8B5: It's ?so interesting because umh I've got first language children who are going to*
311. *English lessons (.) as well so you know it's just barriers to learning regardless of whether it's*
312. *a first or second language umh (.) but that's more in understanding like the phonetics sounds*
313. *and blends the grammar the English=*
314. *R: yes*
315. *P8B5: =as far as instructions and things it would be more second language because they it's*
316. *an auditory thing*

Four educators from schools A and B constructed the children who battle with expressing their emotions as those who have issues with speaking the English language. Extract 61 is an example of the perspectives of the educators. P10B5 says that children who “come from other schools” (line 389) battle to express themselves because they are not competent to do so in English. Although the educator states that there is some form of assistance that can be given to children if the educator “can communicate with them in Zulu” (lines 392-393), this also has to be limited because the school is “an English medium school” (lines 393-394) and children are required to speak English.

**Extract 61.**

388. *P10B5: u:::mh (.) there are some where English is a problem (.) this is an English*
389. *medium school so some children we usually find that with those that come from other schools*
390. *(.) uhh we've had issues where they can't communicate properly and express themselves if*
391. *they want something or if they feel something or something's happened (.) we find that with*
392. *those children it helps if you are of a different race because then I can communicate with*
393. *them in Zulu as well as English but I can't do that all the time cause this is an English*
394. *medium school...*

Issues with language was raised by educators in two out of the three schools in the study. These two schools are both English medium schools, where teaching and academics are carried out in the English language. The other school, which is an *IsiZulu* medium school mentioned no issues with language.

## 5.7. Decline in social-emotional skills over the years

Educators commented that there is a negative change in children's social-emotional skills. There are a number of skills that the educators said were declining every year. The declining social-emotional skills over the years were influenced by a decline in listening skills, maturity, aggression, issues with learning and voice modulation.

### 5.7.1. *Listening skills*

Listening skills were constructed as the most challenging issue for educators. Extract 62 below illustrates this view.

#### **Extract 62.**

372. *P: Do you feel like they are able to listen effectively?*

373. *P5A5: This is our biggest problem (.) it's our biggest biggest problem and it's getting worse (.)*

374. *so this is something I think we need to develop almost like a listening skills program=*

...

378. *P5A5: =but they don't (.) they like instant gratification (.) instant reward*

P5A5 constructs listening skills as the "biggest problem" (line 373) they face as educators and "a listening skills program" (line 374) would have to be developed. She further states that issues with listening are "getting worse" (line 373). This educator constructs the issue with listening as a skill that's affected by the children's difficulty with patience, stating that they want "instant gratification" (line 378). All educators in schools A and B said that listening skills are poor and they are getting worse as the years go by. None of the educators in school C raised an issue with listening.

The final subtheme identified under social-emotional skills that are declining is 'maturity'.

### 5.7.2. *Maturity*

Another issue that educator P2A5 claimed to be on the increase is maturity, as illustrated in extract 63. This educator states that "levels of immaturity have increased" (line 22), with "a different struggle when it comes to umh self control emotional regulation" (lines 24-25).

#### **Extract 63.**

21. *P2A5: Uhm (.) with my class (.) if I compare it with the previous years that I've taught (.) I've*

22. *taught this age group for 5 years(.) I've found that the levels of immaturity have increased=*

23. *R: mmhmm*

24. *P2A5: =each year, there's a different struggle when it comes to uhm (1) self-control (.)*

25. *emotional regulation*

...

275. *P2A5: This is quite a tricky one (1) uhm I'll say it again (.) maturity is another problem (.) I'm*

276. *finding it increasingly difficult as the years go on (.) to find the distinguishing factor between a*

277. *child that is ?immature and is unable to self-regulate to know that this particular task requires*

278. *me to sit and listen to the teacher or sit and play this game (.) he's got a turn I've got a turn and*

279. *this is what we've gotta DO as opposed to a child that i:::s (.) ummh biologically*

280. *neurologically (.) uhm (1) hyperactive*

This educator also expresses that she is “finding it increasingly difficult” (line 276) to distinguish between a child that is “unable to self regulate” (line 277) still going to gain self-regulation skills as they develop from a child who is “biologically neurologically umh hyperactive” (lines 279-280) and needing intervention.

### **5.7.3. Aggression**

Educators in school B all commented that aggression is increasingly a problem in their school and it's getting worse every year. These educators stated that both physical and verbal aggression are a constant problem. Extract 18 is an example from one of the educators in this school. She says that on a daily basis she has to deal with children fighting (line 201).

#### **Extract 64.**

1. *P9B5: I've seen a huge increase [in aggression] huge increase in aggression (2)*

2. *even verbal*

3. *R: [in aggression]*

4. *R: mhmm*

5. *P9B5: the tone of the voice is harsh (2) umh umh I think it comes from (.) the*

6. *screen*

7. *R: mhmm*

8. *P9B5: they are watching a lot of violence*

9. *R: mhmm*

10. *P9B5: umh and we do our country has had to battle with a lot of violence=*

11. R: *mhmm*
12. P9B5: *=so they might have seen witnessed aggression violence*
13. R: *mhmm*
14. P9B5: *but definitely aggression aggressive behavior is on the increase*
15. R: *mhmm*
16. P9B5: *just they way they speak it's an aggressive tone*

In extract 64 the educator says that there is a huge increase even in verbal aggression, with an emphasis on “even” (line 2). This suggests that she may be also be talking about physical aggression as well. This further suggests that the issue with aggression is not only physical aggression but the issue is beyond that. She focuses on verbal aggression when expressing the issue of aggression, saying the children’s tone is harsh (line 5). This educator constructs the screen and exposure to violence as a South African child, as the problem that contributes to the increase in aggression.

#### **5.7.4. Issues with learning**

Educators across all three schools commented that they notice an increase in children presenting with learning issues. A varied account of the educators’ experience with increasing learning problems is outlined below:

#### **Extract 65.**

319. P1A5: *=so academically I would say the biggest problem is attention deficit but there are just*
320. *a handful*
- ...
328. P1A5: *Umh (.) I think as teachers we have grown as well and we can actually differentiate*
329. *when I look back and you think about children that you thought (.) you know are such*
330. *naughty children and they didn't listen when=*
331. R: *mmhmm*
332. P1A5: *=when the class is happening (.) now because I am more educated about attention*
333. *deficit (.) I'm more educated about occupational therapy (.) I can now think back and say*
334. *maybe there was that issue=*
335. R: *mmhmm*
336. P1A5: *=that I wasn't aware of at that stage (1) but I think there were occasional attention*
337. *deficit issues previously (.) it's definitely more prevalent now though*
338. R: *oh okay*

339. P1A5: *Definitely more prevalent now and I think that just has to do with the way kids are*  
 340. *growing up=*  
 341. R: *yes*  
 342. P1A5: *=and what they're being exposed to from the beginning of their lives to now (.)*  
 343. *compared to [what=*  
 344. R: *[ before*  
 345. P1A5: *=the previous generations were exposed to (1) Definitely screen time hehehe*

The educator in extract 65 constructs attention deficits as the contributing factor to children's learning issues. She says that attention deficits are "definitely" more prevalent now (line 337). In contrast to P2A5 in extract 63, this educator says that educators have become more skilled at identifying children with attention deficits (lines 332-334). This experience could be due to different levels of work experience or training opportunities. The educator in extract 65 further constructs screen time as the factor contributing to attention deficits (line 345). All educators in schools A and B raised concern about the poor concentration they are observing in children nowadays. Educators in school C did not express any concern around concentration or paying attention.

#### **Extract 66.**

321. P8B5: *Terrible (.) we've seen such a decline (.) such a decline (.) every year it's actually*  
 322. *worse than the previous year (.) concentration and the listening skills=*  
 323. R: *mmh*  
 324. P8B5: *=it's terrible terrible (.) umh we cannot believe it I don't think children focus at home I*  
 325. *don't think they're expected to listen when parents talk to them (.) I don't think parents look*  
 326. *at their children and talk to them (.) I think the TV's on and they're jumping on the couch and*  
 327. *mom's cooking and shouting across the room (.)umh (.) I think that's what ?happens because*  
 328. *they CANNOT even sitting like this in a little group doing homework=*  
 329. R: *mhmm*  
 330. P8B5: *=they can not focus concentrate >not all< but the majority really struggle (.) it is*  
 331. *something we're dealing with on a daily basis...*

The concern about the decline in concentration is also illustrated in extract 66, coupled with listening skills. This educator expresses disbelief of what is happening where she says "it's terrible... we cannot believe it" in line 324. P8B5 constructs the parents' parenting skills and

management as the contributing issue. She says the parents do not lay down expectations that would foster concentration and listening skills (lines 324 to 328). Listening issues were also only mentioned by educators in schools A and B. The educator in extract 67 constructs learning problems as an inability to write as expected for grade 1. She says “you find like 10 children cannot write they scribble” (line 162). This construction of learning problems is different from the construction in extracts 65 and 66. In extract 65 and 66 learning problems are related to issues with regulation whereas in extract 67 it’s related to fine motor skills.

#### **Extract 67.**

160. P6C3: *Okay (.) let’s say it depends (.) most of our children let’s say (.) it’s increasing that*  
161. *most of the children u:::h just learning problems (.) they have learning problems and I don’t*  
162. *know what’s causing it (.) maybe you find like 10 children can’t write (.) they scribble (.)*

The next section discusses the theme on voice modulation and educators’ perspectives on children’s abilities to modulate their voices.

#### **5.7.5. Voice modulation**

The final subtheme related to decreasing social-emotional skills is ‘voice modulation’. Extract 68 illustrates one of the educator’s perspective on decreased voice modulation skills.

#### **Extract 68.**

72. P1A5: *... ?also the volume so (.) whereas previously children knew the differences between an*  
73. *inside voice and an outside voice=*  
74. R: *mmhmm*  
75. P1A5: *=now it’s just the same outside voice everywhere so they’re quite loud (.) and they*  
76. *don’t generally modulate their voices to know that they’re inside now and they need to talk in*  
77. *a lower tone=*  
78. R: *mhmm*  
79. P1A5: *=and that’s where the issue comes in where the noise levels in the classroom have gone*  
80. *up a bit*  
81. R: *that’s a::: very interesting point (1) so you’re saying in terms of ,generations=*  
82. P1A5: *mmh*  
83. R: *=children have changed a lot compared to [when you started teaching*  
84. P1A5: *[They have they’re much louder than what they*

85. *used to be*

Extract 68 above expresses that the children have become loud, regardless of where they are. P1A5 suggests that children are unable to self-regulate and adjust their voices from when they are outside, versus when they are in the classroom. All educators in school A and 3 educators in school B raised the issue of poor voice modulation. None of the educators from school C raised issues about the children's volume.

Educators claimed that there is another factor which contributes to social-emotional issues. This factor formed the next theme in this study.

### **5.8. Screen exposure a source of social-emotional issues**

Screen exposure was said to be the root cause of a number of issues with social-emotional skills. Educators felt a number of issues are created by screen exposure in the home environment.

Extract 69 illustrates one educator's concern about screen exposure having a negative impact on children's social-emotional skills. Firstly, this educator feels that children are exposed to screens too early in their lives. She says "I think there is an age where they should be exposed to it" (line 739). P1A5 says "the whole of primary school I don't think they need to have all of these things" (line 740-741). This suggests that children should only be exposed to screens after primary school age. She further suggests that tablets impact on what children are able and not able to do. She states that screens impact on children's "emotional growth" (line 745), "concentration" (line 763), they cannot "sustain their posture" (line 752) and they are "impatient with their friends" (line 761).

#### **Extract 69.**

739. P1A5: *=but I think there is an age where they should be exposed to it and I don't think (.)*

740. *even up (.) primary school is the whole of primary school I don't think they need to have all*

741. *of these things*

742. R: *you mean screens as in tabl:::ets [and T::V yes]*

743. P1A5: *[tablets phones and TV yah] that's definitely I think that*

744. *has definitely impacted on what the kids are able h- a- and on their personal level and*

745. *emotional growth at the moment=*

746. R: *mmh*

747. P1A5: =I really think that has made a huge impact

748. R: ?What is it about screens that you feel (.) is an issue

749. P1A5: I think it takes away first of all it takes away physical activity

750. R: mhmm

751. P1A5: so there their holistic growth is not (.) the way it should be there are children that

752. cannot sit up straight for a and sustain their posture=

753. R: sho

754. P1A5: =because they haven't had to do it before umh (.) and then it's also instant

755. gratification so they're looking at a screen they're playing a game they win the game (.) or

756. they lose the game

757. R: mhmm

758. P1A5: so they can't actually then pace themselves and wait for (.) an outcome (I) they want it

759. then and there

760. R: mhmm

761. P1A5: and that leads to that impatience where they then get impatient with their friends and

762. they then want to interrupt you when you're speaking I think a lot of that and then

763. concentration (.) and a lot of parents say but my children can sit on the screen and they play

764. and they're concentrating on that for (I) five hours at a time=

In addition to issues raised by P1A1 in extract 69, P5A5 in extract 70 said that screens affect children's ability to listen effectively. She said "listening skills is very poor" (lines 287-288). P5A5 constructs screens as devices that only need visual interaction, "you don't need to actually listen" (line 288) from a person and therefore negatively impacting on children's ability to listen when required to.

#### **Extract 70.**

287. P5A5: Okay I did say that ummh following instructions isn't that good(.) listening skills is very

288. poor and I put this down to visual, television (.) you don't need to actually listen because you

289. can work out with your eyes what's happening

290. R: Oh::: okay

291. P5A5: Instant ((snaps fingers)) iPad (.) cellphones instant

All educators mentioned effects of screens on children's social-emotional development however the specific issues created by screens differ between schools. Educators in School A commented

that screens affect children's self-regulatory skills such as concentration, patience and listening. School B's educators said screens affect social skills where aggression is an issue as well as self-regulatory skills such as concentration, patience and listening. School C's educators said that screens contribute to the issue of aggression.

## **5.9. Socio-economic factors impacting on social emotional competence**

Socio-economic factors were found to impact on children's social-emotional competence. The subthemes identified were school structure and resources and economic factors.

### **5.9.1. School structure and resources**

In extract 71, educator P3B5 constructs the class size and the number of learners as a problem for the children. She suggests that having too many children negatively impacts on children's ability to focus, which is a self-regulatory skill. This is evident where she says "because of the number of the children in the class we have big classes here" (line 5-6) and "they need to have ordered organized space in order to be able to focus" (line 16-17). Although she acknowledges that thirty children in a class is not that big when looking at the general South African context, she still emphasizes that thirty is a "a lot of children" (line 7). She further says that "those prefabs were not built for thirty children" (line 14).

#### **Extract 71.**

292. R: Okay and when they have to focus do you feel like they are able to maintain focus?

293. P3B5: No (.) not for long (.) focus is very short and again that aga::in is an issue not only the  
294. circumstances which we generally find ourselves in where there are so many distractions (.)

295. but also because of the number of the children in the class we have big classes here=

296. R: Mhmm

297. P3B5: =in the big picture probably not big (.) but ?thirty children in a junior primary  
298. classroom is a lot of children

299. R: So it's more of the practicality [of having too many] children in the classroom

300. PB53: [mh logistics]

301. P3B5: Too many children (.) as well as the other factors

302. R: yes

303. P3B5: A:::nd uh:::m many of the classes (.) the prefabs we have two prefabs with grade 1s

304. those prefabs were not built for thirty children so even to get in between the desks (.) to have

305. space is difficult and that's not good for children (.) they need to have ordered organized

306. *space in order to be able to focus*

In extract 72, educator P9B5 constructs the number of children in a classroom as a problem for children's ability to participate in activities. This educator states that she has to teach each group at a time since there are many children in a classroom, meaning others do not get adult supervision for some time. The children are unable to make queries any time they need to because it would interrupt the children the educator is attending to. This is evident where she says "in our big classes we work in groups... So while the teacher's teaching one group there are probably twenty-two other children sitting at their places... They have to know what is expected of them because they mustn't come and interrupt the group that is being taught" (line 204-210). This suggests that children are unable to participate in activities because instructions are given in a big group, so they are unable to process the instruction. In addition, they are unable to then do their work effectively.

**Extract 72.**

204. *P9B5: Remember in our big classes (.) we work in groups*

205. *R: Yes*

206. *P9B5: So while the teacher's teaching one group (.) there are probably twenty-two other children sitting at their places*

208. *R: Yes*

209. *P9B5: They have to know what is expected of them (.) because they mustn't come and interrupt the group that is being taught*

Both educator P3B5 in Extract 71 and P9B5 in 72 are from school B. Having a large number of children in a classroom may be a reflection of a lack of resources such as classrooms or availability of schools in the area.

The next subtheme under socio-economic impact on social-emotional competence is related to economic factors. These factors are discussed in the next subtheme.

**5.9.2. Economic factors**

The educator in extract 73 raises concern for the emotional impact of starting grade 1 when a child is not ready. This educator makes a distinction between children that are eligible and those who are ready. This being that children may be eligible because of age but not ready due to

social-emotional immaturity to cope with school (lines 10 to 12 and lines 14 to 16). P3B5 says that children are pushed to grade 1 when they are not mature enough for school due to financial reasons, being that grade 1 is cheaper than grade R (lines 22 to 24). The educator does not criticize the parents for this, she says “and I can understand that” (line 24). P3B5 further predicts future emotional issues where these children would have low self-esteem and a negative perception of school.

**Extract 73.**

34. P3B5: *For me(.) uhm when I look at the children (.) my biggest concern is that (.) not*  
35. *actually in terms of school readiness or in terms of COGNITIVE things but in terms of*  
36. *emotional and social and emotional maturity (.) there are aspects they battle with (1) and the*  
37. *one that comes though ALL the time is their ability to focus and to listen*  
38. R: *Mhmm*  
39. P3B5: *And I know that it can be cognitive or it can be social and emotional but you actually*  
40. *can't separate them=*  
41. R: *Yes*  
42. P3B5: *=because if the child is not focusing and NOT focusing and not able to keep up the*  
43. *<work> uh:::m self-esteem drops (.) uh:::m? does not have a good day in the classroom (.)*  
44. *which must affect what happens*  
45. R: *Mhmm*  
46. P3B5: *Sometimes I know it's related to immaturity and there we have an overlap with the*  
47. *children who are eligible to come to school at the age where they turn six (.) you're aware of*  
48. *that*  
49. R: *Yes*  
50. P3B5: *Okay and the ones who have to come to school when they turn seven (.) now again we*  
51. *try very hard we work with the children in the preprimary and if we feel we don't think that*  
52. *they're ready (.) even though they are eligible to come to school (.) we advise the parents that*  
53. *they stay BACK ((hits desk)) for another year (.) that's usually not very well received (.) and*  
54. *that's usually because of the financial reasons because you pay a lot MORE in preprimary (.)*  
55. *than you do in grade 1(.) and they push them through (.) and I can ,understand that (.) but*  
56. *ummh (.) it makes me sad because I can see that those children are going to have an UP hill*  
57. *battle right at the beginning of grade 1 and it's going to affect their PERCEPTION of what*  
58. *school is about*

### 5.10. Diverse construction of maturity

Educators throughout the interviews made reference to most skills being dependent on maturity. These educators construct maturity in a number of different ways, where differences in children and their ability to attain certain skills is concerned. Different types of maturity determine whether or not children have certain social-emotional skills.

P5A5 in extract 74 constructs maturity firstly as gender-based and as age-based. Firstly, the educator says “the boys far more immature than the girls at this age and so for the boys to settle it’s a big task” (line 7-8). This suggests that maturity makes it easier for girls to transition to grade 1. P5A5 also suggests that age impacts on children’s behavior and regulation. This is evident where she says “The children that have turned seven at the beginning of the year are definitely more better behaved” (lines 10-11) and “AGE to me plays a big role in this maturity wise fifty percent are able to do matur- independently” (line 10-12). Finally, P5A5 explains that these children are months apart in age but the differences in maturity are still noticeable. This is evident when she says “six months in a big gap in maturity” (line 18). In both constructs she says this applies to children at this stage, the difference or gap closes with age. This difference is therefore part of development.

#### **Extract 74.**

5. *P5A5: Okay because we are a co-ed school, obviously, boys and girls*
6. *R: Yes*
7. *P5A5: I find the boys far more immature than the girls at this age and so for the*
8. *boys to settle it’s a big task (.) the girls DEFINITELY have the maturity*
9. *R: Mhmm*
10. *P5A5: The children that have turned seven at the beginning of the year are DEFINITELY more*
11. *better behaved than those turning seven towards the end of the year (.) all boils down to maturity*
12. *(.) the way I see it at this age*

Educator P3B5 in extract 75 says that when it comes to working independently the immature children would either ask for help or lack the ability to realise that the work is done incorrectly. She says “you’re most likely to find the other side that’s happy with their work where the teacher doesn’t think that they have taken enough care effort and time to do it” in lines 3 to 5. This construction of maturity is based on cognitive development. The children do not realise the effort required to carry out a task correctly. She says that “at this stage” (line 16) which suggests

that as the children develop cognitively they will be able to be more aware of work done correctly from work done incorrectly.

introduce

**Extract 75.**

560. P3B5: *look you will always get the immature ones who want help*

561. R: *mhmm*

562. P3B5: *uhm but most likely I think you're most likely to find the other side that's happy with*

563. *their work where the teacher doesn't think that they have taken enough care effort and time to*

564. *do it*

565. R: *mhmm*

566. P3B5: *I think that that's possibly (.) more an issue [where they're kind of overconfident*

567. R: *[so with ahahaha*

568. R: *? so even though (I) you're saying even though they may be struggling probably*

569. *academically =*

570. P3B5: *mmh*

571. R: *=compared to the other learners=*

572. P3B5: *mmh*

573. R: *= [they wouldn't see it they'd still be like oh no]*

574. P3B5: *[? no nothing not at this stage it's fine] not at this stage I think later on it will change*

575. *obviously*

576. R: *mhmm they'd be more aware*

577. P3B5: *they'd be more aware*

When it comes to empathy P2A5 constructs this as something that comes with emotional maturity. The more emotionally mature children are able to understand how their actions can make others feel, they understand emotions better. The children who are emotionally immature require the educator's assistance. She says "I would have to sit with a child after a situation's occurred and I would have to say look this is what's happened how would you feel" in lines 187 to 188.

**Extract 76.**

185. P2A5: *U:::hm not always (.) I think this reflects onto the emotionally immature children (.) uhm*

186. *who haven't quite learnt the consequences of what THEY do to others (.) can result in feelings*

187. *of sadness or whatever* (.) *umh often in such situations I would have to sit with a child after a*  
188. *situation's occurred and I would have to say look this is what's happened how would YOU feel*  
189. (.) *kinda talk=*

### **5.11. Summation**

The findings of this study portray perceptions that are very diverse and suggests that issues are context-dependent. While educators were sympathetic about some issues, some were critical of the children. In each theme, children's strengths and weaknesses that educators commented on, were presented in the findings to avoid bias. A large portion of the children's issues that educators commented on, were related to children's home environments and parenting practices.

Table 2 provides an illustration of the themes and subthemes. A total of eight themes were identified in this study, with a number of subthemes under some themes. The first theme was 'social competence' with the following seven subthemes: 'fluid peer relationships'; 'educators' perception of children as disrespectful'; 'conflict management and mediation issues'; 'prosocial behaviour'; 'respect for social norms'; 'factors hindering children from participating in activities' and 'turn-taking'. The second theme was 'emotional competence' with two subthemes: 'difference of expression between positive and negative emotions' and 'emotional regulation'. The third theme was 'poor parenting practices negatively impacting on children's social-emotional competence' with three subthemes: 'young mothers lack parenting skills'; 'parenting roles shifted to other guardians' and 'a lack of emotional reciprocation between parents and their children'. The fourth theme as illustrated in table 2 was 'issues with language', with no subthemes. Following this theme was the fifth theme 'Decline in social-emotional skills over the years' with five subthemes: 'listening skills'; 'maturity'; 'aggression'; 'learning' and 'voice modulation'. The sixth theme identified was 'Screen exposure a source of social-emotional issues' with no subthemes. Seventh on the list of themes was 'Socio-economic factors impacting on social emotional competence' with two subthemes: 'School structure and resources' and 'Economic factors'. The final theme was 'Diverse construction of maturity' with no subthemes.

The next chapter will discuss all the findings in the data, then compare these with literature. This comparison will uncover and consistencies or inconsistencies with previous studies in a similar context.

Table 2: A Summary of the Themes and Their Sub-Themes

Themes	Subthemes						
<b>Social competence</b>	Fluid peer relationships	Educators' perception of children as disrespectful	Conflict management and mediation issues	Prosocial behaviour	Respect for social norms	Factors hindering children from participating in activities	Turn-taking
<b>Emotional competence</b>	Difference of expression between positive and negative emotions	Emotional regulation					
<b>Poor parenting practices negatively impacting on children's social-emotional competence</b>	Young mothers lack parenting skills	Parenting roles shifted to other guardians	A lack of emotional reciprocation between parents and their children				
<b>Issues with language</b>							
<b>Decline in social-emotional skills over the years</b>	Listening skills	Maturity	Aggression	Learning	Voice modulation		
<b>Screen exposure a source of social-emotional issues</b>							
<b>Socio-economic factors impacting on social emotional competence</b>	School structure and resources	Economic factors.					
<b>Diverse construction of maturity</b>							

## Chapter Six: Discussion

### 6.1. Introduction

This chapter will discuss the educators' views that were identified through the study. This study aimed to explore educators' perceptions of the social-emotional competencies of children beginning formal education. The study also aimed to explore the educators' perceptions of the factors contributing to children not being adequately prepared for formal education. In this study, eleven grade 1 educators from three schools in Pietermaritzburg were interviewed. Rose-Krasnor's (1997) theory of social competence was used to explore the educators' perceptions of the social-emotional competence of children beginning formal education. The findings of this study will be interpreted in relation to Rose-Krasnor's theory and other research studies.

### 6.2. Social competence

The first theme that was identified during data analysis was social competence. Rose-Krasnor's (1997) theory of social competence describes social competence as social interaction that is effective, transactional, context-dependent and goal-specific. In this study, the educators that were interviewed assessed whether or not the children's social interaction is effective. The data in the previous chapter was used to determine social competence in relation to Rose-Krasnor's (1997) theory. Fluid peer relationships, educators' perception of children as disrespectful, conflict management and mediation issues, prosocial behaviour, respect for social norms, factors hindering children from participating in activities and turn-taking, influenced social competence.

#### 6.2.1. *Fluid peer relationships*

This study found that all educators perceive children's friendships in grade 1 as fluid. Peer relationships were found to be influenced by factors such as temperament, maturity and personality. Most educators in this study believed that children naturally make friends easily, which aligns with Roehr (1984), who states that children are naturally sociable. However, one educator said that friendships take longer to develop due to the children not being familiar with each other. According to educators in this study, children who bully others experience peer rejection. Rose-Krasnor's (1997) theory of social competence states that children's emotional competence affects their social competence. Research by Denham et al. (2012), Poulin and Chan (2010) and Vlachou et al. (2011) found that children who have inadequate behavioural regulation tend to experience peer rejection. Therefore, friendships of children with antisocial or aggressive behaviours possibly dissolve quickly. Educators also found that prosocial friendships

are also unstable in children at grade 1 level. They stated that children are friends with peers who have something desirable at the time or engaged in a desirable activity. Carter and Nutbrown (2016) and Poulin and Chan (2010) found that young children's friendships are about shared interests and coordinated play, but friendship concerns change and become more stable with development. These findings suggest that friendship development is a part of a child's development. Educators in this study and Poulin and Chan (2010) found that friendships have stronger bonds if children's friendships extend beyond school and know each other from home or other social contexts. Educators in this study said that they pair shy or withdrawn children with more confident peers. Carter and Nutbrown (2016) and Rose-Krasnor (1997) found that friendships assist children with social-emotional competence, academic achievement and adjustment to school. Also, children at this age are still able to accept peers who are socially withdrawn, but this changes as they move up primary school age, making pairing critical for friendship and peer acceptance (Rose-Krasnor, 1997). Educators' pairing system suggests crucial assistance given to help with school success in future years.

According to Rose-Krasnor's (1997) theory, social competence is effective social interaction. At the theoretical level of analysis, friendly children's social interaction is effective because they can make friends due to their prosocial behaviour. At the index level, the prosocial children can fulfil their personal needs for friendship and the needs of others for making friends as well. At the skills level, these children show perspective-taking skills. They can understand that they need to be friendly to others for them to be friends in return. Antisocial children's interaction is ineffective because their peers reject them. These children's goal is to have friends but end up losing friendships due to how they interact with others. Rose-Krasnor's (1997) theory, therefore, implies that aggressive children lack social competence, and prosocial children are socially competent.

### ***6.2.2. Educators' perception of children as disrespectful***

This study found consistency in what behaviours educators perceived as respectful and disrespectful towards adults. Educators perceived speaking in a low volume, humbleness and not interrupting when they are speaking as a display of respect. This research study found that educators from school A and B perceive children as disrespectful towards adults because they said they are too confident, interrupt conversations, speak loudly and do not greet. In contrast, educators in school C perceived children as respectful because they listen and do not shout when interacting with them. Educators in school A and B blame parents for not teaching their children

respect. There seems to be conflict in expectations of ‘respectful’ behaviour between educators and parents in school A and B. This conflict is absent in school C. This difference suggests that diversity factors affect educators’ view of children’s social competence. School C is a quintile three school, which is located in a disadvantaged background and lacks diversity in learners and educators. School A and B being former ‘Model C’ schools consist of learners who are more advantaged and have a diverse learner and educator population. Rose-Krasnor’s (1997) theory states that being able to meet social expectations shows social competence. Therefore, the educators’ perceptions possibly are that children in school C meet social expectations, while children in school A and B do not. The differences in these outcomes could be a reflection of the differences in the socio-cultural norms between educators and learners’ backgrounds. This difference further suggests that in school C, social expectations are consistent with expectations in the children’s home environments.

This study also found that the educator’s age impacts on the perceived respect that they get from children. Older educators felt that children respect them more because they are much older than other educators. This age-related difference in respect could also reflect the educators’ level of experience in managing children’s behaviours.

### ***6.2.3. Conflict management and mediation issues***

This study found that there is a shared view among educators that the children struggle with conflict management and mediation. The educators commented that the children either seek adult intervention or resort to aggression when conflict arises. The children who seek adult intervention are constructed as too immature to understand that they do not need to seek intervention every time they are unhappy about a situation. Denham et al. (2003) state that children need first to learn how to express their emotions to respond to others appropriately during social interaction. Eisenberg et al. (2005) highlight the importance of language in assisting children to express themselves and to ignore unpleasant situations. These theories suggest that children have not learnt how to express their emotions to resolve conflict on their own. The educators construct the children who resort to aggression as too immature to respond to conflict in an adaptive manner. Conflict management and mediation skills require children to have emotional regulation skills. Emotional regulation is the child’s ability to adjust and adapt their emotional reaction to meet the desired goal (Denham et al., 2003; Morrison et al., 2010). Graziano et al. (2007) explain that being able to regulate emotions impacts on social competence as this allows a child to decide on a reaction during a conflict; whether to ignore something or

react in a particular manner. The educators' construction of children's inadequate conflict resolution skills suggests that the children lack emotional regulation skills at this age.

While some educators blamed parents for condoning aggressive behaviour because it is seen as a protective response for children, others commented that parents do not give children responsibilities to resolve issues at home. Educators further constructed a gender-based difference in aggression; where boys are perceived as more physically aggressive and girls as more verbally aggressive. These views are consistent with research by Rose-Krasnor (1997) and Vlachou et al. (2011) which found that boys and girl interact differently, where boys display more physical aggression and girls display more relational aggression.

According to Rose-Krasnor's (1997) theory, the children's perceived social interaction is ineffective, and they are unable to reach their goal of resolving conflict due to their inability to express their emotions effectively. At the index level of Rose-Krasnor's (1997) theory, children should be able to incorporate personal and other's viewpoints to be able to resolve conflict. In this study the educators' stated that the children were unable to express their viewpoints nor consider other's perspectives. This inability suggests a lack of emotional expression, emotion knowledge and emotion regulation at the skills level of Rose-Krasnor's (1997) theory. This specific skill highlights the theory by Denham et al. (2012) that emotional expression, emotion knowledge and emotion regulation are all the components of emotional competence required to be socially competent.

#### **6.2.4. Prosocial behaviour**

Aspects of prosocial behaviours amongst the children that were identified by the educators in this study were empathy and respect for other's rights.

##### **6.2.4.1. Empathy.**

When it comes to empathy, educators had opposing views: one view was that it is learnt and the other view was that it occurs naturally in children. With the former viewpoint, educators commented that empathy is learnt through modelling in the classroom or through the school curriculum. They believed that children who show empathy had been taught to do so. These educators, therefore, construct empathy as social. They believed that exposure to grade R was a factor that determines whether or not children had the opportunity to learn about empathy. Only the educators in school C commented that there was a difference between children with

grade R experience and those with no grade R experience. They constructed exposure to grade R as the only determining factor of whether or not children would show empathy. With the latter viewpoint, the educators commented that empathy is innate in children, with varying degrees of maturity and sensitivity. These educators construct empathy as biological. These educators further constructed children's emotional state as the determining factor of whether or not children would empathise with others. The educators said children do not show empathy when there is something that is deep-rooted and needs intervention.

According to Rose-Krasnor's (1997) theory, a socially competent child would behave in a prosocial manner towards others. Where educators perceived empathy as biological, this is best explained at the index level of Rose-Krasnor's (1997) theory: the children can put other's needs before their own when the situation requires this. With those children who cannot empathise due to deep-rooted, the theory suggests that emotional issues make it difficult for them to shift this priority due to having to deal with emotional issues. Where educators perceived empathy as social, this view is best explained at the skills level of Rose-Krasnor's (1997) theory: the children have perspective-taking skills and emotional competence. The theory, therefore, suggests that the children who are unable to show empathy have not been exposed to the opportunity to learn these skills. Preschool education teaches social skills and offers stimulatory resources (Bhise & Sonawat, 2016). Therefore, the lack of stimulation and education in grade R could explain the view of educators who say children have not been taught empathy in grade R.

#### **6.2.4.2. Respect for other's rights.**

Respecting other's rights is constructed by the educators as a skill that is learnt. While the educators in school C perceived this skill as dependent on grade R experience, educators in school A and B perceived it as developmental. In schools A and B, educators said that the children understand the concept but do not easily apply it at this age. This limitation suggests that the children know the concept in theory but have difficulty applying it practically. The educators in this study also believed that some children are egocentric. This perceived egocentric behaviour is constructed as usual for children at this stage and not harmful to others. According to Rose-Krasnor's (1997) theory, children's social interaction is effective at the index level of analysis. The children prioritise their needs but without affecting their relationships with their peers. This balance shows that the children can attend to their personal needs while being able to consider other's needs. When considering social

competence at the skills level of analysis in Rose-Krasnor's (1997) theory, the children who have been taught to respect other's rights have not yet gained the ability to use their knowledge in practical settings. Although these children have the knowledge and understand it, they are not mature enough to use this knowledge to regulate themselves. Like empathy, it is possible that children with no grade R exposure do not possess the knowledge required to be able to respect other children's rights. This skill has not been taught and therefore, has not been developed.

### ***6.2.5. Respect for social norms***

Social norms in this study pertain to any behaviours and rules expected of the children within the school setting. Aspects of social norms identified in this subtheme were: respect for school resources and property; accepting consequences of negative behaviour, and adhering to the school rules and routine.

#### **6.2.5.1. Respect for school resources and property.**

This study found that educators in school C differed in their construction of the children's respect for school resources from educators from school A and B. Children in school C are constructed as destructive while children in school A and B are constructed as careless. Educators in school A and B say that the children are taught how to use resources, for example books, but come back they come back from home in a different state. This construction suggests that the educators in school A and B perceive themselves as the ones who teach appropriate use of resources and parents do not. This suggests that children from school A and B lack monitoring at home or there is a lack of consistency between what is expected at home and school. Teaching the children about resources may be the reason children in school A and B use resources appropriately in school and those in school C do not. Lack of exposure may contribute to differences between children in these schools since they fall under different quintiles. In South Africa, children from disadvantaged backgrounds tend to lack stimulation, resources and preschool exposure (Bhise & Sonawat, 2016; Bruwer et al., 2014). Inconsistent monitoring in school C may also be a factor because classrooms in disadvantaged schools tend to be overcrowded (Kalam et al., 2016). However, educators from school B also stated that they have large class numbers. This makes it more likely that the difference is due to a lack of exposure to resources rather than class size.

### **6.2.5.2. Accepting consequences of negative behaviour.**

This study found that educators feel that children struggle when it comes to accepting the consequences for negative behaviour or modifying their behaviour accordingly to avoid future consequences. The educators commented that the children would be upset when given punishment, others would shift blame, and others would repeat a behaviour even after receiving punishment for it. The educators constructed the recurrent negative behaviour as a matter of forgetfulness or indifference to punishment. The issue of indifference to punishment suggests that either behaviour modification does not work for all children or educators need further assistance with behaviour management. Behavioural regulation, which is the ability to implement cognitive processes in overt behaviour in order to attain a goal (Morrison et al., 2010), maybe the skill children still lack. A child with good behavioural regulation would avoid punishment by behaving in a way that's expected by their educator. At the index level (Rose-Krasnor, 1997), the children who blame others for their actions would be prioritising their own needs at the expense of others to avoid consequences. At the skills level (Rose-Krasnor, 1997), these children would have the motivation to avoid consequences, which leads to the blame-shifting. These children could also lack perspective-taking skills. When looking at the children who react emotionally, at the index level (Rose-Krasnor, 1997), they struggle with balancing their needs with the needs of their educators. Their educators need them to behave in a certain way, but the children only consider their own needs and perspectives and therefore persist with unwanted behaviour. At the skills level (Rose-Krasnor, 1997), the children may lack self-regulation skills at this age. They are unable to reach the goal of avoiding consequences by modifying their behaviour. Perhaps they will get there as they mature.

### **6.2.5.3. Adhering to the school rules and routine.**

Educators in school A constructed routine as a helpful feature for children and their work as educators while educators in school B and C construct it as a challenge. For school success and adjustment, children need to be able to follow a strict routine (Bruwer et al., 2014). Educators in school A constructed the school routine as something that gives children security, helps with self-regulation and as something that assists with classroom management because the children enjoy it. Educators in school B and C said that it was a challenge to get the children to follow the school routine. From their perspective, in school B, the younger children, less mature children and those without a good routine at home are the ones who

struggle with following the school routine. The educators in school B constructed age, immaturity and parenting as the factors creating the problem. In school C, the educators constructed the lack of exposure to grade R and age as the issues contributing to the difficulties children have with adapting to the school routine. One of the skills preschools prepares children for is following routines (Bhise & Sonawat, 2016). Therefore, since several children have no preschool experience, this could result in difficulty in managing the children. The difference between the schools reflect differences in the demographics of children in these schools and structures of the three schools. Schools B and C have larger class sizes when compared to school A. This could be one factor that makes it easier to implement the school routine in school A. School A may also have a smaller age-gap between children in their classes than the age gaps in school B and C. School A may even have feeder preschools who prepare the children for routine more than other preschools, or their structure may complement the structures and processes in school A. Since routine is essential for school success and adjustment (Bruwer et al., 2014), children in school A might be more likely to succeed in school than children in school B and C.

One educator from school C commented that children do not adhere to the school's rules because of the actions and instructions of their parents. She explained that there is a conflict between what parents want for their children and what the school requires. Matters raised ranged from incorrect school uniform to packing prohibited foods. Because school C is a quintile 3 school, this tension between the school and parents could reflect parents' lack of exposure to a formal school setting, parents being too young, or economic factors. People from historically marginalised groups in South Africa tend to have lower levels of education, a lack of parental involvement in schooling, and a negative attitude towards education (Olivier et al., 2009). Parents failing to adhere to school rules suggests a negative attitude towards education and a lack of involvement in assisting their children to meet expectations at school. Makunga et al. (2017) suggest that caregivers and educators have to form a partnership to bridge the gap between educator expectation and a negative orientation towards education. Perhaps the suggestion by Makunga et al. (2017) needs to be enforced in school C since there is tension between the expectations of parents and educators.

#### ***6.2.6. Factors hindering children from participating in activities***

In this study, the educators identified some children who could participate in activities, but there were issues which hindered other children from participating in activities effectively. The issues

identified by educators were: low self-esteem, young children and the school curriculum, and a lack of grade R exposure.

#### **6.2.6.1. Low self-esteem.**

According to the educators, children avoided activities they find challenging, and others withdrew when required to do an activity in front of others. These behaviours suggest that these children have low self-esteem. This finding might relate to the importance of emotional because emotionally competent children can express, understand and regulate their emotions in social situations (Denham et al., 2003). Integration of emotional, cognitive and social skills protects a child against internalising behaviours such as social withdrawal (Domitrovich et al., 2007). When a child integrates all these skills, they would be confident to do work in front of others and ask for help when it is needed. Eisenberg et al. (2005) also illustrate how emotion regulation and language predict academic and social success. When children have learnt to express their emotions using language, the chances of social and academic success increase. In Rose-Krasnor's (1997) theory at the theoretical level, social competence is ineffective because the children are socially withdrawn and therefore have no interaction with peers. At the Index level of Rose-Krasnor's (1997) theory, these children prioritise their perspectives and need to avoid activities. Rose-Krasnor (1997) says a child's goal at the skills level will impact on competence at the index level. A child would do well when behavioural skills and motivation work in harmony (Rose-Krasnor, 1997). At the skills level, the withdrawn children's goal is not to be excluded from the activity, but they lack the motivation to be a part of the given activity. This goal has implications for competence at the index level because the child does not maintain a relationship with others. This withdrawal would mean that for these children their skills and motivation do not work in harmony because the lack of motivation would hinder their ability to display their skills or learn a variety of skills from their peers.

#### **6.2.6.2. Young children.**

Some educators were concerned about the children's enrolment age. In this study, the educators' said that the 5-year old children struggle with participation in activities: they fall asleep, they want to eat, and they want to play. One educator explained that these children are too young for grade 1; they do not yet understand what is expected of them in school, and they also do not care about learning. This issue suggests that children at this stage have not reached the level of behavioural regulation required for tasks required for the formal school

setting. School enrolment age is one of the issues identified by Kalam et al. (2016). These researchers found that 5-year old children struggle with tasks due to lower developmental skills. The educators' perspectives seem congruent with findings by Kalam et al. (2016).

### **6.2.6.3. The school curriculum and a lack of grade R exposure.**

The educators constructed the school curriculum and a lack of exposure to grade R as issues that impact on children's ability to participate in activities in school C. One educator commented that the children are willing to do their work, but the workload is too heavy for them to complete as required. She further described the process of completing a mathematics activity, where children have to draw a number line for every sum they do manually. This suggests that the school lacks resources such as an abacus, or printed copies of a number line, to assist the children in doing their tasks efficiently. South African schools in disadvantaged areas (such as school C) lack resources (Bruwer et al., 2014). The educators also commented that children with no exposure to grade R are unable to participate in activities. They commented that some are unable to write, some freeze at the tables and others would cry. This suggests that some children lack fine motor skills, others are shy and others are overwhelmed. These issues highlight how critical preschool is for a child's development. Other research has found that children from disadvantaged backgrounds are not adequately prepared for grade 1 due to a lack of resources and insufficient stimulation in preschool (Bhise & Sonawat, 2016; Bruwer et al., 2014; Finlon et al., 2015; van Zyl, 2011). These facts around poverty in the South African context may explain why educators from a disadvantaged school raised these particular issues.

### **6.2.7. Turn-taking**

Educators in this study constructed turn-taking as a skill that is still developing at this age. Educators found that some children are impulsive and impatient towards peers and adults, which affect turn-taking skills. The educators commented that the children can take turns when the activity is a game but are unable to do so when it is a formal and oral activity. They also commented that children with exposure to turn-taking at home are better at turn-taking. This finding suggests that turn-taking skills depend on factors such as self-regulation skills, the type of activity given and exposure to activities that require this skill. Educators commented that all children struggle with turn-taking during oral activities while hyperactive children struggle during all activities, including playing games. The children's inability to give others a turn to speak is constructed as an issue related to boundaries, discipline, self-regulation and self-control.

This construction suggests that the children are not yet mature enough to self-regulate. Hyperactive children are constructed as children who have less adequate regulation than non-hyperactive children. Educators commented that hyperactive children are unable to wait for their turn during games. This issue is typical of children with ADHD, as stated by Soucisse et al. (2015). Children with ADHD behave defiantly and aggressively, which is maladaptive for group play (Pelham & Bender, 1982). Therefore, friendships tend to have high conflict and a lack of reciprocity (Soucisse et al., 2015). Furthermore, educators commented that children who are the last-born at home, and only children, struggle with turn-taking. Van Zyl (2011) found that home is where children first learn about social interaction, where appropriate behaviour modelling is required to teach children how to behave. This issue could reflect that last-born children tend to be given special treatment, where they can stay on an activity as long as they please, and only children have no siblings at home to help them learn turn-taking.

At the index level of analysis in Rose-Krasnor's (1997) theory, social competence is the ability to balance one's needs with other people's needs. Balancing needs as described by Rose-Krasnor (1997) for successful turn-taking, requires regulation skills. Regulation refers to learned skills needed in planning and controlling one's behaviours (Morrison et al., 2010). Eisenberg et al. (2005) and Rose-Krasnor (1997) state that this is a skill that develops with maturity. Eisenberg et al. (2005) show how regulation is a skill that develops over time, as a child develops. Eisenberg et al. (2005) show how language skills and emotion knowledge lead to regulation and social competence over time. The educators' perception that children are not yet able to take turns with others suggests an inability to balance needs and to regulate themselves. It seems that from the educators' perspective, they still prioritise their need to participate in the given activity. It might be that at the skills level of Rose-Krasnor's (1997) theory, the motivation to participate in the given activity continually is what leads children not to consider other's needs at the index level. One educator stated that turn-taking is a mature skill; children understand the concept but struggle with implementing that knowledge. This views of one educator seem to reflect the theories by Eisenberg et al. (2005), Morrison et al. (2010) and Rose-Krasnor (1997) that the children are still at the stage of possessing knowledge but not yet able to implement it.

The second theme identified during data analysis was emotional competence.

### **6.3. Emotional competence**

Rose-Krasnor's (1997) theory of social competence shows how social and emotional competence are intertwined and interdependent skills for children's development. Denham et al. (2003) state that a set of emotional skills are required for a child to be socially competent. These skills are emotional expression, emotion knowledge and emotion regulation (Denham et al., 2003). This means that in the development of social-emotional competence, emotional competence precedes social competence. Emotional competence in this study was influenced by the difference of expression between positive and negative emotions and emotional regulation.

#### ***6.3.1. Difference of expression between positive and negative emotions***

The educators in this study suggest that the children's ability to express their emotions depended on the emotional impact those specific emotions have. Negative emotions are not expressed, whereas positive emotions are expressed very well. Gross and Cassidy (2019) argue that children between the ages of 2 and 5 develop self-conscious emotions such as shame and pride, permitting them to decide which emotions to express. Educators argued that children do not express negative emotions that stem from issues at home. However, positive emotions, such as pride are expressed very well. Educators were sympathetic to the children's behavior as they feel children are exposed to painful issues in their home lives. The suppression of negative emotions seems to be evidence of children applying a regulation strategy called expressive suppression. Expressive suppression is a strategy often used by children where they suppress the overt expression of negative emotions (Gross & Cassidy, 2019). One of the features of emotional expression is the ability to know which emotions to express when interacting with others (Denham et al., 2003). Children's expressive suppression suggests that children can identify their emotions as they make a distinction between negative and positive emotions. Expressive suppression can be self-protective as it assists children in maintaining social relationships and expectations (Zimmermann & Iwanski, 2014). Indeed, at the Skills level of Rose Krasnor's (1997) theory, the motivations direct behaviour at the Index level. It might be that children who repress emotions are trying to maintain good social standing with their family members. This suggests that the children, maintain a positive relationship with family members because they do what is expected of them.

On the other hand, educators say that children who repress emotions tend to show their distress in other ways, such as their moods or body language. The expression, however, is not intentional

because the educators have to notice a change in a child then investigate. Cole and Deater-Deckard (2009) found that persistent expressive suppression can lead to issues with social competence and behavioural regulation. Children would suffer from peer victimisation, relational aggression, depression, anxiety and harmful coping (Gardner et al., 2016; Jacob et al., 2014; Lee et al., 2017; Sai et al., 2016). Although educators did not specify the issues children would display, their points are consistent with the theory that children who repress emotion would have issues. Finally, the educators commented that over time, more children are repressing negative emotions. They said that children have more difficult situations to deal with outside school. This change reflects either a change in pupil demographics in schools over time or changes in the broader social contexts in which children live. Schools may be getting more children from low socioeconomic backgrounds or children may be dealing with increasingly stressful situations in their homes. There is a lack of South African literature on expressive suppression, but findings suggest there is a social expectation for children to keep domestic matters private.

One educator commented that the change in the school report system, coupled with pressure from parents, makes it difficult for children to express their need for help. She said that the use of percentages to report academic outcomes makes parents see how much their child cannot achieve. She constructs the percentage report system as problematic for the parents first, which then impacts negatively on the children. Once parents see how much their child has not achieved, they put more pressure on their children. Once children feel pressurised, they struggle to ask for help because they do not want to be perceived as incompetent. This educator, however, says that children eventually ask for help, but this is a skill that takes a long time to develop. It seems that at the Skills level of Rose-Krasnor's (1997) prism, the children's motivations are initially to appear competent in their work, which is why they do not express their need for help. It is possible that as their self-esteem improves, their motivations also change to getting assistance for activities with which they struggle.

### ***6.3.2. Emotional regulation***

In this study, the educators argued that emotional regulation skills depended on grade R exposure and maturity. Educators commented that the children's ability to regulate their emotions in the morning when entering school and to separate from familiar faces depended on whether or not they have had any preschool exposure. Educators in schools A and B said that children have no issue separating from familiar people when coming into school. The

unexpected phenomenon identified in this study was the parent's separation anxiety in school A and B. Two educators constructed parents as a problem suggesting that they create a platform for children to feel anxious when entering school. Educators in school C said that there is a clear distinction between children who have been to grade R and those who have not. The children with no grade R exposure struggled with regulating their emotions when coming into school. These children would cry for their parents and follow them out of school. After all, preschool offers children stimulation which allows them the opportunity to learn to self-regulate (Bruwer et al., 2014). This finding highlights the importance of preschool education in emotional competence. This finding further highlights the difference in socioeconomic backgrounds of schools and how this background affects children's access to education. Literature shows that many children in South Africa do not have adequate preschool resources due to poverty (Bhise & Sonawat, 2016). Poverty then possibly sets children up for many difficulties and possible failure in grade 1.

One educator constructed mature children as those with better emotion regulation skills than the less mature children. She commented that the less mature children struggle with regulating their emotions throughout their day once one small event upsets them in their morning. She says that a minor event at home in the morning would affect a child the entire day until they go back home. On the other hand, a more mature child would be able to regulate their emotions where they would understand that this was one small issue then be able to continue with their day in a happier emotional state. Emotional regulation releases personal resources that allow a child to be behaviourally regulated so they can focus on learning (Denham et al., 2012). The children who struggle to focus on their school-related matters may have not developed adequate emotional regulation for optimal school success.

The third theme that was identified during data analysis was poor parenting practices impacting on children's social-emotional competence.

#### **6.4. Poor parenting practices negatively impacting on children's social-emotional competence**

From the perspective of the educators, a variety of factors around parenting impact on how well children develop social-emotional skills. How well social-emotional skills develop impacts on children's success in school and school adjustment. In this section, I will explore the parenting issues that were identified by the educators in this study. The subthemes that were identified

were young mothers' lack parenting skills; parenting roles shifted to other guardians and a lack of emotional reciprocation between parents and their children.

#### ***6.4.1. Young mothers lack parenting skills***

This study found that educators in school B and C feel that young mothers lack sufficient knowledge, skills and time to take care of their children. They further stated that young mothers do not respond to requests for items for activities from the school, do not help children with homework, and they do not attend school meetings. Research by Aryani et al. (2018) and Tremblay et al. (2004) found that the children of young mothers lack support, responsiveness and stimulation, putting children at risk for social-emotional issues. Maternal education is required to assist children of young mothers in getting cognitive and academic skills required for development (Bhise & Sonawat, 2016; Ryan-Krause et al., 2009). This literature suggests that maternal education may be beneficial for the children and educators who need cooperation from young mothers.

#### ***6.4.2. Parenting roles shifted to other guardians***

In this study, the educators argued that parenting roles and responsibilities have changed over time. They stated that primary caregiver roles have shifted from mothers to grandmothers and carers. These findings are consistent with the literature on the changing roles of primary caregivers. Makunga et al. (2017) and Mathambo and Gibbs (2008) found a shift in parenting in South Africa, with grandmothers accounting for the highest number of primary caregivers. Educators' and research findings suggest that children do not get to create a bond with their mothers because a secure relationship between a parent and child supports emotion expression and behavioural regulation (Morrison et al., 2010). Rose-Krasnor (1997) states that development is compromised when a child's own needs for secure attachment are not met at the Index level of analysis. It might be that having an absent parent puts children at risk for emotion and behavioural regulation issues. This risk factor means these children are possibly at risk for future developmental issues as well. Furthermore, educators also stated that carers and grandmothers could not assist the children due to illiteracy. Likewise, Makunga et al. (2017) and, Mathambo and Gibbs (2008) found that caregivers in South Africa are unable to adequately support children's social and educational needs because they are illiterate, therefore, lack skills to assist children with their academics in grade 1 and to respond to written communication. This creates a possibility of academic failure as well. Makunga et al. (2017) found that there is a shortage of research on caregivers' challenges in assisting children with homework, due to being illiterate.

This might mean that there is not enough understanding of the challenges illiterate caregivers have with assisting their children. Therefore the required support cannot be given, and the issue will persist.

#### ***6.4.3. A lack of emotional reciprocation between parents and their children***

Educators from school A and B felt that busy parents lack emotional reciprocation towards their children, leading to children developing self-regulation issues. These working-class parents might not have the time required to take care of their children's emotional needs. One educator constructed the lack of time and rushed routines as something inherent in our current times where parents have to manage work pressure to provide for their families economically. Likewise, Amos (2013) found that more South African mothers are spending time away from home due to work demands. The fact that this issue was only raised in school A and B highlights the socioeconomic differences between these schools and school C. Although an authoritative parenting style is considered to be most beneficial for a child in grade 1, it requires parents to have time (Berg, 2011; Zupancic, Podlesek & Kavcic, 2004). The lack of time makes it difficult for working parents to implement an authoritative parenting style. A challenge then presents where a parent or caregiver has the pressure of balancing work demands and providing for children financially, with offering their children sufficient stimulation and support at home.

#### **6.5. Issues with language**

Educators from school A and B stated that some children have language issues. The findings in this study showed the diverse components of language required for a child to be competent language. These components are highlighted when considering learners who speak English as a first language and those who speak it as an additional language.

The perspectives of the educators were that children who speak English as an additional language have difficulty with auditory tasks. School A and B are English-medium schools which put children at a disadvantage. A study done by Jordaan (2011) found that learners who speak African languages are particularly disadvantaged by learning in English. The educators commented that these children struggle with expressing themselves and carrying out instructions. Likewise, research by Moodley et al. (2016) found that children who do not speak English as a first language struggle with speaking, following instructions and listening in English. The findings in this study and by Moodley et al. (2016) support the theory that language impacts on social and emotional competence (Eisenberg et al., 2005; Rose-Krasnor, 1997). The

difficulty in verbal self-expression in English affects a child's emotional and social development. Formal instruction in English is the best strategy for English language acquisition, for children who do not speak English as a first language (Moodley et al., 2016). Moodley et al. (2016) further found that play is not a very effective way for these children to acquire English language skills. These findings highlight the importance of daily social interactions in a specific language for language acquisition. Since it can take a minimum of five years for a child to be academically competent in a second language (Moodley et al., 2016), these findings suggest that for second language speakers, the chance for academic success are compromised. Kalam et al. (2016) found that non-English speaking parents from low socioeconomic backgrounds in South Africa tend to place their children in English-medium schools (Kalam et al., 2016). This preference is based on the perception of English as a language that offers excellent opportunities (Kalam et al., 2016). This literature may explain why educators in this study have children who do not have an adequate command of the English language.

School C mentioned no language issues with non-English speaking learners. School C consists of children who are taught and assessed in their home language. This difference reflects a difference in the demographics of learners in the schools.

The educators also argued that some children have language issues, regardless of whether or not they speak English as a first language. These children struggle with components such as phonetics and grammar. These issues suggest that these are children with learning issues. These schools have learners who have preschool exposure, also suggesting the language issue is more a learning problem than an English language issue. This finding suggests that school C would not be exempt from this issue, even though their learners learn in their home language. However, this study found no language issues in school C. This difference could reflect that educators in school C lack the skills required to identify such learning issues. Olivier et al. (2009) found that educators in disadvantaged communities are not adequately trained to identify children with learning issues. Schools A and B would then need further intervention for their learners. School C would require educator training to assist educators in identifying any language issues.

The educators' perception of a decline in social-emotional skills over the years was the fifth theme identified in this study.

## **6.6. A decline in social-emotional skills over the years**

Educators commented that they had experienced a persistent decline of several skills over the years. A decline in social-emotional skills was influenced by listening skills, maturity, aggression, issues with learning and voice modulation.

### **6.6.1. *Listening skills***

From the educators' perspective, there has been a decline in children's listening skills over the years. One educator constructed listening skills as the biggest challenge that would need to be prioritised for intervention. She further constructed the need for instant gratification as the factor that negatively impacts on listening skills. All educators in schools A and B expressed concern about children's listening skills. None of the educators in school C raised this concern.

Behavioural regulation, such as paying attention and listening allows a child to be able to learn (Denham et al., 2012). The lack of concern by educators in school C may be due to lack of training and skills in identifying learning issues. Oliver et al. (2009) found that educators from disadvantaged schools tend to overlook or deny learning issues. The differences in the concerns around listening skills reflect the lack of skills and knowledge around learning issues. This lack of skill is concerning since educators say there is an increase in listening issues, meaning there might be more and more children who will have issues with meeting the objectives of the learning. After all, behavioural regulation is the more reliable predictor of school success compared to emotional regulation (Belsky et al., 2001). Given the strong predictor of behavioural regulation for school success, intervention for listening issues is one of the issues that should be prioritised.

### **6.6.2. *Maturity***

From the educators' perspective the maturity of children is declining with every year that children begin formal education. It seems that from the educators' perspective behaviour regulation and emotional regulation were the areas where maturity is declining and presenting different issues each year. Also, one educator in school A commented that she is finding it increasingly challenging to distinguish between self-regulation issues due to immaturity, and self-regulation issues due to attention deficits. Glass and Wegar (2000), and Kern and Seabi (2008) did studies which found that educators perceive the incidence of ADHD as higher than the actual prevalence rate. This misperception might reflect that educators have difficulty distinguishing between ADHD and other factors that present as ADHD symptoms. The

educator's admission in this study is consistent with this research on educators' knowledge of ADHD and other regulatory issues.

### **6.6.3. Aggression**

In this study educators in school B found that there is an increase in aggression with every year that children start grade 1. This is constructed as a daily struggle in the school, with both physical and verbal aggression occurring. Educators in school A said they do not have issues with aggression, and educators in school C said they experience aggression amongst the children, but this was not constructed as a problem. Educators constructed the content children watch on screens and South Africa's high rate of violence as contributing to children's issues with aggression. Research by van Zyl (2011) claims that children model the behaviours they witness at home as they observe the social interactions between people at home. Children from low socioeconomic backgrounds are often exposed to violence in their environments outside the school setting (Bruwer et al., 2014). Screen exposure to violence reflects a lack of monitoring of what children watch at home. The lack of monitoring reflects a lack of parental education required to raise a child that has social-emotional competence. The increasingly high levels of aggression in school B and the contributing factors to differences in the aggression levels require further exploration. Perhaps, the protective factors in school A also need exploration to assist other schools who experience high levels of aggression such as school B.

### **6.6.4. Issues with learning**

In South Africa, many learners in grade 1 do not have adequate skills required for formal education (Bruwer et al., 2014; Meusel, 2010). From the educators' perspective children are increasingly presenting with a variety of learning issues for example: attention deficits, poor concentration and listening skills, and poor fine motor skills. Attention deficits were constructed as the most significant problem affecting children's academic work. This concern was expressed by educators in schools A and B. Behavioural regulation is the strongest predictor for academic success when compared to other types of regulation (Belsky et al., 2001). In the school setting behavioural regulation is concerned with retaining and using information and focusing on a task (Denham et al., 2012). In the context of this research, behavioural regulation would require cognitive skills under the working memory, inhibitory control and attentional flexibility components (Morrison et al., 2010). Attention deficits are, therefore, a behavioural regulation issue. Children with ADHD have persistent hyperactivity, impulsivity and inattentiveness

(American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Children with ADHD, therefore, have behavioural regulation issues, putting them at risk for academic failure.

There are no official ADHD statistics for children in South Africa, but there is an increasing prevalence in developing countries; with a rate of 6% to 10% in Africa (Topkin et al., 2015). One educator said that attention deficits presented differently every year and make it challenging to identify attention deficits from immaturity. In contrast another educator said that with increasing experience educators are now able to tell this difference. The findings in this study may reflect what statistics are showing in Africa. However, Hopkin et al. (2015) also found that educators in South Africa tend to report more attention deficits than the actual ADHD prevalence. It is then a challenge to ascertain whether educators are seeing a true reflection of ADHD prevalence in schools or whether they are incorrectly identifying issues. This makes it difficult to ascertain whether or not some educators are adequately trained to identify ADHD.

Due to South Africa's inclusive education system, educators have to identify and manage learners with learning issues such as ADHD (Topkin et al., 2015). Part of managing children with ADHD requires educators to communicate with parents about their child's issue. This study found that educators believe that screens contribute to attention deficits. Tamana et al. (2019) found that screen time is associated with inattention in preschool-aged children. Excessive screen time can then lead to children being incorrectly diagnosed with ADHD (Lissak, 2018). Although the educators' perceptions are consistent with the literature, it is unclear if the educators are referring to attention issues or ADHD. It would be essential to understand whether or not educators know the difference so that any intervention to assist educators could be appropriately designed. Research has found that ADHD can be hereditary, due to premature birth, brain injury or other harmful prenatal exposure (American Psychiatric Association, 2017). Ensuring that educators have the correct information about ADHD prevents incorrect information being passed on to parents and assists with better management in the classroom.

Concentration and listening skills were another concern that educators raised. Concentration and listening were constructed as interdependent skills. Parents' lack of expectations of their children to listen and pay attention to instructions was constructed as contributing to this problem. Listening and paying attention are skills required for a child to regulate behaviour and consequently learn (Denham et al., 2012). Since regulation is the strongest predictor of academic success (Belsky et al., 2014), it is therefore very concerning that there are children who are

unable to regulate their behaviour because this means they are at risk for academic failure in future. In Rose-Krasnor's (1997) prism poor behavioural regulation concerns skills lacking at the Skills level. The lack of skills required for behavioural regulation impact on children's poor social skills at the Index level where they are expected to meet expectations of their educators and peers.

Foundation phase educators in South Africa take in many learners who are not ready at all for education. This means that educators have to work harder to help children overcome learning issues to cope in grade school. Another learning issue identified by educators in this study was poor fine motor skills. Educators found that some children who came into Grade 1 were unable to write as they are expected to at their age. This concern was raised by an educator in school C. This is the school from a disadvantaged background and children with no preschool exposure. Bhise and Sonawat (2016) found that disadvantaged children in South Africa do not have sufficient preschool stimulation and resources to prepare them for grade 1. The educators' perceptions of children with no preschool exposure lacking in the skills their peers already have suggests that they are at risk of future academic failure. Disadvantaged children have to overcome many learning difficulties before they can catch up with their peers.

Educators in school A and B raised concern about increasing attention deficits, concentration and listening. Educators in school C expressed concern about some children's lack of fine-motor skills. It seems that learning issues presented differently in the three schools. In school A and B, the presenting issues seem to be due to poor behavioural regulation skills. In school C, the issues were linked to poor fine motor skills. The lack of concern on the part of educators in school C about other learning issues may be due to what previous studies have found about educators in disadvantaged schools. Topkin et al., (2015) found that educators in disadvantaged schools either deny or overlook learning issues due to a lack of acceptance and training. Although the underlying issues may be different, children with learning problems at this stage are at risk of having continued learning problems and eventually dropping out of school (Bruwer et al., 2014).

#### **6.6.5. *Voice modulation***

Educators perceived voice modulation as another skill this study found to be on the decline. Educators commented that children speak to them in loud volumes. In this study, poor voice modulation was constructed by educators as a self-regulation issue, where children are unable to adjust their volumes between different contexts. All educators in school A and three in school B

raised this concern. Educators in school C did not raise voice modulation as an issue. School A and B are schools where the learner population has diversified over the last few years. The difference in expectations may reflect the educators having to deal with a changing demographic of learners. School C's learner demographics have remained constant over the years.

### **6.7. Screen exposure a source of social-emotional issues**

In this study the educators found that screens have a negative impact on children's social-emotional development. All the educators in this study commented that screens were problematic but the challenges they identified were different. Educators in school A commented that screens affect children's self-regulatory skills such as concentration, patience and listening. Educators like school C commented that screens contribute to aggression. On the other hand, educators from school B commented that screens affect all self-regulatory skills mentioned by all A and contributes to aggression, as mentioned in school C. Lissak (2018) and Tamana et al. (2019) found that screen exposure negatively impacts on children's social-emotional competence, mainly: antisocial behaviour, reduced prosocial behaviour, ADHD-associated behaviours, depressive symptoms and reduced emotional regulation.

The self-regulatory skills that educators say are affected by screens impact negatively on children's social relationships. Educators felt that screen exposure early in childhood contributed to poor development of social skills, where children lack patience towards peers and adults. The lack of patience was constructed by the educators as caused by children's need for instant gratification. They said due to the nature of screens being instantly rewarding or instantly giving feedback to the child when they interact with them, children want this instant gratification when interacting with people as well. They further commented that screens being visual devices means that children do not have to listen in order to interact with them. This suggests that screens offer no opportunity for children to develop listening skills. Finally, screens have also been constructed as contributors to aggression. Educators commented that children are exposed to violent content on screens which they then imitate in the school setting. Therefore, this research is consistent with existing literature on the impact of screen exposure on development.

From the educators' perspective the issue of screen exposure is something that happens in the home. They believed that this meant that children were thus unable to meet the social expectations required at school. At the Index level of Rose-Krasnor's (1997) prism, this would

mean children are unable to take on other's perspectives across different contexts. Although the areas identified by the educators as being affected by children's screen time differ across schools, screen time was seen as a problem by educators in all schools. These findings are perhaps reflective of the increasingly digital world children now live in, which unfortunately might affect their development if not limited and monitored. More research, specifically within the South African context needs to be done to understand this issue better and to assist parents with better parenting practices.

## **6.8. Socioeconomic factors impacting on social-emotional competence**

This study found several socioeconomic factors which educators identified as contributors to socio-emotional issues. In the educators' view, socioeconomic factors which impacted on social-emotional competence were influenced by school structure and resources, and economic factors.

### ***6.7.1. School structure and resources***

This study found that from the perspective of the educators in school B, class size created an obstacle for learning. They argued that having too many children in a classroom negatively impacted on behavioural regulation. Due to the legacy of Apartheid in South Africa, resources were unfairly distributed; a large number of disadvantaged schools still have insufficient resources (Topkin et al., 2015). Kalam et al. (2016) found that overcrowding was one of the issues in schools that affect both teaching and learning in grade 1. In this study educators commented that they are unable to attend to all learners at the same time, so instructions are provided and learners are expected to carry them out independently. She said if any learner needs clarity, they are unable to get the attention required because the educator has to divide the classroom into groups and teach one group at a time. This suggests that these learners do not get adequate support from their educators, at the time support is needed. The educators also commented that children struggle to focus because there are many distractions due to overcrowding. This suggests that processing instructions is difficult when the classroom is overcrowded. Given the low socioeconomic background of school C, it would be expected that these educators would be the ones to raise this issue. The findings in this study are not consistent with literature which has found the issue of overcrowding to exist in disadvantaged schools. This suggests that the distribution of resources within the education system affects even schools in the highest quintile (quintile 5) of government schools. Alternatively, the educators' perspectives suggest that there is a higher demand for schools than before but not enough infrastructure to

meet this demand. The differences in the educators' perspectives could also suggest that educators in school C are used to having large classes and educators in school B are not.

### **6.8.2. Economic factors**

Educators found that there are children who are not ready to begin grade 1 but parents insist that they begin the grade due to financial constraints. They commented that parents opt for children to progress to the next grade without the required skills because grade 1 fees are cheaper than grade R. It seems that from the educators' perspective the children who are not ready to begin grade 1 are the ones who struggle with concentration and listening. They stated that the lack of this behavioural regulation leads to poor academic outcomes, which then affects the children's self-esteem and perception of the school. The South African Schools Act 84 of 1996 states that children from the age of seven are required to attend school (Republic of South Africa, 1996). However, one educator in school B constructed a difference between children who are eligible for grade 1 and those who are 'ready'. Children who are eligible for grade 1 are at the correct age to begin formal education as stipulated by the Department of Education. However, school 'ready' children would have a sufficient level of social and emotional maturity for grade 1. Kalam et al. (2016) found that parents tend to send children to grade 1 once they are eligible, yet children younger than six do not have adequate development required for the grade. Younger children are the ones at highest risk of academic failure when compared to older classmates. Failure is associated with lowered self-esteem due to demotivation towards school success (Kalam et al., 2016). The findings in this study are consistent with the research which highlights issues related to enrolment age and school readiness. This suggests that age eligibility does not necessarily mean that a child has attained the necessary developmental milestones required for them to cope in grade 1. These findings further suggest that parents need education around the concept of school readiness that determines whether or not a child would succeed in school.

### **6.8. Diverse construction of maturity**

In this study, educators constructed different definitions of maturity. This study found that from the educators' perspectives maturity impacts on different skills components in social-emotional competence. The first construction of maturity was based on age. Educators found that even months between children's ages make a difference in their maturity. The educators argued that older children are more mature than younger peers; they can adhere to work independently and attend to tasks. They also thought that older children, therefore, have better behaviour regulation skills. Another construction of maturity was gender-based. Educators in this study said that boys

were less mature than their female peers and that girls adjust to formal education better than boys.

Cognitive maturity was another construction of maturity found in this study. Educators commented that immature children are not aware of their shortfalls when doing academic tasks. They said that they are unable to distinguish between work done incorrectly and work done correctly; work is done because the educator asked them to do it. This suggests that this would make it difficult for children to learn from their mistakes and improve their academic skills. At Rose-Krasnor's (1997) Index level, these children are not yet able to take on the perspective of others; for example, the educator who requires work done in a specific manner. The children see the matter their perspective, and focus on just completing the task.

Emotional maturity is the final construction of maturity that was found in this study. Educators found that emotionally immature children struggle with empathy. These children are unable to understand how their actions affect others. At the Skills level, these children lack perspective-taking skills (Rose-Krasnor, 1997). At the Index level, they are unable to balance between their perspectives and those of others (Rose-Krasnor, 1997). These children, therefore, do not have the understanding that they need to apologise to others if they have hurt them, in order to maintain positive relationships.

This study has shown that maturity is an umbrella term used by educators where different components of maturity exist. This diverse construction of maturity also reflects the multiple components of maturity and development that take place in childhood. Furthermore, these findings also reflect that development is not universal.

## **6.9. Summation**

The themes that were identified in this study were: social competence, emotional competence, poor parenting practices negatively impacting on children's social-emotional competence, issues with language, a decline in social-emotional skills over the years, screen exposure a source of social-emotional issues, socioeconomic factors impacting on social-emotional competence and a diverse construction of maturity.

In this study, there were areas about social competence where educators had similar perceptions, and there are some that differed. All educators commented that children have not yet developed

adequate skills to manage peer conflict and to take turns, their friendships are not yet stable, and they battle when it comes to accepting the consequences for negative behaviour. Educators raised concerns about peer aggression and following the school routine in school B, and C. School A seems to have a protective factor from aggression and school routine issues that require further exploration. When it comes to respecting adults, this study found that educators thought that children in school A and B do not respect adults in the school setting. School C may be exempt from this issue because the social expectation at home may be consistent with expectations at home. Diversity, therefore, may be a factor for schools A and B. Educators' views in school A and B may also be influenced by their own emotional issues. One issue that mainly affects educators in school C has children with no preschool exposure. They commented that the children have issues with behaving towards peers in a prosocial manner, participating in activities and using resources appropriately. Participation in activities seemed to be based on whether or not children have the confidence in their abilities in school A and B. In school B where educators said the classes are too big, inadequate contact lessons may contribute to poor participation. School B's educators raised further issues about young children who have not yet developed the skills to be able to adjust to school. Social competence was therefore perceived to be still developing, with the different components lacking or present according to the children's contexts.

When it comes to emotional competence, this study found that educators perceived that there is a difference in expression of positive from negative emotions and children's emotion regulation skills differed due to several factors. In all the schools, educators found that children express positive emotion well and openly but repress negative emotions. Repression was perceived to be self-protective but lead to children displaying issues through negative moods or body language. Educators in school C found that due to a lack of preschool exposure, children struggle with emotional regulation such as separating from parents. Educators in school A found that the more mature children can regulate their emotion after an adverse event has occurred in their lives. Emotional competence, therefore, was perceived by educators to depend on whether the emotions are negative or positive, preschool exposure and maturity.

Educators felt that children had inadequate social-emotional skills due to poor parenting practices. Maternal age due to socioeconomic status and a lack of maternal education was thought by the educators to contribute to poor parenting practices. Educators in school B and C found that young mothers lack the knowledge and skills to instil acceptable parenting practices

for optimal development. In school B, educators argued that children are left in the care of other caregivers who do not have the skills to support the children. Educators in school A and B further found that working-class parents do not have time to tend to their children's developmental needs. Poor parenting practices were, therefore, due to a variety of factors.

Educators in school A and B found that children who speak English as an additional language have difficulty with self-expression and following instructions. They argue that the gap between English-speaking and non-English speaking learners is created by the fact that non-English speaking parents put their children in English-medium schools. These educators may lack competency in teaching English to non-English speaking learners. Educators also commented that other children have learning issues where they battle with phonetics and grammar. This suggests that these learning issues are not related to children's home language but cognitive issues. School C's complete lack of language issues may reflect a lack of skills in educators to identify language issues.

A very concerning finding in this study was the educators' perception that there is a consistent decline in the social-emotional skills of children. Educators in school A and B commented that children have declining listening skills, attention, concentration and listening, and voice modulation. Also, educators in school A commented that there was a decline in maturity, while educators in school B raised concerns about increasing aggression. These findings suggest that there is still much intervention required for both parents and educators to assist children to overcome this decline in skills required for a successful school career. Educators' in school A's lack of concern for aggression reflects an existing protective factor that would need further exploration to assist school B.

All educators constructed the use of 'screens' as affecting social-emotional skills. In this study educators in school A reported that screen exposure impacts negatively on self-regulation, while educators in school C commented that it contributes to issues with aggression. Educators in school B reported that screens contribute to both self-regulation issues and aggression. Although the issues differ across schools, there is consensus that screen exposure at home affects children's social-emotional skills required for school.

External factors such as socioeconomic background were also found by educators to affect children's social-emotional development. Educators in school B commented that they have a

sizeable educator-to-learner ratio which impacts negatively on participation in activities and focuses on tasks. This finding is inconsistent with literature which states that large classrooms are an issue for schools in disadvantaged backgrounds. The disadvantaged school in this study (school C) did not report this issue. These findings reflect a changing demand for schools which may not have the capacity to reach the demand for the number of learners. Educators in school B also reported that due to financial constraints, parents insist children go to grade 1 even though they do not have adequate skills to cope in formal school, putting them at risk for failure. These perceptions reflect that there are issues beyond a parent's control that affect children's success in school.

Finally, this study found that maturity is constructed in different ways by educators. They commented that children who are months apart in age do not have the same skills level of behavioural regulation. They also argued that female children mature quicker than their male peers. Cognitive maturity, according to the educators, impacts on children's ability to distinguish between work that is done correctly and work done incorrectly. Finally, they commented that emotionally mature children could show more empathy towards others. These perceptions suggest that maturity does not develop universally but consists of different components that develop differently in individuals.

## **Chapter Seven: Conclusion**

This study showed how Rose-Krasnor's (1997) theory of social competence could be applied to explore educators' perceptions of the social-emotional competence of children beginning formal education. Educators' perceptions were studied because they spend most of the day with the children and they are a significant source of information of children's behaviours. It is interesting that educators found that the learner demographics have diversified and new issues were being identified. Findings of this study are presented below, under the relevant research questions.

### **7.1. Research question 1: The educators' perceptions of social-emotional competence of learners beginning formal education**

The educators in this study identified different strengths and weaknesses in children's social-emotional competence. School-based differences depended on each school's socioeconomic background (quintile) and pupil demographic factors. Educators perceived that the children's social skills are still developing, the lack of conflict management, friendship stability, prosocial behaviour and respect for adults are due to immaturity. When it comes to emotional competence, educators found that children express positive emotions well but repress negative emotions to protect themselves. The children's behavioural regulation was the educators' biggest concern. Educators raised concern about an increase in attention deficits and aggression, and a decrease in voice modulation, concentration and listening skills with every year that children begin grade 1. Behavioural regulation is the most reliable predictor of academic success (Belsky et al., 2001). If educators' perceptions about children's behavioural regulation is accurate, this is a cause for concern for children's school success. These findings suggest that intervention required would have to prioritise the behavioural regulation component of social-emotional competence. Therefore, further research on the decline of the mentioned skills would be necessary to prevent further issues with academic work. Furthermore, research on protective and risk factors for each school context would also be useful.

### **7.2. Research question 2: Educators' perceptions of the differences amongst grade 1 learners in social-emotional competence**

Educators commented that children differ in their maturity, learning capabilities and preschool exposure. Children who are mature were perceived by the educators as more competent in their behavioural and emotional regulation. Educators further constructed females as more mature

than males. Some children were perceived by educators as having learning issues which affects their behavioural regulation and language skills. The educator's view that some children have learning issues raises concern that they may have persistent learning issues in future (Bruwer et al., 2014). Children who have been to preschool were perceived as more socially competent and emotionally competent. This difference suggests that children with no preschool exposure begin school with inadequate skills for grade 1. This further suggests that learners with no preschool exposure are at risk for failure in school.

### **7.3. Research question 3: Educators' perceptions of the possible contributing factors to the differences in the level of social-emotional competencies of grade 1 children**

In this study, educators perceived the home environment as the main source of children's differences in social-emotional competence. The minor issue for educators stemmed from the school environment. The first issue related to the home environment that educators perceived as problematic was poor parenting practices. Some educators felt that young mothers lack adequate skills to support their children, others felt that the parenting role has been shifted to other caregivers who also lack skills to support the children. Other educators felt that working class parents lack time to give their children emotional support. Educators found that poor parenting practices contribute to the lack of emotional support, academic support, a strained relationship between parents and educators and excessive screen exposure.

Other issues related to the home environment that educators perceived as problematic is children's home language, financial issues, exposure to violence and screen exposure. Educators commented that children who speak English as an additional language struggle with self-expression and following instructions. According to the educators, parents insist that children go to grade 1 once they are at the eligible age, even though they do not yet possess the skills required for grade 1. Educators commented that parents do this because grade 1 is cheaper than preschool. Educators further commented that these children struggle to adjust to formal school and have inadequate behavioural regulation. Exposure to violence was constructed as a contributing factor to the increase in aggression. Finally, screen exposure was constructed by the educators as contributing to issues with self-regulation and aggression.

One issue related to the school environment that educators perceived as problematic was overcrowding. Educators commented that overcrowding contributed to issues with behavioural regulation.

## **7.4. Strengths and limitations of this study**

### **7.4.1. Credibility**

Credibility is enhanced when research findings are congruent with reality (Silverman, 2013). This study used Rose-Krasnor's (1997) theory of social competence which allows for the understanding of how social and emotional competence are interlinked constructs. This study has highlighted how much different facets of social-emotional competence rely on each other for a child to develop social-emotional skills. For instance, educators explain how they have seen that poor language skills can impact on emotional expression and regulation. Research on social skills in relation to children beginning formal education is much neglected. Having a research study on this phenomenon contributes to the limited research.

Individual interviews were appropriate to explore educators' perceptions of children's social-emotional competence. The interview questions were clear and included terms that the participants understood. In cases where the researcher needed clarity on what is said, the researcher asked, so that the correct interpretation of the participant's words was made. In addition, having the interview schedule in both *IsiZulu* and English allowed bilingual educators to have optimal understanding of the questions they were being asked. Having a bilingual researcher also means that bilingual educators could code-switch when they felt they needed to, to express themselves more accurately. Giving the educators the interview schedule before the interviews commenced also allowed educators to note their responses. This preparation assisted the research process with the time constraints.

The method of speaking to the heads of department and gaining their support made it easier to gain the participant's trust. The educators' acceptance of, and perception of the research as beneficial for them, made them potentially more open to participating. Educators further commented that researchers do not normally ask them directly about their experiences. This positive response might have made them comfortable to raise matters and opinions they might normally suppress. The positive interaction could also have enhanced credibility.

There were limitations to credibility, which compromised the data quality. Firstly, educators had to do the interviews quickly due to the time constraints inherent in the nature of their work. Also, in some instances there were interruptions that made it difficult for the researcher and educator to remember at which point they were interrupted. These challenges made it difficult for the

researcher to probe further or clarify some points. With focus of the study being about children's behaviours, in their direct experience and in their workplace, this may have made participants feel compelled to participate. This could have also led to discussion amongst the educators prior to the interviews, and lead to a particular (perhaps united response), or even a defensive stance when responding. In hind-sight, as a researcher, I asked a lot of leading questions due to two factors. Firstly, the process of interviewing all educators in the same school setting led to me assuming they would all have similar perceptions. Secondly, as a novice researcher I sometimes empathised with educators when they commented on their difficulties. Silverman (2013) states that researchers may lack analytic depth when doing research on issues that affects our daily lives.

Research instruments such as interviews have an important role in providing insight for practice and policy (Silverman, 2013). This study relied on information given by the educators, which does not necessarily make it factual. Information on children's home environments was revealed but I did not interview parents/ caregivers. For instance, a number of issues were constructed by educators as stemming from poor parenting skills, or unstable family structures, but there was no way of checking the credibility of these claims. In addition, the responses of the educators might have been attempts on their part to appear as professionals who do their work well. This limitation has implications for recommendations given because the study focussed solely on the educators' viewpoints.

#### ***7.4.2. Dependability***

Research is dependable when the data is consistent if another researcher replicates the study (Silverman, 2013). The research participants of this study are interviewed as professionals, meaning the next researcher would find the same educators in the schools that were sampled. The stable setting being the educators' place of work also increased participation due to comfort and trust. Having an interview schedule also ensures that educators were asked the same questions.

A less empathetic, or a more experienced, researcher might mean that the processes used in this study would change. Due to educators' being interviewed as professionals, they might have had vested interests in the way they were presenting themselves. Since the interviews are open-ended, different researchers might generate different data.

### **7.4.3. Transferability**

Silverman (2013) states that quality research should have findings that can be transferable. The transferability of the study is enhanced through the detailed reporting of the research process. In this study the methodology section has addressed the process of sampling the participants, and described the school contexts. It has also provided a detailed account of the process of data collection through semi-structured interviews. The process of data analysis was also described in detail. All of these enable the reader of the research report to assess the extent to which the findings of this study could be transferability to similar participants in similar settings.

### **7.5. Recommendations**

The South African education system post-apartheid promotes racial diversity and inclusive education. The Department of Education also states that children are eligible to begin formal education in the year they turn 6 years old. Educators in this study found that they are having an increase in behavioural regulation and learning issues with every new school year. Five-year old children were identified by the educators as struggling with adjusting to school and regulating themselves.

It is recommended that the Department of Education provides diversity training for schools that have a changing learner demographic. Understanding the learners' backgrounds might enable educators to be more equipped to accommodate them in school. It is also recommended that the Department of Education provides training for educators to help them identify and manage learning difficulties in their classrooms. Finally, it is recommended that the Department of Education review the effects of taking very young learners into grade 1 year. This would potentially impact on the readiness of learners for formal schooling.

Educators in this study perceived that there is a disconnect between them and the children's parents. Educators also perceived parents and caregivers' parenting practices to be a hindrance to children's development. Research done by Makunga et al. (2017) and Weigel et al. (2006) found that due to illiteracy, caregivers do not possess adequate knowledge and skills to create environments that are conducive to development, and to foster a working relationship with educators. Makunga et al. (2017) also acknowledges that there is a shortage of literature on caregivers' perspectives on the challenges they have in assisting children. This research study did not explore parent's or caregivers' perspectives on this matter. Therefore, recommendations are made based only on educators' perspectives. The Positive Parenting Skills Training (PPST)

and the Sinovuyo Caring Families Programme (SCFP) (Wessels et al., 2016) are recommended for parents and caregivers. These are evidence-based South African interventions that assist parents to create home environments that are conducive for development. It is also recommended that the Department of Education facilitates workshops for educators and parents to develop a working relationship to benefit the children.

#### **7.6. Suggestions for future research**

Further research on the factors contributing to the increasing behavioural regulation and learning issues needs to be done. Research issues that could be explored are learner backgrounds that are risk factors for increased behavioural and learning issues; educators' understanding of emerging learning issues in the classroom; current interventions in place to assist learning who present with learning difficulties; the ratio of student population versus school availability; risk factors of children in schools with high rates of aggression; protective factors of children in schools with low rates of aggression and increasing aggression in young children.

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## Appendices

### Appendix 1: Department of Education Permission



education

Department:  
Education  
PROVINCE OF KWAZULU-NATAL

Enquiries: Phindile Duma

Tel: 033 392 1063

Ref.:24/8/1733

Ms Ni Zondi  
PO Box 696  
Pietermaritzburg  
3200


Dear Ms Zondi

#### PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN THE KZN DoE INSTITUTIONS

Your application to conduct research entitled: **"AN EXPLORATION OF EDUCATORS' PERCEPTIONS OF SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL COMPETENCIES IN CHILDREN BEGINNING FORMAL EDUCATION"**, in the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education Institutions has been approved. The conditions of the approval are as follows:

1. The researcher will make all the arrangements concerning the research and interviews.
2. The researcher must ensure that Educator and learning programmes are not interrupted.
3. Interviews are not conducted during the time of writing examinations in schools.
4. Learners, Educators, Schools and Institutions are not identifiable in any way from the results of the research.
5. A copy of this letter is submitted to District Managers, Principals and Heads of Institutions where the Intended research and interviews are to be conducted.
6. The period of investigation is limited to the period from 22 February 2019 to 20 July 2021.
7. Your research and interviews will be limited to the schools you have proposed and approved by the Head of Department. Please note that Principals, Educators, Departmental Officials and Learners are under no obligation to participate or assist you in your investigation.
8. Should you wish to extend the period of your survey at the school(s), please contact Miss Phindile Duma at the contact numbers below.
9. Upon completion of the research, a brief summary of the findings, recommendations or a full report/dissertation/thesis must be submitted to the research office of the Department. Please address it to The Office of the HOD, Private Bag X9137, Pietermaritzburg, 3200.
10. Please note that your research and interviews will be limited to schools and institutions in KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education.

UMgungundlovu District

  
Dr. EV Nzama  
Head of Department: Education  
Date: 22 February 2019

KWAZULU-NATAL DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION  
Postal Address: Private Bag X9137 • Pietermaritzburg • 3200 • Republic of South Africa  
Physical Address: 247 Burger Street • Anton Lembede Building • Pietermaritzburg • 3201  
Tel.: +27 33 392 1063 • Fax.: +27 033 392 1203 • Email: Phindile.Duma@kzndoe.gov.za • Web: www.kzmeducation.gov.za  
Facebook: KZNDOE... Twitter: @OBE\_KZN... Instagram: kzn\_education... Youtube: kzndoe

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## Appendix 2: Ethical Clearance Letter



25 June 2019

**Ms Nokubonga I Zondi 210526501**  
School of Applied Human Sciences – Psychology  
Pietermaritzburg Campus

Dear Ms Zondi

**Protocol reference number:** HSS/Q481/019M

**Project Title:** An exploration of educators' perceptions of social-emotional competencies in children beginning formal education.

### **Full Approval – Expedited Application**

Your application dated 22 May 2019, the Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee has considered the abovementioned application and the protocol has been granted **FULL APPROVAL**.

**Any alteration/s to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form, Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach and Methods must be reviewed and approved through the amendment /modification prior to its implementation. In case you have further queries, please quote the above reference number. PLEASE NOTE: Research data should be securely stored in the discipline/department for a period of 5 years.**

**The ethical clearance certificate is only valid for a period of 1 year from the date of issue. Thereafter Recertification must be applied for on an annual basis.**

I take this opportunity of wishing you everything of the best with your study.

Yours faithfully



.....  
**Dr Rosemary Sibanda (Chair)**

/px

cc. Supervisor: Dr M van der Riet  
cc. Academic Leader Research: Prof R Teer-Tomaselli  
cc. School Administrator: Ms P Konan

---

Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

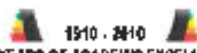
Dr Rosemary Sibanda (Chair)

Westville Campus, Govan Mbeki Building

Postal Address: Private Bag 354331, Durban 4013

Telephone: +27 (0) 31 200 3681/8300/4067 Facsimile: +27 (0) 31 250 4608 Email: [rsibanda@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:rsibanda@ukzn.ac.za) | [hr@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:hr@ukzn.ac.za) | [enquiries@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:enquiries@ukzn.ac.za)

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## **Appendix 3: Information Sheet**

### **Educators' information sheet**

Dear Educators,

I am Ms Nokubonga Zondi (University of KwaZulu-Natal), (contact details provided at the end).

#### **The study**

*An exploration of educators' perceptions of social-emotional competencies in children beginning formal education.*

As you know there are many children that begin formal education without the emotional and social skills required to begin grade 1. Preschools offer a variety of training and intervention programmes to prepare pre-schoolers for grade 1. However, we also know that pre-schools have various approaches to formal school preparation. I would like to find out how prepared children are for formal education when they enter grade 1. I would like to specifically find out if children have the social and emotional competencies required for formal education when they start grade 1. In addition, I would like to know what you feel contributes to any differences in school preparedness, that you may observe. To explore this, I will interview grade 1 educators to find out what their experiences and perceptions are regarding this topic.

The results of this study could assist in motivating for implementation of certain programmes or techniques to assist the children to be better prepared for school.

#### **Interviews with educators**

I would like to conduct an in-depth interview with educators at the school. The questions will focus on the behaviours you observe on a daily basis, and what you have observed about the contributing factors to the differences in the children.

The interview will be between 25-30 minutes in length and will be conducted at your place of work, in a suitable venue.

You may answer questions you are comfortable to answer and leave the ones you wish not to comment on.

The interview will be conducted by the researcher.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You are free to leave the study at any time of the process.

With your permission I will record the interview, so that I can accurately process the information contained in the discussion. In working with the interview material. I will not use your name, or identify your school or class in any way. Instead I will use pseudonyms (false names).

### **After the interviews**

After the discussion I will take the recordings and transcribe them into a written form. In this process you will still be referred to by your pseudonym. The information from the interviews will be used to compile reports for the school, for the Department of Education, and for my thesis publication. The information may also be used in future research projects.

These written documents, will use only pseudonyms and not reveal any identifying information related to the participants in the study.

### **General issues**

If you would like feedback on the study, we can arrange this with the Principal of the school after the study has been completed.

### **Storage of Information**

The information will be kept for future research purposes. It will be stored in a secure location with Dr Mary van der Riet (UKZN), who is the research supervisor.

### **Risks and benefits**

I do not see any risks for you if you participate in the research. The questions in the interviews are not about you but about what you observe about children in the school. Participating in the study has no direct benefit for you. However, the study could indirectly benefit schools and children in the area in that it will help planners and the Department of Education make decisions about whether and how to improve the level of preparedness of learners that will be going to grade 1.

### **Those involved**

If you have any questions about this study, then please talk to the researcher and/or email those involved in the study.

The study supervisor is Dr Mary van der Riet, from the Psychology Department, School of Applied Human Sciences at University of KwaZulu-Natal. Her contact numbers are 033 260 6163. Her email address is VanDerRiet@ukzn.ac.za

The researcher is a psychology master's student, Ms Nokubonga Zondi.

The study has been approved by the Department of Education, that has given

The study has been approved by the Department of Education, that has given me permission to work in the school. The study has also been agreed to by the principal at the school.

The ethical issues in the study have been considered and approved by the University of KwaZulu-Natal's Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (HSSREC) (ethics review number: HSS/0481/019M)

If you have any concerns about this study, you can also contact:

Ms Phume Ximba

**HUMANITIES & SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS ADMINISTRATION**

Research Office, Westville Campus

Govan Mbeki Building

Private Bag X 54001 Durban 4000

KwaZulu-Natal, SOUTH AFRICA

Tel: 27 31 2604557 - Fax: 27 31 2604609

Email: [HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za)

**Imininingwane yothisha**

Bafundisi,

Ngingu Nksz Nokubonga Zondi wase Nyuvesi yakwaZulu-Natali (imininingwane inikezwe ekugcineni).

**Ucwaningo**

*Ukwazi kabanzi ngombono wabafundisi mayelana nabantawana, ngokwe mizwa nangokwe nhlalo uma beqala imfundo yabo yamabanga aphansi.*

Njengoba kwaziwa ukuthi izingane eziningi ziqala isikole zingakabi nawo amakhono afanele ukuqala ibanga lokuqala. Izinkulisa (Grade RR, R) zidingengekile kubafundi ngoba bathola uqeqesho nezindlela zokulungiselela ukuqala isikole.

Impfumela yocwaningo ingasiza ukugqugquzela izinhlelo nezindlelazokusiza abafundi, ukuze balungele isikole.

**Izingxoxo nabafundisi**

Mina ngifisa ukwenza inkulimo luhlolo ejulile nabafundisi esikoleni. Imibuzo igxile ekutheni yikuphi ovame ukukuqaphela ngokuziphatha kwabafundi nsukuzonke, nokuthi ikuphi okungaba amaphuzu aveza umahluko kubafundi.

Lemibuzo yethu iyothatha imuzuzu engasuka ku-15 kuya ku-30, khona endaweni yakho yokusebenzela. Uzophendula leyomibuzo okhululekile ngayo, uyishiye eminye.

Yonke imibuzo iyobuzwa umcwaningi.

Ukhulukile, akukho ophoqwe kuko... unalo ilungelo lokushiya loluhlelo noma inini.

Uma usiphe invumo yakho, sizoyiqopha le ngxoxo ukuze phela sikwazi ukuthi sibuyele emuva sihlaziye, singaphuthelwa yilokho nalokho. Okumqoka kuthina ulwazi, angeke silisebenzise igama lakho noma ikilasi/isikole sakho, siyokunika igama lokuphiwa elingasho lutho nje.

**Emva Kwezingxoxo**

Sizothi mesesiqedile sithathe zonke leziqopho sifike silobe phansi konke okuqoshiwe. Sizohlale njalo sikubiza ngaleligama lesidlaliso. Konke okuxoxwe ngesiZulu kuzohunyuswa ngesiLungu. Ulwazi olutholakele luzoqoqelwa ndawonye kwakhiwe umbiko ozokwethulelwa isikole, umnyango wezemfundo Kanye noshicilelo lwe *thesis* yami.

Ulwazi olutholakele lungasetshenziswa kucwaningo oluzayo. Lezethulo angeke ziveze ubunikazi balowo muntu ozibandakanya ocwaningweni.

### **Ukugcinywa kolwazi**

Ulwazi luyogcinwa endaweni ephaphile, kanye nomemuleki uDokotela Mary van der Riet (wase UKZN).

### **Izinkinga ezijwayelekile**

Uma ungathanda ukwazi ngomphumela walolucwaningp singahlela nomphathi sikole uma sesiqedile ngocwaningo.

### **Ubungozi kanye nezinzuzo**

Abukho ubungozi obungavela uma uzibandakanya nalolucwaningo. Imibuzo yezingxoxo ayikho mayelana nawe kepha kepha iloko okubonile mayelana nabafundi esikoleni. Ukuzibandakanya kwakho kulolucwaningo akunanzuzo kuwe kepha kungasiza izikole, nabafundi kanye nomnyango wezemfundo ukwenza izinqumo zokulekelela ukuba abantwana balungele ukuqala isikole samabanga aphansi.

### **Abathintekayo**

Umangabe unemibuzo mayelana nalolu cwaningo, ungaxhumana nomcwaningi noma abanye abathintekayo.

Umeluleki wocwaningo ngu Dkt Mary van der Riet wakwa Psychology, wase School of Applied Human Sciences eUniversity of KwaZulu-Natal. Inombolo yakhe yocingo u 0332606163.

Imeyili yakhe VanDerRiet@ukzn.ac.za

Umcwaningi umfundi wesiqu esiphezulu (masters) saka sayikholoji, uNksz Nokubonga Zondi Lolucwaningo luvunyiwe nguMnyango Wezemfundo osinikeze invume yokusebenzisana nezikole. Lolucwaningo luphinde luvunywe ngothisha nhloko bezikole kanye nabafundisi.

Izinkinga ezimayelana nokuziphatha zibhekiwe zavunywa yi Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (HSSREC) yase Nyuvesi yaKwaZulu-Natal (inombolo /yokubuyekwezwa kokuziphatha: HSS/0481/019M)

Uma unokukhathezeka okuphathelene nalolu cwaningo ungaxhumana no:

Nksz Phume Ximba

### **HUMANITIES & SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS ADMINISTRATION**

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Govan Mbeki Building

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Ucingo: 27 31 2604557 - Ifeksi: 27 31 2604609

Imeyili: [HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za)

## **Appendix 4: Interview Schedule**

### **Educators' interview schedule**

1. What is the general behaviour of children in the classroom?
  - a. What differences in general behaviour have you seen in the children in the classroom?
2. Are the children able to separate from parents or familiar people when they enter school?
3. How well do the children interact with peers?
  - a. Do they play with others and develop friendships easily?
  - b. Do they take turns when participating in activities?
  - c. Do they show empathy towards each other?
  - d. Do they respect other children's rights?
4. How do the children resolve conflict with their peers?
  - a. Do the children resolve conflict themselves?
  - b. Do they resolve conflict aggressively?
5. Do the children express pride when they have achieved something? a. How do they express their pride?
6. To what extent do the children participate in activities? a. Do they maintain focus on a given activity?
7. To what extent do the children interact with adults? a. Do they interact with adults in a respectful manner?
8. How well do the children follow instructions/rules?
  - a. Do they accept their school routine?
  - b. Do they accept the consequences of their behaviour?
  - c. Do they use resources appropriately?
  - d. Do they listen effectively?
9. How well do the children demonstrate confidence in tasks? a. Do they attend to tasks independently?
10. How well are the children able to express their feelings and needs? a. Are they able to ask for help?
11. What do you think are the factors that contribute to the differences that you see in the children's social and emotional skills?

### **Uhlelo lokuxoxisana nabafundisi**

1. Injani indlela abafundi abaziphatha ngayo egumbini lokufundisa?
  - a. Yimuphi umehluko owubonile ngendlela abafundi abaziphatha ngayo egumbini lakho lokufundisa?
2. Ngabe abafundi bakuthola kulula yini ukhlukana nabazali kanye nalabo abahlala nabo?
3. Injani indlela abafundi abaxhumana ngayo nabanye abanye abafundi?
  - a. Ngabe bakuthola kulula yini ukudlala nokwenza ubungani nabanye abafundi?
  - b. Ngabe bayakwazi yini ukudedelana uma bexoxisana ngokuthile?
  - c. Ngabe bayakwazi yini ukuveza ukuzwelana komunye nomunye?
  - d. Ngabe bayawahlonipha yini amalungelo abanye abafundi?
4. Abafundi baxazulula izinkinga kanjani komunye nomunye?
  - a. Bayaxazululela izinkinga bebodwa ngaphandle kosizo?
  - b. Bayayixazulula inkinga ngokulwa?
5. Bakuveza ukujabula uma benze kahle kokuthile?
  - a. Bakuveza kanjani?
6. Bazibandakanya kangakanani ekwenzeni umsebenzi?
  - a. Ngabe bayakwazi ukunaka umsebenzi bangadidiseki kalula?
7. Baxhumana kangakanani nabadala?
  - a. Baxhumana ngenhlonipho yini nabadala?
8. Bayilandela kahle yini imithetho abayibekelwe?
  - a. Bayayilandela yini inqubo abayibekelwe yesikole?
  - b. Bayayamukela yini imivuzo yokungaziphathi ngendlela?
  - c. Bayakwazi yini ukusebenzisa izinsiza kufunda ngendlela okuyiyona yona?
  - d. Bayakwazi yini ukulalela okuyiko?
9. Bakuveza kanjani ukuzethemba uma benikwe umsebenzi?
  - a. Bayakwazi yini ukuzenzela umsebenzi ngaphandle kosizo?
10. Bayiveza kanjani imizwa nezidingo zabo?
  - a. Bayakwazi yini ukucela usizo uma belidinga?
11. Yini imbangela yokhlukana kwabafundi ngokwenhlalo nangokuveza imizwa yabo?

## **Appendix 5: Informed consent**

### **Consent to participate**

I \_\_\_\_\_ have been informed about the study entitled: *An exploration of educators' perceptions of social-emotional competencies in children beginning formal education* by Ms Nokubonga Zondi (details provided on the information sheet).

I understand the purpose and procedures of the study. I have had an opportunity to read and understand the information sheet given to me.

The purpose of the study has been explained to me. I understand what is expected of me in terms of my participation in this study and the time commitment I am making to participate.

I declare that my participation in this study is entirely voluntary and that I may withdraw at any time without affecting any of the benefits that I usually am entitled to.

If I have any further questions/concerns or queries related to the study. I understand that I may contact the researchers at the details they have provided on the information sheet.

I understand that my data will be stored securely for a period of five years and may be used for future research. I understand that measures will be taken to ensure that my identity is protected and my participation in this research will be completely confidential in this regard. I understand that no identifying information about me will be published.

If I have any questions or concerns about my rights as a study participant, or if I am concerned about an aspect of the study or the researchers then I may contact:

Ms Phume Ximba

#### **HUMANITIES & SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS ADMINISTRATION**

Research Office, Westville Campus

Govan Mbeki Building

Private Bag X 54001 Durban 4000

KwaZulu-Natal, SOUTH AFRICA

Tel: 27 31 2604557 - Fax: 27 31 2604609

Email: [HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za)

### **CONSENT**

**I hereby agree to participate in the study**

---

**Signature of Participant**

---

**Date**

---

**Signature of Researcher**

---

**Date**

## **Imvumo yokubamba iqhaza**

Mina \_\_\_\_\_ ngazisiwe ngocwaningo olubizwa: **Ukwazi kabanzi ngombono wabafundisi mayelana nabantawana, ngokwe mizwa nangokwe nhlalo uma beqala imfundo yabo yamabanga aphansi.** Loluhlelo lwenziwa ngu Nksz Nokubonga Zondi (imininingwane inikezwe ephepheni lomniningwane).

Ngiyayiqonda inhloso nenqubo yalolucwaningo. Nginekeziwe ithuba lokufunda nokuqanda kahle ishidi lolwazi ebengilnikeziwe .

Ngiyazi ukuthi ukubamba iqhaza kwami kulolucwaningo ngikwenza ngoba ngithanda, ngingayeka noma inini ngaphandle kokuphucwa inzuzo enginelungelo layo.

Uma ngineminye imibuzo/ukukhathezeka okuphathelene nalolu cwaningo ngiyaqonda ukuthi ngingathintana nomcwaningi kulomniningwane engiyinikeziwe kwi shidi lolwazi.

Ngiyazi ukuthi ucwaningo engizolunikeza luzobekwa endaweni ephephile iminyaka emihlanu futhi lungase lusetshenziswe kolunye ucwaningo olungadingeka ngesikhathi esizayo. Ngiyazi ukuthi lolucwaningo luzovikela ubumina nengizokwethula (khuluma) kuyohlala kuyimfihlo, akukho okuyoshicilelwa.

Uma ngineminye imibuzo/ukukhathezeka mayelana namalungelo ami noma okuphathelene nalolu cwaningo ngiyaqonda ukuthi ngingathintana no:

Nksz Phume Ximba

### **HUMANITIES & SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS ADMINISTRATION**

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## **IMVUMO**

### **Ngiyavuma ukuba ingxenye yalolucwaningo**

---

**Isignesha yomhlanganyeli**

---

**Usuku**

---

**Isignesha yomcwaningi**

---

**Usuku**

## **Appendix 6: Audio Recording Consent**

### **Audio recording consent**

In order to be able to understand clearly what has been said in the interview, and to remember it, I would like to record the discussion on this small digital recorder. I will then listen to the recording and write it down word for word.

After this transcription has been made, I will then delete the recording on the digital recorder.

I assure you that your name will not be linked to the recording or the written information from the recording. I will give you a code name, using numbers, for example Interview 1.

Do you consent to the recording of this discussion? YES  NO

Please sign here \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

### **Imvumo yokuqopha inkulumo**

Ukuze ngiqondisise, ngikhumbule konke obekushiwo engxoxweni ngingathanda ukuyiqopha le ngxoxo kulomshini omuncane, ngizobe sengiyilalela lengxoxo, ngilobe konke okushiwo... igama negama.

Uma sekulotshiwe konke ngiyobe sengiwulahla umqopho.

Ngiyakuqinisekisa ukuthi igama lakho alisoze lasetshenziswa kukhona konke engiyokuthatha; okuqophiwe nokubhaliwe. Uyonikezwa isidlaliso esingahambisana nenombolo, isibonelo: Isikhulumi 1.

Uyavumelana nokuqoshwa kwalengxoxo? YEBO  CHA

Sayina Lapha \_\_\_\_\_ Usuku \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix 7: Jeffersonian Transcription Notation

Jeffersonian Transcription Notation includes the following symbols:

Symbol	Name	Use
[ text ]	Brackets	Indicates the start and end points of overlapping speech.
=	Equal Sign	Indicates the break and subsequent continuation of a single interrupted utterance.
(# of seconds)	Timed Pause	A number in parentheses indicates the time, in seconds, of a pause in speech.
(.)	Micropause	A brief pause, usually less than 0.2 seconds.
. or ↓	Period or Down Arrow	Indicates falling pitch.
? or ↑	Question Mark or Up Arrow	Indicates rising pitch.
,	Comma	Indicates a temporary rise or fall in intonation.
-	Hyphen	Indicates an abrupt halt or interruption in utterance.
>text<	Greater than / Less than symbols	Indicates that the enclosed speech was delivered more rapidly than usual for the speaker.
<text>	Less than / Greater than symbols	Indicates that the enclosed speech was delivered more slowly than usual for the speaker.
°	Degree symbol	Indicates whisper or reduced volume speech.
ALL CAPS	Capitalized text	Indicates shouted or increased volume speech.
<u>underline</u>	Underlined text	Indicates the speaker is emphasizing or stressing the speech.
:::	Colon(s)	Indicates prolongation of an utterance.
(hhh)		Audible exhalation
? or (.hhh)	High Dot	Audible inhalation
( text )	Parentheses	Speech which is unclear or in doubt in the transcript.
(( italic text ))	Double Parentheses	Annotation of non-verbal activity.