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Jamaican Kindergarten and First Grade Teachers' Expectations for Readiness Skills

Sadie Henrietta Harris-Mortley
Walden University

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Sadie Harris-Mortley

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Abstract

Jamaican Kindergarten and First Grade Teachers' Expectations for Readiness Skills

by

Sadie Harris-Mortley

MA, University of South Florida, 2002

B Ed, University of the West Indies, 2000

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Education

Walden University

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Abstract

Children's readiness to meet demands in Grade 1 is a common concern in most primary schools in Jamaica. Teachers have voiced their expectations that students should display a level of mastery in readiness skills so that they can be engaged in academic tasks when they transition from the kindergarten to Grade 1. The purpose of this qualitative case study, guided by social constructivism, was to explore kindergarten students' readiness for Grade 1 based on the perceptions of kindergarten teachers compared to Grade 1 teachers on readiness skills, instructional practices, and expectations of students' competency. The research questions were designed to explore how teachers prepare students with readiness skills, to what extent teachers believe incoming students are prepared, and to what extent students' mastery of readiness skills influence students' competencies for the formal curriculum at Grade 1. Ten face-to-face, semi-structured interviews were conducted, and documents from the standardized assessment of Grade One Individual Learning Profile were reviewed. Data were coded and analyzed for themes. The findings indicated that the teacher-pupil ratio needs to be addressed; students were exposed to readiness skills, but mastery in the requisite areas for literacy and numeracy needs greater focus; and there should be greater collaboration of stakeholders about the expectations for students. This research may influence positive social change by informing policymakers as they review, refine, and implement the expected standards for young children who transition to Grade 1.

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Dedication

I would like to dedicate this study to the late Dr. Darragh Callahan—my mentor, instructor, and friend—who was consistent, caring, and competent in her interactions with me and the other candidates that I met in this learning community at Walden University. Dr. Callahan passed away in April 2018. Although she did not live to see the end of this investigation, the contributions she made to my success in this doctoral journey is invaluable. I am most grateful for the telephone conversations, Skype interactions, and e-mails with Dr. Callahan that helped me to perfect my advancement as a scholarly practitioner and achieve approval at the proposal and oral defense stage.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Children in the 6-year-old age cohort begin formal education at Grade 1 in the Jamaican education system. Grade 1 teachers expect that students who enter their classrooms should have the skills and competencies to display mastery on teacher-made and standardized tests at that level despite the students' backgrounds or previous educational experience (Kinkead-Clark, 2015). However, children who transition into Grade 1 may not display the competencies and skills they need to carry out cognitive tasks, which Grade 1 teachers may blame on how the children were prepared in kindergarten (Kinkead-Clark, 2015). But teachers at the kindergarten and preschool levels work with young children to meet the competencies established by the Jamaican Early Childhood Commission (ECC), often expressing confidence that the children leaving their classrooms are ready for Grade 1. Further, children learn at different chronological and mental ages and stages of their development (Koçyiğit & Kayili, 2014). Children need scaffolding of their learning of skills and assistance in building on their experiences, which requires teachers to provide the environment and learning opportunities for students to engage in active learning and acquire readiness, problem-solving, and critical thinking skills.

This chapter contains an outline of the background to issues with Jamaican teachers' expectations for young children entering learning environments. It also provides the purpose of this study, research questions, and the conceptual framework. The nature of this study, definitions of related terms to this issue, assumptions, scope, and

delimitations, and limitations are also included. Finally, the chapter includes the significance of the study and a summary that transitions into Chapter 2.

Background of the Study

Children in the early childhood cohort in Jamaica are usually sent to four types of institutions: daycare centers, infant schools/infant departments, basic schools, and private kindergarten and preparatory schools. Daycare centers cater to infants and toddlers up to age 3, and basic schools, which are community-based, cater to children 3 to 6. Some of the individuals who facilitate learning in these two environments are classified as paraprofessionals, meaning they have only been exposed to short courses on childcare and development and education from National Council on Technical and Vocational Training (NCTVET). Infant schools/infant departments are owned and operated by the Government of Jamaica and are staffed with formal certified teachers who either have a diploma or bachelor's degree from the accredited teacher training institutions in Jamaica. Infant departments are connected to a primary, all age, or junior high school. Private institutions and preparatory schools have a mixture of trained teachers as well as individuals who have a certification from NCTVET. The interactions and experiences children receive at these institutions may be different; however, all the children are expected to transition into Grade 1 with mastery in the requisite readiness skills. Children entering Grade 1 are expected to demonstrate competencies in basic academic areas (Abu Taleb, 2013; Bowers, 2015; Kim, Al Otaiba, Folsom, Greulich, & Puranik, 2014).

Teacher preparation and curriculum should be guided by developmentally appropriate practices to prepare children to be ready for Grade 1 (Bas, 2016; Whitebook,

Gomby, Bellm, Sakai, & Kipnis, 2009). The expectations for children at Grade 1 in the Jamaican education system are embedded in teacher preparation programs as well as the teaching and learning activities (Kinkead-Clark, 2015). However, in Jamaica, there may be contrasting training and educational requirements for teachers at the preprimary and the Grade 1 levels. Some teachers at the preprimary level have limited training in pedagogies for the early childhood level or have a degree in primary education rather than early childhood education (Davies, 2004; The Education Ministry Transformation News Archive, 2017). The facilitators at the kindergarten level without formal training are referred to as paraprofessionals who are certified by the NCTVET Levels 1 and 2. Applicants are required to have a minimum qualification of a diploma or a degree in teaching from one of the island's teacher's colleges or universities (Ministry of Education and Youth Information [MEYI], ECC) to be eligible for a Grade 1 teaching position in Jamaican primary schools. Additionally, Grade 1 teachers' diplomas or degrees do not require certification in the specialization of early childhood education, which could result in a lack of understanding for the teacher about appropriate pedagogies that apply to children under the age of eight for the acquisition of readiness skills. The lack of specialized training can lead to teaching strategies that do not support active learning or developmentally appropriate practices.

The MEYI and the ECC—an agency of the MEYI in Jamaica—also expect preschool and kindergarten teachers to meet the minimum requirement of having certification in the NCTVET Level 2. This program has courses related to early childhood education and care as well as some standards to achieve. Some

teachers/paraprofessionals at the kindergarten or the preprimary grades do not have a diploma or degree in early childhood education but rather a minimal number of hours of training that covers content and competencies that addresses early childhood education and care. However, learning at the early childhood level provides information on the need for active interactions, where children are exposed to readiness skills and concepts. Through planned activities, the early childhood environment should be designed to lay the foundations for learning so that children can build their cognitive experiences.

Teachers who facilitate learning at the early childhood level should understand how children acquire readiness skills, the ways they display their knowledge, and competencies in given tasks (Koçyiğit & Kayili, 2014). Early childhood teachers at both the preprimary and primary levels must build on children's background experiences (Dewey, 1997) and scaffold them in the learning process (Vygotsky, 1978a, 1987) so that appropriate readiness skills can be fostered (Sahin, Sak, & Tuncer, 2013). Grade 1 teachers can use scaffolding through meaningful activities, engage in continuous assessments, and implement authentic feedback strategies to improve children's performance rather than have expectations that make judgments of what children should be mastering. Misguided expectations can negatively influence the academic progression of children in the learning environment (Coleman, Micko, & Cross, 2015). The curriculum should guide teachers so that they scaffold children to explore the content for increased knowledge and information as they progress in their developmental domains (Barnett et al., 2008; Brown, 2013). As children gain their confidence, they will

demonstrate greater competencies so assessments can reflect children's true potential (Brown, 2015; Kinkead-Clark, 2015; Steen, 2011).

The issue of readiness for children entering Grade 1 encompasses many concerns for Jamaican early childhood educators and stakeholders, who expect children to display mastery of skills when they enter Grade 1 (Kinkead-Clark, 2015). Grade 1 teachers expect children to show some level of mastery for the readiness skills when they enter Grade 1. At this level, standardized tests are administered to assess children's proficiency in areas of literacy, numeracy, and general knowledge. Teachers, however, have had concerns that some children do not display mastery in some of the essential areas expected for students entering Grade 1. There has been some research on the transition of children at the early childhood level in the Jamaican education system (Davies, 2015; Kinkead-Clark, 2015); however, enough information was not published on early childhood teachers' expectations for the Grade 1 children's readiness for the national curriculum. Thus, this study addresses the need for further research on Jamaican educational issues of both teachers and children at the early childhood level.

Problem Statement

Teachers and principals have expressed their concerns that the children who enter Grade 1 are not ready to begin the formal curriculum (Davies, 2015; Kinkead-Clark, 2015). The children who transition from infant departments, infant schools, basic schools, and private early childhood institutions to Grade 1 of the Jamaican education system are expected to be ready with the skills necessary to begin the national curriculum (Kinkead-Clark, 2015; Ministry of Education and Culture, 1999; New Standards Curriculum,

2014). However, teachers at the kindergarten level may not prepare children with the needed readiness skills for Grade 1 (Davies, 2004; Transformation news archive, 2017). Children need readiness skills to begin the required tasks at Grade 1 of the formal education system (Davies, 2015). But some children have limitations in acquiring mastery in readiness skills, so teachers and facilitators in the Grade 1 classrooms have numerous challenges when they engage children in planned activities in the teaching-learning process (Brown, 2013; Kinkead-Clark, 2015).

One of the Ministry of Education in Jamaica's policies mandates that all children who are entering Grade 1 (the age 6 cohort), the beginning of the formal education system, must complete a standardized test: Grade One Individual Learning Profile (GOILP). However, some students are not displaying the skills and knowledge for mastery of this standardized test. The GOILP, developed in Jamaica and assisted by Organization of American States (OAS) Symposium Transition (Venor, 2009), is the standardized test that is administered to evaluate children's readiness skills for formal education at the Grade 1 level of elementary/primary schools. The rubrics on the GOILP standardized assessments are explained as *proficient*, *developing*, *beginning*, or *not yet of* readiness skills and competencies. The assessment evaluates the performance level of the children, teachers, schools, and parishes in the country when they enter the formal level of the education system (Bourne, Baxter, Pryce, Francis, & Davis, 2015). The results of the assessments are then norm-referenced with other children in this age cohort across the island of Jamaica. Teachers in the Jamaican school system have access to general information about how their schools scored relative to readiness skills for the Grade 1

level, but the specific identifiers are not available to them. But being informed when children's performance does not meet the standards can help teachers address student issues (Bowers, 2015; Brown, & Weber, 2016). When children recognize that they are not performing as well as their peers, they feel inferior, anxious, or become discouraged (Kostelink, Gregory, Soderman, & Whiren, 2011). Limitations in competencies also impact learning activities and assessments (Brown, 2013; Deb, Garesion, Bhattacharyya, & Jiandong, 2015; Kinkead-Clark, 2015).

Another issue is that teachers in Jamaican classrooms expect that children who are entering the new learning environment should be prepared for the grade level so that they can attain mastery on the standardized assessments. However, there is a lack of communication about the expectations of readiness for the formal curriculum between kindergarten level and primary level teachers in the Jamaican school system (Davies, 2015; Kinkead-Clark, 2015). This communication gap about the expectations for readiness skills can affect children's academic performance (in literacy and numeracy tasks) as well as influence stakeholders' involvement in the education process. Further research must be conducted to add to and update information on issues related to the expectations stakeholders have for children who transition from kindergarten to Grade 1 in Jamaican classrooms.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore kindergarten students' readiness for Grade 1 based on kindergarten and Grade 1 teachers' views on readiness skills, instructional practices, and expectations of students' competency. I wanted a better

understanding of the gap that may exist between Grade 1 and kindergarten teachers' expectations for children's readiness when they transition into the formal education system in Jamaica. I reviewed the curriculum requirements, teaching and learning strategies for kindergarten children to acquire readiness skills, documents (curriculum, planned activities), assessments for the national curriculum, and the expectations of the Grade 1 teachers. The readiness skills that children display for Grade 1 affect their performance on standardized tests and other assessments at the Grade 1 level (Brown, 2013; Kinkead-Clark, 2015), especially in Jamaican schools. Readiness skills are important for children in this age cohort so that when they are exposed to the formal curriculum (Brown, 2015; Brown & Pickard, 2014; Kinkead-Clark, 2015), they can display the competencies needed for active learning.

Research Questions

Research Question 1: How do kindergarten teachers prepare students with the readiness skills needed for Grade 1?

Research Question 2: To what extent do Grade 1 teachers believe incoming students are prepared to meet the demands of the Grade 1 curriculum?

Research Question 3: To what extent do students' mastery of readiness skills influence teachers' expectations of students' competencies for the formal curriculum at Grade 1?

Conceptual Framework

The social constructivism theory was the framework for this research, which highlights how children construct meaning while engaged in activities that relate to their

previous experiences (Vygotsky, 1987). I used the framework to explore teachers' expectations for children's readiness skills and the competencies that they should acquire to begin the national curriculum at the Grade 1 level in Jamaica. Additionally, the cognitive constructivist theory of learning is a lens to view concepts of child development in early childhood years (Piaget & Cook, 1952). The theory emphasizes the importance of facilitators of learning, preparing the environment so that children can construct meaningful knowledge (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Dewey, 1997; Rosa & Tudge, 2013). For this research, these theoretical views contributed to the conceptual framework of constructivism.

As a part of the constructivist framework, Vygotsky (1987) introduced the concept of the zone of proximal development for learners, which refers to what the child can do with assistance today and what he or she will be able to do on his or her own for future tasks. At the lower end of the zone, a child can do something independently, and at the top of the zone the child can do something with the assistance of a more competent other (Vygotsky, 1987). Vygotsky also believed that play promotes holistic development whereby children in the early childhood cohort best develop in all domains of learning. When a child is in his or her zone of proximal development, it is through play that a more able peer or adult can best support that child to reach upper levels of their zone (Vygotsky, 1987). The importance of play and the ideas of the zone of proximal development at the early childhood level are components for understanding what appropriate practices look like in the first-grade, and kindergarten levels.

Vygotsky's (1987) views of social constructivism theory that embraced the constructivist approach to teaching and learning were used as the framework for this study. Through this process, I gained insight from the experiences, beliefs, and thoughts of the participants. The research questions guided by the purpose of this study assisted me in gathering data and interpret the findings so that new information can be added to existing knowledge. The interpretations were guided by the social constructivist conceptual framework, which will be further described in Chapter 2.

Nature of the Study

I used a qualitative case study design to examine the expectations of five kindergarten teachers and five Grade 1 teachers within the Jamaican education system who are guided by the MEYI. The study design allowed for more significant analysis of how teachers prepare students with readiness skills, observation of documents for curriculum delivery, and evaluation of expectations for supporting Jamaican early childhood students for the formal curriculum at Grade 1. Interviews were conducted with 10 participants, and the documents with the results of the Grade 1 assessment (GOILP) from the MEYI were analyzed. In analyzing the teachers' expectations of children's readiness for the national curriculum, data were collected and analyzed from questionnaires, interviews, audio recordings, journals, and documents from the Ministry of Education in Jamaica. Patterns and themes emerged from the conversations about teachers' expectations for children's readiness for the national curriculum were identified and noted. Data were analyzed and are presented in tables and descriptive form (Creswell, 2012; Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014)

Definition of Terms

Basic schools: Community schools catering to the holistic needs of children 3 to 6 years old. They are called *basic* because they identify practices that work and seek to make them available to every child. Additionally, they prioritize language and a core of essential knowledge. The overarching goal of the basic school is to strengthen elementary education by bringing together key components of quality education (The Jamaican Early Childhood Curriculum Guide for Children, Four and Five, 2009).

Early childhood curriculum: A planned document with pedagogical guidelines outlining the processes through which young children can achieve desired outcomes through experiential learning, open involvement, play-based programming, adult and peer interaction, and enriched learning environments (Dougherty, 201 National Association for the Education of Young Children [NAEYC], 2012)

First-grade children/Grade 1: The point where children have completed the kindergarten readiness program and begin the formal education system. The child is normally 6 years old when entering Grade 1 (California Department of Education, Child Development Division, 2010).

Formal education system: Refers to the curriculum and school system that begins in Grade 1/first grade (National Association for the Education of Young Children [NAEYC], 2012)

Infant schools: Government-owned and operated institutions with trained teachers (who hold a diploma or degree in teacher education from one of the Island's teachers'

colleges) cater to the holistic development for four and 5-year-olds (in the Jamaican education system; <https://moey.gov.jm/about>).

Kindergarten: A school or class that prepares children for first grade. A child in Kindergarten is typically 3 to 6 years-old. (This is the requirement for children entering the primary/elementary institutions in Jamaican early childhood education; Bredekamp & Copple, 1997; NAEYC, 2012).

Preprimary education: The initial stage of organized instruction, designed to introduce young children to a school-type environment. (“The Jamaica Early Childhood Curriculum Guide for Children, Birth to Three,” 2009; “The Jamaica Early Childhood Curriculum Guide for Children, Four and Five,” 2009). Preprimary and kindergarten will be used interchangeably in this study to refer to children in learning environments before the primary/elementary level

Readiness: In this study, *readiness* refers to multiple levels:

- *School readiness* is about children, families, early environments, schools, and communities (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997; NAEYC, 2012). Each child enters school ready to engage in and benefit from early learning experiences that best promote the child’s success (Kentucky Department of Education, 2017).
- *Child readiness* includes all areas of children’s maturity to develop physical, cognitive, social, and emotional competencies (California Preschool Program Guidelines, 2015).
- *A child’s readiness for school* should be measured and addressed across five distinct but connected domains: physical well-being and motor development;

social and emotional development; approaches to learning; language development; cognition and general knowledge (“Five Domains of School Readiness, Indiana Department of Education,” 2010).

Assumptions

An assumption in this study was that teachers would respond honestly to the interview questions. I ensured confidentiality with all the interviewees’ responses and documented how the participants felt and reassured them to speak openly. The respondents were also assured that their information would not be used to judge them or their schools and the data would be anonymous.

Scope and Delimitations

Jamaican early childhood institutions are governed by the ECC and are feeder schools for primary/elementary schools. The MEYI provides oversight and guidance for teacher qualifications at the pre-primary and elementary levels and pays their compensation. In this study, two primary and infant schools were included that facilitate the transition from the kindergarten level to the Grade 1 level and enroll students from basic schools, infant schools/departments, and preparatory early childhood institutions for Grade 1. The sample included five Grade 1 teachers (that received the children), and five kindergarten teachers who prepared the children for Grade 1 within this system. These schools were chosen because they have the infant/kindergarten department at the same location, are subject to the same source of guidelines, and fall within the realm of public education. Children transition from the infant department into the Grade 1 level at the

same site. Children in kindergarten and the Grade 1 level fall within the early childhood population, which was the focus of this study.

Limitations

One limitation of this study is that only schools from Jamaica's public urban school system were used, limiting generalizability and transferability. The face-to-face interviews, field notes, journals, and observation of documents could have more scope if another sample size and method were used to collect the data. However, the findings can be used to inform the practice of other teachers at the early childhood level in the larger education system in Jamaica as well as on a more global level where there may be different expectations within one system (the policies and practices of the private institutions are sometimes different from those in the government-owned institutions).

Significance of the Study

This research may provide information that could be used by policymakers, curriculum developers, and stakeholders about kindergarten and Grade 1 teachers' understanding of developmentally appropriate practices for children as they acquire knowledge. As a result of this study, teachers could be better informed about competencies children display at the kindergarten and the Grade 1 level. This study will also add to research about teachers' construction of knowledge on appropriate learning expectations for children. The findings may also help teachers arrange their environment to support a smoother transition for children from kindergarten to Grade 1. This environment can complement the child's active learning style as well as support the continuous acquisition of readiness skills and knowledge in the process of teaching and

learning (Brown, 2013; Curby, Rimm-Kaufman, & Ponitz, 2009). This research will inform teachers and other stakeholders about potential gaps in the education, preparation, and training requirements currently in place, which may interfere with complementary expectations.

Summary

In the Jamaican education system, infant department/kindergarten teachers are expected to prepare young children with readiness skills to begin the formal curriculum at Grade 1. Readiness skills enable, empower, and equip young children with knowledge and experiences so that they will demonstrate mastery of age-appropriate standards and competencies. Grade 1 teachers expect that children should transition with full mastery of skills and concepts, not leaving room for the children whose assessments show that they attain near mastery, non-mastery, or children with special needs. Therefore, I conducted this study to explore teachers' perceptions on readiness skills and expectations for competencies. This chapter provided a background on the study, the framework, the purpose, and the nature of the study.

Chapter 2 contains the literature review, which includes the theoretical foundations of children acquiring readiness skills as they transition to the next level of the education system; the importance of readiness skills for the formal curriculum; and expectations for children's academic performance. Further, I address factors that affect readiness, and the assessments given to young children. I also highlight the expectations that early childhood teachers have for children who enter the formal education system at Grade 1 in the Jamaican education system.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore kindergarten students' readiness for Grade 1 based on teacher perceptions of readiness skills, instructional practices, and expectations of students' competency. The results show the factors that affect readiness when children transition from the kindergarten to Grade 1 such as the influence of education stakeholders' expectations for children's readiness on academic performance. In this chapter, the theoretical foundations for readiness and assessment for young children, the importance of readiness skills and school readiness for the formal curriculum, and teachers' expectations for readiness skills are presented. It is also important to address assessments for young children as well as teachers' expectations for assessments and children's competence level when they enter Grade 1. I also highlight the teachers' colleges could assist classroom teachers to scaffold children with readiness skills as they transition from the kindergarten level to the primary/elementary level.

Literature Search Strategy

In this chapter, the review of the literature supported the purpose of this qualitative case study to explore kindergarten students' readiness for Grade 1 based on teachers' perceptions. I searched for information from a variety of literature in databases that included Walden University Library multidisciplinary databases; Sage, ProQuest, ERIC, and ScienceDirect; and Walden's qualitative research resources. I also used some research textbooks and the Internet. The NAEYC Website was used to access information that highlighted relevant literature about children that supports the problem to be

investigated. Key search terms included *readiness, readiness skills, and first-grade; readiness and teacher expectations; teacher collaboration, readiness and assessments; factors that influence as well as promote readiness; teacher quality and students' performance; third space theory, developmental milestones and children in the first-grade; the profile of the five-year-old and six-year-old; expectations of stakeholders for children at the Grade 1 level; and transition from kindergarten to Grade 1/first-grade.*

The research embraced constructivist learning theories.

Conceptual Framework

I used the theory of social constructivism by Vygotsky (1978b), Piaget (1929), and Piaget & Cook, (1952) as the conceptual framework because they observed and presented information about how children construct understanding and knowledge of their experiences, which is essential for the acquisition of readiness skills for formal learning. According to Piaget and Vygotsky's social constructivism, each learner individually and socially constructs meanings as he or she learns (Ageeva, 2016; Kretchmar, 2015; Liu, & Chen, 2010). Vygotsky and Piaget outlined that constructivist learning is not only understanding the true nature of things but rather a personal and the social construction of meaning (Kretchmar, 2015; Liu & Chen, 2010; Tuddenham, 1997a; Tuddenham, 1997b). As teachers facilitate constructivist teaching and learning practices, it is important to scaffold children to internalize, transform, and reshape their understandings with new information (Bas, 2016; Brooks & Brooks, 2001; Liu & Chen, 2010). Additionally, according to cultural space theory, learning takes precedence over

teaching, and cultural experiences of the learner influence knowledge, skills, and attitudes that are needed for the future (Bhabha, 1994).

Looking further into the importance of teaching and student learning, Piaget (1929) and Piaget and Cook (1952) believed that humans construct meaning from their interactions with other individuals as well as their environment. Piaget suggested that teachers should encourage learners to focus on the learning processes rather than the product as well as (a) use methods that require truths through discovery or reconstruction; (b) engage collaboration so students learn from each other and value social interactions; (c) provide useful problems that can create disequilibrium for the child; and (d) evaluate age appropriateness and children's levels so that tasks fit children's needs (Tuddenham, 1997a; Tuddenham 1997b). Further, experiences and maturation provide a foundation for children to develop new structures in the learning process (Dewey, 1938, 1997; Piaget & Cook, 1952). Individuals learn from real-life experiences, and the learning environment should be created so that children can construct meanings from mental processes (Dewey, 1938, 1997). Other philosophers, sociologists, and educators who added their views and perceptions to constructivist learning are Bruner (1966) and Ausubel (1968).

Teachers Who Support Constructivism in Early Childhood Learning Environment

First-grade teachers who support constructivism are not focused on assessing children to find out if they have attained mastery in all the requisite skills for this level (Kretchmar, 2015). In teaching and learning environments, assessments should not be the focus for children's academic performance, which requires different teacher expectations (Curby et al., 2009). Ongoing assessment should be done in alternative ways to promote

success as children progress from one level to the next (Bohlmann & Weinstein, 2013; Bowers, 2015). Constructivist teachers' classrooms are created to motivate and promote active learning where teachers act as facilitators, coaches, and motivators as children construct meanings and increase their knowledge and understandings from their interaction (Day, Conner, & McClelland, 2015; Fairbairn, 2013). *What, when, and how* children should learn helps facilitators have a better understanding of their expressions (Katz, 2012). Children who are engaged in a constructivist classroom may improve social and communication skills as questions are asked and answers are found (Bas, 2016). Learners should be facilitated, scaffolded, and guided through effective questioning and supported so that clarifications of concepts and information can be promoted (Dewey 1938, 1997; Piaget & Cook, 1952; Vygotsky, 1987).

It is also important to promote collaboration among learners with emphasis on exchanged ideas such as children's make-believe play (Berk & Winsler, 1995; Vygotsky, 1978a). Cognition is socially constructed and shared with language, so collaboration is an important component for a child-centered approach to teaching and learning at the early childhood level (Berk & Winsler, 1995). Children's language, their social context, and culture play a significant role for learners to communicate, build on their experiences, and understand reality as they construct meaning in their interactions that positively impact children's cognitive development (Ageeva, 2016). Children learn from their interactions, which are structured within a real-life context that allows children to own their understanding and improve their intelligence (Bhabha, 1994; Idrus, 2015; Levine, 2010). From their experiences, children are more likely to retain knowledge and skills

that they can transfer as they explore their world. It is important to have collaborative interactions, cooperative teaching, and learning methods so that individuals will contribute as well as build their knowledge in groups, and teamwork will be enhanced in the learning process (Vygotsky, 1978b, 1987).

Literature Review Related to Topic

Transitioning to the Primary Level of the Education System

According to Piaget (1929) and Piaget & Cook (1952), children who are entering the primary grades are in the preoperational stage. Children in the 3-6 age cohort have the preoperational capacity to think and learn, dictating activities and interactions within cognitive environments (Gestwicki, 2013). At this stage, children use their senses to gain information from the environment, so teachers should facilitate their interactions and motivate them to acquire skills, knowledge, and intelligence that prepares them for future learning. Additionally, learning and language are closely linked, as they allow children to develop necessary communication skills (Gestwicki, 2013; Kim et al., 2014). To prepare students for school and life, it is important to address physical health, socio-emotional development, approaches to learning, language and literacy, and cognitive and general learning (Doyle et al., 2010). Heckman (as cited in Doyle et al., 2010) highlighted that “Children who are developed well at the earlier stages and are ready at the start of school are in the position to elicit interactions and experiences that accelerate their subsequent development, and facilitate their academic achievement” (p. 2).

A child’s readiness to the next level in school is considered within the child’s chronological age (Brown & Pickard, 2014; Koçyiğit & Kayili, 2014). The child’s mental

age also plays a significant role in assessing the child's and abilities in the learning environment. When a child is examined through formal assessments, teachers can make evaluations to determine the child's social and emotional development, fine and gross motor skills, cognitive abilities, language usage, a desire for learning, and knowledge that envelop the skills, and concepts needed (Koçyiğit & Kayili, 2014). When children in the 6-year-old age cohort are assessed for readiness skills, they should have some competencies to transition to the next level (Brown & Pickard, 2014; Minnott & Leo-Rhynie, 2015). However, teachers have their own expectations on what is necessary for children's social and emotional competencies (Betawi, 2013; Bohlmann & Weinstein, 2013)

In some early childhood programs, teachers who facilitate children's learning do not have the requisite training so they can employ pedagogical strategies in early childhood education care and development. Training in developmentally appropriate practices can help educators address children's level of mastery on assessments at the Grade 1 level (Kinkead-Clark, 2015; NAEYC, 2012). Developmentally appropriate practices should guide the teacher's preparation, delivery of content in the teaching, and learning process so that children can gain the requisite skills to complete cognitive tasks when they enter the formal education system at Grade 1 (Bas, 2016; Whitebook et al., 2009). High-quality learning environments are also a determining factor toward bridging the achievement gap between children living in poverty and their peers (Brown, 2013, 2015; Brown & Pickard, 2014; Clarke, 2016; Koçyiğit & Kayili, 2014; Kim et al., 2014; Kinkead-Clark, 2015; Kotaman, 2014; Pantaleo, 2016; Sahin et al., 2013). Research

shows that children who do not transition successfully to kindergarten and primary school will display their limitations in assessments (Betawi, 2013; Steen, 2011). Children who enter Grade1 without mastery of readiness skills will have challenges as they try to meet the expectations of the teachers, who welcome them to begin the formal teaching and learning requirements at that level (Brown, 2015; Kinkead-Clark, 2015; Minnott & Leo-Rhynie, 2015).

Teachers' Knowledge about Children's Transition

It is important for teachers in Grade1 learning environments to have adequate knowledge about the holistic development of children in that age cohort so that they can address students' needs. As children are exposed to cognitive activities to construct knowledge, there is sometimes the assumption that teachers and children form mutual relationships that positively influence holistic development (Pandey & Mishra, 2014). However, the teacher's self-perception of children's ability could influence how the teacher interacts with children as well as how they assess the students (Bohlmann & Weinstein, 2013). It is important for teachers to choose the best strategies to scaffold children in the learning environment while ensuring that they have an awareness of how children's groups affect areas of individual variations and differences and differences as they acquire cognitive skills (Fairbairn, 2013; Jones & Reynolds, 2015; Morrison, 2015).

Young children should attain readiness skills so that they can be equipped for the most important stage in their life—the primary/elementary period where formal learning begins (Brown & Pickard, 2014; Koçyiğit & Kayili, 2014; Kotaman, 2014). Early education provides a range of experiences that enrich children's understanding and assist

them to comprehend and construct meaning to the content in books (Carlsson-Paige, McLaughlin, & Almon, 2015, p. 5). Children who enter the education system without the knowledge, skills, and competencies in readiness tend to struggle with academic problems or personal issues; they depend on the system and teachers to motivate them to advance academically (Koçyiğit & Kayili, 2014; Kotaman, 2014; Pears et al., 2014). School readiness also has an important role in young children's educational and personal achievements as they strive for academic excellence (Kotaman, 2014). School readiness might serve as a precursor for the acquisition of skills, which build on the foundation from kindergarten (Sparapani et al., 2016). Considering this, children should have self-regulation as well as the competencies and skills for educational success and holistic development (Sparapani, et al., 2016). The child is ready for school when his or her level of development is ready (Brown & Pickard, 2014).

Some psychophysiological factors that are determinants of school readiness for 6-year-olds include “selectivity of voluntary attention, general work capacity, physical maturity, and sensorimotor coordination of voluntary movement” (Krivolapchuk & Chernova, 2012, p. 264). Further, readiness can be traced to the National Educational Goals, which contain a declaration of a national priority for all children to enter school “ready to learn” (Hatcher, Nuner, & Paulsel, 2012, p. 2). Teachers' beliefs about kindergarten readiness have also influenced their decisions about kindergarten enrollment (Hatcher et al., 2012). These beliefs also influence their choices of curricula and their overall images of children attending both preschools and kindergarten. Young children, however, need to be exposed to hands-on activities so that they can acquire the requisite

readiness skills for transition to the next level of the education system. Readiness skills include perceptual skills (auditory and visual), motor skills, language skills, listening skills, number knowledge, general knowledge, and a desire to read (Kinkead-Clark, 2015; NAEYC, 2012). Preschool and infant/kindergarten/basic school teachers can provide the environment and opportunities for children to attain mastery in the core skills areas, so that they will be prepared to enter the formal education system at Grade 1. Children also need time to assist them with a smooth transition to the first grade (Sahin et al., 2013; Steen, 2011).

Young children's experiences and interactions build their cognition; giving young children varied opportunities to engage in meaningful activities so that they can acquire skills, concepts, and attitude for their transition to the next level of the education system (Piaget, 1929; Piaget & Cook, 1952; Vygotsky, 1987). For children to acquire mastery in cognitive tasks, they need an ability to develop and understand social skills in their actions and be able to monitor how they act during their interactions to attain competencies in the learning environment (Abry, Latham, Bassok, & LoCasale-Couch, 2015). In attaining competencies children's cultural background and experiences also play a significant role (Katz, 2012; Rice, 2014). Thus, it is important to have culturally relevant pedagogy for children as teachers assist them to combine their background experiences as they acquire knowledge (Ladson-Billings, 2014).

Children may also receive exposure to brainstorming, attribute listing, and forced relationships to develop their critical thinking and creative skills so that they can be engaged in active learning (Michael, 2014). Teachers can facilitate and promote effective

relationships through positive social skills in their interactions with their peers. Teachers can engage young children in constructive play so that they will interact, relate, and touch their lives in an impactful way (Day et al., 2015; Kim et al., 2014). Play constitutes a bridge between the social world and the acquisition of social skills (Day et al., 2015; Kim et al., 2014). Pretend play affects thinking in three ways: (a) reading other intentions, (b) social referencing, and (c) distinguishing between real and imaginary events (Gordon & Williams Browne, 2016). Through play young children can develop deductive reasoning for cognitive clarity (Jones & Reynolds, 2015; Morrison, 2015; Rice, 2014) and begin to think of others before they can think alone (Vygotsky, 1978a, 1987). Print-rich play environment also contributes significantly to emerging reading and writing activity (Oncu & Unluer, 2015).

Though certain teaching practices help children transition better, teachers and program directors need to adhere to Bredekamp and Copple, (1997), and NAEYC (2012) statements about the standards for developmentally appropriate curriculum, assessment, and staff so that children can attain all the benefits of holistic development to have a smooth transition into the formal education system. However, some children need intervention programs so that they can be ready for their transition from infant/kindergarten to first grade (Bracken & Panter, 2009; Pears et al., 2014). The intervention programs such as Head Start and special needs programs can be recommended for children who have issues in the learning environment. Head Start teachers also embrace the importance of cultural relevance as they prepare children with readiness skills to transition to the next level of the education system because children's

culture and background influence acquisition of knowledge and skills (Gichuru, Riley, Robertson, & Park, 2015). Early Head Start's research findings state that the benefits of such interventions include better vocabulary expressions and improved cognitive and socio-emotional competencies (Morrison, 2015). The results reflect lasting positive effects for children having, improved parental involvement, and improved relationships with partners and stakeholders (Bracken & Panter, 2009; Gichuru et al., 2015; Gordon, & Williams Browne, 2016; Morrison, 2015; Pears et al., 2014).

Teacher Expectations for Readiness Skills

Readiness is grounded in a critical period during early childhood development when children learn the main concepts and skills (Brown & Pickard, 2014). Pantaleo (2016) and Brown (2015) stated that a display of experience, attitude, competence, planning, implementation, and delivery, assessments of the curriculum, and teacher's feedback would influence children's acquisition of requisite skills, and performance in the teaching and learning environment. It is imperative that teachers build on children's background experiences (Dewey, 1938; Dewey, 1997), scaffold them in the learning process (Vygotsky, 1987), so that the readiness skills can be acquired. The skills children acquire in the educative process will be enriched, and sustained as they transition to the next level (Sahin et al., 2013). Steen (2011) emphasized his views that teachers should devote the first weeks of the school year to getting to know each child, their family, and the child's competencies so that they can individualize their expectation. However, the child's strengths, weaknesses, as well as his or her potential, can be identified as he/she transitions to the first-grade. The focus would then be on strengthening the child's

acquisition of knowledge, and competencies (Day, et al., 2015; Fairbairn, 2013; Firmender, Gavin, & McCoach, 2014; Katz, 2012), reducing teachers' expectation of children to show mastery when they are given standardized tests. Pandey and Mishra (2014 p.31) concurred that children who advance by slow deliberations tend to make fewer errors and portray a better understanding of skills, knowledge, and intelligence. While their peers who respond too quickly with a display of skills tend to make many mistakes (Pandey & Mishra, 2014 p.31). Abu Taleb (2013 p. 1879) further highlighted that teacher expectations of children's readiness could also have an influence on the teaching and learning process as well as academic performance, and successes at the kindergarten level.

Improving the Quality of Teachers that Facilitate Learning for Young Children

Teachers with high-quality training usually encourage developmentally appropriate pedagogies that are needed to enhance teaching, and learning environments (Abu Taleb, 2013; Bas, 2016; Day et al., 2015; Jechura, Wooldridge, Bertelsen, & Mayers, 2016) for children in the early childhood cohort to positively impact their success in school. Morrison (2015) agreed that to improve the quality of teachers, with adequate training, program directors/owners should advocate for developmentally appropriate practices that positively influence, and promote active learning. Hyson, Horn, and Winston (2012) also agreed that it is of critical importance that individuals that are trained in early childhood education be exposed to adequate knowledge of child development so that they will understand how to implement appropriate teaching and learning strategies. Morrison (2015) further stated that programs should safeguard high-

quality standards by ensuring that teachers have specialized training and preparation to execute effective pedagogy. The teachers will be engaged in relevant planning and curriculum implementation, with ongoing assessments that align with children's developmental stage, so that each child can actively engage in the learning activities to achieve his/her desired outcome. Carlsson-Paige et al. (2015) agreed that if schools do not receive the same resources, quality teachers, and funding then, there will always be a disparity in educational offerings that will continue to explain the gap in academic success for some children. Morrison (2015) concurred with Montessori's beliefs that if teachers should prepare learning environments that are stimulating, informative and educational, making children the center of the teaching and learning process, then teachers should be adequately trained. Teachers should embrace their role to prepare the environment, follow children's interests and needs, and facilitate learning through encouragement (Brown, & Pickard, 2014; Day et al., 2015; Salo, Uibu, Ugaste, & Rasku-Puttonen, 2015). Teachers should provide materials and activities, observe, document, cater to the developmental stage, work collaboratively with colleagues, and maintain regular communication with parents (Morrison, 2015). Rice (2014) and Carlsson-Paige et al. (2015) also stated that in play-based kindergarten and pre-school programs, teachers intentionally expose children to a print-rich environment that promote oral language, so that children can have real-life experiences. Morrison (2015) cited Magnessio & Davis (210) that children deserve to have teachers that are equipped with appropriate pedagogies so that they can realize their full potential and attain academic success). Although, teachers who facilitate children in the early childhood focus on the objective,

methods, and strategies to achieve curriculum goals; some children are negatively influenced, as issues of non-mastery of skills, and low competencies for requisite knowledge arise, when they transition from one level of the education system to the next. The issues of children not being ready for the next level arises, as teachers expect them to enter the first-grade with basic knowledge, skills, and competencies to begin the formal curriculum. Factors Affecting Readiness for Young Children that Transition to the Next Level (Koçyiğit & Kayili, 2014).

Sahin, et al. (2013, p. 1709) outlined the need for consistency and persistence between the kindergarten and Grade 1 programs so that the transition process can be smooth and meaningful for the children. Teachers will have shared knowledge, goals, as well as aspirations for children as they scaffold them into active learning in supportive classrooms (Abry et al., 2015; Rice, 2014). Sahin, et al. (2013) also outlined that the setting, and learning environment may be different in the kindergarten and Grade 1 classrooms. Pears et al. (2014, p. 433) outlined that as children transition, they are in the process of reorganizing their competencies which when assessed may set the trajectory for later school performances. There are developmental, self-regulatory, and teaching and learning environments that can be factors that impact a display of skills when children are assessed for readiness skills (Pears et al., 2014). Koçyiğit and Kayili (2014) and Kostelink, et al. (2011) highlighted some factors that affect readiness, and the transition to primary school as physical, cognitive, emotional, and social factors.

Children can also have limitations in communication using language, comprehension, reasoning, problem-solving, critical thinking, and intelligence as they try

to adjust to their new learning environment in Grade 1. Teachers should be informed about the physical, social, emotional, and cognitive factors so that they can target, and assist children to improve the dimensions in the learning process (Kim et al., 2014 ; Kostelink, et al., 2011; Magnessio & Davis, 2010). Salo et al., 2015; Abry et al., 2015; Brown, and Pickard, (2014) concurred that teachers' beliefs can strongly influence new teaching-learning practices for the learner's cognitive, and social development.

Children's background experiences influence the knowledge, and intelligence they require in the first year of formal learning. These experiences will affect their academic competencies as they transition upwards in the education system (Dewey, 1938; Dewey, 1997; Koçyiğit & Kayili, 2014). Although children need these competencies, Brown (2015) in his article cited Hatcher et al. (2012) that learning environments for young children should not focus mainly on attaining academic skills that ignore children's individual, social, cultural, and language needs. Teachers should build on the experiences as well as scaffold the child to be actively engaged in developing skills, so that they can acquire knowledge, and gain confidence in displaying his/her competencies. Teachers should also have positive relationships with children in their class by accepting the children, motivating their efforts, encourage peer relationships, and celebrating their academic achievements (Feeney, Christensen, Nolte, & Moravcik, 2012; Košir & Tement, 2014; Kostelink, et al., 2011).

Stakeholders Expectations for Children's Readiness for Formal Learning

Stakeholders in education expect teachers to use whatever strategy, technique, approach, and skills while interacting with children in the preschool years so that when

they enter the formal education system, they will display academic strengths, and competence. This interaction will help children attain desired results when they are assessed for a smooth transition to advance at the next level of the education system. Guardino and Fullerton (2014) highlighted that past studies established the fact that well-managed transitions tend to increase the potential for greater academic learning. Teachers are expected to design their classrooms to improve their practice so that positive connections can be made between children's academic performance, and their level of readiness, and competencies so that they can master assessment prepared by stakeholders. Sahin et al. (2013) and Fairbairn (2013) concurred that school readiness consists of children's holistic development. Children's transition from kindergarten to Grade 1 should be smooth to encourage academic success.

Assessments for Young Children

At the beginning of each school year, stakeholders of education assess children in kindergarten; some of this assessment includes Ohio's Early Learning and Developmental Standards, Mississippi Early Learning Standard for Classrooms Serving Four-year-olds, and Maryland State Kindergarten Assessment. Assessment for kindergarten children mainly includes four areas of early learning: Social Foundations, Mathematics, Language and Literacy Development, Physical well-being and motor development. The Ministry of Education in Jamaica and the Board of Education in the United States and other countries all over the world, create standardized tests, and assessments for young children. In the Jamaican education system, the GOILP replaced the Grade One Readiness Inventory (GORI) in 2008. The GOILP was developed to assist

the teacher in Grade 1 to determine the academic level at which children enter Grade 1. The GOILP requires individual, small group, and large group administration (Venor, 2009). There has also been a recent introduction of an alternate assessment for four-year-olds by the MEYI and ECC in May, 2016. Formative and summative assessments are necessary for the teaching and learning environment so that informed decisions can be made to prepare for children's learning, improve their skills and competencies while they are learning, and give feedback so that children, parents, teachers, and the school can be promoted for academic performances. Hatcher et al. (2012) agreed that early childhood educators continually develop formal and informal assessment tools to evaluate readiness so that, children can demonstrate academic competencies that will compete with their peers worldwide. Research shows that the economic effect is of major importance to policymakers and economists the advancement of the education of the nation's children. There is heightened interest from stakeholders and policymakers in education about children's competencies as they receive awareness that the success or failure of individuals' impact on economic development. Feeney and Freeman (2014), and Bowers (2015) supported the importance of assessing children's transition to identify children's progress monitor those who are at risk, as well as those who need an intervention program. Feeney and Freeman (2014) stated the ethical conduct of NAEYC for assessments at the kindergarten and highlighted the dilemma of the influence of standardized testing for children in the early childhood cohort. Some children will not display their potential on standardized tests; however, authentic assessments would give

better details of what children can do, rather than for accountability of the school/institution (Feeney et al., 2012; Feeney & Freeman, 2014; Huba & Freed, 2000).

Bagnato, McLean, Macy, and Neisworth (2011), Firmender et al. (2014) and Bas (2016) highlighted the importance of identifying instructional targets so that authentic assessments can be realistic, and valid for young children. Bagnato et al. (2011) further outlined five major developments for assessments presented from research since 1986. These methodologies are based on practice-based evidence (PBE) and professional standards for developmentally appropriate practices in early childhood environments. The five major developments are (a) authentic assessments, (b) curriculum-based assessments, (c) functional content and objectives; (d) curriculum aligned with early standards and outcomes, and (e) individually designed targets for instruction in an inclusive and natural environment (Bagnato et al., 2011). Since it is essential to address the unique need of each child, an awareness of the child's competencies in academic tasks is required. Educators/teachers should ensure that each child is engaged in realistic assessments where they are provided with access to the content, resources, and opportunities to achieve the skills and competencies for the first-grade. Authentic assessments will reduce teacher expectations for what children should take into the learning environment, allowing more focus on what the child learns when he/she explores, investigates, and discover in the learning environment.

Bredenkamp and Copple (1997) outlined NAEYC's position statement for the need to, make ethical, appropriate, valid, and reliable assessment a central part of all early childhood programs. The rationale for assessing children will be to identify children's

strengths, weaknesses, and limitations so that positive feedback can be given to children, parents, teachers, stakeholders, and policy-makers. This feedback will then address issues, and challenges that will influence the holistic development of all children.

NAEYC's position statement further states that assessments help teachers/ developmental officers, and other professionals understand how children learn and their knowledge, and competencies; so that their knowledge, and intellectual proficiencies can improve the settings, provide resources, cater to children who have challenges, and special needs. Assessments for children should be conducted in authentic situations to reflect the performance, and each child's competencies can be noted.

Standardized assessments form the background to the evaluations for children's performance, and teacher's competencies speak volumes in the requisites children need to progress to the next level of the education system (Kinkead-Clark, 2015). Davies (2015) stated that early childhood assessments should include a more holistic, and sustained approach so that desired outcomes can be realized. Feeney and Freeman (2014) purported that teachers should develop an awareness of the importance of appropriate assessments so that they can attest to the consequences of inappropriate assessments for young children. Bagnato et al. (2011) agreed that PBE supported as well as promoted practices, and are the linkage among assessment, instruction, and progress evaluation that are critical issues for future policy, practice, and research. Feeney and Freeman (2014) further stated that teachers should resist the temptation to teach test-taking skills; preparing children with the appropriate content, skills, and knowledge that will help them with competencies in standards-driven assessments at the first-grade. If, however,

children do not master the assessments, children, teachers, and schools are labeled as non-performing. Teachers, and facilitators of learning should advocate for appropriate assessment strategies, and proper feedback with the results, so that children can benefit from the results (see Bas, 2016; Bowers, 2015; Clarke, 2016; Feeney & Freeman, 2014).

Teacher Expectations for Assessments

Teachers at the next level of each grade have higher expectations for children to achieve academic competencies. Abu Taleb (2013), Kim et al. (2014), and Bowers (2015) supported the thoughts that teachers expect children to have fluency in, fine and gross motor skills, recognition of letters, numerals, shapes, color, and sizes. First-grade teachers expect children to show mastery of these skills when they enter Grade 1. When given standardized tests; however, some children do not display mastery in some basic areas. There are, however, some contributing factors that impede as well as promote children's readiness and a smooth transition to the next level of the education system. These factors influence teacher's expectations for formative and summative assessment of young children. These factors include teachers with inadequate pedagogical skills for early childhood education, and the promotion of holistic development; children not displaying readiness from home to school and class to class. For some children, however, there is insufficient parental involvement and commitment to providing resources; while, some children do not have the background experiences, and competencies they are expected to display for their age; also, the teacher/pupil ratio and classroom sizes; as well as the availability of resources influence children's assessments.

The curriculum implementation, planning, and delivery of the lesson, the type of assessments, standardized tests and evaluation given to children by policymakers and education ministry personnel need further assessment and evaluation to achieve the desired outcome for readiness. Barnett et al. (2008) and Firmender et al. (2014) stated that the curriculum should guide the teacher to scaffold children's acquisition of the developmental domains and explore content and knowledge so that authentic assessments can be given. The curriculum should support children in self-regulation and private speech as well as acquire learned behaviors in quality teaching and learning environment (see Clarke, 2016; Dougherty, 2017; Kaplan & Hertzog, 2016). Barnett et al. (2008), Dougherty (2017) and Kaplan and Hertzog (2016) agreed that the curriculum should encourage teachers to arrange as well as create an environment that is inviting to enhance children's academic experiences. The objectives of education will motivate teachers to contribute positively to the teaching and learning process as they scaffold children to attain competencies for assessments as well as strive for academic success.

In the Jamaican context, parents bring their young children to school so that teachers can enhance their capabilities to acquire content, knowledge, understanding, and the requisite skills to achieve academic excellence (Kinkead-Clark, 2015). Parents expect their children to attain mastery on all the assessments in the school system although they do not provide the resources or the support that their children need. Okado, Bierman, and Welsh (2014) concurred that positive interactions and parental involvement help to shape, and enhance children's readiness skills for the transition, and assessments. Conversely, Okado et al. (2014) agreed that low levels of parental involvement as well as providing

cognitive materials that impact children's language as well as academic performance. Steen (2011) and McIntyre, Eckert, Arbolino, Reed, and Fiese (2014) highlighted that some parents are taken aback for the educational demands of the kindergarten program for young children. Steen (2011) and McIntyre et al. (2014) further stated that children who have successful transitions tend to engage in active learning, and quickly adapt to their new setting at Grade 1.

Stakeholders Expectations for Children's Academic Performance

Children in kindergarten schools/institutions are not given the attention, resources, and financial support that is needed because persons express their thoughts that children should not engage in play; although, some children cannot express themselves well, and they cannot sit still for extended periods. However, when children enter Grade 1, stakeholders expect that they should show mastery of the skills, and knowledge, display that they are intelligent and competent in academic tasks. Betawi (2013) and Bohlmann, and Weinstein (2013) concurred that the expectations for kindergarten students include: application of knowledge in new situations, engage in solving problems activities to generate new ideas, and make connections during the acquisition of knowledge in their learning environment to be able to apply it to the world around them. Fairbairn (2013) and Pandey and Mishra (2014) underscored that there are knowledge differences among children; imploring stakeholders to provide a greater variety of ways for children to acquire the expected learning outcomes from the learning environments /educational institutions.

Teacher Educators Assisting with Young Children's Readiness and Transition

Brown and Weber (2016) outlined the struggles educators have, to overcome the state/country's prescription, for developmentally appropriate practices (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009), in early childhood classrooms. Abu Taleb (2013) agreed that teacher education, and classroom preparation are important components for children to attain mastery for the standards at the kindergarten level. In spite, of this knowledge, teachers are sometimes forced to teach children to master standardized tests although, young children develop and learn differently from their peers at the elementary/primary level of the education system, Brown and Weber, (2016) cited (Bales, 2006, and Commins & Miramontes, 2006). This practice has transformed the ways classroom teachers work with young children (Brown, 2015; Brown, Lan, & Jeong, 2015; Salo et al., 2015), and the support teacher educators give to cooperating schools, and teachers. As teacher educators, we should advocate for learning environments (Jechura et al., 2016; Salo et al., 2015), that promote active learning, to motivate children to achieve on cognitive tasks, as well as regulate children's behaviors, and personalities to attain desired learning outcomes for academic success (Bas, 2016; Day et al., 2015; Llenaresas, Bercasio, & Oyales, 2015). Children will engage in active learning when there is a prepared environment, their peers are available, and teachers are willing to scaffold them in the process. Jones and Reynolds (2015) outlined the importance of staff development, and teacher training to improve children's academic performance. As an advocate for developmentally appropriate practices; consultations will be made with other educators to apply improvements to pedagogies as we scaffold, mentor and coach, student teachers, to

enter communities of teaching and learning (Hyson et al., 2012; Levine, 2010). Teachers need to provide the materials, interact with, as well as observe how children interact with the materials, so that they can have a better understanding of the benefits of interaction; and the meanings children create during their play (; Ageeva, 2016; Jones & Reynolds, 2015). Student-teachers will also embrace communication, and collaboration, in the ‘community of learners and practice’ (Levine, 2010), when they are integrated into the learning environment.

Summary and Conclusion

Children who enter Grade 1 in the six-year-old age cohort, should enter the formal system with experiences, skills, the ability to communicate, engage in problem-solving, and critical thinking skills, so that they can be confident to be engaged in given academic tasks. Grade 1 teachers expect children to demonstrate the competencies and mastery, in the academic activities. When children do not demonstrate basic skills in literacy, and numeracy activities teachers tend to blame the basic, kindergarten, or infant department from where the children transition. Sometimes the assessments are not fair because there are factors that affect the acquisition of the skills that children should develop. These factors include teacher competencies, lack of early childhood pedagogy, an interactive environment where children can construct meanings, lack of parental involvement and support, and the child’s level of maturity to glean the skills, knowledge, and intelligence. The content, and the method of assessment are sometimes inappropriate for the level of children. Children are sometimes given a standardized test so that an evaluation can be made for their cognitive knowledge. Davies (2015) agreed that children should be

assessed holistically in authentic environments at this level so that they can demonstrate their true potential.

Grade 1 teachers, parents, policymakers, and some stakeholders expect all children that are entering the formal system, will demonstrate readiness skills, so that they can master given tasks on assessments; however, this may be unrealistic since young children have different times when they mature and display mastery in academic tasks. When stakeholders understand how children acquire skills, and knowledge, construct meanings in their interactions, and develop the confidence to build on their experiences. Then, they can adjust their thoughts, and attitudes toward their expectations for young children's performance on academic tasks.

When stakeholders, and policymakers have access to appropriate information, they can embrace the strategies, and methods for assessing young children. They can promote best practices, and provide the resources for teachers to create, and maintain an environment where children will construct meanings in their interaction. Stakeholders will understand the importance for children to have the autonomy to engage in problem-solving activities, feel comfortable to communicate their thoughts and feelings, and have the freedom to display their ability with skills, knowledge, and intelligence. Bowers (2015) agrees that children should be assessed for readiness, as well as evaluate the effectiveness of the curriculum, and programs that children are exposed. The GOILP is prepared by the MEYI in Jamaica, and administered by Grade 1 teachers. The raw data of the GOILP is sent to the MEYI. The results should be sent back to inform teachers,

schools, and other stakeholders who have vested interest in the smooth transitioning of six-year-olds from kindergarten to Grade 1.

Grade1 teachers in Jamaican classrooms expect that children who transition should have the experiential knowledge to begin the formal curriculum. However, when some children arrive in the new environment, teachers identified issues with their competencies for the grade level. Grade 1 teachers are voicing their feedback from informal assessments that the children are not displaying the requisite readiness skills to attain mastery on the standardized, as well as for their introduction to the formal curriculum. On the other hand, the teachers at the kindergarten are assured that the children in early childhood environments have been exposed to readiness skills they need for Grade 1. Bowers (2015 p.2) highlighted some common tests for preschoolers to include the Battelle in (Newborg, Stock, & Wnek, 1984), the Child Behavior Checklist (Achenbach, 1992), the DIAL-R (Mardell-Czudnowski & Goldenberg, 1990), the Miller Assessment for Preschoolers in Miller, 1982), the Peabody Developmental Motor Scales (Folio & Fewell, 1984) and the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test (Dunn & Dunn, 1981) Desired Results Developmental Profile- School-Age (2010). Kindergarten teachers are convinced that the Grade 1 teachers should engage children in an active learning environment so that they can build on their knowledge, and acquire new skills for problem-solving, communication, and critical thinking. With this background, chapter 3 outlined the method that was used to collect and analyze the data used to examine the gap that existed between children's readiness skills, and Grade1 teachers' expectations as they transition to the Grade 1 level.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to examine kindergarten students' readiness for Grade 1 based on the perceptions of kindergarten and Grade 1 teachers toward readiness skills, instructional practices, and expectations of students' competency. I reviewed the teaching and learning strategies for kindergarten children to acquire readiness skills. I also examined documents (curriculum and planned activities), assessments implemented in preparation for the national curriculum, and the expectations of the Grade 1 teachers. In this chapter, I present the research questions, the role of the researcher, selection of participants, methodology, and design of the study, instrumentation, and data collection strategies, data analysis, issues of trustworthiness, and ethical concerns that guided the research.

Research Design and Rationale

The research questions that led this qualitative case study were

1. How do kindergarten teachers prepare students with the readiness skills needed for Grade 1?
2. To what extent do Grade 1 teachers believe incoming students are prepared to meet the demands of the Grade 1 curriculum?
3. To what extent do students' mastery of readiness skills influence teachers' expectations of students' competencies for the formal curriculum at Grade 1?

My aim for this research was to provide an in-depth understanding of the perceptions of Grade 1 and kindergarten teachers' expectations of children's level of

mastery for skills and competencies for the formal curriculum when they enter Grade 1. Teachers at the kindergarten level may not be preparing the children with the expected readiness skills for Grade 1. Additionally, teachers at Grade 1 may have curriculum expectations that conflict with how children are prepared at the kindergarten level. To explore these issues and explain pedagogies at the Jamaican early childhood level, I used a single case study (see Maxwell, 2012; Miles, et al., 2014; Yin, 2014). The curriculum requirements at both the kindergarten and Grade 1 levels in the Jamaican public early childhood learning environment was the context, setting, and focus. It was also important to note the teachers' qualification and training requirements that influenced the strategies for helping children achieve goals. Therefore, a qualitative single case study approach was appropriate because it provided an in-depth understanding of teacher expectations of readiness skills for children who transition from one level of the education system to the next (see Yin, 2014).

I collected data from interviewing participants, reviewing teachers' planned and curriculum documents, and examining the type of assessment used in kindergarten and Grade 1, noting how readiness skills were assessed, the feedback given to teachers about children's competencies, and how the scores were assessed. In the interviews, I noted the strategic behaviors, the participants' expectations for children's competencies, and the strategies that they used in their lessons to promote readiness skills for Grade 1. I analyzed the participating teachers' expectations for the children from the kindergarten classes who transitioned into Grade 1, the participating teachers' background

education/training requirements, and the teaching and learning strategies they used to prepare children for the formal curriculum.

Rationale for the Chosen Tradition

The issue of readiness for Grade 1 has been a common concern in some primary schools in Jamaica. Both qualitative and quantitative designs were considered, but I did not employ a quantitative method because I did not want to prove a hypothesis, and I did not participate in an intervention or engage participants in an experiment to test a theory. I also did not use a survey to collect data from the population (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). I selected a qualitative case study design to understand, describe, and discover teachers' expectations for children's readiness for the Grade 1 curriculum. Within such a design, there can be multiple units embedded within the bounds of this study (Yin, 2014), which in this study related to the infant department and Grade 1 teachers' teaching and learning strategies. Face-to-face interviews, observation of curriculum guidelines within the system, and the GOILP scores were examined to reveal children's readiness skills and whether there is a gap in the structure of the system (see Yin, 2014).

Multiple sources of information were used to allow for triangulation of data: an interview protocol and questions (Appendix A), a demographic questionnaire (Appendix B), and document analysis of the GOILP scores (see Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 2009; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). I examined the readiness curriculum and the planned activities in the learning environment for children in kindergarten and Grade 1. The curriculum in early childhood environments is geared toward enhancing children's hands-on learning experiences and it is intended to support their age and stage in the learning process

(Michael, 2014; Pantaleo, 2016). Children can acquire the readiness skills highlighted in the curriculum, with guidelines of teaching and learning strategies at the kindergarten and Grade1 levels. Semi-structured, face-to-face interviews were conducted to gather perceptions of kindergarten and Grade 1 teachers regarding students' readiness for Grade 1.

The results are presented in a representation of a case study design about readiness skills in the early childhood classroom and not an analysis of cultural themes. Quantitative elements are not included in this research, eliminating a positivist design. Other qualitative designs were considered but not chosen. A phenomenological approach was not appropriate because I was not engaged in classroom observations, and I was not fully involved or be active in the program (Maxwell, 2012; Saldaña, 2015), and I was not engaged in an intervention. Ethnography was not considered because I was not immersed in the culture of the school or with the children' experiences (Creswell, 2012). I also did not select a narrative or grounded theory design because I was not engaged in exploring the lives of the participants and did not develop a theory in the field (Creswell, 2007). I used a case study with semi-structured interviews, a demographic questionnaire, and observed documents related to the GOILP to gather data. I reviewed and analyzed the data and then presented an in-depth picture of the activity and program for one case in the Jamaican context (see Creswell, 2007, 2012; Stake, 2005).

Role of the Researcher

I adopted the role of a participant observer in the investigation. My roles and responsibilities as a college lecturer include supervision of student teachers in their field

experiences and scaffolding them in the teaching and learning environment. However, I do not supervise the teachers/participants at the schools that were directly involved in this study. As an educator at the teachers' college level, I have gained respect and trust of the participants in the cooperating schools (schools that partner with the teachers' college to accommodate student-teachers for their field experiences). My familiarity with the overall school administration allowed access to the sites. I entered the site in a different role as a researcher throughout my study. The relationships that were established with school communities and the participants/teachers promoted acceptance. The participants were informed that I was not there in a lecturer or supervisory role but as a researcher. After an explanation to the participants of my role as a researcher, they were comfortable and volunteered willingly. They provided valuable information about their practices that will be added to existing knowledge about the education system in Jamaica.

During the research process, I ensured that rich, thick data were collected. I adhered to the ethical standards of confidentiality that protected the privacy of the school and teachers in this research. I was cognizant of personal biases and maintained objectivity and integrity while I interacted with the participants and analyzed the data (see Maxwell, 2012). I was conscious of my roles and responsibilities and personal commitments for my place of work. I received the permission to undertake this study. Semi-structured interviews were used to ensure comparability for the information obtained and to provide answers to the research questions.

Methodology

Participation Selection Logic

In this population, 20 teachers met the inclusion criteria. A total of 10 teachers, five from kindergarten level and five from Grade 1 level, volunteered willingly to be participants in this study. They were from two urban primary schools in Jamaica. In this geographical location, two cooperating schools accommodate student teachers during their field experiences. These schools comprise an infant department and a primary department at the same location, allowing children to transition into Grade 1. This process allows children from the kindergarten level to transition to the primary/elementary level, where formal learning begins in the Jamaican education system. These schools were selected because they fall within the bounds of this study—that is, they are located within an urban area, under the oversight of the Ministry of Education (Jamaica), the curricula at both levels are consistent with the requirements of the educational system, and the participants met the teacher qualifications criteria and teaching at the kindergarten and Grade 1 within this system.

Purposeful selection was used to ensure that similarity of responses were collected within each level (see Maxwell, 2012). Saturation size is also an essential consideration in qualitative studies as it can contribute to content validity (Maxwell, 2012). An exact number as to what constitutes saturation varies with the aim of each study. Researchers agree that saturation occurs when no new information is being generated, no new codes are surfacing, and the information gathered allows replication (Ness, 2015). After I administered the demographic questionnaire, engaged the

participants in face-to-face interviews, and examined documents from the MEYI, I was then able to determine whether saturation criteria were met. I determined that I met saturation when I had sufficient information to answer my research questions in the breadth and depth essential for qualitative research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).

Instrumentation

Data were collected from a demographic questionnaire, interview protocol and questions, and documents (archived data from the GOILP) from the MEYI. I developed the demographic questionnaire that provided background information from the five infant/kindergarten and five Grade 1 teachers. This questionnaire included demographic data and included a question to elicit information about Research Questions 1 and 2. The interview protocol and questions enabled me to gain detailed information about teachers' expectations, teaching and learning strategies, and the support they received for children who were transitioning into Grade 1. The data from this source provided information for additional questions in the semi-structured interviews.

The semi-structured interview questions, which I developed, contain the interview protocol and questions. The interviews were held with five infant department and five Grade 1 teachers at two schools in Western Jamaica. Additional probes were added based on the information from the questions and responses within the interviews. The purpose of these semi-structured interviews was to answer and clarify information from the interview questions, gather additional information about teachers' expectations for children entering the Grade 1 and their teaching and learning environment, and to assess their perceptions of appropriate practices.

Before the interviews, while participants were examining the consent form and interview protocol, I informed the participants about my research and gave them a copy of the interview questions. After checking my audio equipment and ensuring that the devices were working correctly, the interviews began, the responses from the interviews were recorded. The interview sessions lasted for 45-60 minutes and were audio-taped, and supporting notes were written to capture all the data. At the end of each interview, I observed the curriculum documents and written activity plans to assess and corroborate teachers' perceptions. At the end of each interview, debriefing procedures were done with the participants with an assurance that they would benefit from the results. When I went home, the data were transcribed from the tapes and supporting notes; then they were coded, categorized, and analyzed to allow the emergence of patterns, and themes.

I examined the results of the legal documents about the scores of the GOILP assessments from the MEYI for the children at two schools. Examining the scores for the children of the participating teachers assisted me in addressing Research Question 3. This information was important so that an assessment could be made whether children at the kindergarten and Grade 1 level met the stated expectations by the Government standards, as reflected in the curriculum guidelines that teachers at both levels are required to meet.

The information from the teachers about their age, the number of years in the classroom, and educational and training background was useful for assessing and supporting details for the stated goals at each level. Interview notes and memos complemented the interview questions and helped me to organize the information throughout the process. Data collected from these sources allowed me to provide more

details to the analysis of the perceptions and expectations of kindergarten and Grade 1 teachers when children leave the infant department and enter the Grade 1 of the formal system.

Data Collection Instruments

I created the instruments that were used for the questionnaire and interviews for this research. The items were never used before, and modifications were not necessary because this was the first time that this instrument was being used. Content validity was observed for readiness skills (Brown, 2015; Brown & Pickard, 2014; Kinkead-Clark, 2015), as the Jamaican culture and context in which it was used was important. The interview questions were reviewed by my chair before submission at the proposal stage. The basis for the development was based on the review of literature about children acquiring the requisite readiness skills to begin formal learning (Brown, 2015; Brown & Pickard, 2014; Kinkead-Clark, 2015). The instruments allowed for sufficient data to be collected about teachers' expectations for children's readiness when they transition at Grade 1 in the Jamaican education system.

Procedures. After receiving IRB approval from Walden (approval no. 05-10-18-0262910), I visited the schools and requested permission from the principals of these two schools (the authorizing authority) by delivering a letter in person highlighting the details of my proposed research. I asked the principals if they could arrange a meeting with the eligible teachers in their respective schools. At this meeting, I was introduced, and I presented my proposed study, outlined to the teachers what their involvement would be, and asked if they would volunteer to participate. I also informed the teachers that should

they volunteer, they could also withdraw from the study at any time with no consequences. I left letters with each teacher and asked them to return their responses to me in the postage-paid envelope or to the school's secretary.

The returned responses comprised five teachers from infant/kindergarten and five teachers from Grade 1. A meeting with the participants was scheduled to find out the most convenient time to begin the collection of data for the study. I also got their telephone number to set appropriate times and dates for the interviews for this research. Ten interview sessions were conducted with the participants who volunteered over a 6-week period. The interviews were recorded with the permission on the participants, and supporting notes were written during the process. After the interviews and debriefing procedures, I went home to transcribe the data.

I wrote to the MEYI for the results of the GOILP for the document review. To get clarity, I went back to the schools for additional explanation, and information about the administration of the GOILP and scores children obtained. When the study is completed, I will meet with the teachers at both levels of the education system to report the findings. The MEYI has also asked me to share my findings with them so that they can better serve the nation's education system. I will also share the findings with other relevant stakeholders in the education system, such as the ECC and policymakers.

Data Analysis

After collecting the data from the demographic questionnaire and interview questions, I analysed them using descriptive analysis, then presented them with a summary using tables and descriptive analysis. After gathering data from each source, I

began the analysis process so that I could solicit answers to the research questions, then I focused on the analysis portion of my research. The audio recordings of the interviews were transcribed, along with written notes, memos, and journals. Upon completion, I reviewed the transcriptions, so that I could identify the patterns and themes (see Miles et al., 2014), then began the coding process.

In qualitative studies, descriptive analysis is required to ensure that emergent themes from the data are clear and accurate. While reviewing the transcripts from the interviews (see Miles, Huberman, Huberman & Huberman, 1994; Miles, Huberman & Saldana, 2014), I began the first phase of coding that was open coding. In this emic data analysis, I began the process with open coding, looking for patterns in the data from the interviews, that provided the basis for identifying themes (Ravitch & Carl, 2015) from the responses. The second phase of coding was thematic coding, that allowed me to engage in line by line coding for all the responses of the interviews; patterns and themes were sought to ensure that I understood the data in a coherent and important way (see Maxwell, 2012; Miles, et al.,1994). This understanding enabled me to be engaged in descriptive analysis of the data. During this process, Saldaña's (2015) ideas about the coding process were utilized. The participants expressed their expectations for the competencies of the children, while reflecting on their mode of academic assessments versus developmental level for the age cohort. They gave details about early childhood versus elementary education (practices); play versus preparation for tests, and skill acquisition versus assessment. As I reviewed my transcripts to complete this cycle of coding, it allowed me to understand what was still unclear, I embraced additional drive

for the retrieval of information for the guidelines for analysis (Miles et al., 2014). To capture all the content, I used manual codes to create the themes from the data.

According to Merriam (2009), “themes are summary statements and explanations of what was going on” (p. 207). I used descriptive analysis was used to understand the responses from the participants at both levels in the sample of this research. The analysis was also supported with journal entries that documented the information and thoughts gleaned about teachers’ expectations for readiness at the Grade 1 level.

In the first cycle of data analysis from the responses of the interviews, I completed two phases of coding: the first phase was open coding that allowed for emerging themes from the interviews and document review. The second phase was line-by-line coding, to complete examining all the data from the interviews and documents, as I sought the patterns and descriptions from the interviews and document review. During this process, I utilized Saldaña’s, (2015) ideas about versus coding for an in-depth understanding of the expectations expressed by teachers. I reflected on the literature about the academic versus developmental level of children at the early childhood versus elementary education level; autonomy in play, versus test preparation, and skill acquisition versus assessment for this cohort. As the first cycle of coding was completed, it allowed me to understand what was still unclear, as well as drive additional retrieval and analysis of the data (see Miles et al., 2014).

Once the first cycle for the interview responses was completed, an interim coding cycle occurred before I moved on to the second cycle of coding. Looking at the initial codes, I began sorting the data from the interview into categories. For example, versus

codes helped me to categorize the groupings from the interviews and documents that referred to policy together, along with those that refer to practices (Saldaña, 2015), so that could identify the relations between them.

Second cycle coding from the interviews commenced after the interim level. I looked for the emerging codes that addressed the issues and reviewed the information based on the categories in the framework of this study. During this cycle, there were reorganizing, and reanalyzing of the codes from the transcripts of the interviews and documents review. I then applied an axial coding process, whereby I identified the categories and sub-categories that emerged from the latest round of coding from the data. It was during this process that the refinement of the data from the participants occurred (Saldaña, 2015). Also, during this cycle, the issue of saturation was addressed, I ensured that the research questions were appropriately answered (see Ness, 2015).

After coding the data from the interviews, the MEYI gave access to their legal documents about the scores from the GOILP so that further examination, and analysis of the results from the assessment could be done. The documents were observed to assess teachers' expectations of children's readiness on the standardized assessment. The details of the assessment for the children's level of proficiency about readiness skills were noted with the areas of strengths and weakness. Their levels of proficiency for the readiness skills at Grade 1 were identified, so that teachers could begin the formal curriculum. The documents from MEYI Office, was sent to my email, so that a record of the necessary information could contribute to answering my research questions. The results from the GOILP allowed the Grade 1 teachers assess their expectations of the children's readiness

skills, so that they could make judgements about the competencies that the children bring with them to Grade 1 from the Kindergarten level

At this point, I reviewed my work for situations where the data may have been considered discrepant or contradictory to offer explanations, but the data was clear. I gain a clearer understanding that careful attention to such data could address potential errors in my interpretations, as I tried to find the reason for such discrepancies that could strengthen the validity of my research. Once my transcripts were organized and coded, I returned to the teachers and requested that they reviewed my work for accuracy of translation and interpretation of the data (Miles et al., 1994; Miles et al., 2014). Here the teachers were asked to look at the notes before I reorganized or redefined the transcripts (narrative) so that I could code it into the coding categories (data) to see if the responses given were accurate and appropriate; then changes were made as warranted.

Collectively, the information from these data sources provided the depth, and breadth necessary to answer my research questions, in the coding, analysis, and presentation of the data about teachers' expectations for children's readiness at Grade 1. The information from the interviews, demographic questionnaires, notes, and document review were necessary so that the details of the issue could be examined. Burkholder (2016), Maxwell (2012), Miles et al., (2014), concurred that overlooked data might lead to extending areas of importance, as well as areas of existing information. The data from this research could reinforce thoughts for the trend that exists in the policies, standards, and procedures in early childhood education, and provide more evidence for supporting

or refuting the issue of my focus. If new information from the data is highlighted, then it will be added to existing ones until saturation has occurred.

Issues of Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness in qualitative research is the post-positivists' answer to assuring validity, and reliability in the positivists' mind. That is, qualitative research must demonstrate credibility (validity), transferability (generalizability), dependability (reliability), and confirmability (proof) (Miles et al., 2014). The strategies to accomplish trustworthiness in this study are outlined below.

Credibility

Regarding credibility, thoughtful understandings had to be achieved as the information emerged from the interviews with the participants at sites AB, and DF that were within the criterion outlined in this study. Through descriptive, interpretive, and evaluative data evidence emerged from the participants statements about the issue (Maxwell, 2012; Miles et al., 2014), and possible conclusions or the existence of potential threats were identified from this research. I took note in identifying for discrepant data, and addressed rival explanations gleaned from the information about the expectations participants had for children who transitioned into Grade1. The patterns and themes emerge from the descriptive, and interpretive evidence that allowed me to make conclusions in this research process. Transcript reviews were conducted to ensure validation for my interpretations in the interviews. I invested time in the field while ensuring that I understood the culture involved, and built trust with the stakeholders, and participants.

Transferability

The data collected in this study from the interviews and document reviews may be transferable to other contexts, and settings in the Jamaican education system. The schools in Jamaica use the standardized curriculum issued by the MEYI, and all instructions are based on the thematic integrated approach. Children are placed in similar settings in classrooms in Jamaican schools, with one teacher and some resources. This data may be transferable because I have described the participants, settings, and procedures in sufficient detail to enable persons in other locations, as well as the reader, to determine whether the findings could be transferable in their setting (Miles et al., 1994; Miles et al., 2014). It will also be up to the reader to determine transferability out of the bounds of this research.

Dependability

In addressing the dependability of my findings, the raw data documents and notes will be available through me (as I have sole access to ensure confidentiality) so that Walden University, and persons with a vested interest can analyze the information to corroborate my analysis (Miles et al., 2014) at any time. The notes and tapes from the interviews and information gleaned from the assessment documents from the MEYI were reviewed and have contributed to the triangulation process. Analysis and review of the data were on-going to ensure the validity of the findings of this research (Miles et al., 2014).

Confirmability

Reflection and reflexivity were exercised throughout the collection, and analysis to check for confirmability of data (Maxwell, 2012). I remained objective while considering the responses about the participants' expectations of the children's competencies as I reviewed the interview notes, transcripts, and planned and curriculum documents (that teachers used). The data were reviewed for the discrepancy, but there were none, and transcript reviews were conducted to ensure validation of interpretations as I processed and analyzed the data (Maxwell, 2012). The participants agreed with the information from the interviews that were presented to them.

As mentioned above, attention to any discrepant data was noted, and I addressed rival explanations. Transcript reviews were conducted to ensure the validity of my interpretations. I invested time, ensured that I understood the culture involved, and built trust with the stakeholders, and participants while I was engaged in the research.

To address the dependability of my findings, the raw data can be made available (as I have sole access to ensure confidentiality) so that Walden University, and persons with a vested interest can analyze the information to corroborate my analysis (Miles et al., 2014). The interviews, and information gleaned from the assessments of the documents from the MEYI were reviewed, and will contribute to the triangulation process. Analysis, and review of the data was on-going to ensure the validity of the research (Miles et al., 2014).

The information gathered from this investigation allowed thick, and rich description of kindergarten, and Grade 1 teachers expectations about what children

should be able to do, and what they could do when they transitioned from the kindergarten level to Grade 1 of the formal education system in Jamaica. Individuals in similar situations may be able to determine the extent to which the findings could be applied (transferred) to other settings.

Once my study has been completed, I will meet again with the participants, and other interested stakeholders to express my appreciation for their participation, and interest in my research. During this session, I will provide details to allow applicability to other settings should someone else be interested in repeating my study (transferability). A printed summary of my findings along with my contact information will be provided to the participants, and interested attendees, if additional information is needed for replication. Before the adjournment of the meeting, I will express thanks to all those who were involved, and personally deliver a hand-written note to show appreciation to all participants.

Ethical Procedures

I was cognizant of the participants' privacy, protecting the schools' identity, and other ethical issues of confidentiality that could have surfaced during the collection, and storage of data. I wrote to the schools to ask for permission to carry out the investigation; a letter was also written to the MEYI that sought permission to enter the schools as well as to examine the GOILP documents. I employed the application of consent procedures and policies of Walden University, using the necessary consent forms to gain access to the participants, as well as the applicable permission to access and examine documents for this research. Walden's IRB guidelines were followed to include the appropriate

permissions involved for approval of this research. The ethical guidance surrounding the procedure for participation were given to the participants, and appropriate stakeholders. Participants were ensured of the tenets of confidentiality and assured ethical protection. I ensured that the data collected, and analyzed are protected, and stored properly, and will be destroyed after five years. I gained knowledge about the amount of time that was required to collect, analyze, and present the information for this research. I sought permission from my work place so that I could be engaged in this research. I endeavored to manage my time wisely so that satisfactory achievements to be attained while executing my roles and responsibilities at work, and completing this research.

The participants were informed about the purpose of the study as well my written guarantee to protect their anonymity (see Creswell, 2012; Creswell, & Poth, 2017; Maxwell, 2012; Merriam, 2009; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). The participants were given the details that they could withdraw from the study at any time without consequences. I continued to adhere to the instructions of my chair, committee member, the University Research Reviewer, and the IRB.

Summary

In this research, I sought to examine the expectations of kindergarten/infant and Grade 1 teachers for the readiness skills for six-year-olds who enter the formal education system. Teachers at the infant department and Grade 1 who facilitate children's transition from one level to the next were included in this research. The investigations were guided by research questions that addressed the expectations of kindergarten/Infant department teachers in preparing children with readiness skills, and the Grade 1 teachers who

received them. The expectations of kindergarten and Grade 1 teachers for children entering the formal education system, and how these expectations aligned with developmentally appropriate practices for children to acquire readiness skills to begin the formal curriculum were addressed. Data was collected from the demographic questionnaire, interviews, and analyzing documents from the formal assessments from the MEYI, to answer the questions in this case study. The data collected about children's readiness was documented, analyzed, and presented. Some themes that emerged can be resonated in similar settings (see Maxwell, 2012), and learning environments. The findings were intended to describe the gaps that now exist within the Infant department and Grade 1 teachers so that young children can be positively impacted in the teaching and learning environments (see Maxwell, 2012). The discussions of this issue may provide insights for policymakers, facilitators of learning, and teacher educators to evaluate their perspective on young children's display of competence at the kindergarten, and the Grade 1 levels of the education system (Maxwell, 2012; Miles et al., 2014; Yin, 2014).

This study will contribute to positive social change (see Walden's Student Handbook, 2014) by identifying the shortfalls or disconnects in understanding teacher expectations about readiness for children who transitioned in the formal education system. Their demands for mastery information, and how children function cognitively, and socially in the six-year-old cohort. The expectations for mastery as compared to earlier stages of development could be improved with increased knowledge of the competencies children have when they transition to the next level. Teachers' expectations

for all children to show mastery, and competencies in requisite skills at Grade 1 may not be fair. Other stakeholders will be exposed to a greater awareness of children's competencies at this level.

I gleaned, and presented descriptions from the data. It is hoped that stakeholders will emphasize the importance of this data from these findings, to promote greater investments, and make informed policy decisions. Teachers at the early childhood level can be supported to scaffold children to attain desired competencies in the teaching and learning environments. Teachers may be motivated to build on the foundations, knowledge, and skills that children take with them from basic schools, infant schools, infant departments, and preparatory schools when they transition to the Grade 1 level. Chapter 4 highlights the analysis of the data collected in this investigation from interviews, notes, and document reviewed.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

Readiness skills remain significant for children in kindergarten so that when they transition and receive exposure to the formal curriculum, they can apply competencies and display mastery of the concepts (Brown, 2015; Brown & Pickard, 2014; Kinkead-Clark, 2015). The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore kindergarten students' readiness for Grade 1 based on the perceptions of kindergarten and Grade 1 teachers on readiness skills, instructional practices, and expectations of students' competency. The research questions helped explore the expectations of five kindergarten and five Grade 1 teachers by asking how students are prepared with readiness skills, the extent teachers at Grade 1 believe incoming students are prepared, and to the extent students' mastery of readiness skills influence students' competencies for the formal curriculum at Grade 1. This chapter presents information for the setting, demographic questionnaire, data collection process and analysis from semi-structured interviews, and assessed documents from the GOILP by the MEYI in Jamaica, curriculum, and planned activities. The information is presented with a descriptive analysis, accompanied by tables and figures. There is also an analysis of the results by each research question, evidence of trustworthiness, and a summary of the information in the chapter.

Setting

In this study, the sites were identified as School AB and DF with infant and primary departments, respectively. The layout for School AB comes with separate buildings for the infant and primary departments, whereas for School DF, the

departments are housed at the same location in an adjoining section. The classrooms for Schools AB and DF are arranged similarly for the infant departments. They have the following characteristics: children sat around child-sized tables and chairs in the center of the room and access to learning centers. Other facilities include areas of interest, teaching aids, storage area, and a bathroom that was easily accessible from the classroom.

At Grade 1, there were differences with the physical arrangement for the classes in the two schools. In School AB, there were individual rooms with a mix of seating arrangements. Some classes had combo benches seating up to three children, whereas others had child-sized chairs and round tables that can accommodate up to six children. The arrangement for School DF was significantly different with all the three classes occupying one space that is separated by partitions and limited privacy. Children sat in combo benches, with a display of children's work and teaching aids on the walls and sides of partitions. The bathrooms were in another location. The participants accommodated me, so I did not encounter any personal or organizational conditions that impacted the semi-structured interviews or the document review. The participants were receptive to the research and accommodated my visits to the sites in their classrooms or the staff area.

Demographic Data

The population was selected from two sites with a total of 19 teachers in an urban area of Jamaica. Ten teachers from the two sites volunteered to be participants in this study. They were from Artens Barr* (pseudonym, shortened to AB) and Du Four* (pseudonym, shortened to DF) primary and infant Schools; there were five participants

from the infant department and five participants from the Grade 1 or primary level. A demographic questionnaire sought the personal and professional information from the participants and their expectations for the children who transitioned from the infant/kindergarten level to Grade 1 in September 2017. The demographic data outlined the data from the participants. The ages of the participants in the sample for kindergarten level were two teachers in the 31-40 age cohort, two teachers in the 41-50 age cohort, and one teacher in the 51-60 age cohort. The participants at Grade 1 were one teacher in the 21-30 age cohort, one teacher in the 31-40 age cohort, one teacher in the 41-50 age cohort, and two teachers in the 51-60 age cohort.

The level of training for the participants at the kindergarten/infant department are four teachers who hold baccalaureate degrees, and one teacher holds a Master's degree in Education. The five participants who teach at the Grade 1 level attained baccalaureate degrees. All the participants who teach at the infant department level for the selected population had specialized training in early childhood education. At Grade 1 level, one participant specialized in early childhood education, and four specialized in primary education.

The participants at the kindergarten level have teaching experiences ranging from 7, 12, 14, 17, and 27 years. The participants who taught at the Grade 1 level had teaching experiences ranging from 10 months, 1 year, 3 years, 12 years, and 36 years. The teacher-pupil ratio ranged from 1:37 and 1:38 at School AB and 1:31 at School DF in the infant department, whereas at Grade 1 the teacher-pupil ratios were 1: 37 and 1: 38 at School AB and 1: 37, 1: 38, and 1: 46 at School DF. These were large class sizes without an

assistant although the MEYI's policy suggests a teacher-pupil ratio of 1:32 at the primary level for the schools. Infant school participants are presented as P1, and P2, for School AB and P3, P4, and P5 at School DF. The participants at the Grade 1 level are presented as S1, S2 for School AB and S3, S4, S5 at School DF. Table 1 presents the data about the demographics of the participants at the Infant department and Grade 1 in this research.

Table 1

Demographic Data for Participants at Schools AB and DF

Participants/ Teachers	School	Age Range	Grade taught	Years of Experience	Degree Level
P1	AB	41 - 50	Infant Department	14	Bachelors
P2	AB	31 - 40	Infant Department	12	Masters
P3	DF	31 - 40	Infant Department	7	Bachelors
P4	DF	41 - 50	Infant Department	17	Bachelors
P5	DF	51- 60	Infant Department	27	Bachelors
S1	AB	31 - 40	Grade 1	7	Bachelors
S2	AB	51- 60	Grade 1	12	Bachelors
S3	DF	21 -30	Grade 1	.83	Bachelors
S4	DF	31- 40	Grade 1	2	Bachelors
S5	DF	51- 60	Grade 1	36	Bachelors

Data Collection Process

This research involved a case study approach to explore kindergarten students' readiness for Grade 1 based on the perceptions of kindergarten and Grade 1 teachers. I reviewed the teaching and learning strategies for kindergarten children to acquire readiness skills, examined documents (curriculum, and planned activities), and reviewed

assessments (GOILP) administered to children at Grade 1 in preparation for the national curriculum. I wanted to understand the expectations that kindergarten and Grade 1 teachers have for the children who transition into Grade 1 to begin the formal curriculum.

Over 6 weeks, the participants were interviewed in their classrooms after the students had left for home or had not yet arrived at school and in the staff room at both schools. The area selected for the interviews was quiet and away from other school activities. I adhered to the privacy and confidentiality requirements for the participants, used an interview protocol and questions, asked for permission to record the conversations from the interviews, and assured the participants that I would not disclose their information or identity to anyone.

Participants

To collect data, 10 participants were selected from two schools with primary and infant departments. Five teachers were from the infant department that houses children in the 4- and 5-year-old age cohort with support services in one location. Five teachers were from Grade 1, the primary department that houses children from Grades 1 to 6. The participants in this research work at the schools that are supported by MEYI's policy guidelines through the national curriculum. The participants were given consent forms to confirm their understanding of the process and their commitment to an engagement in this research.

The location, frequency of visits, and duration of data collection for each data collection instrument will be discussed in this section. The instruments that I used to collect the data included a demographic questionnaire, an interview protocol and

questions, the scores from the Grade One Individual Profile assessment, and curriculum and planned documents from the teachers.

Demographic Questionnaire

I met with teachers from the kindergarten and Grade 1 classes at School AB, then at School DF, and gave them the demographic data questionnaire (Appendix B). Ten participants who volunteered to participate in the study returned their copy of the demographic questionnaire within 1 week. The participants recorded their personal information and answered one question that solicited information about their expectations for children leaving the Infant department to transition to Grade 1 of the education system. I collected the data and began descriptive analysis.

Interviews

At first, I visited the sites over 6 weeks and conducted interviews and observed documents. The 10 participants who volunteered to be interviewed were given a consent form to state their agreement to be a part of the research. I met the interviewees to inform them about gathering data on their expectations for children at the infant/kindergarten level who transition into Grade 1. I obtained their contact information to schedule the most suitable time for the face-to-face interviews. I was cognizant of the teaching and learning times allotted for the children's engagement, so I did not go for interviews during the teaching hours. Some of the interview sessions were conducted in the staff room where it was private, and the others took place in the classrooms before the children arrived for class as well as after school when the children had gone home for the day.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the participants at Schools AB and DF. The interviews lasted for 40 to 45 minutes each and were guided by the interview protocol (see Appendix A). I met with each participant two times after the initial group meeting. The participants were interviewed at the first meeting, and the data were validated at the second meeting. During the interviews with the participants, open-ended questions were used to gather detailed information about their expectations for children's readiness for the curriculum (see Rubin & Rubin, 2011). The interview questions helped answer how kindergarten teachers' prepare students with readiness skills and how prepared the students were when they transitioned into Grade 1. The responses to the interview questions were recorded on my computer and telephone, and notes were written from the interview sessions. The interviews ended with debriefing procedures and expressions of thanks. After each visit, the information from interviews through audiotaping and notes were transcribed, and journal entries were written to support my experience. Analysis of the data began after completing each interview so that I could be engaged in initial coding to understand the data. During this process, to ensure validity, clarifications for the data was made by telephone contact with the participants at least once after the face-face interview to clarify the data collected.

Document Analysis

The curricula and planned activities that each teacher used with their students were also examined. I reviewed the teachers' lesson plans and supporting materials that they prepared to use with the children in the teaching and learning environment. The raw numerical data of the GOILP assessment that was sent to me by e-mail from the MEYI

were also examined. These data had to be analyzed so that they could be presented with a descriptive rubric outlined as *proficient*, *developing*, *beginning*, and *not yet*. Additionally, I had to call four participants from the infant departments and Grade 1 on more than one occasion for further clarifications about the administration of the GOILP assessment. The research sites were revisited twice to access copies of the administration, and the students' assessment booklets for the standardized test from the MEYI were used for further clarity about the information of the test scores.

The challenges encountered in reviewing the documents from the GOILP (assessment scores) at MEYI were due to personnel from the ministry of education who were engaged in workshops and seminars to implement a new assessment strategy called the *primary exit profile*. As a result of this new initiative, the officers from the assessment unit were engaged in the field. Several telephone calls were made, and e-mails were sent to access the information regarding students' test scores for 2017. The schools were revisited to access copies of the documents that were sent to the MEYI. This information was subsequently sent to my e-mail after 4 weeks, although it was raw data on a spreadsheet. The data were analyzed so that it could be presented in this document.

The information from this investigation were consistent with the data collection plan. Thick and rich descriptions about teachers' expectations for children at Grade 1 were collected to provide the foundation for the analysis. I explored how teachers at the infant department prepared children with competencies and skills in readiness to meet the demands of the Grade 1 curriculum. The teaching and learning strategies they used for children to acquire readiness skills, their documents (curriculum, planned activities), and

assessments implemented in preparation for the national curriculum were examined to understand the expectations of the Grade 1 teachers. The assessment scores presented the children's competencies on the GOILP assessment they have descriptors for *proficient*, *developing*, *beginning*, or *not yet* for readiness skills on the GOILP. Content analysis was used with an inductive process to understand and analyze the data.

Journal Entries

The responses from the interviews with notes were documented in journal entries after each visit. The notes reflected the process of the interviews, my thoughts, and feelings about this research process, and the information while I was engaged in analyzing the data.

Data Analysis and Coding Process

In qualitative studies, descriptive analysis is required to ensure that emergent themes are clear and accurate. While reviewing the transcripts (Miles et al., 2014), I began the first phase of coding as open coding. In emic data analysis, open coding, or looking for patterns in the data from the interviews, provides the basis for identifying themes from the responses (Ravitch & Carl, 2015). The second phase of coding was thematic coding, which allowed me to engage in line-by-line coding for all the responses of the interviews; patterns and themes were sought to ensure that I understood the data in a coherent and important way (see Maxwell, 2012; Miles et al., 1994). This understanding enabled me to be engaged in descriptive analysis of the data. During this process, Saldaña's (2015) ideas about the coding process were utilized. The participants expressed their expectations for the competencies of the children while reflecting on their

mode of academic assessments versus developmental level for the age cohort. They gave details about early childhood versus elementary education (practices); play versus preparation for tests, and skill acquisition versus assessment. As I reviewed my transcripts to complete this cycle of coding, it allowed me to understand what was still unclear, I embraced additional drive for the retrieval of information for the guidelines for analysis (see Miles et al., 2014). To capture all the content, I used manual codes to create the themes from the data. According to Merriam (2009), “themes are summary statements and explanations of what was going on” (p. 207). I used descriptive analysis to understand the responses from the participants at both levels in the sample of this research. This analysis was also supported with journal entries to document the information and thoughts that emerged in the process.

In the first cycle of data analysis from the interviews and document reviews, I completed two phases of coding: the first phase was open coding that allowed for emerging themes. The second phase was line-by-line coding, to complete examining all the data, as I sought the patterns and descriptions from the interviews and document review. During this process, I utilized Saldaña’s, (2015) ideas about versus coding for an in-depth understanding of the expectations expressed by teachers. I reflected on the literature about the academic versus developmental level of children at the early childhood versus elementary education level; autonomy in play, versus test preparation, and skill acquisition versus assessment for this cohort. As the first cycle of coding was completed, it allowed me to understand what was still unclear, as well as drive additional retrieval and analysis of the data (see Miles et al., 2014).

Once the first cycle was completed, an interim coding cycle occurred before I moved on to the second cycle of coding. Looking at the initial codes from the response from the interviews, I began sorting the data into categories. For example, versus codes helped me to categorize groupings from the interviews and document review that referred to policy together, along with those that refer to practices (Saldaña, 2015), so that I could identify the relations between them.

Second cycle coding commenced after the interim level. I analyzed the transcribed interviews for the emerging codes that addressed the issues and reviewed the information based on the categories in the framework of this study. During this cycle, there were reorganizing, and reanalyzing of the codes from the transcripts of the interviews and document review. I then applied an axial coding process, whereby I identified the categories and sub-categories that emerged from the latest round of coding. It was during this process that refinement of my data from the participants occurred (Saldaña, 2015). Also, during this cycle, the issue of saturation was addressed, I ensured that the research questions were appropriately answered (see Ness, 2015).

After coding the data from the interviews, the MEYI gave access to their legal documents about the scores from the GOILP so that further examination, and analysis of the results from the assessment could be done. The documents were observed to assess teachers' expectations of children's readiness on the standardized assessment. The details of the assessment for the children's level of proficiency about readiness skills were noted with the areas of strengths and weakness. Their levels of proficiency for the readiness skills at Grade 1 were identified, so that teachers could begin the formal curriculum. The

documents from MEYI Office, was sent to my email, so that a record of the necessary information could contribute to answering my research questions. The results from the GOILP allowed the Grade 1 teachers assess their expectations of the children's readiness skills, so that they could make judgements about the competencies that the children bring with them to Grade 1 from the Kindergarten level.

At this point, I reviewed my work for situations where the data may have been considered discrepant or contradictory to offer explanations, but the data was clear. I gain a clearer understanding that careful attention to such data could address potential errors in my interpretations, as I tried to find the reason for such discrepancies that could strengthen the validity of my research. Once my transcripts were organized and coded, I returned to the teachers and requested that they reviewed my work for accuracy of translation and interpretation of the data ensure the credibility and validity of a study (see Miles et al., 2014). Here the teachers were asked to look at the notes before I reorganized or redefined the transcripts (narrative) so that I could code it into the coding categories (data) to see if the responses given were accurate and appropriate; then changes were made as warranted.

Collectively, the information from these data sources provided the depth, and breadth necessary to answer my research questions, in the coding, analysis, and presentation of the data about teachers' expectations for children's readiness at Grade 1. The information from the interviews, demographic questionnaires, notes, and document review were necessary so that the details of the issue could be examined. Burkholder (2016), Maxwell (2012), and Miles et al., (2014) concurred that overlooked data might

lead to extending areas of importance, as well as areas of existing information. The data from this research could reinforce thoughts for the trend that exists in the policies, standards, and procedures in early childhood education, and provide more evidence for supporting or refuting the issue of my focus. If new information from the data is highlighted, then it will be added to existing ones until saturation has occurred.

Coded Initials for Interviews

Marginal remarks were used to label and identify the participants' initials at the Infant schools, then presented as P1, and P2, for School AB; and P3, P4, and P5 at School DF. The data were coded for the participants at the Grade 1 level with the participants' initials and presented as S1, S2 for School AB, and S3, S4, S5 at School DF. Then line-by-line, the data was color-coded to organize, and categorize (Maxwell, 2012) the responses for the interview questions, into codes so that the categories and themes would emerge. The initials of the participants were used as tags and labels, and units of meaning were applied to describe the data that were color-coded (Miles, et al., 2014). The data were chunked into words, sentences, and phrases to analyze, and infer meanings; pulling together the different categories of the data, and presenting it with a greater understanding through descriptive analysis for issue identified, then drawing conclusions, and making recommendations for social change (Maxwell, 2012; Miles et al., 2014).

After the interviews with the participants began, I started in initial coding, checking for words, phrases, sentences, and paragraphs with similar meanings. I went through the documents from the interviews of the ten teachers, as well as the notes; printed the interview transcripts and went through the document, line by line and color-

coded to organize, and categorize the information from the respondents (Maxwell, 2012). While reviewing the transcripts of the interview notes, I was objective and tried to capture the responses of the participants correctly. The transcripts were supported by the teachers' documents. These documents gave details about how teachers organized the curriculum to plan for the children, the strategies, methods, and content used in their lessons, and the activities they gave to the children to scaffold their acquisition of readiness skills. I repeated this process several times so that I could be grounded in the main themes.

I also used marginal notes, and memos to remind me of the codes, patterns, and themes for greater focus (see Maxwell, 2012; Miles et al., 1994; Yin, 2014). Miles et al., (1994) guided my views, as I tried to connect different aspects of the data into recognizable clusters that showed how the data related to the general concept. It was a tedious task at first; the process was repeated numerous times until an electronic copy was made with the color codes for the responses. The interview questions were coded first; then the responses were categorized into themes from the research questions; I chose to generate codes from the data and not from literature because the data analysis needed to be an inductive process, where I explored the expectations that teachers have for children's level for readiness skills for the formal curriculum in Jamaica.

In the second stage, I returned to the color codes, gathered from the interviews, and documents review to collapse the information into frequencies, similarities, and differences to highlight and summarize the data. During this process, I felt more comfortable, because I was more familiar with the data and the process; I was able to

identify the emerging patterns and themes more accurately. In the third stage coding, I was able to organize the data into descriptive summaries with tables (Maxwell, 2012; Miles et al., 1994; Yin, 2014) I tried to be as objective as I could in this process. While I was interacting with the data, I printed some of the information to understand the process and the data; then, I created some electronic files to categorize the data using the initials of each participant with the emerging themes to be stored into a file for future references.

The scores from the GOILP had to be analyzed using the rating scale format of Proficient (P), Developing (D), Beginning (B), and Not Yet (NY) from numerical scores that children received on the assessment (see Appendices D & E). The administration manual was sourced from the sites to observe the instructions, and printed the data with the scores of the categories outlined for literacy, numeracy, and general knowledge, so that the information could be presented to corroborate with the children's performance, and expectations teachers have for them at Grade 1.

In my analysis, I was sensitive to the data that could be identified as discrepant. I perused the information carefully to identify any rival explanations which I may not have considered. I communicated with the participants about the data, and clarified misunderstandings. I then presented the information about these data so the reader can determine whether a rival explanation is warranted or not. Through member-checking with the participants at School AB and School DF, and their conversations about children's competencies for readiness skills, provided added information so that I could present the data from my interactions.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness in qualitative research is the post-positivists' answer to assuring validity, and reliability in positivists' mind. That is, qualitative research must demonstrate credibility (validity), transferability (generalizability), dependability (reliability), and confirmability (proof) (Miles et al., 2014). The strategies to accomplish trustworthiness in this study are outlined below.

I found that the process to collect the data was private and confidential, the participants felt comfortable sharing details about their connections, experiences, and thoughts on how they interacted and assisted children in attaining academic advancements. I concur with Maxwell, (2012) who agreed that thoughtful understandings were achieved as knowledge emerged from the descriptive, interpretive, and evaluative evidence that could challenge possible conclusions or the existence that contributed to this research process.

Credibility

Regarding credibility, thoughtful understandings had to be achieved as the information emerged from the participants at sites AB and DF that were within the criterion outlined in this study. Through descriptive, interpretive, and evaluative data the evidence about the issue emerged (Maxwell, 2012; Miles et al., 2014), and possible conclusions or the existence of potential threats can be identified from this research. I took note in identifying for discrepant data, and addressed rival explanations gleaned from the information about the expectations participants had for children who transitioned into Grade1. The patterns and themes emerge from the descriptive, and

interpretive evidence that allowed me to make conclusions in this research process.

Transcript reviews were conducted to ensure validation for my interpretations in the interviews. I invested time in the field while ensuring that I understood the culture involved, and built trust with the stakeholders, and participants.

Transferability

The data collected in this study may be transferable to other contexts, and settings in the Jamaican education system. The schools in Jamaica use the standardized curriculum issued by the MEYI, and all instructions are based on the thematic integrated approach. Children are placed in similar settings in classrooms in Jamaican schools, with one teacher and some resources. This data may be transferable because I have described the participants, settings, and procedures in sufficient detail to enable persons in other locations, as well as the reader, to determine whether the findings could be transferable in their setting (Miles et al., 1994; Miles et al., 2014). It will also be up to the reader to determine transferability out of the bounds of this research.

Dependability

In addressing the dependability of my findings, the raw data documents and notes will be available through me (as I have sole access to ensure confidentiality) so that Walden University, and persons with a vested interest can analyze the information to corroborate my analysis (Miles et al., 2014) at any time. The notes and tapes from the interviews and information gleaned from the assessment documents from the MEYI were reviewed and have contributed to the triangulation process. Analysis and review of the data were on-going to ensure the validity of the research (Miles et al., 2014).

Confirmability

Reflection and reflexivity were exercised throughout the collection, and analysis to check for confirmability of data (Maxwell, 2012). During the interviews, I remained objective while considering the participants' expectations of the children's competencies and as I reviewed the interview notes, transcripts, and planned and curriculum documents (that teachers used). The data were reviewed for the discrepancy, but there were none, and transcript reviews were conducted to ensure validation of the interpretations as I processed, and analyzed the data (Maxwell, 2012). The participants agreed with the information from the interviews that were presented to them.

In this research process, I concurred with (Maxwell, 2012; Miles et al., 2014), that my personal experiences and background knowledge about children's competencies for readiness skills may influence my perceptions and findings. To reduce bias, I adhered to the regulations, and guidelines of Walden University. I used descriptive analysis, for the information from the interviews, notes, and review of the documents, to ensure that data collection, and data analysis were closely aligned at every step of the research process, so that researchers would be able to replicate this study

Results

The following sections present the findings I found from the data for this investigation. The findings outline details from the responses to the interview questions from each participant and information about curriculum documents, teachers' planned activities, and lessons, as well as the results for the GOILP for the two schools in the sample. The findings are presented in a manner that responds to the research questions.

Some verbatim responses of the participants are highlighted throughout the presentation of the findings for the teachers' expectations for readiness skills at Grade 1 when children transition into the formal education system.

In addressing Research Question 1, how do Kindergarten teachers prepare students with the readiness skills needed for Grade 1? The data to support this research question came from the responses for the interview items one, two, three, six, and seven (see Appendix A), interview notes, and review of documents. The ideas, concepts, meanings, patterns, and themes emerged as Infant department teachers explained how they prepared students with readiness skills.

I used first-level coding to summarize the segments of the data (Miles et al., 2014), then, the responses from the interviews were placed into the codes of Curriculum Standards (CS), since this was common to all the responses for the participants; Supporting Students with Readiness Skills (SSRS) was the next marginal code that emerged; Teaching and Learning Strategies (T/L STR) emerged because teachers gave information about their interactions with the children and what they expect the children to learn in the process. The participants also reported on how they assist students who fall behind in the teaching and learning environment (A/S/FB); the participants outlined the resources they used in the Teaching and Learning (R/T: L) environment, and the Barriers to teaching and learning (BR: T/L) emerged as the participants' expectations were impacted by these barriers. The aim was to see the emerging themes so that the data could be highlighted and analyzed.

Figure 1 summarizes the research questions and the interview questions (Appendix A) and the themes that emerge from the data. Research Question.1 - How do Kindergarten teachers prepare students with the readiness skills needed for Grade 1? The interview questions that responded to this question were questions 1, 2, 3, 6, and 7. Research Question. 2 To what extent do Grade 1 teachers believe incoming students are prepared to meet the demands of the Grade 1 curriculum? The responses from the participants to this question came from interview questions 4 and 5, interview notes, and document review. Research Question 3: To what extent do students' mastery of readiness skills influence teachers' expectations of students' competencies for the formal curriculum at Grade1? The responses from the participants to this question came from interview questions 8, 9, and 10, interview notes, document review.

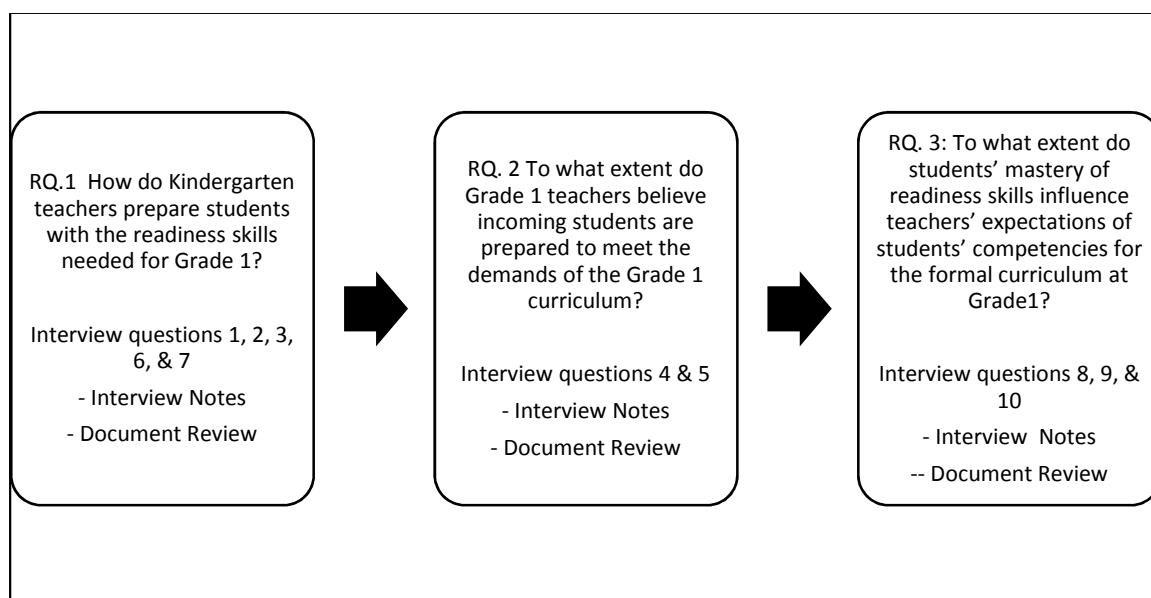


Figure 1. Research and interview questions with data collection sources.

The themes that emerged are 1. Curriculum standards that are used to prepare and support children with readiness skills. 2. Teaching and learning strategies that are used to

prepare children with readiness skills for Grade 1. 3. The barriers/limitations that impact the preparation of readiness skills for Grade 1. In Research Question 2 the participants expressed their thoughts on the children's level of preparedness and their expectations at the Grade 1 level.

Children entered the Grade 1 environment prepared with some level of readiness skills; however, they need to develop an understanding of the language for the curriculum, and the books that they had to read. In the area of reading, some of the children had difficulty with basic sight words and were not aware of some of the letters; some children were not able to read at their grade level.

The themes that emerged from Research Question 2 were 1. Preparedness with readiness skills for learning for Grade 1 and Preparedness with readiness skills at Grade 1 for the curriculum. 2. Areas that children showed preparedness for Grade 1. 3. Areas that children lacked preparedness for Grade 1; and 4. Supporting children who lacked preparedness for Grade 1, and the barriers teachers encountered in scaffolding children with the readiness skills. The participants expressed that children's level of mastery, and the competencies displayed for Grade 1 greatly affected how they prepared their lessons, group the children in their class, and the strategies they employed in the teaching and learning environment.

The participants concurred that children who transitioned from the Infant department into Grade 1 needed to display some level of mastery, and competencies in readiness skills so that they could have an understanding how to construct meanings,

build their competencies, be aware with general knowledge and show maturity in the social skills to work with each other in their new learning environment.

Figure 2 outlines Research Question.1. The data that provided responses to this question were interview questions 1, 2, 3, 6, and 7 (see Appendix A). The themes that emerged were (a) Standards used to that prepare children with readiness skills, and resources that promote the acquisition of readiness skills for five-year-olds at the Infant department to transition into Grade1; (b) Teaching and learning strategies that are used to prepared the students with the requisite readiness skills, and (c) The barriers and limitations teachers and students encounter in acquiring readiness skills needed for Grade 1.

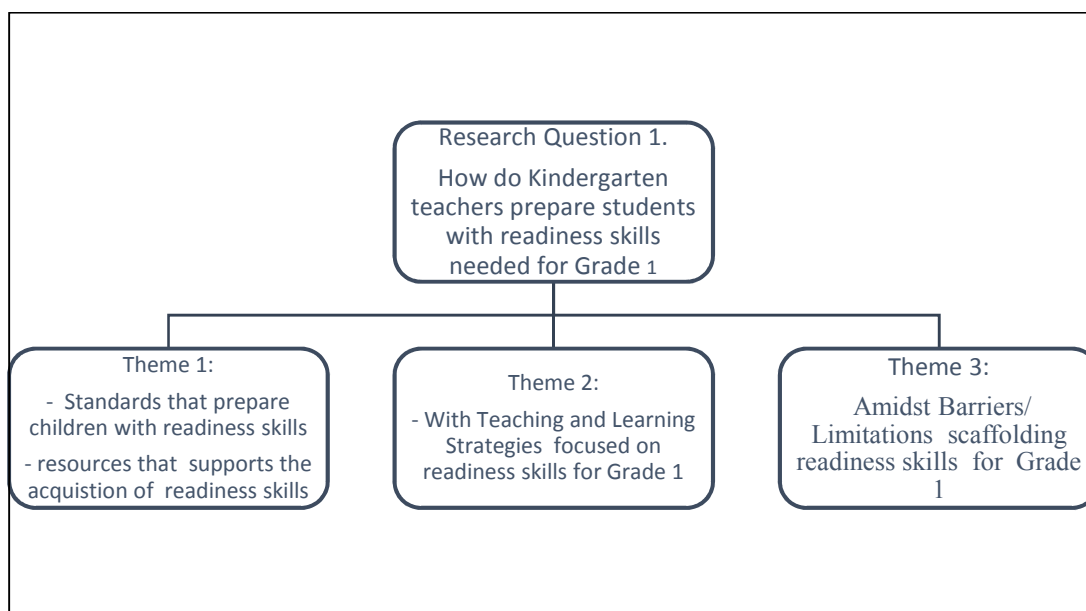


Figure 2. Research Question 1 with emerging themes.

The participants from the Infant department explained that when children enter Infant school or departments, they are not equipped with the skills, knowledge, and

competencies of the grade. Therefore, teachers at the infant department have to provide an environment with materials so that they can prepare the children to acquire basic skills and build on them for learning in the future. For Research Question 1 teachers are guided by developmentally appropriate practices prepare their students with perceptual skills (visual and auditory), motor skills (fine and gross motor); language skills; general learning and a desire to read.

Research Question 1

Theme 1: Curriculum standards that promote readiness skills for Grade 1.

The curriculum standard that is required at the Infant department is observed by all teachers. In the interviews, the five participants at this level stated that infant departments, basic schools, and preparatory and kindergarten departments in Jamaican schools used the standardized curriculum guide for four and five-year-olds that is provided to the schools by the ECC in collaboration with the MEYI for teaching and learning. This Jamaican national curriculum is a written guide to inform facilitators of learning about objectives, method, content, and evaluation. At this level, the guidelines are suggested for teachers to engage children with activities and concepts to develop skills in listening, language, number knowledge, perceptual (visual and auditory), motor (fine and gross), reading readiness, reading and socialization, and at what time in the term the themes and topics should be covered. In response to the interview questions, the teachers concurred that the curriculum that is used at the kindergarten department is a planned document distributed by the Ministry of Education (MEYI) and Early Childhood Standardized (ECC) *Curriculum for Four and Five-year-olds*. It is a readiness curriculum

with selected topics that help children relate to: Who Am I, My Family, Travelling, Sports & Exercise, and My Community.

In explaining the type of curriculum that is used in the Infant department in Jamaican schools so that children can acquire readiness skills for Grade 1, one participant said,

The teachers who facilitate learning for the four to five in the Jamaican education system use the readiness curriculum that has a thematic approach and is activity-based. The Early Childhood Commission and the Ministry of Education distribute copies to the schools. The curriculum outlines themes and teachers are encouraged to engage the children in hands-on activities so that they can be exposed to the content, gain experiences for readiness skills that they need to display at Grade 1.

These interactions allow children to attain the curriculum standards needed for Grade 1.

Another participant said,

The curriculum that I use in the Infant department has deliberate learning experiences to bring out the desired learning outcome. The curriculum has guidelines for teachers to facilitate children with activities that will enable them to acquire readiness skills such as listening, numeracy, reading readiness, reading, and social skills.

Resources that promote the acquisition of readiness skills. In supporting the children in Infant departments with resources, teachers provide the necessary materials and resources such as alphabet and number Frieze, calendar, weather chart, some

manipulative materials, specific activities, and learning centers to motivate them for the acquisition of readiness skills in their learning environment. All of the respondents at the Infant department reported that the first thing they did when students enter their class was formative assessments to find out what areas of readiness skills the children had and their background knowledge of basic information for school. During this process, children's experiences and competencies are assessed and compared with the level at which they should be performing. All of the respondents (100%) explained that from their assessment, children were placed in ability groups based on the results of the assessment. The respondents explained that children were exposed to curriculum content while building skills, competencies, knowledge, and experiences. During workshops, it was impressed by teachers to motivate the learners in their environment in supporting children with readiness skills. In supporting the children to acquire readiness skills, the participants agreed that the curriculum encourages teachers to support children in the learning process by facilitating the learning styles, scaffolded them with necessary skills and motivating them in the learning process.

The respondents also concurred that as children learned concepts, and skills, when other resources were provided so that they could be engaged in deliberate activities that would allow them to develop an awareness of the letters of the alphabet, letter sounds, phonemic awareness, number knowledge, and basic mathematics concepts and operations.

One respondent expressed, "I can speak for all my colleagues that the children in the infant department are exposed to general knowledge, where they learned about

shapes, the days of the week, the months of the year, the calendar, and the types of weather daily.” She also explained that as the children explored the manipulatives that were deliberately placed in their environment, they should acquire knowledge and competencies.

The participants also agreed that during their interaction, children were given materials, resources, and activities that were geared towards building readiness skills that included the perceptual, motor (fine and gross), listening skills, language skills, general knowledge, problem-solving skills, and creativity. During their interaction teachers also facilitated and scaffolded individual children and in the process catered to their interest and needs.

Theme 2: Teaching/learning strategies used to prepare readiness skills. In supporting children to acquire readiness skills, the five respondents said that when children entered the learning environment at the Infant Department, they did not enter with background knowledge and experiences. Therefore, they had to be taught, supported with materials to learn, build on their experiences, and develop the level of readiness that they need in their new learning environment. The respondents said that about 80% of children who entered the five-year-old class in the Infant department had limitations in oral language and communication, the ability to manipulative objects (that were needed to improve their writing skills and strengthened their fine motor skills), and they needed to be taught skills, and competencies for cognitive development, social interaction and to build on their awareness. One participant said,

In the teaching and learning environment, I try to model the skills, concepts and scaffold the children to participate in the activities so that they can be sensitized and be motivated to learn to read while promoting the content such as for travelling, types of water transport. I also allow the children to be engaged in hands-on activities/things as well as free play.

Another participant explained,

As teachers we use basic teaching and learning resources such as the alphabet, and number Freize, Calendar, and Weather chart. We invite resource persons, to provide added information that children need in the teaching and learning environment. We take the children on nature walks and field trips to enhance their learning experiences.

This participant further said,

When the children enter my classroom, I begin with the alphabet; while engaging them in activities to allow them to be aware of the letters, letter sounds and how to apply phonics to words. I scaffold them as they explore the manipulatives to acquire number knowledge and basic mathematics concepts operations. I try to expose them to general knowledge where they learn about shapes, the days of the week, months of the year, the calendar and the weather to name a few. I allow the children to play because they learn through play as the theorists Piaget and Vygotsky promoted. Play helps the children to grow and develop, and they learn more than what I can teach them.

Teaching and learning strategies used in the infant department. The schedule that was displayed in the classroom, gives details of the activities that take place daily. For the Infant department, the schedule for the day begins with free activity (children can choose to interact with material at the center of their choice), then comes Circle time, which is teacher directed whole group presentation. This session sets the pace for the day, in this session, the teacher informs the children about the content from the theme, or the topic for the lesson, the literacy, and numeracy focus for the day is also introduced. The schedule then transitions into the next session '*Guided learning*' where two small groups do independent activities, and the teacher sits and works with the third small group. The sessions activities are rotated for one hour, the teacher ensures that each child has an opportunity to participate in all the activities. These sessions aim to accommodate skill acquisition, and knowledge. Teachers have to plan and execute the lessons with appropriate activities so that the children will grasp the concepts, skills, and competencies that should be learned in those sessions. There is also break and lunch time, guided creative time and story-telling.

The respondents in the Infant departments highlighted that the teaching and learning strategies that teachers used include: Grouping, questioning, resource persons, team teaching, teacher exchange (that utilize the strengths of our colleagues), role play, games, songs, dramatization, computer-aided strategies, field trips and nature walks (taking the children outdoors for them to explore, observe and relate learning to their real-life experiences, For reading readiness skills, teachers provided the children with flashcards and engaged them in strategies such as stretching and chunking and word wall

strategy to help them to learn sight words and other words in the curriculum. For reading readiness skills, teachers provided the children with flashcards and engaged them in strategies such as stretching and chunking and word wall strategy to help them to learn sight words and other words in the curriculum. Teachers engaged the children in storytelling to assist them in sequencing, comprehension skills and retelling stories. Children were engaged in discovery and inquiry learning; they were allowed to explore, research and do projects. Three respondents highlighted that they were observant, and careful to assist children to understand, for example, our culture and the people that came to Jamaica to build our land. Table 2 describes the teaching and learning strategies that the teachers at the infant department used to prepare children with readiness skills.

Table 2

Strategies Used in the Infant Department

Teaching and Learning Strategies	Participants										
	P1		P2		P3		P4		P5		
	<i>T</i>	<i>L</i>	<i>T</i>	<i>L</i>	<i>T</i>	<i>L</i>	<i>T</i>	<i>L</i>	<i>T</i>	<i>L</i>	
1 Grouping	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
2 Questioning	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
3 Teacher aided assistance, scaffold	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
4 Role-play, Games, Dramatization	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
5 Computer-aided strategies	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
6 Field Trips/ Nature Walks	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
7 Stretching and chunking strategy	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
8 Story Telling	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
9 Discovery and inquiry learning	-	✓	-	✓	-	✓	-	✓	-	✓	✓

Note: T – Teaching Strategies; L – Learning Strategies

The respondents also reported that during the interaction, they ensured that they catered to the learning styles of the children. They also provided opportunities for promoting engagement in auditory activities, for example, listening to the letter sounds from the Audio Cassette with a CD, or facilitating visual activities as children discovered the letters of the alphabet, and noted similarities and differences between the letters, objects, and pictures. This process also included kinesthetic activities that allowed children to manipulate objects and other things from the environment. One participant said,

To ensure that I keep the children motivated to learn, I use grouping, questioning, and computer-added strategies to execute my lessons. I engage the class in hands-on activities to guarantee that they are learning the concepts and skills. Since the

focus for this age cohort is on the acquisition of letter sounds, knowledge of letters, number word attack skills for reading, and number knowledge. I have to implement strategies that will engage children in activities to enable them to develop skills for reading and learning.

Another participant said that she used teachable moments to assist children to understand our culture and the people that came to Jamaica to build our land. Teachers have to provide opportunities so that children will be motivated to learn. In response to motivating children to learn the readiness skills, this participant said,

When children enter the teaching and learning environment, I provide flash cards while engaging them in the stretching and chunking strategy so that they can learn the basic sight words and other vocabulary words in the curriculum. I also take the children outdoors so that they can explore, observe and relate learning to real life experiences.

All the participants reported that children were given the opportunity to collaborate and communicate, as they facilitated their engagement in activities to develop problem-solving critical thinking skills through discovery, and inquiry learning. Children sat in groups where they were scaffolded, coached, and motivated to acquire skills, knowledge, and competencies. The children, as well as teachers, asked questions for clarity and understanding. The word wall and word cards were used for stretching and chunking. Children had the autonomy to explore their environment inside and outside of the classroom in the learning centers, on nature walks and field-trips to be engaged in the

discovery and inquiry learning. During the scheduled story time, children participated using role play and dramatization and enjoyed playing games.

The participants at the infant department concurred that they gave children some hands-on materials to expose them to the concepts and build their knowledge in literacy and language skills, number knowledge and fine and gross motor skills. The participants emphasized that they engage children with deliberately planned activities for them to acquire readiness skills for Grade 1.

The respondents who cater to the children at the Infant department believed that at this level children do not fall behind pertaining to cognition; some children did not have any background experience or exposure to structured cognitive activities. These children need to be exposed to materials, scaffolded with concepts, and skills so that they can apply them when it is required in the learning process. Five out of five or (100 %) of the participants reported that before the children entered the five-year-old class, they are required to do a four-year-old standardized assessment by the ECC. The participants showed me some documents used for the in-house written assessments, observation, and alternate assessments so that they were able to make informed decisions about the children's interest, and needs in their natural setting, and readiness skills. Three out of five (60%) participants purported that they did not pressure the children to master given tasks. The participants said that they assessed the children's in areas of weaknesses, build competencies, and skills so that they could acquire background experiences. The participants informed me that the children were placed in groups so that teachers could work with them individually and collectively.

The participants at the Infant department explained that they used 15 minutes pull-out sessions at break time, lunch time, or after school so that they could have one-on-one interactive sessions, aimed at engaging children in deliberate activities for them to learn the requisite skills, and competencies required at their age, and stage of development. The participants reported that the children were scaffolded with concepts and skills, as well as built their experiences, and knowledge for the next level of the education system. The participants explained that sometimes children were placed in similar ability groups or mixed ability groups so that they could learn the required skills, and competencies from their peers, to enable them to show mastery at Grade 1.

Resources to support the acquisition of readiness skills at the infant department. Children needed to be supported with the necessary resources so that they could be intrinsically motivated in the learning process. The MEYI provides the curriculum guides, furniture, some textbooks, and a monetary grant to all schools at the Primary level. The administration ensured that the teachers had basic equipment such as television, CDs, audio and videotape, and multi-media projector; (however these resources had to be shared among classes in the kindergarten department.). The participants who facilitated learning at the infant department explained that their administration also assisted them with basic materials, and resources such as markers, and cartridge paper, but the resources were inadequate for the number of children, and activities for engagement. The administration at both schools was very supportive, providing materials with the aim to promote learning for children in the Infant department. The participants reported that the administration at their schools also helped

with printing documents to send home, as well as some worksheets for the children to be actively engaged at school. The participants also said that their administration also encouraged them to attend workshops, and professional development sessions conducted by the MEYI and ECC that would empower them with methodologies, strategies, and information; they also got an opportunity at these workshops to share their best practices with other teachers.

The respondents reported that the schools provided permanent and white board markers, tape and video recorder, multimedia projector, and math manipulatives so that they could actively engage children in the teaching, and learning environment. The respondents informed me that although the school provides some printing services for activities for the children; teachers have to supplement learning with additional materials and resources. The participants explained they had their laptops to access information, CD players, and cassettes to complement their lessons and they used other resources to assist them in the teaching and learning environment. They had printers to print additional activities, and worksheets for the children in their classes. The participants also added that they sourced teaching aids and other materials to decorate the classroom, making the environment attractive and welcoming for children to learn. The participants also concurred that they had to provide the children with basic resources such as pencils, crayons, and books so that children could be actively engaged in follow up activities. The respondents reported that parents assisted them with some manipulatives and artifacts but they had to source other resources they need to facilitate active learning. The participants also agreed that they accessed, and used environmental resources to promote teaching

and learning. The MEYI supplies schools with the curriculum guides, text and work books and furniture. Visitors also donate resources such as pencils, crayons and story books.

Theme 3: Barriers in preparing children with readiness skills for Grade 1.

In preparing students with the readiness skills needed for Grade 1, there were some barriers that emerged. Although this was not an original intent, the participants explained that they encountered some barriers that impacted the students' acquisition of readiness skills, the teaching and learning process and the competencies that the children displayed. The data were collected from the interview questions, journal entries, and examining teachers' documents. The participants at the infant department highlighted the barriers that they believed affected the children's acquisition of readiness skills to meet the demands of Grade 1. The barriers include resources, financial issues, attendance at schools, teacher-pupil ratio, and class size, mixed abilities, parental involvement, and children with learning challenges. The participants explained that some children do not come to school with the necessary resources they need for learning such books and pencils; teachers have to source the materials from the school or personal funds. One teacher said,

I provide the necessary materials and resources that the children in my class need. Because some children come to school without notebooks, pencils and textbooks. I really cannot allow the children to sit in my class, and not do the work that I know they need to learn and for me to move along with the curriculum. Therefore, I have to get them to be engaged in the activities.

There is one multi-media for the entire Infant department, so teachers had to share the projector which sometimes posed a problem when plans were made to incorporate technology in the lesson for more than one teacher. Teachers indicated that that they did not have enough manipulatives for all the children in the classroom; they found it challenging to encourage the children to use the available materials. Teachers experienced difficulty because some children did not want to share, as some of them have not mastered the skills of caring for each other and working corporately. The Infant department participants also said that when children had to share materials, some children displayed inappropriate behaviors and actions when they were instructed to interact for given activities. When this occurred, teachers had to stop the lesson or activity to address the issue, and sometimes incorporate the value of social skills and social intelligence among peers.

Another barrier that the participants reported was that some children faced financial needs. One participant explained that a few children came to school hungry; as a result, they could not participate in the teaching and learning activities comfortably. Teachers had to ensure that these children have something to eat before the lesson began or during the lunch time. One participant said,

I support some children emotionally, financially and socially when they attend school. When I see the children display certain signs and behavior, then I have to make enquires about the well-being of the children. Consequently, sometimes I realize that they need extra support with something to eat so that they can learn at school.

The participants also explained that sometimes some children came to school late, therefore they would miss out on the circle time session where the information about the topic is given, and instructions for pending activities are given. This sets the pace for the day in the early childhood environment.

Another barrier that participants highlighted was the teacher/pupil ratio. The participants explained that the class sizes were big, with only one teacher that accommodated thirty-one or forty children with no assistant. The participants informed me that the government wants a target teacher-pupil ratio of twenty-five to one teacher. Because of the class size, the participants concurred that they did not have time for deeper relationships to facilitate more individual time with the children, to improve their strengths and weaknesses, and scaffold them to acquire skills they need to accomplish cognitive tasks. The participants also explained that if teachers at the Infant department/kindergarten level in Jamaican schools had assistant teachers, they would be better able to cater to all the children's needs. One hundred percent of the participants thought that an assistant would have been very helpful for classes in the infant department.

One participant explained that in addressing the need for assistants at the early childhood level, the Government of Jamaica have implemented a program to engage a few novice teachers through the Housing Opportunity Production and Employment (HOPE) program. It encourages some of the new graduates from high schools and colleges to assist in the Infant department and other early childhood institutions. The

individuals employed on the HOPE program do not stay because of the remuneration and the conditions of their tenure to work.

Another barrier that the participants highlighted was that the children in the class had mixed abilities; some children were performing well above their stage of development, while there were others that did not have the background experiences and knowledge. Some children were not mastering the acquisition of concepts, and skills so that they could apply them in problem-solving sessions or display competencies when they are given activities after a lesson. The participants explained that grouping the children was challenging because some children also did not come to school with background experiences, and resources they needed; some of the children were not able to initially grasp the concepts when they were taught. Consequently, the participants explained that they had to reteach lessons, concepts, and skills or ask children who were competent to explain the concepts or skills to their peers, so that they would not be left behind in the learning environment. One participant said that she was tempted to put the children in similar ability groups so that she could address the individual, and collective needs of the children. However, she said that this type of grouping was not promoted by the school for this level of children. She also explained that children learned from each other, and sometimes their peers could explain concepts and skills to them for understanding.

Fifthly, the participants indicated that that there were special events that took place during the term such as heritage week, harvest, Jeans day, movie day; these are days are designated for fund- raising purposes that should assist with financing the

school's budget for the year. The participants explained that the time lost during these days/time cannot be recovered; it impacted the teaching and learning time. The participants further explained that not all of the fundraising days could be used for educational emphasis where they could expose children to related topics, themes, or cultural content in the curriculum. One participant also explained that when a teacher has a post with special responsibilities (senior teacher), she assumes the position of supervisor for the Infant department. She also said that sometimes the responsibilities and duties take precedence over teaching; taking her away from the class which influences instruction time.

Another barrier that the participants reported was that some of the parents whose children were having challenges in the classroom did not assist their children with their homework. The participants explained that a few of these parents also had difficulties with reading for themselves; those parents could not assist their children with homework activities, and projects, as a result the children could not learn from the experience. Ten percent of the respondents also stated that some children had other issues at home because their parents were separated, divorced or migrated; teachers had to be understanding, considerate, and compassionate about the children emotional state and well-being of the learners,

Finally, the participants underscored that teachers in the Infant department had to be engaged in continuous assessments that were very time-consuming for the number of children in the classes. Through informal assessments, teachers had to observe the children so that they could make informed decisions about the children's knowledge,

competencies, and background experiences, and how they apply concepts, and skills in given tasks. The participants reported that from developmental checklists some developmental delays could be identified.

The participants explained that the findings from the observations, and evaluation were communicated to the principal, administration, and some parents. One participant at the infant department stated,

I have observed children with special needs in the Infant department; however, teachers at this level are not trained to diagnose children who have educational issues or learning challenges for intervention. In spite of children's needs, they are accommodated in the teaching and learning environment at the Infant department as best as possible. Teachers at this level do not create individual educational plans to address the child's needs. Some of the children who enter the infant department with special needs, their parents are aware of their condition, yet they seem to be using the Infant department of the school as an avenue to get their children into the special education unit at the school. I believe that some parents are in denial, claiming nothing is wrong with their children.

Although there were barriers for the acquisition of readiness skills, children need to be prepared with readiness skills for when they transition into Grade 1. All the participants at the Infant department reported that, for literacy development, the children were engaged in individual, and group activities so that they could gain competencies and knowledge of letters of the alphabet, and the letter sounds; structured activities to acquire skills in syllabication, phonics, sight words, vocabulary, and using sentence strips to read.

For number knowledge, the participants explained that the focus was on allowing children to acquire knowledge of the numerals, numbers and the number name. The aim was to empower the students to acquire skills in basic computation, problem-solving, and critical thinking skills that should prepare them for the next level, one participant said,

I constantly work with the children in my class, so that they can develop mastery in the main skills areas of literacy, and numeracy that will enhance their learning when they move to the next level. To reduce the barriers, I also assist the children so that they can develop competencies and maturity in social and emotional skills.

The students who did not have issues were given tasks to prepare them with the skills they needed to acquire while at the infant department, students with issues /barriers were exposed to more hands-on activities so that they can acquire the skills they need for Grade 1.

Readiness skills children need to acquire for grade 1.

All the participants at Infant department reported that children needed readiness skills for learning; for literacy development, teachers engaged the children in individual, as well as in group activities so that they could gain competencies and knowledge for word recognition, letters of the alphabet, and the letter sounds, structured activities such as syllabication, phonetic skills, sight words, vocabulary, oral and written communication, visual perception and discrimination and reading. For numeracy, the participants explained that the focus is on allowing children to acquire knowledge of the numerals, numbers and the number name that will empower them to acquire skills in basic computation, problem-solving, and critical thinking skills. The participants further

explained that some children did not have background experiences or the stimulation so they had to be allowed to learn at their own pace. They did not have competencies in general knowledge (colors, shapes, general information). These children needed more interaction with their peers to develop social and emotional skills. Consequently, some children would not meet the expectations of the Grade 1 teachers for the competencies and skills. Table 3 outlines these skills.

Table 3

Skills Children Need to Acquire at the Infant Department

		Participants				
		P1	P2	P3	P4	P5
Literacy	Word recognition	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Letter sounds	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Sight words	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Writing	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Oral Language and Communication	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Reading	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Visual perception and discrimination	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Numeracy	Number knowledge (Numerals, numbers and number name)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Problem Solving	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Computation and application of	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Critical Thinking	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
General Knowledge	General Knowledge (Alphabet, colors, shapes, general information)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Social skills	Social skills	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Emotional skills	The ability to think, understand and follow and instructions	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Physical Skills	Fine and Gross motor skills	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

The participants at the Infant department agreed that when the children from the infant department transition into Grade 1, teachers had high expectations for them. The children coming from the Infant department are expected to be prepared with as well as

display the requisite skills, so that they can gain and extend their cognitive experiences. Teachers at the Infant department said that they believe that children are exposed to the skills they need to be taught at this stage of their lives. They concurred that the children should be scaffolded with the skills for holistic development; then they can display the readiness skills they have already acquired and be able to build on their competencies.

Research Question 2

The participants at Grade 1 said that they believe the children who transition need to display some competencies, so that they can meet the demands of the curriculum at Grade 1. I sought answers from the Grade 1 teachers to respond to Research Question 2 - To what extent do Grade 1 teachers believe incoming students are prepared to meet the demands of the Grade 1 curriculum? The answers came from interview questions four and five (see Appendix A). In Jamaica, children are expected to enter the Grade 1 environment prepared with some level of readiness skills, and an understanding of the language of the books that they have to read. In the area of reading, the participants stated that some of the children had difficulty with basic sight words, not having an awareness of some of the letters. Some children were not able to read at their grade level.

The participants at the Grade 1 explained that children's level of mastery, and the competencies they display for Grade 1 greatly affect how they prepare their lessons, group the children in their class, and the strategies they employ in the teaching and learning environment. The data were organized under categories, and the themes that emerged from Research Question 2 were: 1. Children showed some level preparedness for some readiness skills for learning at Grade 1; 2. Children were not adequately

prepared in some areas of readiness in literacy, numeracy when they transitioned, (they showed limited competencies in general knowledge and social skills); and 3. Support is needed for skills acquisition, Grade 1 teachers also highlighted some barriers children and teachers encountered in acquiring the requisite readiness, thus preventing them from being fully prepared to be challenged with academic activities from the curriculum.

Figure 3 presents the data with the emerging themes.

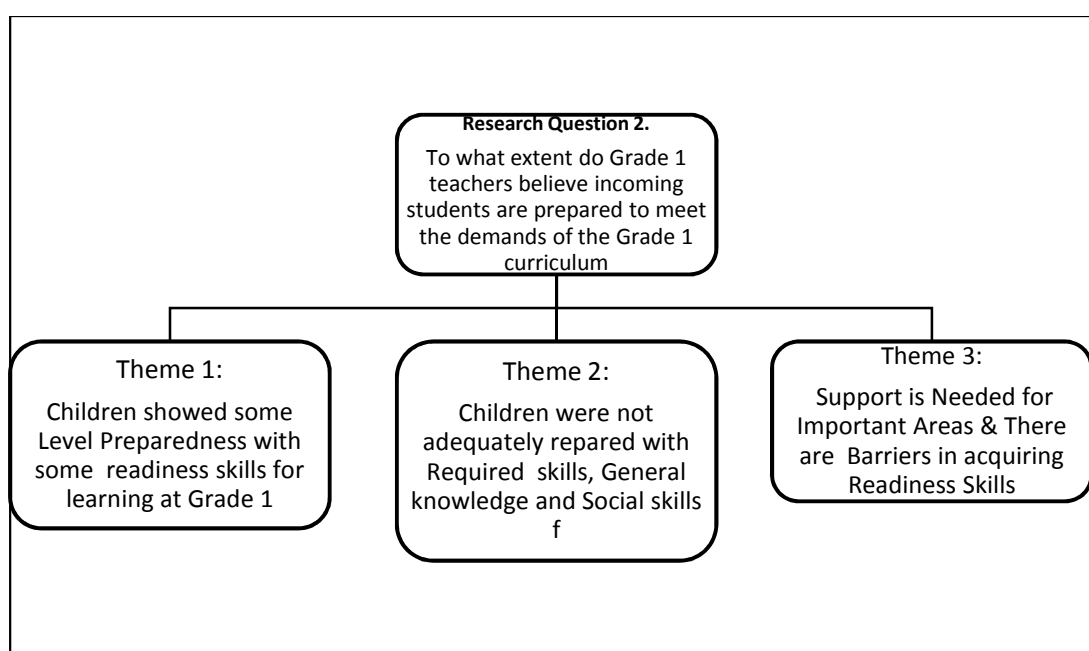


Figure 3. Research Question 2 with the emerging themes.

The respondents at Grade 1 reported that children who transitioned from the Infant department were not entirely prepared to meet the demands of the curriculum at Grade 1. They agreed that the children entered Grade 1 with some background experiences, but the skills they displayed were inadequate to meet the requirements of the new national standards curriculum (NSC). The participants agreed that the environment had to be re-organized, and learning materials provided for the children to have more

interaction. The participants concurred that the children who transitioned in this cohort were not displaying the level mastery for basic sight words that were necessary for reading, as well as the competencies in number knowledge that is a pre-requisite for basic mathematical operations. The participants explained that the children were placed in groups and were encouraged to work together so that they could acquire the skills needed, and build on their background experiences.

The participants at Grade 1 concurred in their belief that children who transitioned into Grade 1 had some level of preparedness to use materials, and other resources in their learning environment. However, they believe that children should develop the required readiness skills that will enable them to meet the demands of the formal curriculum. From the interviews the participants from the Grade 1 explained that majority of the children showed some level of readiness that enabled them to display competencies, but they needed to have mastery so that they can be engaged in cognitive tasks when they are exposed to the formal curriculum.

Theme 1: Preparedness with readiness skills for learning at Grade 1. The participants at Grade 1 concurred that children displayed competencies in some areas of readiness. They showed that they were prepared in some of the basic areas these include, for literacy; recognition of some letters of the alphabet, and letter sounds, some basic sight words and word recognition skills. For number knowledge, (that is understanding identifying numerals, some numbers and number names they had little competencies. In general knowledge (that is colors, shapes, days of the week, months, general information) they had limited competencies; and social skills some children found it difficult to share

materials, sit and work in groups and form friendships. Table 4 presents the data that Grade 1 participants identified that the children showed some competencies when they transitioned into Grade 1.

Table 4

Preparedness for Skills at Grade 1

Areas that children showed preparedness		Participants				
		S1	S2	S3	S4	S5
Literacy	Alphabet	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Some sight words	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Number Knowledge	Numerals	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
General Knowledge	Limited General knowledge	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Social Skills	Some social skills	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

The participants at Grade 1 reported that some of the children had basic skills, but lacked general awareness, background experiences, and mastery of the knowledge of skills, competencies, and their general information. The participants at Grade 1 concurred that additional work had to be done, to assist children with literacy acquisition, they said they believe that the children came into Grade 1 with limited competencies for important areas. The respondents at Grade 1 reported that although some children have not fully grasped all the concepts and skills, they had to transition into Grade 1.

One participant explained that at the early childhood level there is no program for screening and intervention for children who may have a developmental delay or display a special need in the education system in Jamaica. Consequently, all children in this age cohort transition in the public school system with their peers even if they are not ready

All the participants believed that most of the children that transition into Grade 1 were prepared in some areas in literacy, numeracy, general knowledge and social skills but the competencies displayed were inadequate for them to begin most of the cognitive activities required from the curriculum at Grade1 level. In areas of literacy, the children displayed limited knowledge in identifying letters of the alphabet and letter sounds; some of them only knew a few sight words. The children could identify the numerals and could count up to twenty. The children also had limited general knowledge, and social skills.

The participants at Grade 1 reported that teachers had to cater to the children's holistic needs in the teaching and learning environment. The teachers reported that they scaffold the children in various teaching and learning activities to expose them to the content of the new curriculum. The respondents explained that they had to give additional support to the children who were not at their grade level for cognitive tasks. Teachers were also engaged in continuous assessments to improve their planning, execution, and delivery of lessons to meet the demands of the Grade 1 curriculum. Participants at Grade 1 explained that they motivated the children to be problem-solvers, as well as be able to apply themselves to be critical thinkers. One participant explained

Although some children at six years old did not fully grasp the concepts, knowledge, and skills they needed at this level, they are placed in Grade 1. In the Jamaican education system, we do not have a formal plan or intervention program to assist these children to acquire the required skills, attain mastery, and gain parity with their peers. Consequently, the children have to transition into Grade 1,

from the Infant department or sometimes from home. As teachers, we have the task to ensure that they learn the content at this level.

Theme 2: Children not prepared with readiness and social skills, and general knowledge. The participants at Grade 1 said that some of the children that transitioned are not fully prepared with the requisite readiness skills, social skills, and general knowledge. They reported that some children lack knowledge of literacy skills that includes sight words, and word recognition to read at their grade level. The participants further agreed that some children lack the reading readiness skills for identifying letters, letters sound, visual discrimination, and perceptual knowledge. One participant said that she identified that some children that had issues with identifying, writing, and recognizing some letters that include *P*, *Q*, *B*, and *D*. Three participants at the Grade 1 level reported that some children in their class did not know letter differences, and sometimes when they wrote letters they were mixed up, or they were in reversal form. The participants at Grade 1 explained that most of the children who transitioned had a challenge with the skills in writing regarding spacing and ordering of the letters. They explained that the children were equipped with some number knowledge skills, as they could identify numbers, but were not able to tell the number names; they lack the competencies in problem-solving and computation.

The participants expressed that on closer evaluation of the children at Grade 1, teachers made informal conclusions that children did not have mastery in content areas or the competencies that they are expected to have at the Grade 1 level. The participants at Grade 1 concurred that the children needed to show that they were prepared in areas of

literacy that includes: word recognition skills, identify letters and letter sounds, and know basic sight words; be able to display writing skills, engage in oral communication, show an understanding for basic instructions, and follow instructions for their activities.

Children needed to display competencies in word recognition skills, letters sounds, sight words, writing oral communication, visual perception, and discrimination for reading.

Children needed to show preparedness for competencies in number knowledge, (have an awareness of the numerals, number and number name), and be able to apply basic skills in mathematics, be engaged in computations and application of skills; be able to engage in problem solving and critical thinking. The participants believed that the children should display competencies in general knowledge so that they can build their intelligences. Children should display mastery in physical activities such as writing, eye-hand coordination, and other fine and gross motor skills that are necessary at this level.

Table 5 outlines the participants response for the skills that teachers believe children needed to begin the formal curriculum at Grade 1.

Table 5

Skills Necessary to Begin Grade 1

Skills Children need for Preparedness to begin the Curriculum		Participants				
		S1	S2	S3	S4	S5
Literacy	Word recognition skills	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Letter sounds	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Some sight words	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Writing Skills	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Oral Language and Communication Skills	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Reading skills	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Visual perception and discrimination	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Numeracy	Number knowledge	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Problem Solving Skills	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Computation and application of skills	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Critical Thinking Skills	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
General Knowledge	General Knowledge	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Physical Skills	Fine and Gross motor skills (writing, motor activities)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

The participants also explained that at this age, children have short attention spans. Consequently, the lessons and activities had to be interesting, engaging, and exciting to hold the children's attention. Teachers at Grade 1 agreed that children should know their personal information, such as their names, (a few of them gave their pet names, and not their real name), date of birth, names of their parents or guardians, and where they live. The participants explained that children also lacked the knowledge of non-numeral concepts, and position in space, and time. One out of five (or 20 %), of the participants at Grade 1 said they observed that some children lack physical competencies in the fine motor skills such as tying their shoelaces and buttoning their shirts.

One participant reported that on a scale of 1-10, she would place most of the students who entered the Grade 1's level of preparedness with regards to the requisite skills children need to begin the formal curriculum at Grade 1, at about 5. The participants reported that they thought some of the children were somewhat prepared to take on the challenges of a new environment while some of the children were not adequately prepared with the readiness skills that they needed at the Grade 1 level. One participant reported

From my observations, and discussions in meetings with the other teachers, I agree that some children found it challenging to sit still so that they can focus on acquiring skills. Some of children do not show mastery for listening so that they can understand, and comprehend instructions to apply the skills for the tasks given in the class.

Preparedness with general knowledge for Grade 1.

Four out of five (80%) of the participants reported that some of the children had limitations in general knowledge, they did not know basic colors, shapes, and lacked skills in oral language and communication. Some children did not communicate in full sentences or expressed themselves well, they did not converse audibly. The participants stated that some children were not expressing themselves well with oral language while the class was engaged in discussions, they did not show an understanding of curriculum information where they can share their background experiences, when they were asked to participate. One participant said,

Whenever the students speak, they speak in creole or Jamaican patois. In the teaching and learning environment, we have to accept the home language that the children bring with them. When they express themselves, their home language sometimes interfere with the Standard English that is used, and is required in the education system in Jamaica.

Five out of five (100%) participants agreed that the majority of the students who enter Grade 1 are prepared in some areas in general knowledge, but they lack the competencies in some of the pertinent areas for learning.

One participant said, some children that transition into Grade 1 do not display a mature command of general knowledge (This includes knowing about shapes, colors, days of the week, months of the year and basic skills). I believe at this level, children should display increased competencies in general knowledge so that, teachers can assist them to build on their intelligences, creativity, and critical thinking.

Lack of social skills for Grade 1. Three out of five participants said that a number of the children who transition into Grade 1 display inappropriate social skills. Some examples of social skills include caring, sharing, and teamwork. The participants said that sometimes the children had difficulty sharing, or working amicably with their peers, as well as caring for each other needs and belongings. From the participants' observations in the learning environment, children were not willing to share materials, take turns without fussing, or clean up their area without displaying anti-social behaviors. The participants outlined that when children do not have the requisite social skills, they are sometimes

frustrated, and so they display inappropriate behaviors. One participant explained that some of the children in her class became frustrated when they were asked to do cognitive tasks that they felt they could not master. The participants at Grade 1 concluded that the children displayed a lack for social skills. One participant further stated that some of the children were shy or reserved and were slow to warm up during the lessons. Five participants agreed that the children were not displaying social skills and competencies when they are engaged in cognitive activities. The participants said the children would get into fights and squabbles when they had to work in groups or when the teacher had to be away from the classroom. The participants concurred that emotional development and intelligence is important for children in this age cohort. Children need to feel that they are accepted especially by their peers, and be comfortable in their learning environment. The participants explained that it was important to promote motivation, greater effort, responsibility, initiative, impulse control, and perseverance that reflect emotional development for the children.

The participants at Grade 1 agreed that children displayed some level of preparedness with social skills, but they were not satisfied with the level of mastery for these skills that the children displayed, so that academic tasks could be achieved in their new learning environment. The participants concluded that if children cannot work well socially, then competencies in Literacy, language, and numeracy will not be achieved, and teachers will encounter challenges as they engage the children in cognitive activities for the formal curriculum.

Theme 3: Supporting important areas that children lack preparedness.

The participants at the Grade 1 level concurred that they had to support students who seem to lack preparedness with the requisite readiness skills needed to begin the formal curriculum at Grade 1. The participants reported that they had to further support the children in the teaching-learning process, by engaging them in purposeful activities that would assist them to be ready cognitively, physically, socially, and emotionally. The children who did not display the required skills for the grade level had to be further supported, so that they could gain skills and competencies needed to be prepared for the national curriculum. To attain the objectives, Grade 1 teachers have to adhere to the standards stipulated by the MEYI. One participant said,

I use a lot of technology, and manipulative activities with the children in my class to build their motor skills and competencies. After I identify the areas of weaknesses pertaining to the skills that the children display. I decide what intervention strategy I should use to assist them to acquire the skills they need to perform at this level. Then, I inform their parents that I plan to keep their child a little longer after dismissal so that I can give their child more individualized help to build his/her cognitive abilities (most times the children identified are boys).

Curriculum standards to promote learning at Grade 1.

In the interviews, the participants that accommodate learning at Grade 1, responded that the curriculum that all Grade 1 classes used, is the curriculum that the MEYI distributes for use in the Jamaican schools. The curriculum is outlined in an integrated approach with the components outlined as Integrated Studies, Language Arts,

and Mathematics windows that should be done daily at Grade 1. The curriculum has been revised within the last 5 years, and schools are currently using the NSC that was prepared, written, distributed, and supervised by the MEYI and stakeholders. One participant who accommodated learning at Grade 1 explained,

Teachers at Grade 1 now use the National Standard Curriculum. This is a new curriculum distributed by the Ministry of Education (Jamaica). This curriculum embodies an integrated approach to teaching and learning. It promotes a greater focus on areas of Language Arts such as phonics, word recognition, communication tasks, and sentence structure. In mathematics the focus is on strands for number knowledge, geometry, basic shapes; it also encourages problem-solving, and computing worded problem.

The participants at Grade 1 agreed that children who transitioned into Grade 1 should have the readiness skills to begin the learning process. They said that teachers assisted the children to develop fluency in reading and to apply comprehension skills. The participants explained that they gave the children in the Grade1 hands-on activities, and encouraged them to work together in groups, as well as independently so that they can be prepared for the curriculum tasks at this level. Teachers also said that they scaffolded the children to make independent and informed decisions in the learning process.

All the participants at Grade 1 explained that over the first month they had to place more focus on the children who were exhibiting weaknesses in areas of reading. They explained that children who had challenges in reading were sometimes placed in

similar ability groups for selected sessions and activities. They could be give deliberate cognitive activities to assist them to gain skills, knowledge and competencies. One participant who taught Grade 1 said,

We identified the children who were having issues with readiness skills especially in reading and noted the other areas for learning; then parents were invited to a conference where they were told about the areas of weaknesses that their children faced. During the conference, parents were informed about the options, and strategies that teachers wanted to use to address, as well as assist children to improve the skills that their children displayed.

The participants agreed that all teachers at Grade 1 were desirous to further support the children in Grade 1, so that they can glean the concepts, and skills they need as they adjust in the new grade. One participant reported that she used role-play, songs, and games to support children in the learning environment so that they could glean knowledge, for improvement in the areas of weakness especially in reading and numeracy.

The observation of the documents informed me about the format that the teachers at Grade1 used for planning, and executing lesson for the new curriculum. The objectives for lesson plans aim for the children to acquire important areas for curriculum content, the procedure incorporates the 5Es (Explore, Engage, Extend, Elaborate, and Evaluate) while infusing the 4Cs (Collaboration, Creativity, Communication, and Critical thinking) in the teaching and learning process as they cater to the needs of the 21st Century learner.

The participants also informed me that training sessions were held for all Grade 1 teachers in Jamaica over the past two years. The workshops sought to expose teachers to the methodologies and strategies that the MEYI promotes for the NSC. These workshops informed teachers about the format of the lesson, planning, execution, delivery methods, and strategies of the new curriculum. At the training sessions, teachers were encouraged to embrace more student-centered approaches in their engagement with the students, so that they can promote the acquisition of problem-solving, critical thinking skills, and knowledge. The participants reported that teachers at the workshops were asked to motivate the children in their learning environments, work with more practical experiences, and actively engage them in the learning process. All of the participants agreed that curriculum planning and execution should entail hands-on, student-centered instruction for learning. To meet the standards for the new curriculum, one participant explained,

During the training exercise with the MEYI, the personnel from the Ministry of Education informed us[teachers] at the workshop that our curriculum delivery methods should be infused with technology, as well as the '*curriculum drivers*' (that is music, art, drama, art) aimed at enhancing the execution, and delivery of our lessons. I was encouraged to promote active learning in creative ways among the learners in my class.

The participants at Grade 1 explained that in supporting the children to be ready to meet the demands of Grade 1, they placed them in the groups according to the areas of weakness, for example, areas of weaknesses from the items from the GOILP that include

personal information about the children. The respondents said that they ensured that the correct information was accessed from the parents, as well as from the school records. The information was used in practical ways so that children could understand the importance of knowing their personal data, and develop an awareness of how to apply the knowledge, as well as give the details when it is necessary.

All of the respondents that taught Grade 1 reported that after the administration of the GOILP (see Appendices D & E), the first thing they did was to engage children in formative assessments to assess their competencies in areas of letter sounds, and letter identification, spatial awareness, number knowledge, and general knowledge. All of the participants said that they assessed children's skills and competencies using teacher-made tests so that they could make informed decisions to plan their lessons with appropriate activities that cater to the children's needs, while they supported them in areas of weakness. Sixty percent of the participants also said they ensured that areas of the curriculum were adequately addressed, because they included age-appropriate knowledge, skills, competencies, and activities.

The participants concurred that they exposed the children who transitioned into Grade 1 with high-frequency sight words. The aim was to assist the children to acquire knowledge of the basic sight words so that they would show competencies and be able to read. The participants also reported that they had to further scaffold the children with additional skills for reading (such as syllabication, word recognition, and fluency) at the grade level so that they could understand the content of the curriculum.

The participants explained that at Grade 1, teachers placed the children in similar ability groups after identifying the areas of weakness for literacy, and numeracy so that teachers could support them by working with them collectively, and individually. Teachers at Grade 1 said that they sought to address the interest, and needs of each child in their classes so that they could have made informed evaluations. During the break period, at lunch-time, and after school, teachers worked with the children to assist them individually to support them in areas of weaknesses, so that they could increase their level of knowledge, and awareness for general learning. The participants further stated that teachers' motivated children, empowered them in areas that they lacked the skills for application, and scaffolded them to achieve mastery for learning, and gain cognitive experiences. One participant at the Grade 1 level explained,

For children who are not prepared for Grade 1, I engage them during extra lessons after school, and have pull-out times at lunch and break time so that they can develop the competencies in reading as well as other areas for the curriculum content. I use a one-on-one approach so that I am sure that they master the concepts. I found out that some children need this interaction to develop the skills they need for learning.

Participants at Grade 1 reported that teachers engaged the children with varying teaching, and learning strategies with an objective to support, and motivate them to be prepared for the demands of the curriculum, and formal learning. The teaching and learning strategies include, questioning to find out about their students' background experiences, assessment as they learn and what they have learned during their

interactions, and grouping to engage the children in learning strategies. The teachers said children were exposed to cooperative strategies where they were required to take responsibility for their learning while working with each other. They also used storytelling and dramatization (children were allowed to dress up as characters and act in various scenes) to enhance their collaborations. Some participants said they allowed the children to be engaged in the project approach, so that they could get hands-on experiences using manipulative activities, activity-based interactions, and play and research-based activities to promote children's interests, and needs while they explored topics to build their intelligence. The children were also exposed to nature walks/field trips, games, singing, cooking (where they had real-life experiences), and technology that encouraged an understanding of the concepts, and skills needed. The strategies for language activities included giving children the opportunity to talk and have conversations with others. They were engaged in discussions where they were encouraged to listen to each other. One participant at Grade 1 used elkonin box for word identification. The participants at Grade 1 said they engaged the children in listening and observation activities to develop listening skills. All the participants at Grade 1 reported that they used the environment as a teaching tool, as well as incorporating research-based activities. They also said that they incorporated technology in singing, games, manipulative activities, audio, and used videos (oral and visual presentation) to reinforce concepts. Teachers also used differentiated instructions for content, activities and assessments to cater to the needs and the learning styles of the children. Table 6 describes

the teaching and learning strategies that the respondents at Grade 1 used for their classroom activities.

Table 6

Strategies Grade 1 Teachers Used

Teaching & Learning Strategies	Participants									
	S1		S2		S3		S4		S5	
	T	L	T	L	T	L	T	L	T	L
Grouping	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Questioning	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Dramatization	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Games/ Role Play	✓	✓	-	✓	✓	✓	-	✓	✓	✓
Project Approach	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Cooperative Learning Strategies	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Language Experience Approach	✓	-	✓	-	✓	-	✓	-	✓	-
Interviews	✓	-	✓	✓	✓	-	✓	✓	✓	✓
Story Telling	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Songs	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Audio/ Video Presentation	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Elkonin box	-	-	-	-	-	-	✓	✓	-	-
The Environment	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Technology	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Cooking	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Nature Walks/ Field Trips	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Story Telling	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Research- based activity	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Discussion	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Listening and observing	-	✓	-	✓	-	✓	-	✓	-	✓
Oral presentation	-	✓	-	✓	-	✓	-	✓	-	✓
Differentiated Instruction	✓	-	-	-	✓	-	-	-	✓	-

The participants at Grade 1 reported that they also placed the children in mixed ability groups to ensure that the faster or more competent students, assisted the slower

ones. For reading strategies, 100% of the participants said they used the Language Experience Approach, to find out how children used their experiences, to support their upward mobility in the demands of the curriculum. One participant said,

Teachers motivated the children to use their background experiences to build their reading competencies. We allowed them to relate to their life experiences as they improve their competencies in reading. Children are encouraged to create stories about their experiences, and share them, so that they can develop their oral communication and listening skills. The students were encouraged to explore their environment using their senses to get additional information.

The participants at Grade 1 reported that from their interactions the children learned how to be creative organizers, and communicators in the reading, and writing process. The teachers at Grade 1 expressed that through their observations in this process some children did not know basic sight words that they needed for reading and writing because they would ask them to spell or help them to identify simple words. As a result, different strategies had to be used to assist children in learning. One participant said,

In supporting the children, one learning strategy that I use is the Elkonin box to assist the children with the acquisition of letter-sound, blending, and segmenting spoken words. Sometimes, I had to guide the children in my class so that they can attain the skills they need and build on them. I also allowed the children to apply the skills for number knowledge and other mathematical concepts on an individual basis.

Elkonin boxes are a literacy strategy that can help children to build their phonological awareness by segmenting words into individual sounds or phonemes. It is a strategy that can help children with reading difficulties to gain confidence, and motivation to read (Blachman, Ball, Black, & Tangel, 2000). The participants at Grade 1 said they allowed children to role-play scenarios, and through their engagement it helped them to apply the knowledge, and skills in creative ways. Three participants reported that they gave the children topics to conduct interviews. Children were required to explore, so that they could find answers for selected topics for example, who are the workers in our school community and what do their jobs entail. Children found out the details about the topic then return to the class, and reported the information to their classmates. In using the project approach to support important areas in learning, 100% of the respondents highlighted that various types of groups were encouraged, children got topics related to the curriculum, discussed it, then researched for the details. After collecting the information about the children, the participants explained that they used open-ended questions with rubrics for formative and summative assessments.

All of the participants at Grade 1 reported that in supporting children with the important areas needed for the demands of the curriculum, sometimes they faced challenges with oral communication. The teachers said that they engaged the children in discussions, and reading tasks that require them to communicate in standard Jamaican English. One participant explained and said she was speaking on behalf of her colleagues; she said,

One important issue that teachers encounter in the classroom, is that, some children do not understand Standard Jamaican English [SJE]; the language of the books we use, and the formally accepted language in our education system. As teachers, we accommodate the language that the children bring into the classroom (the Jamaican creole), this is the language the children speak at home, to their friends, and to communicate in their daily conversations. Consequently, I find that I have to teach the children to speak, and read in SJE; so that they can understand when I speak to them, as well as the content of the books. However, when the children go back home the conversations they hear and take part in, are Jamaican creole, therefore, coming back to school, and the process restarts all over again.

Two respondents at Grade 1 highlighted that some children do not have the language and communication skills for school. They further stated that some children were quiet or slow to warm up, consequently, they had to be placed in small groups to receive deliberate engagement in developmental activities. They had to be assisted with words to communicate their thoughts, feeling, and concerns, and given opportunities to learn the skills, master concepts; and then they were reintegrated within the whole group. The participants said that, teachers had to ensure that the children were involved in class discussions, activities, and interaction to encourage oral communication with their peers. The participants at Grade 1 reported that they encouraged individual interaction as they worked with the children, while highlighting the importance of learning the skills, and concepts for holistic development. Grade 1 teachers purported that they would also prompt, scaffold (by giving them counters to develop number knowledge, or letter tiles

and word tiles to form words and sentences), as well as facilitate them to learn new content from the center of interest in the classroom. The participants explained that as teachers they had to develop an awareness, when to scaffold children, knowing when to assist and when to withdraw the help given to the children. Three participants said that discrimination and labels for children with learning challenges were not permitted at this age and stage of development.

To further support the children, the participants at Grade 1 said they engaged the children in visual, and auditory activities, used teaching aids, and other cognitive activities that required children to listen, observe and manipulate to cater to the different learning styles. The participants explained that they incorporated technology in their lessons, and used the environment, to ensure that the 5Es and the 4Cs were infused in the teaching and learning experience.

The participants at Grade 1 agreed that the children, especially the boys, needed to be coached, scaffolded, and motivated in different ways so that they could acquire readiness skills for the demands of the new curriculum. They explained that teachers had to plan various strategies, and implement different methods that would encourage active engagement with deliberate learning activities to ensure that the children gained the competencies, and skills that would enabled them to be prepared for Grade 1 curriculum. One participant explained,

In my classes, boys dominated the population. Therefore, the lessons had to be interactive with many hands-on activities. The boys in the class like to manipulate the gadgets. When technology was used in the lesson, the boys were the key

persons. However, I had to teach the boys how to take turns while they assisted me during the lesson. I think this promotes fairness, and justice within the learning environment; when students are all given a chance to assist the teacher.

The participants at Grade 1 reported that teachers used DVDs, manipulative activities, resources persons, and other colleagues for their instructions. For the children's activities it was hands-on, self-correcting and problem-solving with critical thinking. Teachers also created worksheets in the areas that needed to be addressed. For numeracy skills, children were allowed to do more hands-on interaction with concrete materials, using counters and other math manipulatives. The participants at Grade 1 explained that the support that they gave to the children at this stage assisted them, to improve their acquisition of concepts and skills, develop emotional literacy, reading readiness, motor skills, literacy and numeracy skills, build their competences, and displayed confidence as they were engaged in the teaching and learning environment. One participant stated,

The main aim at this level is to support children to acquire skills they need in Language Arts, Mathematics and General Knowledge. As their teacher, my role is to ensure that no child falls behind, or feel left out during the teaching and learning process. I think that when children are actively engaged in activities, they develop knowledge, and are motivated to learn.

The participants at Grade 1 concurred that sometimes more competent peers were assigned to assist the children who needed further understanding for the information, skills, and concepts. The participants further reported that sometimes teachers had to go

back to using concrete objects with purposeful interactions, so that the children can get a better understanding of the concepts, and skills, as well as build confidence in mastering activities and gaining competencies.

A descriptive analysis is presented with data for the support of materials, and equipment that Grade 1 teachers needed to prepare children to meet the demands of the curriculum. All the respondents in this cadre indicated that along with their personal contribution of materials, and equipment (that includes personal laptops or desktops, printers, web access to current information and resources), the support they got from their schools assisted them in the teaching and learning environment. All the participants said that they created teaching aids (from trashables), used CD players cassettes and DVD's, accessed additional stationery to supplement their teaching aids, and provided extra learning materials to support children's acquisition of readiness for the curriculum content. The participants reported that the schools/administration provided materials and equipment that include cartridge paper, markers (white board and permanent) tape and video recorder, multi-media projector, some teaching and learning materials, and printing services for children's activities. The MEYI/ECC provides the curriculum, furniture for the classes, and some work and textbooks. They also facilitate workshops, seminars and training sessions for teachers' professional development. Some parents assist with artifacts, and manipulatives such as wooden blocks, toys and story books. They also act as resource persons (for example, community helpers); other stakeholders provide resources materials, and equipment to support, and scaffold children in learning activities at Grade 1.

All the participants in this research informed me that they had to source additional teaching aids, and other materials to enhance learning in the classroom, so that they could make learning attractive, and welcoming for children. The participants concurred that they had to provide children with basic resources such as pencils, crayons, and books when they came to school to encourage active engaged in follow up activities. The respondents reported that parents assisted them with manipulatives, artifacts and volunteered to be resource persons.

The participants who facilitate learning at Grade 1 reported that other stakeholders for education assisted, and supported teachers, and children with needed resources, that assisted in building knowledge, skills, and experiences in the learning environment. Three out of five (60%) of the respondents thought that the resources they received were inadequate to support all the activities for the children in the learning process. The participants explained that the school provides a multi-media projector; nonetheless, all of the participants expressed that they had to share the projector among the classes in that grade. The respondents said the MEYI and their principals encouraged them to incorporate more technology into their teaching, and learning as this would promote strategies and methodology for the new standards curriculum. Teachers, however, had limited access to the multi-media, because the demand for the use of the projector was greater, based on the curriculum requirements.

The respondents stated that some printing facilities for learning activities were accessible, while at school; but most times teachers had to pre-prepare activities for children to use. Therefore, teachers had to provide these additional materials at their

expense. Three respondents reported that the school also provided a tape recorder and, math manipulatives so that children could be actively engage in the teaching and learning environment.

All the respondents at Grade 1 reported that their principals were very supportive towards the needs of the learners. The participants said that their principals wanted the children in Grade 1 to acquire the requisite skills, knowledge, and understanding for application at next level. The aim is for children to achieve mastery when they are assessed at the next level or externally assessed in Grade 3 and 4 for competencies in Literacy and numeracy, as well as in the different areas of reading. The participants (at both sites) reported that their principals were desirous that teachers, and children at this level maintain high standards for proficiency; based on the feedback from the GOILP results.

Five participants at Grade 1 explained that teachers made teaching and learning resources, and aids from recycled materials such as charts, manipulatives for the centers, and activity sheets that supported active learning of curriculum content, and activities in their classes. The respondents at Grade 1 stated that they also provided books, games, puzzles, laptop, tape, and video recorder, as well as a printer to assist them to provide additional activities to facilitate the children in the teaching and learning environment. The participants also explained that sometimes teachers had to source books, materials, and resources online for example stories, content for the lessons and child-centered activities so that they could scaffold the children with knowledge. The interviewees at

Grade 1 agreed that they provided pencils and books for the children to participate in the activities while promoting fairness as teachers were engaged in continuous assessments.

The participants at Grade 1 stated that some parents were very supportive, they gave the necessary resources to assist the teacher in the learning environment; assisted their children with homework, projects, and other activities that needed parental input. Some parents provided cleaning agents, and personal care materials for the class. Sometimes parents would ask the teacher to purchase the books and materials needed, and then, they would repay when they had the money. One participant explained that some parents were unable to provide the assistance children needed for homework due to financial challenges. On the other hand, some parents did not provide the basic resources or assisted their children with their school work. As a result, these children fall behind when they did not have basic resources such as pencils, and books that they needed to assist them at home, and school to assist them to function effectively in the learning environment. She further stated that some parents do not support teachers with the basic things that children needed so that they can develop a better understanding of what was taught at school. While some parents were not literate so they were not able to assist or support their children with the knowledge or competencies needed in the teaching and learning environment

One of the participants at Grade 1 stated that during Grade meetings, parents were informed that they are a part of their children's learning process. Parents were asked to help their children by providing materials for the projects, and assist children in making

different items for homework. To assess these tasks, parents, teachers, and children work with a rubric to complete tasks from the curriculum. Another participant said,

Some parents from my class are very supportive during our engagement in the topics areas in the curriculum. Parents would go online, and access activities, information, and worksheets; bring them to school and enquire if the materials are appropriate for the topic that we are focusing on in the class.

The participants who facilitate learning at Grade 1 reported that, other stakeholders for education assisted, and supported teachers, and children with resources they needed to assist in building knowledge, skills, and experiences in the learning environment. Stakeholders provide support for the acquisition of skills, concepts, and knowledge that can prepare the children for learning at Grade 1. Teachers need to embrace the importance of an awareness of supporting children with the motor, language and cognitive skills by using the resources to build their-fine motor skills and competencies. Three respondents said they supported the children in Grade 1 by giving them additional resources aimed at building their creative expressions in the aesthetics, based on the curriculum drivers. The participants concurred that children were motivated to achieve excellence in the learning process, but sometimes there were barriers that affected the acquisition of the skills children need, at Grade 1.

Two of the respondents at Grade 1 stated that some of the children lived in volatile areas that were affected by the emergence of crime and violence; this affected their attendance pattern, and acquisition of knowledge at school. The participant stated that children are impacted cognitively at school as there was no continuity of educational

support outside of the classroom. Some of the children are left with older siblings, aunts, and other relatives because their parents had migrated. As a result, children do not have the support of their parents to assist them to achieve to their full potential. Teachers also encountered challenges due to the class size and other responsibilities of the school that could affect the concentrated assistance that children need in the learning process.

Barriers in the acquisition of readiness skills for curriculum at Grade 1.

The five participants that accommodated children in Grade 1 tried to justify why they believe the children that transitioned were not fully prepared for the new environment. They explained their thoughts highlighting some of the barriers that affected the children, why they did not acquire the skills, and competencies needed for Grade 1. The participants concluded that from their interactions the children did not show mastery in readiness for the teaching and learning process. They highlighted barriers that include: resources, curriculum execution, and internet connection, language that children take into the classroom, children's attendance at school, the influences by crime and violence, teacher-pupil ratio, spacing and the type of benches in the classroom, behavioral issues, and low parental involvement.

First, the resources in the teaching and learning environment were limited or not available for children. Some children did not have the textbooks to do independent work that influenced continuous, and summative assessments. The participants (100%) explained that when there were not enough materials for each child, conflict tend to arise when they had to share the materials. Although the MEYI, and the school gave the children some of the textbooks, there are other selected textbooks that were used in the

grade that children did not have access. One participant reported that some parents did not provide the necessary resources that their children need such as textbooks books, crayons, pencils, and notebooks, or supply snacks or lunch money. As a result, this hampered children's ability to acquire the concepts and skills for cognitive advancement.

The participants concurred that the lack of these resources posed numerous challenges in the teaching and learning environment, as some children did not have access to the content and suggested activities. Teachers were not able to adequately cover the topics, content or activities in that textbook, as well as engage them in independent work. The lack of resources also prevented the teachers from following the schedule for Grade 1 (three subjects should be completed each day; integrated studies, Language Arts, and Mathematics window). One participant stated,

Some children come to school with one note book, as a result, when the first activity for the day is given, I have to hurry to assess their work, or sometimes return the books with the work being unmarked. Furthermore, sometimes I do not get an opportunity to assess those children's progress, because of the class size; I cannot find the extra time to revisit the assessment for that activity. Some of the children do not have the textbooks, therefore, that also creates other issues in the teaching, and learning environment.

Second, the NSC encourages the use of technology in the teaching and learning process. The participants at Grade 1 reported there were four classes in the grade, and teachers are required to do the same topics to disseminate the same information for the curriculum content. There was one multi-media projector (for each site) that had to be

shared for all the classes in the grade; limiting the number of times each teacher could access the projector for teaching and learning sessions. The participants at Grade 1 explained that if all the teachers planned to use the projector, then they would have had an issue on hand. The participants in the grade expressed that they had to share the use of the projector or find innovative ways to present the curriculum content. The teachers at Grade 1 explained that sometimes they resort to just using the computer screen; although all the children could not see and hear what was on the screen. They had to give the information orally. The participants agreed that the school needs more projectors so that teachers can adequately integrate the use of technology in their lessons. The teachers at Grade 1 said that sometimes they used other methods inclusive of the project approach, and field-trips making it interactive, so that children could gain knowledge about the content.

Thirdly, the next barrier that the participants highlighted was internet connection. The participants said that access was not available inside the classrooms, limiting their connectivity to the web to research areas, glean information where needed, as well as provide clarity, and find additional activities that are relevant to the topic,

Fourth, the participants at Grade 1 explained that language was a barrier for some children in the Jamaica classroom. Children speak the Jamaican dialect; 60% of the respondents said that they had an issue when children should pronounce letter sounds such as 'th' and 'h' in words for reading.

Another barrier that the participants highlighted was that some children did not come to school regularly; they would miss out on the content, skills, competencies, and

knowledge that were taught for the day, or week. Some students had financial needs that allowed them to miss out on the acquisition of skills, concepts, and information that were taught at school. While some children suffered from health issues or condition such as asthma and juvenile diabetes. Some children arrived at school late (because they had to travel from far distances, neighboring communities or their parent had to work the money needed in the morning, before they allowed the children to come to school). One participant explained

When the children are absent or late they miss out on the acquisition of important concepts, skills, and information to take them from one level to the next. When some of the children come to school the next week, day or later in the day, they would not have the pre-requisite knowledge to move on, sometimes it seems unfair to hold back the children who were present, grasp the concepts, and are ready to move on. Sometimes I have to move on, and reteach the concepts to accommodate those children who were absent during break or after school in extra lessons.

The participants at Grade 1 also said that sometimes, planned activities at the school such as fun day, Jamaica day, or heritage week celebrations, affected the time allotted for teaching and learning with supporting activities.

Sixth, 40% of the participants purported that another barrier they encountered was some children come from volatile areas where they are influenced by crime and violence. When topics such as *My Family* were taught, teachers sometimes had to stop in the

middle of the lesson to address the emotional needs of the children who were affected.

One participant said,

Some of the children that come to school are traumatized by the graphic images of crime and violence that they experienced at home or in their community. As teachers, we try to assist the children to deal with their emotional issues in the class. While I was teaching one day, one child blatantly said, “Mi nuh have no fada, (I don’t have a father) gunman kill him!” (He was killed by a gunman). It was during one of the lessons on *My Family*. I had to bring some comfort to that child, and tried to empathize with his situation.

The next barrier that the participants at Grade 1 reported was the large teacher-pupil ratio. The classes of the participants had an average of 1 to 37 – 1 to 45. All the participants at Grade 1 thought that if they had an assistant, they would be more effective teachers. They explained that with an assistant, teachers would be better able to address the interest and needs, as well as the challenges that some children encountered in the learning environment. The assistant could assist with impacting more students with individual needs. The participants expressed their concerns that teachers were not able to adequately have pull-out sessions to work with the children who had challenges, and needed extra practice or had time to scaffold the children because of the large class size. Teachers had limitations in helping children with skills and concepts; sometimes children with individual needs were overlooked.

Eighth, the participants explained that another barrier they faced was the type of benches, and the number of benches in the small space in the classroom. The respondents

(60%) stated that the space available did not allow for a display of learning centers, and areas of interest so that the children could be motivated to construct meanings from their environment. The respondents thought that a smaller number of children would be ideal in the space to allow more effective teaching and learning. They believed that teachers would be better able to address areas of weakness by scaffolding children in the learning environment.

Another barrier that the participants at Grade 1 encountered was behavioral issues in the teaching and learning environment. Two participants explained that some of the children had serious behavioral issues with their peers; teachers had to stop the lesson at times to address these issues, and discipline children who were involved. One participant said that sometimes the issues that surfaced were serious so that young teachers in the grade could manage. Some children with their issues had to be taken to the grade supervisor or principal. One respondent said that she had concerns because she had to leave the other children, and the lesson so that the issues could be addressed. She could only be assured when steps were taken to correct the inappropriate behavior that was displayed. One participant explained

Some teachers at Grade 1 are not equipped or do not have the experience to handle some of the behavioral issues that surfaced in the classroom. Some parents had to be called in, and the school also try to get professional help to assist teachers, and parents to deal with some of the issues that emerged. Some of the challenges that children displayed had to be dealt with externally, while some of the issues had to be addressed in the class, because they arose during the class

time. Therefore, I had to assist teachers in the grade to address the issues that arose in their classes; so teaching and learning are sometimes affected.

The five participants at Grade 1 reported that some of the children displayed other inappropriate behaviors. Teachers had to come up with different behavior modification strategies, and ways to reduce negative behaviors, so that positive behaviors could be promoted when they interact in the classroom. Teachers try to understand the reasons why children display inappropriate behaviors so that they can provide the necessary support. One participant said that she identified a few boys who smoked marijuana; she said, that she thinks this practice could influence their competencies, behavior, and the attitude that they displayed during class time.

Finally, another barrier that the participants highlighted in the Grade 1 classes was low parental support. Two respondents lamented that some children came to school poorly dressed, dirty, hungry, or did not eat a proper meal; this influenced the children's level of concentration and self-esteem. The participants explained that children who are hungry, cannot focus on the content or information that was being taught. One respondent reported that some parents were not able to assist their child/ren with projects and their homework because they are not functionally literate. However, there were some parents that were very supportive of their children and the teachers in the classes. All of the participants (100%) agreed that children need parental support for educational advancement. The participants agreed that children at this level need to be facilitated, motivated and encouraged to attain educational advancement. Children need to be

scaffolded at home with extra practice to acquire skills, and knowledge so that they can develop their competencies, and gain confidence in their classwork and grade level.

Research Question 3

Research question three outlines how the extent of children's readiness skills influence teachers at the kindergarten and Grade 1 level's expectations for competencies at Grade 1. The data gleaned from Infant, and Grade 1 teachers' expectations on competencies on assessment tasks were different; but gave details that the feedback from standardized tests can inform progression at Grade 1 and practice. Based on the level of mastery for readiness skills (literacy, numeracy, general knowledge on the GOILP) curriculum content can be implemented. The responses to Research Question 3, to what extent do readiness skills influence teachers' expectations of students' competencies for the formal curriculum at Grade 1, came from interview questions 8, 9, & 10, the observation of the documents from the MEYI, and planned documents from the teachers. The data were analyzed, and organized, and the themes that emerged were; the importance of competencies on assessments, Feedback from the standardized assessments can assist children's progression at Grade 1, as well as inform practice, Based on the results on the GOILP assessments curriculum content can be implemented. Figure 4 presents Research Question 3 and the themes that emerged from the data.

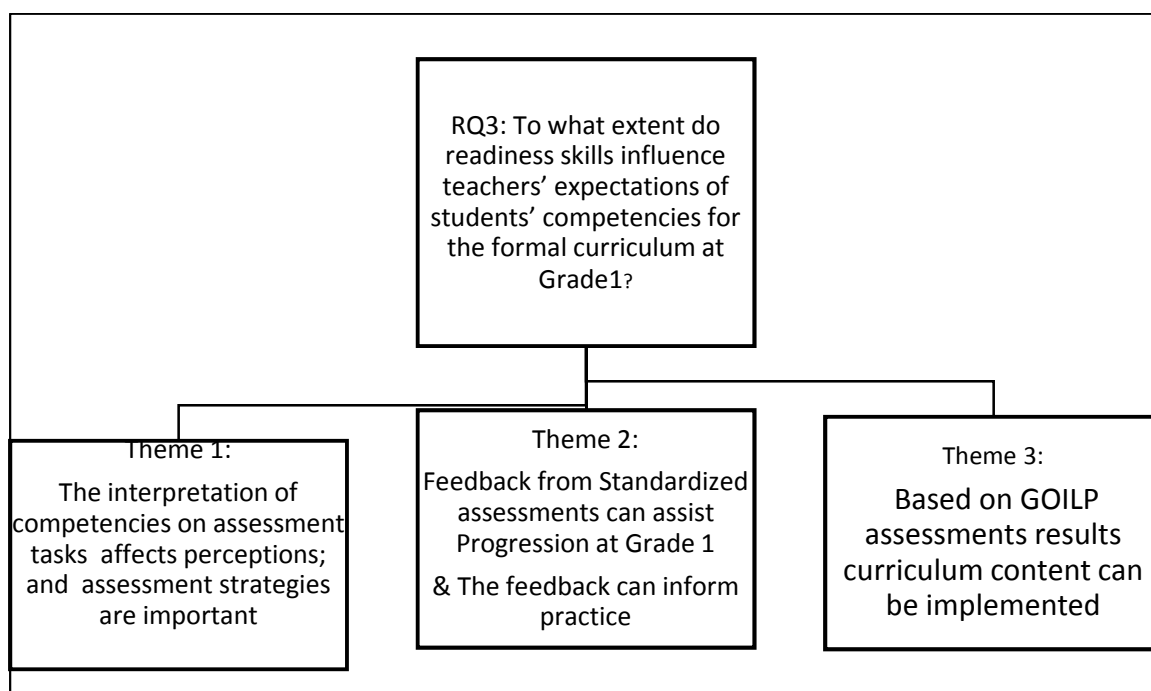


Figure 4. Research Question 3.

Theme 1: Teachers interpretation of competencies on assessment tasks. The participants at Infant department and Grade1 level of the Jamaican education system said that one of the roles of a teacher is that they should be engaged in continuous assessments, so that they can be informed about children's holistic development. The assessment strategies that the participants who accommodated children at the infant department used to evaluate the competencies for children's readiness for the demands at Grade 1, included formative assessment, (that is assessments for learning, and assessments as children learn), these strategies include: questioning, grouping, observations; discussions, and performance assessments were also used.

The continuous assessments included, giving the children a number of sight words to evaluate their knowledge of the words they needed to know when they transition into Grade 1; Oral language assessments, discussions, performance and portfolio

assessments (which displays an accumulation of deliberate activities, showing children's progress and growth, as well as their creativity over the year), projects, (teachers, as well as children, can observe the level of improvement they have achieved over the year); anecdotal and running records to capture events, observations, and episodes of children's performances, and competencies.

For summative assessments the Infant department teachers engaged children in oral reading, and reading competitions, journal writing, and activity sheets. Children were given developmental and reading checklists to assess all the areas of development, assessment in reading that emphasize levels of mastery, portfolio assessments, teacher-made tests, paper and pencil tests from the school, developmental and cognitive checklists, diagnostic tests, and standardized test from the Ministry of Education. The assessments strategies used by the participants at the infant department are presented in Table 7.

Table 7

Assessment Strategies Used in Teaching and Learning in the Infant Department

Formative assessments	Summative assessments	Continuous assessments
Questioning	Checklists	Questioning
Grouping	Observation	Grouping
Observations	Journals	Checklists
	Teacher made Tests (activities, end of unit, semester, year)	Anecdotal Records
	Portfolio Assessments	Running Records
		Observations
		Oral and written language and communication
		Discussions

The five participants at the Infant department explained that they allowed children in their classes to interact with sight words; created word walls and flashcards, and allowed children to be engaged in active learning. Children were allowed to interact with their peers to gain confidence in acquiring knowledge, skills and competencies for academic advancement. Through continuous assessments, the participants said that they expected that the skills and intelligences that the children displayed would be embedded in their cognition so that they could function well at Grade1. One participant said,

I do formative and continuous assessments by observing the children's interaction to see how well they recognized words, spell them, and used them in sentences.

Using formal and informal observations, I document and made my evaluation about each child's competencies for the skills, concepts, knowledge, and abilities needed for the formal curriculum at Grade 1.

The participants at the Infant department concurred that at the end of the school year, (for summative assessments) common teacher-made tests were compiled by all the teachers who taught the five-year-olds to evaluate the children's competencies, and readiness for Grade 1. The aim was to ensure that children were displaying the requisite level of mastery in the readiness skills that are needed at Grade1. Teachers also said that they used alternate assessments strategies that included reading, literacy and numeracy tasks, and creative expressions to assess the children's competencies in those areas.

Alternate assessments used at the Infant department aimed at highlighting the areas of weakness, and strengths so that teachers could work with the students to prepare them for future learning, as well as on oral and written assessments. The participants

explained that they also evaluated the children's performance (at their schools) to compare them with the other children in the other five-year-old classes, noting the areas of strengths and weaknesses for readiness skills. The participants at the Infant department said that they evaluated the children in the classes to identify the children who fell behind for the required standard so that they could work with them individually. The participants at this level were adamant that children who transitioned had the pre-requisite skills to enter the learning environment at Grade 1. They expressed their concerns that teachers at Grade1 need to change their strategies to cater to the children's holistic needs. The participants at the infant department also concurred that the teachers at Grade 1 had great expectations for the children that transition from the infant department. The infant department teachers said that Grade 1 teachers had expectations that when the children transition, they should display mastery in the areas of readiness skills, so that they can begin the formal curriculum. One participant said

At the Infant department, we believe that the teachers at Grade1 should assist the children more when they transition. Teachers need to help the children to build on the knowledge, and competencies they acquired at the kindergarten level. During my conversations with the Grade 1 teachers, I think that they expect that the children should transition, mastering all the skills for reading, writing, and basic mathematics. If the children cannot master these skills, then they blame us (Infant department teachers) for not preparing the children properly.

Interpretation of competencies from Grade 1 participants.

Teachers at Grade 1 expect that children who transition should display some level of mastery for readiness skills so that they can perform on cognitive tasks. The respondents from Grade 1 said, from their observation, the children who transitioned, level of competencies was below their expectations. They explained that all teachers in the Grade 1 assist with the administering the GOILP assessment that seeks to assess the children's level of competencies in the main areas of readiness skills. The descriptors on the GOILP tests assesses children as *Proficient, Developing, Beginning* and *Not Yet*, so that the main stakeholders can make an evaluation about their performance.

The participants at the Grade 1 level reported that based on their assessment, they thought they can make an evaluation. The administration of the GOILP takes place at the beginning of the school year; five out of five (100%) of the respondents said that they also do their assessments to find out where the children are (cognitively). The respondents explained that after identifying the areas of weakness, they dialogued with the parents to inform them about the weaknesses their children encountered, and suggest ways in which they can work with the teachers, and the school to assist their children during, and after school. Three participants explained that they had to work with a few parents one to one, to highlight the areas that children need extra support, then work with the parents helping them to assist their children in the areas that needed assistance.

The assessment strategies used to evaluate the children who transitioned into Grade 1 from the Infant department, included; the GOILP assessment, and teacher-made tests. The GOILP is used to assess children's level of mastery for readiness skills so that

the formal curriculum can be implemented. After the administration of the GOILP assessment, the results are noted to identify the areas of weakness and strengths. Teachers had a better understanding to be informed about the strategies to employ in their teaching and learning, planning sessions, execution of content, and evaluation. The items on the GOILP assessment sought to assess children cognition, their knowledge of personal information (such as their date of Birth), their names (first and last), the names of their parents, and letters of the alphabet, colors, simple concepts and general information. The children were required to draw sets, and identify the number of items in each set. From the results, teachers at Grade 1 and other stakeholders were able to examine the areas of weakness, and strengths for the children, and identify areas where additional help was needed.

If children are not able master these tasks, then teachers at Grade 1 cannot begin teaching the formal curriculum. The participants at Grade 1 explained that decisions are made from these results, and they influence teachers' perceptions of the children. The evaluations were used to plan intervention strategies to assist the children improve on the areas of weakness, build on their knowledge and experiences, as well inform stakeholders. The respondents said that all teachers of the grade meet to discuss the way forward, analyzed teaching and learning strategies, and shared best practices for the coming year. One participant at Grade 1 explained,

Parents of the Grade 1 children need to understand why it is important for their children to display mastery at this level. Parents were invited to the school where they were informed about the results of the 2017 GOILP assessments. They were

enlightened about how teachers would be assisting their children in the new learning environment.

The strategies that the participants at the Grade 1 level used to assess the children that transitioned include formative assessments, summative assessments, and continuous assessments. The participants explained that in formative assessments the teachers used questioning (to gain an understanding of the children's background experiences), this information was be used to assist, and guide teachers in the teaching and learning process; grouping (cooperative, abilities and interest groups) to promote collaboration and communication. Summative assessments that include: checklists, observations, journal writing, cumulative records, teacher- made assessments (end of month, term and year tests), portfolio assessments (that complies the children's progress over the year), performance assessments and cumulative records. Continuous assessments that include questioning, grouping, checklists, anecdotal records, portfolio assessments and observations. Table 8 presents the data for the assessment strategies that participants at Grade 1 used.

Table 8

Assessment Strategies Used in Teaching and Learning in Grade 1

Formative Assessments	Summative Assessments	Continuous Assessments
Questioning	Checklists	Questioning
Grouping	Observation	Grouping
Observations	Journals	Checklists
	Teacher made Tests (activities, end of unit, semester, year)	Anecdotal Records
	Portfolio Assessments	Portfolio Assessments
	Performance Assessments	Observations
	Cumulative Records	-

The participants at Grade 1 explained that the children who transitioned were placed in groups where formative assessments such as questioning, developmental checklists, alternative assessments, and continuous assessments were used to evaluate if they had grasped the requisite concepts, and skills for the grade. All the participants at Grade 1 explained that they used standardized, and teacher-made assessments to identify the children's level of understanding for the content, how they applied skills, concepts, and knowledge. The participants further stated that they wanted a greater awareness about the children's level of mastery especially in letter sounds, and basic sight words, as children needed to display these competencies so that they can appropriately apply the skills and knowledge when they are required.

The participants at Grade 1 reported that summative assessments such as anecdotal records, portfolio, and performance assessments, activity sheets were used to document children's performance at the end of the lessons, and teacher-made tests were also administered monthly or sometimes used at the end of the unit assessments, to identify areas in the curriculum that the children did not fully understand.. These activities aimed to track the children's progress on the learning curve. The participants at Grade 1 said that children were encouraged to make journals entries, and build portfolios that would display curriculum content, showcase their best pieces and progress. The participants reported that through these assessments they were able to evaluate their teaching and learning strategies, mastery in completing activities, and children's cognitive growth over the school year. The participants stated that they also observed

children for competencies in social skills noting their behavior, their attitude towards others, and how they showed respect.

The participants said that the results of the GOILP assessment was used to make an evaluation about the children's competencies in reading. Two out of the five respondents from Grade 1 reported that they also used the Informal Diagnostic Reading Inventory so that they could be informed about the children's reading level. The respondents explained that this assessment is a reading test that can be used to inform teachers about each child's level of reading, comprehension skills, fluency, and knowledge of phonics. One participant at Grade 1 said,

Reading is an important skill that children need when they transition into Grade 1. I find that if a child cannot read, it poses a problem. When I try to teach the lessons that I plan from the curriculum, that child will be left behind. That child will not have the background knowledge that he/she needs to learn the information that is required for learning. I think that all children need to know basic sight words so that they can learn to be fluent in reading.

The participants indicated that they were encouraged by the MEYI and their principals to engage the children in activities that enhances the development of their physical, cognitive, socio-emotional, reading, and writing skills. The participants stated that teachers at Grade 1 allowed the children to participate in different activities (such as poster, song, poetry or story and reading competitions), with an aim to assess learning in through their learning styles. Four out of five or 80% of the participants reported that they teach the child first, ensuring that each child understands the required concepts, and skills

so that they can apply them for cognitive tasks before they teach the curriculum. The participants at both levels agreed that continuous assessments are needed, because it is important that teachers who facilitate learning be aware of the children's competencies at the infant department as well when they transition into Grade 1.

Theme 2: Feedback from standardized assessments and progression at Grade 1. The participants that accommodated children in the Infant department said that children were assessed with the GOILP at the beginning of the school year in September. This evaluation from the MEYI seeks to identify the areas of strengths, and weaknesses displayed by children who transition from the Infant department into Grade 1 in Jamaican Schools. At Grade 1, this assessment compares the performance of the children transitioning from the Infant department with the other children that are coming from Basic, Infant, and Preparatory schools that also transition into Grade 1. One participant at the Grade 1 level informed me that teachers at both levels are given the feedback from the standardized assessment at a meetings held by the principal of the schools with the Infant department, and Grade 1 teachers.

The information presented for this study was garnered from the 2017 sitting of the standardized assessment, it gave the information about the performance and competencies on the GOILP assessment for the children who transitioned from the Infant department into Grade 1 at two Jamaican schools (AB and DF). All the participants in the research agreed that the aim of the meeting was to inform teachers from the schools about children's performance on the assessments and to identify ways they can improve their practice as they prepare the children to transition from the Infant department to Grade 1.

The Grade 1 teachers reported on the data gleaned about the children's (who transitioned from the Infant department) proficiency on the GOILP assessment for the 2017 sitting of the assessment. The participants at Grade 1 agreed that the competencies that the children displayed were not what they had expected. The participants further said that some children could not read the instruction for the tasks given, and they did not display requisite skills and competencies for reading. The participants at Grade 1 reported that the results were presented, and discussed among the principal, teachers of Grade 1, and Infant department. The participants further stated that during the discussion teachers were informed about the children's level of mastery on the GOILP assessment for literacy, numeracy and general knowledge. The participants at Grade 1 explained that when both levels of teachers met they discussed the children's performance on the standardized assessments, suggest ways in which they can assist children who have weaknesses and outline intervention strategies to assist the children. Teachers at the Grade 1 level purported that they were not pleased with the results from the 2017, GOILP assessment for the children who were coming from the Infant department at their school. They expressed their views and expectations, and outlined the facts that children did not show level of competencies required for the Grade 1 level's curriculum.

The participants who accommodated the children from the Infant department said they knew the children that they had in their classes, that there were competencies that children had acquired that should be embedded in them. One participant at the Infant department stated,

As teachers, we have an idea of the competencies that the children have, and how well they can perform on academic tasks. We had to work with the children's personal level of intelligence, background experiences and stage of development so that they could attain requisite skills and competencies for readiness.

On the other hand, teachers at Grade 1 made comparisons, and reference to the results from previous years when the standard was higher, they said that those children were better prepared and attained mastery on the items that speak to readiness. The cognitive competencies displayed by the children who transition from the Infant department were of concern for the participants at Grade 1 with regards to starting the content of the new curriculum.

The participants at the Infant department concurred that when the children leave from the Infant department and are assessed with the GOILP, they are not able to do an intervention because the children would have already transitioned into Grade 1. From the feedback given to the cohort of teachers, there were given numerous options to improve their strategies so that they can impact the children's competencies in Literacy and numeracy for the following year. One participant at the Infant department said, based on the informal results, Literacy and numeracy were the main areas of weakness that the children displayed. The other participants at the Infant department concurred that feedback from the assessment was necessary for them to allow the children to have a smooth transition to Grade 1 and for teachers to improve their practice. The participants at the Infant department highlighted their observations that the expectations of Grade 1 teachers were very high for the children. One participant said,

I think that Grade 1 teachers expect a lot from the children coming from the Infant department. When children transition, prescriptive strategies should be used to address the issues they have. Grade 1 teachers have to understand that all children do not learn at the same pace. Therefore, they should try to find out the areas of strengths, and weaknesses; so that they can better help the children in the areas they need support so that they can build their cognitive competencies at Grade 1.

All the participants at the Infant department agreed that the information from the feedback assisted them at the Infant department/kindergarten level to identify the areas that need to be addressed so that the necessary adjustments can be made for the acquisition of readiness skills. Teachers at the infant department agreed that they were also sensitized how to support children who displayed weaknesses. They concurred that they had to purposefully include strategies and activities geared towards improving the competencies for the next group of children that will transition into Grade 1.

Two of the participants in the Infant department said they volunteered to work with the teachers at the Grade 1 level. While supporting the children in the areas of weakness, they assisted the teachers with age appropriate strategies that were engaging so that children learned concepts and skills through play, games, song and hands-on activities. The participants at the Infant department agreed that children needed more visual, auditory and tactile engagement in the teaching and learning environment. They further stated that they believe Grade 1 teachers need to purposefully cater to the different learning styles, so that children can be actively engaged in their learning. The participants at the Infant department concurred that teachers have to be deliberate in children's

learning environment. They should allow children to acquire readiness skills that will assist them extend their learning, enable them to apply concepts and build on their knowledge.

The participants at the Infant department and Grade 1 agreed that they needed greater collaboration to build on the competencies, and skills that children bring to the learning environments. The participants at the Infant department explained that they believed that children leave the infant/kindergarten department with the skills that teachers at Grade 1 should build on. The participants at the Infant department agreed that teachers need to empower children with new, and improved experiences that will allow them to build their confidence, intelligences, competencies, and knowledge. These participants also explained that they thought the transition might be an issue because the period is not very easy for the children.

The participants at both levels expressed concerns that the timing of the national assessment could have been an issue for the children to display their competencies. The participants concurred that the GOILP assessments were administered after the children left the Infant department, at the end of the summer holidays in September, and before they had any formal instruction pertaining to new knowledge or revision. Children do not get an adjustment period in their new environment at Grade 1. Participants at the Infant department said that when children transition into Grade 1 they received new teachers that they are not yet familiar with; and they are asked to display competencies, apply the knowledge, skills, and intelligence needed in Grade 1.

The participants at Grade 1 also explained that there were also a few children who did not attain mastery because they may have a special need, or may not be at that stage of development. One participant at the Infant department stated,

Although, children are not formally screened, assessed for learning issues, or special needs before age six. Children with learning challenges have to transition into Grade 1. The places that assess children for disabilities or special needs are few in Jamaica. They also have a waiting list that is frustrating to parents, and teachers. From my observation a few parents send the children to the infant department of this school, hoping that the child will be accepted in the special education unit. (This school has a special education unit for children with special needs).

Feedback from standardized assessment from teachers at Grade 1.

The participants that accommodates learning at Grade 1 said that the MEYI in Jamaica allows teachers at the schools to administer the GOILP assessment (see Appendices D & E). A rubric for scoring the results of the children's performance accompanies the test. Through the observation of documents the GOILP assessment the scores were highlighted, outlining the level of competencies for readiness skills that children display. The scores were recorded in using the areas of *Proficient; Beginning, Developing and Not yet*. The literacy items highlighted the areas in language arts and the numeracy items focuses on the different strands in mathematics. The participants at Grade 1 reported that after administering the assessment, the MEYI require schools to send the data from the assessment to their Assessment Unit. Therefore, the schools send

the raw scores with all the information about the children's level of mastery to the Ministry of Education. For good record keeping purposes, schools should also keep a copy of the raw scores of the children's performance at every sitting. The participants agreed that although the schools have access to the information, it is in raw data form. The teachers at both levels said they needed informed feedback of the analyzed data, so that the issues may be addressed.

The participants at Grade 1 reported that from the GOILP assessment, some of the areas of weaknesses identified were: knowledge of some sight words, word recognition, and letter sounds and number knowledge. Grade 1 teachers said these areas are important for their progression in the curriculum. Although teachers expect that the children would transition with some competencies, and skills, teachers at Grade 1 said that the children lacked the level of mastery needed for the curriculum content. Since schools, do not get the details of children's weaknesses in written form from the MEYI, sometimes Grade 1 teachers have to assess the raw scores from the GOILP assessments, so that they can make their informal diagnosis, and decisions on the way forward for the children.

The participants that cater to the Grade 1 children reported that after the assessment of the GOILP, if they got a detailed feedback from the assessment it would validate their personal evaluation. It would give them a better understanding of the children's cognitive level. Five of the participants at Grade 1 said they would be better informed as they identify areas of strength and weakness for cognitive tasks. Two participants said they could be knowledgeable as it pertains to the areas where greater focus are needed as children transitioned into a new learning environment. Two

participants said with more informed knowledge they would be able to identify strategies, and methodologies that they needed to implement for active learning. One participant said she would be better able to identify what intervention the children needed to make learning easier for the children. Two of the participants also stated that they would develop greater awareness to identify improvements in the performance for the desired results on the GOILP. Four teachers at the Grade 1 level said they would be able to inform the Infant department teachers about children's competencies, and five participants said a detailed feedback from the MEYI could better inform them about these areas so that they could inform parents and other stakeholders for the children's needs. Table 9 presents the data outlining what teachers at Grade 1 expect from detailed feedback from the assessment.

Table 9

Detailed Feedback from GOILP by Grade 1 Participants

Detailed Feedback	# of Grade 1 Teachers
Know where children are cognitively	5
Identify strengths and weaknesses	5
Inform teachers where greater focus is needed	2
Strategies and methodologies	2
Intervention	1
Improvement in performance for desired results	2
Inform teachers at the Infant department	4
Inform Parents and other stakeholders	5

The participants at Grade1 said that when they identified the areas as mentioned in Table 9 on the (2017) GOILP assessments in details, they were better informed to make evaluations and participate in discussions, so that children could be assisted. From

the feedback, both levels of teachers were informed about children's cognitive abilities so that prescriptive actions could be taken in their teaching and learning activities. Teachers at Grade 1 developed an awareness of the areas that needed immediate attention as they engaged children in learning environment.

The participants at the Infant department reflected that although they highlighted areas of weaknesses, and strategies for intervention; it would not impact the students who transitioned. These areas could be addressed for the new set of children that they would be scaffolding, coaching and facilitating for the next school year. All the participants agreed that the sessions, where results were discussed, were very important for the benefit of the children, teachers, and the schools. The participants at Grade 1 explained that during the meeting, they had discussions about the intervention strategies that they could use to engage the children in the acquisition of the skills, and highlight the competencies they need.

Two of the participants at Grade 1 said they used differentiated instruction to cater to the needs of the children, and they used continuous and performance assessments to monitor the child's progress at their different levels of competencies. The participants concurred that teachers are scheduled for grade meetings each week where discussions are held concerning the planning, and execution of teaching and learning content, activities, and assessments, as well as highlighting the areas of strengths and weakness of the students, and the strategies used, sharing best practices, and stating what did not go so well for the content, skills, strategies, and assessments.

After the teachers meeting, parents of Grade 1 students were invited to a meeting, where they were given the information about the areas of strengths, and weakness on the assessments; what it means, and how teachers will assist their children to work on the weaknesses, and promote the strengths.. The participants at the Grade 1 level stated that they informed the parents what they intended to do in the learning process, and what parental assistance were required to address the issues or assist the children to improve their competencies. The participants at both levels concurred that parents benefited from the feedback from the results on the GOILP. Three participants at Grade 1 explained that they encouraged parents to use the time at home to interact with their children in positive ways. One participant explained,

At the grade meeting parents were informed about teachers' expectation for the children at that Grade 1. Parents were encouraged to partner with teachers to assist children so that they could develop their cognitive, and social skills and general knowledge while teachers engaged children in the formal curriculum.

In supporting the dissemination of the information about children's performance on the GOILP another participant said,

Special parent conferences were held with selected parents to inform them of the expectations that teachers have for assisting their children to improve their competencies. As teachers, we ask parents to support their child's progress during the intervention. At the meeting, parents were asked to sign off on the intervention chosen for each child. The information about children's performance on the GOILP was also shared during the general PTA meetings.

The Importance of feedback from the GOILP for Teaching and Learning.

The participants at Grade 1 said that they believed that it was important to have feedback from the MEYI for the results of the GOILP that is used to assess the children who transition from the Infant department to Grade 1 for the progression in the teaching and learning at this level. The participants from the infant department said that they appreciated the knowledge from the feedback about the children's performance on the assessment; they said it is important because it informs them as well as other stakeholders about children's level of readiness for Grade 1. The participants in the research all agreed that teachers at the infant department and Grade 1 need to understand the assessment, and the requirements for its administration as well as children's performance on the GOILP. Consequently, teachers at the Infant department are asked to assist with the administration of the GOILP assessment. One of the participants who cater to the children at the Infant department said,

At my school, the Infant department teachers are alternated to help with the administration of the GOILP assessments to the children. During this exercise, I made an important observation. I observed that, Grade 1 teachers did not give the children a *wait time* to respond to the questions on the standardized assessment. I think this practice could contribute to the children's performance on the assessment and could be an issue for the evaluation teachers make about the children's level of proficiency. Furthermore, the teachers at Grade 1 are new for the children. Therefore, the children need to be afforded with more time to follow instructions, identify details, and recall or process information. I also believe that

the children who transition from the Infant department need more time to adjust to their new environment, before the assessment is administered, so that they can get a better understanding of what they are asked to do.

All participants at Grade 1 agreed that a detailed knowledge of the results would better inform teachers them on how each child performed on the GOILP assessment. They said that information would enlighten teachers about individual and collective weakness of children who transitioned to Grade 1. The participants at Grade 1 reported that although the schools do not currently get written feedback from the MEYI with the results, they think that it could inform teachers about the areas of strengths, and weaknesses identified in the GOILP assessment.

After the assessment and evaluation, teachers in the Infant department currently have a sit-down session with the principal and teachers of Grade 1 where the areas of weakness are discussed. The participants at the Infant department agreed that, if schools were guided by formal feedback from the Ministry of Education; teachers at the Infant department would have a better understanding of the weakness, and strengths of the children's performance so that they could be able to address the holistic needs of the learners for Grade 1. Infant department teachers would also be informed on the areas that need to address and how to work with the new group of five-year-olds.

The participants at the Infant department said that the feedback would positively impact teachers of this cohort's practice regarding evaluating self and engaging in reflective practice. Teachers would be able to identify the areas of weakness children display, and try to improve their strategies, and methodologies to bring out the skills, and

concepts required for formal learning at Grade 1. They further stated that teachers could improve the pedagogies they use for instruction, and assessment, as well as facilitate active learning for the acquisition of knowledge, and competencies for the next level of the education system.

The participants at both levels explained that teachers of the grade had a common planning time where they discuss areas of strengths and weaknesses; share best practices and decide what to teach each week. One participant at the Infant department said that the information from the feedback could also enlighten teachers. They will develop an awareness that sometimes they would have to move away from the curriculum content, to focus on the child. They will then ensure that each child acquire the requisite skills, gain knowledge, and learn the competencies that would address areas of weakness so that, that child can be proficient with readiness skills when they are given assessments, and teacher-made tests.

The participants at the Infant department reported that a detailed knowledge of the results would better inform them about the children competencies on the assessment so that they can improve their practice. They would have an awareness of where to place greater focus to prepare children with the required readiness skills needed for the assessment on the GOILP, and Grade 1. They would gain deeper understanding of on how to empower children with the competencies, knowledge, and skills needed for the next level of the education system. Teachers at the Infant department would be purposeful as they address how the children learn, as well as plan activities with achievable objectives. They further commented that children could be positively

impacted in their acquisition of the competencies that prepare them with the readiness skills they need to display on the GOILP, as well as for the formal curriculum at Grade 1.

The participants at the Infant department explained that not all the children who transition are ready with the requisite skills, knowledge, and competencies they need at Grade 1; however, most of them are equipped with skills and knowledge, based on their exposure, and experiences with the readiness curriculum, as well as the assessment they receive at the Infant department. The participants at the infant department explained that teachers prepared the learning environment, ensuring that it is print-rich, activity-based and inviting; so that children can feel accepted, be physically, socially comfortable and motivated to develop habits where they love to learn. The participants at the Infant department explained that teachers had to address the children's personal needs, have an awareness of the individual needs of each child, such as if he or she is hearing or seeing; hot or distracted by sounds or have a learning delay. Two participants at the Infant department stated that teachers, and administration at this level of the education system should also listen to what the parents are saying about their children. Teachers would be better informed on how to cater to all aspects of the child, to achieve the desired outcome in the teaching and learning environment.

Infant department teachers stated that they would be guided, as well as be informed about the best strategy, and method to employ as they assist in children's holistic development as they learning the requisite skills. Children would be able to apply concepts, as well as build their learning capacity. The participants further stated that among them they ensured that they had an awareness of the areas of learning needs, call

in the parents, and informed them about their children's areas of weakness. They also facilitated the parents by giving them their contact numbers so that they can contact them to clarify homework tasks and activities.

Participants who accommodate children at Grade1 reported that when children enter the Grade1 learning environment, teachers do not know where the children are cognitively. It is based on their performance on the GOILP and the Informal Diagnostic Reading Inventory that teachers make an evaluation. The results of the GOILP informs teachers where to begin in the NSC. The participants at Grade 1 expressed that getting a detailed feedback from the MEYI of children performance on the GOILP assessment would positively influence their interactions with the children who transition from the Infant department. The participants at Grade 1 reported that some of the other standardized tests that the MEYI administers in the upper grades are given detailed information about the weakness. Therefore this assessment should not be different. All the teachers at the Grade 1 level thought that a formal report or feedback should be sent back to the schools. The participants also informed me that teachers needed the details from the GOILP assessment, so that they can identify the issues children face; incorporate improved learning activities to address the areas of weakness, as well update their teaching strategies and methodology. The participants reiterated that most times the areas of weakness are in reading skills, and the application for number concepts and skills. One participant at the Grade 1 level said,

The children's level of competencies influence how I teach, I have to be mindful of how quickly I can move the children with the content of the curriculum. I have

to ensure that the children learn the concepts, skills, and understand the content outlined in the curriculum. If children do not have the skills, and competencies for the grade; then I cannot move on with the content, and knowledge that children should learn at this level.

The participants at Grade 1 concurred that with formal feedback they would be better inform how to plan, and execute their lessons, and be aware of the challenges children face, so that prescriptive measures can be implemented. Another participant at Grade 1 stated,

Being knowledgeable about the areas on the GOILP where children are, cognitively, could assist me better; so that I would be able to place greater focus on those areas where they need help. I would be better informed how to my plan lessons with the appropriate activities to scaffold learning, so that children can achieve the desired results for mastery of skills, and the curriculum content. The teachers at the infant department could also be informed so that their practice can be positively impacted, as they are the ones that assist children to be prepared with the areas of readiness that they need for Grade 1.

The participants at Grade 1 explained that getting detailed feedback from the GOILP would positively impact teachers' practice; so that they would have a better awareness of how to plan more focused lessons that cater to the interest and needs of the children. One participant who cater to the students at Grade1 explained,

My class for the year (2017) was mainly boys. They were performing at a lower level than the other classes at Grade1. Therefore, I had to use different strategies

to hold their interest and maintain order. I had to give them more hands-on activities, and use discovery, and exploratory methods that would challenge these boys to build their knowledge, understanding, and competencies in the curriculum content.

The participants at Grade 1 explained, that if teachers had a greater level of feedback, they would be able to tweak their content, and knowledge they deliver to their students. They would be able to plan and prepare planned learning activities to address the needs rather than trying to complete the curriculum within a specified period. The aim would be to focus on adequately addressing the needs of each child, building on his/her strengths and assisting him/her with the weakness displayed. The participants also shared that from the assessments, teachers could share their best practices to support each other to address similar issues.

Three participants explained that teachers in the Infant had to work with children individually so that they could attain mastery for readiness skills; but they were also mindful of the other children's interest, needs, and ability. One respondent explained.

When the children come into the learning environment in my class at Grade 1, they come from different homes and diverse environments. They were not adequately stimulated for learning or motivated to acquire the requisite skills; for example, some children could only scribble, some were unable to identify letters or letter sounds, and some did not have an awareness of number knowledge.

However, after working with the children for the year, and seeing them mastering

most of the activities in the class; I felt motivated to scaffold other children to learn.

Three participants at the Infant department thought that Grade 1 teachers needed to spend more time to focus on the disciplines each day. They believed that Infant department teachers could engaged children in more pull out sessions to address their needs and interest. One respondent from Grade 1 stated that children from the Infant department have needs in the critical areas of literacy; those children should be given activities to practice in areas such as sight words, syllabication, and chunking that will assist them in reading; also children should be engaged in more hands activities.

The participants at Grade 1 concurred that if detailed feedback from the GOILP were sent to the schools; the areas of weakness could be identified, and an informed intervention could be implemented. This feedback would positively impact children as they learn to master skills; apply their knowledge, and display their competencies. With an improvement of their knowledge and competencies, children can display mastery when they are assessed with the GOILP as well as teacher-made tests at the end of the year.

The participants at Grade 1 agreed that children who received low scores, or did not attain mastery on the descriptors of the GOILP, should be grouped so that they can be scaffolded, and empowered with skills, knowledge and competencies. Two participants at Grade1 explained that they used differentiated instruction, as well as different strategies to assist students as they worked cooperatively in groups. The participants further stated

that the curriculum standard at Grade 1 demands more from the students when they transition. One participant reported,

At Grade 1, the students are expected to do more writing from the chalk/white board, and be engaged in more deliberate activities. Therefore, they have to be able to understand concepts, and apply skills for cognitive activities. The students have limited space to do their work; the number of students in the class is also a lot and they are required to complete the academic tasks for the day. Some of the children get restless as they try to stay focus on the given cognitive tasks, while some get frustrated when they do not have the skills to master the activity and complete their work.

Another participant who facilitate the children at Grade 1 stated that as an early childhood trained person, she incorporates songs, finger plays, and jingles in the lesson when the children get restless. Two participants also explained that they had to introduce creative ways to keep children motivated, give tokens, praises, and use tangible and intangible rewards. Two teachers at Grade 1 also explained that they remained positive while impacting the children in the teaching and learning environment, they encouraged them to love to learn, and always want to enjoy the engagement in the learning environment.

The participants at both levels agreed that an awareness of the children's performance on the items, as well as the results would inform their teaching and learning strategy. It would assist them to know where they need greater attention as well as support teachers to be more focused on activities and the presentation of content, skills,

concepts, and knowledge. They agreed that knowledge of the areas of weakness would inform the teachers' practice.

The participants at Grade 1 agreed that children needed more parental support. They concurred that more parents needed to be partners with the school for the benefit of their child/children. The participants further stated that parents were invited to the school for a grade meeting after the GOILP is administered. Parents were informed, and advised how they can assist their child to acquire the skills highlighted. Teachers at Grade 1 thought that a collaboration between parents and the school would motivate the children to be more actively engaged in the learning process, so that their issues could be reduced. One respondent at Grade 1 reported that some of the children do not attend school regularly. Consequently, those children tend to fall behind, miss learning opportunities, and occasions to gain knowledge on how to apply concepts, and skills that are needed at the Grade 1 level.

In Grade 1, (100%) of the respondents expected that the children would come into the learning environment with the knowledge of the basic sight words, be equipped with word recognition skills, and number knowledge, and display some social skills. They explained that some children come into Grade 1 with some number knowledge, but they had issues with worded problems, and reading. Three respondents highlighted that some basic information and skills that children were expected to acquire, before they transition to Grade 1 were not evident.

All of the respondents thought that the transitioning period could be challenging for the children when they entered into their new learning environment. At Grade 1, the

seating arrangement was different from what they had in the Infant department. There were a few learning centers because of the space in the classroom; some of the interactive materials had to be placed in boxes. The class sizes were bigger with a higher teacher-pupil ratio. Children are coming from an environment with a ratio of 15 -20 children with their teacher. However, in this new environment at Grade 1, children had to adjust to class sizes with 42 -45 children and one teacher. One site, for this research, had one area for three Grade 1 classrooms, with partitions to divide it. Three children sit on a combo bench; the space and the noise level was also an issue for the teachers as well as the children. The students had limited areas for indoor play, and they were not encouraged to play outdoors.

The respondents at Grade 1 expected that the teachers at the Infant department would engage the five-year-olds to more writing skills. Infant department teachers said children were exposed to the skills that would develop their fine motor skills. Grade 1 teachers believed that the children who transition should have an awareness of their surrounding; be careful not to encourage strangers and be aware of unsafe areas and habits. Those respondents expected that children entering Grade 1 should learn to conform to rules, and regulations of parents and teachers. Grade 1 teachers expect that children would be obedient at home, at school, and in the classroom. Three respondents at Grade 1 said that they expected more from teachers at the Basic/Infant/preparatory schools concerning their assistance to the children to improve their competencies for knowledge of basic sight words so that they could be better prepared for reading. Three of the five (60 %) participants at Grade 1 also explained that some children do not show

maturity, or display an understanding of the skills they need for formal learning. One participant who taught at the Grade 1 level said,

I would not blame the teachers at the Infant Department alone, for the deficiencies that the children display when they transition into Grade1. Parents are needed for an active engagement in their children's learning experiences and ensure that their students are ready for the transition from home to school and allow them to be empowered with the skills they need to begin formal learning at Grade 1.

The respondents at Grade1 concurred that they thought that the transition process was hard for the children; as they were being exposed to longer hours for the school day, and the time allotted for each discipline was greater than what they were accustomed to at the Infant department. Another participant who cater to children at Grade 1 further explained,

Over the years, I discovered that a majority of the children who enter Grade 1 are not socially, and physically ready (some of them do not work well in groups, they get into fights, and their writing skills are sometimes underdeveloped). However, we conduct the new parents' meeting, where they are informed about the teachers' expectations for the children at Grade 1. Parents are asked to partner with the teachers at Grade1, to assist their students in developing their social skills, as well as be engaged in the cognitive development for the formal curriculum. I think, parents have to understand that they play an important role in the lives of their children; therefore I encourage them to develop a partnership with the teachers, and the school that assist their children so that they can adjust

easier and perform better. I also inform them that it is not just the mental development that we focus on, but children's holistic development.

The participants at Grade 1 concurred that they expected that children who enter Grade 1 would have mastered basic readiness skills for listening, language skills (although some children come with only their home language), fine and gross motor skills. The participants explained that they were not expecting fluency, but children who transitioned should be able to identify letters and letter sounds, know the basic sight words and be equipped with word recognition skills; so that they could display reading readiness to begin the formal curriculum at Grade 1. Some children enter Grade 1 with some number knowledge but have issues with worded problems. The participants at Grade 1 reported that in their assessment, and experience with the children who transitioned; some children did not have the competencies of the basic readiness skills that they need to begin the formal

Theme 3: Mastery on GOILP assessment and curriculum implementation.

The responses revealed that the participants placed importance on having knowledge of the results for the GOILP so that the curriculum content can be implemented. Documents with scores from the GOILP assessment and some of the planned activities from the teachers were observed. The themes that emerged included; the importance of attaining mastery on assessment tasks; assessment strategies used to attain mastery; feedback from standardized tests and progression at Grade 1; mastery of readiness skills for curriculum content on the GOILP. The participants concurred that mastery on assessment items were important because it would inform them about the children's level of mastery in readiness

skills. They will develop an awareness of how to plan, and organize their classes; engage children in the teaching and learning environment, and identify ways to employ assessment strategies in the process.

The participants at the Infant department and Grade 1 reported that they used curriculum standards to prepared children by scaffolding them through hands-on interactive materials. The aim was to equip the children with readiness skills, so that when they transition they would display the competencies and skills they gleaned. Although infant department/ kindergarten teachers expected that children would transition into Grade 1 with the requisite skills that are needed, they agreed that some children lacked some of the basic skills. Teachers concurred that they used different teaching and learning strategies to engage the children in learning such as grouping, differentiated instruction, technology, role play, games, and storytelling so that children could learn the concepts, skills and knowledge for the curriculum standards. Teachers encouraged the use of applications to promote problem-solving, critical thinking skills and appropriate computations and interactive materials for academic competencies. Teachers had to motivate the children who had issues so that they could have autonomy for discovery learning as well as construct meanings in their interactions. Some children did not master or adequately acquire the requisite skills before they transition maybe they were not ready or they have developmental delays. There were barriers in the preparation process as teachers engaged students in the teaching and learning process for acquiring readiness at the Infant department as well as display competencies at Grade1. Table 10

outlines a summary of the participants of the Kindergarten and Grade 1 views of how they prepare children to be ready for Grade 1.

Table 10

Teachers Preparing Children with Readiness Skills for Grade 1

Themes	Infant/Kindergarten Teachers
Curriculum Standards	✓
Supporting Growth with Interactive Materials and Technology	✓
Various Teaching and Learning strategies	✓
Motivating Students	✓
Skills and concepts acquisition	✓
Barriers in Preparation	✓

The participants at the Infant department agreed that the children had acquired requisite skills but may lack mastery in problem solving and critical thinking skills. They reported that resources were provided and used to support the acquisition of readiness skills; teachers motivated students as well as encouraged them to acquire the skills, and concepts as they were exposed to them in the teaching and learning environment.

Summary of Barriers

The participants at both levels reported that the barriers they faced in the education system included large class sizes in small spaces; high teacher-pupil ratio with no assistant teacher; children had to be placed in mixed ability groups, teachers and students lacked resources, and parental support; poor attendance pattern at school (for some children), and some children were faced with personal and financial issues that teachers were not adequately prepared to address for the students.

A rapport was established with the participants so that multiple perceptions were gleaned from the interviews notes, a document review for assessments and perusing the curriculum requirements and GOILP scores for two schools in western Jamaica, for a deeper understanding of the teachers' expectations for the children when they transitioned into Grade 1. Teachers at Grade 1 agreed that children were at different stages, and levels of development, but there were some requisite skills, and knowledge that children should master when they enter Grade 1. Teachers at both levels concurred that the transition period for young children needs some adjustment and consideration.

The barriers encountered for this Research Question 1 were, children lacked the word recognition skills, adequate knowledge of the basic sight words needed for reading, the ability to comprehend the content at Grade 1, and the requisite competencies for number knowledge that would assist them to apply basic mathematical operations. Some of the children did not have assistance from their parents or main caregivers to support them in cognitive activities. The details for the activities, and practice of the skills outside the classroom were minimal. Teachers had to adjust their teaching methodology and strategies to accommodate large class sizes in small spaces, limited resources including the multi-media projector, while encouraging children to share materials, and space. Some children did not display mastery of social skills; they had issues when they had to work with each other. Another barrier was the lack of parental involvement in school activities, especially for the children that needed extra assistance. Teachers at this level viewed their interaction at times as a struggle; they had to scaffold children to build

knowledge, improve their competencies in academic tasks, motivate them to embrace positive social skills, and cater to their emotional challenges.

The participants at Grade 1 reported that the barriers identified related to the limitations children displayed for readiness in word recognition, sight word vocabulary and reading. The lack of formal feedback from the GOILP assessment (see Appendices D & E), allowed restrictions for the participants' awareness of the children's strengths and weaknesses for the Grade 1 curriculum. The acquisition of readiness skills are necessary, so that children can build their confidence in cognitive tasks, and be able to construct meanings when they transition into Grade 1. The GOILP outlines the areas of readiness that children had proficiency, developing, beginning and not yet (see Appendices D & E) but not in areas of reading, comprehension and general knowledge. The data from the interviews and the document review revealed that children had challenges with oral communication, reading, and number knowledge for basic computations in mathematics. Consequently, teachers had to allow time to work with children individually and in groups before they could begin the content for the formal curriculum. Although the process was very time-consuming, this initiative had to be done so that teachers could achieve academic goals, objectives and targets. The GOILP documents presented information about the level of mastery children had attained in Literacy, Numeracy and General Knowledge skills. The assessment results showed the children that were highlighted from School AB and School DF attained over 80 % proficient in some readiness skills. However, teachers at Grade 1 explained that children needed to display greater levels of mastery in literacy, and numeracy skills so that they could apply

competencies for the curriculum and attain the standards for the academic goals. The participants at Grade 1 agreed that a lack of these skills affect children performance on assessments and their progress at the Grade 1 level-

Summary

The participants at the Infant department in this study reported that they prepared students by engaging, as well as scaffolding them through hands-on, and interactive materials aimed at equipping them with readiness skills, knowledge, and intelligences needed at the next level of the education system. They concurred that teachers guided the children using varying strategies such as grouping, differentiated instruction, role play, games, and storytelling so that the concepts, skills, and knowledge for the grade level could be acquired. Kindergarten teachers explained that they motivated the children to have autonomy for discovery learning as well as construct meanings through cooperative interactions. Grade 1 teachers, reported that the children that transitioned, into Grade 1 were not displaying mastery for basic sight words that were necessary for reading, as well as the competencies in number knowledge that is a pre-requisite for basic mathematical operations. As a result, the lack of these skills negatively impacted children's progression for displaying knowledge, skills and competencies needed for the curriculum.

An evaluation of the GOILP assessments in 2017 showed that more children were proficient in readiness skills than in developing, beginning and not yet. Grade 1 teachers, however, had high expectations for a display of mastery in literacy and numeracy areas that are required when they transition to begin the formal curriculum. Chapter 5 outlines the interpretation of the findings, suggest some recommendations, highlight some

limitations and make references to social change that can contribute to the educational advancement for young children in the Jamaican education system. It also gives the conclusion for this investigation.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

In Chapter 5, I review the purpose of the study, present the study's findings and interpretation. This chapter also includes recommendations for stakeholders' actions and social change that could benefit students at the kindergarten and Grade 1 of the education system, stakeholders, policymakers, interest groups, and agencies. The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore kindergarten students' readiness for Grade 1 based on teachers' perceptions. This qualitative case study was guided by a conceptual framework of social constructivism outlined by Vygotsky and Piaget. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with five kindergarten and five Grade 1 teachers. I also examined documents (curriculum, planned activities) and the GOILP assessments administered in preparation for the national curriculum for data about the expectations of the teachers.

Interpretation of Findings

I interpreted the key findings of the established research questions and previously reviewed research as discussed in Chapter 2. The research questions were designed to gain an understanding of the expectations teachers have for children's competencies in readiness skills. The participants taught at the infant department, who prepare children with the skills, competencies, and knowledge to transition into Grade 1, and Grade 1 teachers, who welcomed the children from the infant department. The participants were situated at two schools in Western Jamaica.

The factors that contributed to the investigation in this research included personal readiness as well as school readiness where children should be grounded in a critical period during their early childhood years to develop while they learn the main concepts, and skills (Brown & Pickard, 2014). For example, Pantaleo (2016) and Brown (2015) stated that children should display the required experiences, attitude, and competencies so that teachers can cater to their needs in planning, implementation, and delivery of lessons. The participants from the infant department in this study stated that they engaged the learners with purposeful activities so that they could acquire requisite skills at this stage of their development. During their interactions the participants said they used formative and summative assessments based on the curriculum content and standards that allowed them to evaluate of the children's academic performance with the competencies and skills they need to transition into Grade 1.

Further, Vygotsky (1987) stated that children should be scaffolded in the learning process so that they can further develop the skills that they take with them as they move from one learning environment to the next. Children will learn how these skills can be applied to problem-solving and critical thinking applications. The participants at the infant department expressed that their expectations pertained to children acquiring of readiness skills, which influenced their teaching. They engaged children in deliberated learning episodes where they would be exposed to the requisite skills, build on their knowledge, and increase their cognitive experiences. With these experiences and preparation children were able to display their skills, competencies, and academic

performance when required as they transition into Grade 1. It is the teachers' hope that children will display these skills when they begin the formal curriculum.

The participants at both levels had high expectations for a display of readiness skills for children at Grade 1. But there were concerns for strengths, weaknesses, and the competencies displayed from the GOILP standardized assessment and (Informal Diagnostic Reading Inventory) reading tests as children transitioned into Grade 1. The teachers at Grade 1 agreed that most of the children were proficient with some readiness skills. However, many children did not show the level of mastery in the requisite areas in reading, writing, number knowledge and the ability for basic computations in mathematics that are vital for academic advancement.

The findings of this study support previous research suggesting that the focus at the kindergarten level should be on strengthening children's application of knowledge, and readiness skills, and working with their level of competencies so that they can achieve academic success (Day, et al., 2015; Fairbairn, 2013; Firmender et al., 2014; Katz, 2012). The participants in the infant department insisted that they received children without background experiences. They had to purposefully expose them to the areas of readiness where they could acquire perceptual, listening and language skills, general knowledge, and a desire to read. During these engagements, teachers had to strengthen children's knowledge and background experiences, motivate them to learn through discovery and inquiry learning, and allow them to have autonomy as they learn and increase their cognitive abilities.

The Expectations of Teachers

The participants at the infant departments' expectations were that children would display some level of competencies and readiness skills after their exposure to readiness skills. Children were scaffolded with hands-on activities that catered to their interest, needs, stage of development, and experiences. Teachers had expectations that children who came from homes, previous classes, and certain situations would have some exposure to the requisite foundation, knowledge, skills, and information. Teachers at Grade 1 expected that they would quickly build on children's background experiences, so that they would display their knowledge, competencies of readiness skills, and mastery for Grade 1. The infant department teachers had high expectations for the children who transitioned because based on the activities they provided and observations of children with their peers, they believed that they displayed the requisite skills, attitude, and abilities that could lay the foundation for cognitive mobility.

The Grade 1 teachers also had expectations for children to show mastery when they are given standardized tests. They were concerned that some children did not display the skills and competencies for letters and letter sounds, basic sight words, reading and understanding basic instructions, and applying competencies for mathematical operations, problem-solving, and critical thinking skills. The participants explained that without these skills and competencies they concluded that the children were not prepared to begin the NSC at Grade 1 in the Jamaican education system.

Teachers in the infant department also thought that Grade 1 teachers would build on what the children had acquired when they entered the new learning environment. The

participants at the infant department had expectations that teachers at Grade 1 would scaffold children's advancement for cognitive tasks, engage them in active learning so that they can apply problem-solving and critical thinking skills, and promote confidence for increasing knowledge, skills, and competencies. Teachers in the infant department were concerned about the strategies that Grade 1 teachers used as well as their knowledge of how children at this age cohort display competencies, their learning styles, and level of mastery in different tasks.

Further, Grade 1 teachers who participated in the study said that they had high expectations that children who transitioned should display aesthetic and creative expressions at this stage of their development. They also believed that children should demonstrate some level of general knowledge and have an awareness of the letters of the alphabet and the letter sounds that can assist them in the reading process. They believed that children should display communication skills (oral and written), express their thoughts for advancement in the learning process, and have the understanding to obey simple commands. The participants also said that children should be better equipped with problem-solving and critical thinking skills when they transition for greater application in the learning environment. These skills are promoted for the NSC, but if they are not encouraged in the learning process, there will still be a gap in schools for the acquisition of the competencies. Children should display the skills for application of the knowledge, and intelligences at this level of the education system. They need to be coached, mentored, and scaffolded so they can apply them when they are in the learning process.

The participants at the infant department concurred that if the skills, knowledge, and competencies are not taught, reinforced and mastered, then children will not display confidence in applying them. They will not know how to apply their abilities to cognitive tasks and be motivated to go beyond what they can do without assistance. Children should be encouraged and have the autonomy to construct meanings from their interactions, though teachers may sometimes find it challenging to be constantly scaffolding children with the requisite skills needed for academic advancement.

The participants at both levels agreed that continuous assessments were needed to empower teachers and children so that they can develop their aptitudes, attain mastery in skills, build confidence, and acquire knowledge and experiences in the learning process. The participants at both levels also concurred that judgments should not be made from the results of standardized and teacher-made tests. Children should be allowed to construct meanings and build their skills and competencies in authentic settings.

GOILP Results for Literacy, Numeracy, and General Knowledge

Children at age 6 in the Jamaican education system who transition into Grade 1 are given the GOILP standardized assessment to evaluate their level of readiness for the national curriculum (see Appendices D & E). The documents that were observed highlighted a group of children from two schools' level of competencies in literacy, numeracy, and general knowledge in 2017. The data were sourced from the Ministry of Education in Jamaica with information about the students' performance from School AB and School DF. The data were presented in the following categories: literacy, which includes oral language with the descriptor that communicates experiences; reading, which

includes descriptors, names letters, and initial letter sounds; and writing, which includes descriptors, first and last names descriptors, drawing self, completing a simple sentence, and writing the alphabet. The GOILP Assessment 2017 for numeracy includes the description counting to 10, addition, subtraction, naming numerals, drawing sets for numerals up to 9, and selecting sets to match numerals 1-9. For general knowledge, the descriptors were knowing personal information, naming colors, telling differences, telling similarities, and understanding concepts (see Appendices D & E for the scores for both Schools AB and DF).

The results showed that more children were proficient in the areas of literacy, numeracy, and general knowledge than *beginning*, *developing*, and *not yet*. The infant department teachers gave details that these are the areas that children were taught. As a result, they would show some levels of proficiency but maybe it is unfair to expect children to show mastery in the reading, writing, comprehension, and mathematical operations. Infant department participants said they believe Grade 1 teachers need to accept the children where they are, use different strategies to engage them in the learning process, apply intervention strategies where they are needed, and build the children's competencies, knowledge, skills and intelligence in active learning environments.

The participants at Grade 1 agreed that the children had some competencies and were proficient in some areas of readiness on the GOILP. They expressed their concerns that if the children did not display mastery in the basic areas of reading (that includes knowledge of letters and letter sound and sight words), writing, number knowledge (numbers, numerals and number name), general knowledge, and having a lack of social

skills (that will allow them to work amicably with their peers), they will not function effectively on cognitive tasks. As a result of the lack of these skills, the participants concluded that the children were not prepared for the formal curriculum at Grade 1. Without these skills, the participants concurred that they would not be able to begin the formal NSC curriculum and would have to spend time doing remedial work and implementing intervention strategies that they do not have the skills to be effective.

Support Services Infant Department and Grade 1 Level

The participants concurred that they got support from their schools' administration, parents, and other teachers, and the MEYI; however, they needed more assistance with resources and personnel to accommodate the number of children they had in their classes. With greater support, children will develop the habit to love to learn, apply the requisite skills for cognitive tasks, and be motivated to engage in discovery learning, critical thinking, and problem-solving.

Mandatory requirements at this level from the MEYI and the ECC include theories from Vygotsky and Piaget that learning environments should cater to the interests and needs of the children. They should be exposed to activities that will help them to build on their knowledge, competencies and experiences while teachers facilitate interactions children can be empowered in the learning process. Teachers should prepare an environment and facilitate learning to encourage children to be literate and numerate to meet the standards of the education system as well as to function globally. Children should be culturally aware and have the autonomy to participate in extracurricular activities.

Limitations of this Study

The population of this study was limited to only two sites that had children who transitioned from the infant department into Grade 1, catered to student- teachers from the teacher training college, and were supervised by the MEYI (in Jamaican). I used specific criteria to select a sample for this case study. The sample size was limited to 10 participants who volunteered to be a part of the research. I used semi-structured questions to interview the participants who facilitated the learning process at the infant department, and Grade 1 at the two sites. The interviews could have had more scope if other methods were explored to collect the data, and a case study approach was chosen.

During the interviews, I observed protocol, and allowed flexibility with the participants, however, I had to concentrate on gathering all the information from the tape-recorder, as well as writing supporting notes so that all the details could be captured. I had limitations in accessing the documents for the GOILP assessments for 2017, for my perusal in this research. The persons from the MEYI took some time to send the information because they were otherwise engaged. I also had limitations in exploring this research because I had to be focused on the issue of this study, although the participants had other issues they wanted me to highlight. If I had selected more participants from varying environments that cater to children in the six-year-old age cohort, as well as teachers who have different expectations for the level of readiness children have when they transition into Grade1, maybe they would have different perceptions of their competencies.

Recommendations

Recommendations for Further Study

This qualitative case study has contributed to the limited research on this issue in the Jamaican context. This research examined Kindergarten students' readiness for Grade 1, based on the perceptions of Kindergarten teachers compared to those of Grade 1 teachers towards readiness skills, instructional practices, and expectations of students' competency. Although the study was limited to ten teachers at two schools in Western Jamaica, further research may be done that can include other purposive samples.

Quantitative research using a survey method maybe used, it could include a wider cross-section of teachers across the Island, to understand their expectations for the children who transitioned in Grade 1. A final recommendation would be to conduct a longitudinal study for five years to assess children with the initial GOILP assessment at Grade 1, the Diagnostic test at Grade 3 and then the *primary exit profile* at Grade 6 to evaluate the children's strengths and weakness in Literacy and Numeracy skills over a six-year period.

Intervention strategies can be implemented for the children who display challenges; parents should be included, giving them information so that they can provide greater emotional and cognitive support. Teachers need to be given reduced class sizes or have assistants so that they can be more effective as they facilitate children in the teaching and learning environment. Teachers also need to be motivated and encouraged to be reflective practitioners so that their voices can be heard as they share their experiences and practice.

Recommendations from this Research

In analyzing the data from the interviews of the 10 participants, reviewing the GOILP scores, and curriculum documents, it has led me to highlight several recommendations, including the following:

- Teachers at both the Infant department and Grades 1 levels should be given smaller class sizes and an assistant teacher.
- Teachers in the infant schools, infant department, basic schools, and preparatory should be given more recognition, support, and remuneration (in Jamaica). Because these teachers have to scaffold children who have no experience, motivate them to acquire knowledge, garner skills that can promote a positive attitude to learning, and encourage children to display their competencies while showing that they value learning at consecutive stages of the education system.
- Teachers who facilitate learning in early childhood classrooms (that is, children in infant, basic, and preparatory schools, mainly 3-5 year-olds, and Grades 1-3), should be exposed to abreast strategies, and methodologies that can assist them to scaffold, and facilitate the learning process for young children. Children should be exposed to the skills, knowledge, and competencies at their critical periods so that they can display maturity as they learn
- Teaching, learning, and assessments have to be aligned with the developmental level of children.

- Schools should not use the results of the GOILP as a placement option for children when they transition into the Grade 1 classes. Teachers should use the results to assist students at their level.
- Stakeholders and policymakers should not place limitations or pressure on teachers who facilitate the learning process for children in reading, writing, problem-solving, and critical thinking skills, because doing so will also place limitations on the children to learn the skills, knowledge, and competencies that are needed for the 21st century learner.
- Children should be allowed opportunities to be engaged in play so that they can construct meanings from their interactions. Their learning environment should also encourage exploration, investigation, experimentations, and the autonomy to learn at their own pace.

The expectations of the infant department and Grade 1 teachers' should be aligned so that they contribute to students' abilities who are eager to learn in a prepared environment. Teachers should be purposeful as they cater to their learning styles and will facilitate 21st-century learners. This study showed that teachers at this level need to be empowered with updated strategies, and skills on how children learn, and develop. Teachers should embrace an awareness of holistic development, be supported with resources, and the systems to scaffold children while adhering to what is developmentally appropriate at this level of the education system.

Implications

The findings from this study provided insight into the importance of the acquisition of readiness skills at the early childhood level, and outlined the high expectations teachers have for the children who transition into Grade 1. At Grade 1, greater competencies and mastery of skills, especially in reading, are expected. Children need more interaction with the sight words so that they can develop fluency in reading. The first implication is that teachers at the infant department and primary levels of the education system should have a greater collaboration, to improve the expectations they embrace for children's readiness. Secondly, teachers at the early childhood level of the education system should be exposed to developmentally appropriate practices, and be empowered with pedagogies so that they can guide the efforts of children and enhance their cognitive abilities at the Grade 1 level. Thirdly, the GOILP assessment scores for 2017 showed that the children were proficient for a number of the descriptors for readiness skills for Literacy, Numeracy, and General Knowledge yet teachers expect higher levels of competencies for the curriculum content. The suggestions for evaluating children's performance on cognitive tasks that are introduced for the New National Standards Curriculum (in Jamaica), should show some improvements for closer alignment with the children's developmental level, attitude, and taking responsibility in the learning process. The findings suggest that more focus should be on the children's age, and stage of development at the end of the infant/kindergarten level. The results from this research can provide data for further research that will inform empirical knowledge of children's readiness skills. The results can inform personnel who facilitate,

train and mentor novice and in-service teachers, and enable the instructors at the colleges with knowledge of the data in the field as they host workshops and training sessions. The knowledge gleaned from this data could also empower teachers to positively affect the children when they engage them in the teaching and learning environment.

Action for Schools

The findings from this research will inform schools that they should encourage early childhood trained teachers to be empowered with the skills, methodologies, and strategies so that they can scaffold children within their interest, and needs in the learning process, to be ready for Grade1. Schools need to address the teacher-pupil ratio reducing the class size so that children can be motivated to succeed at their grade level. Teachers could be allowed to stay with one group of students for at least two years so that children can have some stability, and continuity in the learning process. Schools administration should also ensure that there is adequate space, proper seating arrangement, and adequate ventilation for children and their teachers in the learning environment. Schools should also provide the necessary support teachers need for children to embrace intrinsic motivation to learn, apply readiness skills, competencies, and knowledge required as they are being prepared to be positive contributors to society.

Action for MEYI and ECC

The MEYI should continue to support schools, teachers, and children with the required curriculum guide, resources, grants, furniture, and training sessions they currently offer. The ministry should provide documentation for formal feedback of the GOILP results to schools, highlighting the strengths and weakness of the children in each

school so that proper intervention strategies can be implemented. The results from the GOILP should also be more accessible to teachers for research purposes. The GOILP could be administered at the end of the school year while the children are at the infant department before they enter Grade 1, or give children an adjustment period of 2-4 weeks in September before administering the assessment. When the assessment is given, children are entering a new environment with a new teacher, and after the summer break. The ECC should also be more aligned with the standards of MEYI for the holistic development of children in infant departments, infant schools, basic schools, and preparatory schools. All the children in the schools should have similar experiences because they are assessed with the same assessment. Stakeholders should not place boundaries on teachers for exposing young children to reading, and writing skills, because they are expected to display the competencies when they transition to the next level of the education system. If teachers have boundaries on what they do in the learning environment, then children will have limitations when they are assessed with standardized tests.

Conclusion

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore Kindergarten students' readiness for Grade 1, based on the perceptions of Kindergarten teachers compared to those of Grade 1 teachers towards readiness skills, instructional practices, and expectations of students' competency. Teachers at the kindergarten level scaffold children to acquire the requisite readiness skills that should enable them to function effectively at the next level. While at the kindergarten level, greater emphasis needs to be

placed on the acquisition of the skills so that children can display competencies in basic literacy, and numeracy skills that are needed at Grade 1. On the other hand, teachers should be constantly empowered with improved pedagogies so they can motivate their students to become confident in the learning process.

The results of this investigation indicated that participants at Grade 1 had high expectations for children to display mastery in skills, competencies, and knowledge when they transition from the kindergarten level. Although the children were proficient in a number of the descriptors on the GOILP assessment, teachers were concerned that they could not begin teaching the content of the formal curriculum, because the children did not display mastery in some vital areas for learning. Participants at the infant department believe that teachers at the Grade 1 level should assist the children in building on their competencies, knowledge, and skills for cognitive experiences and advancement.

Some of the barriers for the acquisition of readiness skills that were identified by the participants of this research included large class sizes, limited space and resources, and no assistants so that they could have greater advancement in the learning process and limited resources. Children who transitioned lacked some of the requisite reading competencies so that they can begin the formal curriculum. Although some of the children displayed some beginning skills in writing, they lacked social skills for interaction during group work. The children that transitioned were just beginning to develop an understanding of academic content; therefore, they more time should be allotted for adjustment to their new learning environment before they are given standardized assessments. The participants at the infant department had concerns about a

smoother transition, so that children can be better adjusted to begin learning at the next level, and be able to advance in the new curriculum successfully. The participants agreed that teachers have to align their expectations with children's readiness, and scaffold them into learning at their level, and stage of development.

Major stakeholders of education and policymakers should have a greater awareness of how children learn, knowledge of their academic level, and an understanding of their expected competencies so that realistic outcomes can be achieved. They should be encouraged to extend more collaboration, and communication when they support both teachers, and children at this level. Children can then be empowered to learn, have the autonomy to build their competencies, develop confidence when displaying their acquired readiness skills, knowledge, and intelligences in their learning environment.

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Appendix A: Interview Protocol and Questions

Time of the Interview: (45 Minutes – 1 hour)

Date of the Interview:

Interviewer: Sadie Harris-Mortley

Interviewee: First-Grade & Kindergarten teachers

Position of Interviewee: Early Childhood teachers

Description of the Research: Children in the Jamaican education system transition from kindergarten/basic schools into the first-grade/grade one of the education system to begin the formal curriculum. Teachers at the first-grade expect that the children will come into the learning environment equipped with the skills and knowledge. However, Grade1 teachers are saying that the children are not ready for the transition. While the teachers at the kindergarten/basic school level are saying they have prepared children in the five-six age cohort with readiness skills and they expect children to first-grade teachers to build on the skills and knowledge the children bring into the new environment. There is a disconnect with the teachers' expectations and what the child can do and what are the expectations for teachers both at the basic schools and at grade-one.

Interview Questions for teachers:

Background:

Type of school?

Degrees held?

Years of teaching?

Age/grade level currently teach?

1. What curriculum/standards do you currently use to prepare students in the classroom?
2. In what ways do you support students' growth and development of the readiness skills from the curriculum?
3. Can you give some examples of the teaching and learning strategies used to prepare children for Grade 1 (ask them to be specific and give clear classroom examples of the strategies and classroom activities they use)?
4. How prepared are majority of the students who enter Grade 1/ your classroom to meet the demands of the curriculum/standards?
5. How do you support students who seem to fall behind others in certain areas of the curriculum/standards?
6. What resources do you have to do so? (i.e., admin support, parental support, classroom resources, tutors, etc.)
7. What barriers do you feel exist for you to properly support all of the students in your classroom to meet the demands of the curriculum?
8. What are the assessment strategies used for children entering the Grade 1 level?
9. Are you able to get feedback as well as provide feedback from the results of the standardized/informal test?
10. What impact do you think a knowledge of the results will have on how you relate to the children in the teaching and learning environment?

Appendix B: Demographic Questionnaire

Please complete the following questions

1. What is your gender?
 - a. Male
 - b. Female
2. What is your age?
 - a. 20 – 30
 - b. 31 -40
 - c. 41 – 50
 - d. 51 – 60.
3. What is your level of training?
 - a. NCTVET.
 - b. Diploma
 - c. Bachelors
 - d. Masters.
 - e. doctorate
4. What is your specialization?
 - a. Early childhood
 - b. Primary
 - c. Special Education
 - d. Other _____
5. How long have you been teaching Grade 1/ Kindergarten _____ (months/ years)
6. How many children are in your class? _____
7. What expectations do you have for your kindergarten/Grade 1 children in terms of their readiness to handle the rigors of the curriculum?
8. What instructional strategies do you implement to help the students master the curriculum expectations?

Appendix C: List of Codes for Data Analysis

Code and Code Abbreviation	Definition of Code	Examples of Code from Interview Transcripts
Curriculum Standards Used (CS)	The curriculum stipulated by the Ministry of education Curriculum for Four and Five Year olds New Standards Curriculum- Grade 1 -3	The curriculum that teachers at the infant department use is an activity-based curriculum that facilitates active learning in a prepared environment; children are engaged with hands-on materials.
Supporting Students' (SSRS)	How teachers support children's Growth and development with readiness skills	In the teaching and learning environment I try to model the skills, concepts and scaffold the children to participate in the activities, so that they can be sensitized and motivated to learn to read, while promoting the content such as for travelling, types of water transport. I also allow the children to be engaged in hands on activities/things as well as free play.
Teaching and Learning Strategies used to prepare children with the skills (T/L. STR)	What are the teaching and learning strategies that teachers used to prepare children with the readiness skills?	I use grouping, questioning, and computer-added strategies to execute my lessons. I engage the class in hands-on activities to guarantee that they are learning the concepts and skills. Since the focus for this age cohort is on the acquisition of letter sounds, knowledge of letters, number word attack skills for reading, and number knowledge. I have to implement strategies that will engage children in activities to enable them to develop skills for reading and learning
Preparedness with readiness Skills Grade 1 (PPNS)	How preparedness are majority of the students with readiness skills Grade 1? What skills do students have? What skills do they need to enter Grade 1?	I engage the children who have weaknesses in extra lessons after school and pull-out times at lunch and break time so that they can develop the competencies in reading and other areas for the curriculum content. I use a one-on-one approach so that I am sure that they master the concepts. Some children need this interaction to develop some of the skills they need for learning
Assisting students who seem to fall behind (A/S/F/B)	What kind of Support do teachers use for students who seem to fall behind	The participants reported that they had to further support the children who fall behind in the teaching-learning process, by engaging them in purposeful activities that can assist them cognitively, socially, and emotionally.
Resources used to Support students learning Resources (R/T:L)	What resources do teachers have to support students in the acquisition of skills?	I provide the necessary materials and resources that the children in my class need. Because some children come to

		school without notebooks, pencils and textbooks. I really cannot allow the children to sit in my class, and not do the work that I know they need to learn and for me to move along with the curriculum. Therefore, I have to get them to be engaged in the activities.
Barriers/limitations for Teaching & Learning (BR: T/L)	What are the barriers/limitations for Teaching and Learning	I constantly work with the children in my class, so that they can develop mastery in the main skills areas of literacy, and numeracy that will enhance their learning when they move to the next level. To reduce the barriers, I also assist the children with cognitive tasks so that they can develop competencies and maturity in social and emotional skills
Assessment strategies used for children entering the Grade 1 level (ASS/STR)	What are the assessment strategies used for children entering the Grade 1 level	I do formative assessments by observing the children's interaction to see how well they recognized words, spell them, and used them in sentences. Using formal and informal observations, I document and make my evaluation about each child's competencies in the skills, concepts, knowledge and abilities needed for the formal curriculum at Grade 1
Feedback from the results of the standardized test? (F/BK)	The importance of Feedback from the results of the GOILP for teaching and learning	The participants explained if teachers had greater level of feedback they would be able to tweak the content and knowledge as well as prepare planned learning activities to address the needs rather than trying to complete the curriculum within a specified period.
Mastery of Literacy, Numeracy and General Knowledge for Grade 1 (M/L/N&GK)	The importance of Mastery of Literacy, Numeracy and General Knowledge for the Curriculum at Grade 1	The participants further stated that it is important that children have mastery for basic literacy and numeracy skills. When children do not know the basic sight words, it influences their ability to read, develop fluency in reading and learn comprehension skills. A lack of knowledge for number concepts also affect children's ability to be engaged in problem-solving, and basic computations in math. The lack of these skills affect children performance on assessments and their progress at the Grade 1 level

Appendix D: GOILP Scores for School AB

Table D1

GOILP Assessment (2017) Literacy Scores for School AB

Description	Not yet	Beginning	Developing	Proficient
Oral language				
Communicates experiences	2	7	20	109
Follows 3 step direction	1	5	23	107
Reading				
Names Letters	0	3	6	129
Identifies initial letter sounds	20	6	15	97
Makes letter sounds	12	5	7	114
Writing				
Writes first and last names	1	9	11	117
Draws self	0	1	1	136
Completes a simple sentence	1	1	8	128
Writes Alphabet	0	7	8	123

Table D2

GOILP Assessment 2017 Numeracy Scores at (School AB)

Description	Not Yet	Beginning	Developing	Proficient
Counts to 10	0	2	2	134
Addition	3	5	6	124
Subtraction	2	5	8	123
Names Numeral	1	1	6	130
Draws sets for numerals up to 9	1	1	0	136
Selects sets to match numerals 1-9	0	2	3	133

Table D3

GOILP Assessment (2017) General Knowledge Scores at School AB

Description	Not Yet	Beginning	Developing	Proficient
Knows Personal Information	2	7	26	103
Names Colors	3	0	9	126
Tell Differences	4	4	19	111
Tell Similarities	0	2	2	134
Understands Concepts	0	2	8	128

Appendix E: GOILP Results for School Du Four (DF)

Table E1

GOILP Assessment (2017) Literacy Scores for (School DF)

Description	Not yet	Beginning	Developing	Proficient
Oral language				
Communicates experiences	1	4	11	147
Follows 3 step direction	0	5	21	137
Reading				
Names Letters	1	5	2	156
Identifies initial letter sounds	5	13	15	130
Makes letter sounds	11	6	8	138
Writing				
Writes first and last names	0	6	12	146
Draws self	1	1	4	157
Completes a simple sentence	2	2	6	153
Writes Alphabet	0	7	9	147

Table E2

GOILP Assessment 2017 Numeracy Scores at (School DF)

Description	Not Yet	Beginning	Developing	Proficient
Counts to 10	0	2	2	120
Addition	3	1	14	104
Subtraction	4	3	12	103
Names Numeral	1	3	8	112
Draws sets for Numerals up to 9	1	2	4	117
Selects sets to match numeral 1-9	2	2	6	114

Table E3

GOILP Assessment (2017) Literacy Scores for (School DF)

Description	Not yet	Beginning	Developing	Proficient
Oral language				
Communicates experiences	1	4	11	147
Follows 3 step direction	0	5	21	137
Reading				
Names Letters	1	5	2	156
Identifies initial letter sounds	5	13	15	130
Makes letter sounds	11	6	8	138
Writing				
Writes first and last names	0	6	12	146
Draws self	1	1	4	157
Completes a simple sentence	2	2	6	153
Writes Alphabet	0	7	9	147