

## CHAPTER ONE

### 1.0.Introduction.

This chapter introduces the background to the study, significance of school readiness and research gap, research questions, and the scope of the study.

### 1.1. Background of the study

Given the significance of school readiness, the global ratification of Sustainable Development goals (SDGs) has increased commitment for all countries around the world to invest in early childhood education and make it as the basic rights to all children (Wolf et al., 2017). Like to any other countries in the world, the government of Tanzania in collaboration with other national stakeholders and international educational agencies such as UNICEF, Save the Children, Plan international, USAIDs has been emphasizing access to quality education and set early childhood education as a foundations for children's developments (Mtahabwa & Rao, 2010a). Despite of the governments' efforts to expand access and enhance equality education at all levels, the global quality initiatives has continued to impact on local policy practices in educational contexts. However, the implementation of educational policies and quality early childhood education around the country are not accompanied by operational plans basing on school settings and facilities available in schools. Programs such as, early childhood care and development (ECCD) programs

has been established in Tanzania to equip and shape children's cognitive, social, language as well as improving readiness of children to schools (Mtahabwa, 2010).

There are number of reasons to why the earliest period from conception to the age of 5 years is very critical age to the cognitive and social development of children. It is during this first 5 years where rapid physical and motor development milestones are dominants to children. With the help from parents, teachers and community, children learn to grasp objects using their hands, socialize, reading, learning some writing skills and mathematic skills. According to Scharf et al., (2016), during children's early progression, the impacts of parenting on children's growth manifest in many aspects of their development throughout this time. All developmental milestones, including cognitive, social, language, fine motor skill, and gross motor skill development, are expected to be observable throughout this stage of a child's development. Several scholars has tried to associate school readiness with children's early developments including cognitive, social and emotional developments. For example Welsh et al., (2010) in his work revealed the importance of working memory to the academic success of the children. Basically, children's developments and school achievements is well stabled during early years of developments. Therefore, failing to identify children's development milestones during early years would course developmental delay of children. Meanwhile, when examining the questions of how children are ready and how to ensure their readiness for school, there is a need for school teachers to reflect how well the concept of school readiness is perceived as well as all related developmental foundations of children (Not et al., 2006). Therefore, the estimations on children's latter academic achievements is made in

relation to school teacher's awareness or school readiness skills as well as early care programs provided to children before entry to kindergarten settings.

School readiness has recently given a special concern from all educational stakeholders including teachers, parents, policy makers and the societies around the world. The reason behind is to assess and improve early childhood education. The consensus made by the scholars around the world acknowledge that the prior interventions made to children during their early years has significant impacts to the start of schools. Meanwhile, parents are struggling to get their children enrolled in school as quickly as possible. Yet, to know what time is appropriate for the children to be ready to start school might be a challenge to some of the parents and school teachers (Carlton & Winsler, 1999), since some parents only knows that children become ready for school immediately after they reach the ages that the governments recommends in educational policies. School readiness provide a picture of levels of children development reached. Therefore, school readiness is not recognized from a single factor of children development but also all early abilities and behaviors in multiple domains of development that largely determine transformation from home to school learning environments (Hatcher et al., 2012).

It is very important that all children attend elementary schools when they are ready to learn. Hatfield et al., (2016) noted that school readiness is achieved from the supportive environments and empowering families during early years of children developments. It is highly agreed that home learning environments help to promote higher cognitive skills, children interactions as well as social skills to children. Hence, parents and caregiver's have the role to consider and support

development of soft skills such as an ability to control their bodies, easily interact with their environments, stimulate abilities to recognize differences as well as an ability to question. However, school readiness skills is not only tied up with abilities to read and arithmetic but also how children are confident and curious to learn things by their own (Fontaine et al., 2006). Therefore, early identifications of school readiness challenges help school teachers and parents to intervene and find the most effective solutions in solving teaching and learning difficulties to children.

Before and even after attending schools children simply need to have some prior skills and abilities that enable them to learn how to socialize and solve some simple problems. Children develop these skills and abilities as a result of interactions with their parents, communities, and the people around them (Kitta & Silverius Kapinga, 2015). Mostly, those children who do not have these prior skills and abilities are likely not to perform well when they engage with schools later. Basically, early year interventions have a clear role to shape children's development and their school readiness (Sharry et al., 2005). This is the reason why early stages of transitioning to school need to be treated seriously since it lays the groundwork for a child's academic in the future. It is a challenging stage for both children and parents since it necessitates an extensive preparation before children enter school settings. It is the time where parents think about readiness of their children and decide on which school is best for their children while also considering their financial situations. The results of various researches indicate that most of children who are actively raised from ready families, ready communities, and ready early learning settings have positive better start in school settings (A. Rahmawati et al., 2018). Therefore, school readiness skills are very important

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to school teachers as well as parents and other stakeholders to determine essential needs for children to be ready for school.

To highlight the importance of school readiness, the questions of whether or not school teachers understand what it takes for children to be ready for school is important. Their understanding is required for them to overcome some of the hurdles that children confront when entering school environments. According to Lin et al., (2003), teachers' abilities to comprehend what it takes for children to be ready for school have an impact on children's academic outcomes. Basically, early identification of the school readiness challenges help to improve early childhood educational policies and programs, extend abilities and skills of the children and perhaps promote and improve social and emotional development of children (Ohle & Harvey, 2019). However, it is true that most of school teachers prioritize few criteria specifically in cognitive abilities as a school readiness criteria such as ability to count some of the numbers from one up to five and sometimes ability to mention their names (Desmangles, 2018). Nevertheless, when assessing children readiness, considerations of multiple aspects that comprise children development as whole is important such as Cognitive/intellectual development, physical development, social development and emotional development (Xie & Gan, 2017).

School teachers are in charge of evaluating children's abilities across all areas of development in order to determine whether or not they are ready to start school. Their assessment are very important to assure school teachers and other stakeholders that children are ready to enter in the school setting. According to Solari (2014), acknowledge that when assessing school

readiness, typically various criteria need to be considered including cognitive and non-cognitive criteria, though most of schools prioritize children's ages and cognitive abilities as the most criteria for children entrance to the school. However children readiness is influenced much on the readiness of the educators, family, system, communities and readiness of the school (Davies et al., 2016). As a result, assessments should take into account not only a single factor but a variety of factors that influence a child's preparation for school.

Evidences found in evaluation reports and various literature indicate that early learning is critical for children's latter academic success (Wiltshire, (1993), Marcon, (1999), Klein & Knitzer, (2007), Ball, (1994)). Therefore, this study is extremely important to all children's stakeholders, including parents and school instructors, to gain a better understanding of the standards of early childhood development, with early childhood learning being prioritized in this study. Also, this study is important as it will help to explore and promote some strategies that foster school readiness as well as promoting children's social and emotional development as a critical foundation of school readiness. Likewise, the study will prove to be an important study in the area of parenting and will serve as a basis for future research. Furthermore, the goal of this research is to look into numerous aspects of children's development that are crucial in determining whether or not they are ready for school.

In Tanzania, there are ongoing educational improvements to ensure continuity of education to children through enacting some educational programs and policies. However, it is the responsibility of both school teachers, parents and the larger society to ensure readiness of children

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for elementary school and ensure equitable provisions of quality educations to all children around the country. Not just children and parents, but all educational stakeholders are involved in school readiness. As stated in the early childhood educational curriculum in Tanzania, readiness of children are influenced by a number of factors, including age (WEST, 2016). However, previous research on school readiness in Tanzania are still lacking. The most are centered on the developmental and educational outcomes. For example, the study by Raikes et al., (2019) was on Psychometric evaluation, measuring early learning quality and outcomes of children on the basis of school readiness constructs in Tanzania. Therefore, representing a sample of Tanzanian kindergarten teachers, this study explicitly seeks to investigate and explore the individual understanding of school teachers on school readiness as well as the way they use to assess children's school readiness in their respective localities specifically in Mtwara-region.

## **1.2. Research Questions**

This research will address the following questions;

1. How does the concept of school readiness and transition to school perceived by school teachers?
2. What are the alternative strategies school teachers use to assess and improve children's school readiness in their respective localities?
3. How school teachers play their roles towards promoting children's school readiness?
4. How does the aspects of children's school readiness perceived by school teachers?

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### **1.3. Scope of the Study**

Recently, there is an increase of concern in early childhood education to many developing countries including Tanzania. The scope of the proposed study will be looking on the definition of school readiness; perception of teachers regarding school readiness; examine different domains of children development that are regarded as the determinants of school readiness.

### **1.4. Significance of the study**

Tanzania government is still working to improve access to equal and high-quality education across the country. Though, a significant number of researches has proven that some kindergarten school teachers in Tanzania have not yet reached the quality level of teaching children. As a result, some of the school teachers are unable to define the pre-requirements for children's readiness and sometimes fail to support children in addressing their needs for school in the time of admission for the first time. Therefore, the findings and outcomes of this study will often be of theoretical and practical value to all policy makers, school teachers, parents, and researchers in Tanzania contexts since will provide a clear picture of how the concept of school readiness is understood to most of kindergarten teachers in Tanzania.

As it is obvious that learning starts long before school entry, knowledge about school readiness is very important to both school teachers and parents to prepare children succeed in school and life in general. Teachers and parents have to understand all essential ingredients for school readiness such as creating enriching and supportive learning environments. It is from this study where by all scholars as well as school teachers interested in researching about school

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readiness, will find this study useful in determining where to begin their research. Likewise, findings from this study will assist and inform the government perhaps to restructure and adjust some educational policies and curriculums to help school teachers better understand the concept of school readiness as well as the various domains of school readiness. In addition, the study allows parents and caregivers to gain a better understanding of parenting in relation to school readiness principles.

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