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Kindergarten Readiness Through the Lens of Parent Perspective

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KINDERGARTEN READINESS THROUGH THE LENS OF PARENT PERSPECTIVE

A Dissertation Prepared
for the Degree of Doctorate of Education
in the School of Education
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ABSTRACT

This study utilized a phenomenological approach to explore parent perspectives about kindergarten readiness. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 10 parents from a public preschool whose children were about to start kindergarten. The parents' own kindergarten experiences were discussed as well as their perspectives and beliefs about what kindergarten readiness means as it relates to the preparation for and transition into kindergarten. Interview transcripts were analytically coded resulting in findings that were authentic and specific related to personal kindergarten recollections, kindergarten preparedness practices, and assumptions about preschool used as a kindergarten preparation tool. Findings answered the research questions providing specificity about how parents view kindergarten readiness, parent perceptions about preschool preparing children for kindergarten, and at-home preparation activities and behaviors parents engage in with their children prior to the beginning of kindergarten. The findings are informative and beneficial to practitioners, teachers, and stakeholders within education communities as the findings directly impact curriculum, instruction, and education practices within early childhood education.

ABBREVIATIONS

DAP   Developmentally appropriate practice

NAEYC   National Association for the Education of Young Children

NCLB   No Child Left Behind

DEFINITIONS

Achievement gap: a significant difference in academic outcomes between diverse groups of students

At-risk student: a student who is likely to fail in school (grades and/or drop out of high school)

Cognitive development: how children think, explore, and figure things out

Early childhood education: education of children birth to 8 years of age

Emotional development: emergence of expression, understanding, and regulation of emotions from birth to childhood to adolescence and into adulthood

Kindergarten readiness: readiness skills that contribute to the ability to adapt to kindergarten successfully

No Child Left Behind Act of 2001: law that held schools accountable for how kids learned and achieved skill mastery

Physical development: acquisition and refinements of a child's ability to use and control their body

Play-based learning: a type of early childhood education based on child-led and open-ended play. Play-based learning helps children develop social skills, motivation to learn, and even language and numeracy skills.

Social skills development: developing an awareness of how we communicate, solve conflict, and interact with others

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

One of the most memorable experiences in a child's life is the start of kindergarten as it represents the transition from home to formal school. As with any monumental change, there are readiness factors that teachers, administrators, and parents often times consider when determining overall readiness for kindergarten. Is there a specific definition that defines *kindergarten readiness*? Researchers and teachers have found variations in how they define kindergarten readiness, but most agree that a child's emotional, cognitive, social, and physical development play a vital role in their transition into formal school and successes, as well as failures, beyond the kindergarten year. Besides chronological age, which is turning the age of 5 before September 1st of the kindergarten school year, most school districts don't have a set of mandatory guidelines that children must meet in order to attend kindergarten. While some argue mandatory guidelines are necessary, many teachers indicate otherwise (Bassok et al., (2016). Research studies show that children enter kindergarten with varying degrees of skill sets which means children don't start kindergarten on a level playing field (Dombkowski, 2001).

These skills sets are created, supported, and shaped by parents and caregivers during the first years of a child's life before formal schooling ever begins (Welchons & McIntyre, 2015). Since parents are the primary influence on a child's life before school, it is beneficial to teachers, administrators, and policymakers to investigate what kindergarten readiness really is using the lens of parent perspective. A number of studies have been done through the lens of teacher

perspective, but few studies have examined kindergarten readiness through the lens of parent perspective.

A generation ago, maybe even two generations ago, if you asked a parent what their child needed to know to be ready for kindergarten, most parents would say the following: chronological age of 5, be able to hold a crayon in their hand, put a simple puzzle together, and be able to play with their classmates. Times have really changed; consequently, the expectations of kindergarten readiness have morphed and evolved into a more academic realm than a generation or so ago (Hustedt et al., 2017). When parents are asked about kindergarten readiness today, the answer you get is usually multilayered and fairly complex. Finding specificity can be difficult as parents consider mental, physical, emotional, and social development skills. Even the look of kindergarten classrooms has changed as more academic accountability and push-down academics have begun to transform what a kindergarten classroom is "supposed" to look like (Harmon & Viruru, 2018). In the 1980s, most children entered their kindergarten classroom as a completely novice student with little to no prior school experiences much less scholastic preparation from a preschool curriculum or exposure to a preschool with routines and structure (Little et al., 2016).

Today's kindergarten students are being immersed in academic pressures, routines, and expectations, so how do parents feel about their individual child's *kindergarten readiness*?

Statement of the Problem

Few studies have investigated *kindergarten readiness* through the lens of parent perspective, so in order to better understand *kindergarten readiness* expectations, the need to talk with parents is critically evident. Both teachers and parents want children to begin kindergarten on a solid footing ready for academic success, but what do parents specifically think about what

readiness really means? The answer to that question is different for every parent as they reflect on life experiences and skills taught in the home (Hatcher et al., 2012; Kim et al., 2005). One particular area that has received recent attention is the efficacy of preschool programs as they relate to kindergarten readiness in a variety of areas: routines, social skills development, and future school success (Recchia & Bentley, 2013). This puts parents in a difficult spot as they try to decide if preschool is the right decision for their child as well as weighing the pros and cons of preschool education. If a parent chooses for their child to remain at home or in a daycare setting before entry to kindergarten, it is important to also consider how parents and caregivers prepare young children for the transition to kindergarten as it may differ from the preparation skills taught using a formal preschool curriculum (Yoshikawa et al., 2016).

The result of push-down academics has resulted in the theory that children should have multifaceted skill sets before they enter kindergarten, so they will be more likely to perform well on standardized assessments, achieve skill mastery earlier and earlier, and the overall achievement gap among students will begin to close (Harmon & Viruru, 2018). The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001 was a critical turning point in education particularly in the early grades like kindergarten as it caused a shift in kindergarten expectations, instruction, and preparedness from one of play-based learning to more structured, skills-based learning (Meyers, 2018). As a result, teachers are being forced to teach skills that are not developmentally appropriate and are causing kindergarten students to feel anxious (Mincemoyer, 2016). As we learn what beliefs, thoughts, and assumptions parents have about kindergarten readiness, we can better equip children for the transition from the home to formal school.

Purpose of this Study

The purpose of this study is to investigate the term *kindergarten readiness* through the lens of parent perspective. While school districts consider and value teacher input about kindergarten readiness, many school districts don't include parent perspective about kindergarten readiness. This can have a negative effect on children, parents, teachers, and administrators as they all strive to frame each child's kindergarten experience with preparedness, support, and success (Gartrell, 2016; LaParo et al., 2003). Including parents in the kindergarten readiness experiences can result in a successful transition into kindergarten as well as a factual knowledge base of what parents believe their child should know before they enter kindergarten.

It is evident that parents play a vital role in their child's education, so it makes sense that parents are an equal stakeholder in their child's education experiences both prior to formal school and during the attendance of formal school. Routines, academic environment, and social relationships among parents and children in the home can be very different from those relationships among teachers and students in school (Vitiello et al., 2019). Understanding kindergarten readiness through parent perspective can provide a detailed view into what parents believe is most important in the following areas: social skills, behavioral expectations, academic skills, emotional development, and physical development. Academic readiness expectations prior to kindergarten have increased, but have those expectations been adherently communicated to parents? Despite a parent's most authentic effort to prepare their child for kindergarten, complex educational expectations and pressures have caused children to enter kindergarten already labeled "behind" or "at risk". This study aims to express the importance of, identify themes within, and interpret parent viewpoints and perspectives as they relate to kindergarten readiness.

Research Questions

This qualitative study will address the following research questions:

1. How do parents and caregivers view *kindergarten readiness?*

2. What are parents doing to help support early childhood experiences related to *kindergarten readiness?*

3. How do parents perceive preschool education influencing *kindergarten readiness?*

4. What are some identified misconceptions about *kindergarten readiness*?

Significance

The significance of this study is to inform teachers, practitioners, and educators of young children what parents believe, theorize, and assume about kindergarten readiness based on their own experiences as well as their child's experiences. In order to provide best practice methods, meaningful learning experiences, and developmentally appropriate practice, teachers need to recognize what impacts and shapes the lives of children entering kindergarten. Kindergarten readiness is a fluid term that directly impacts parents, students, teachers, administrators, and policymakers as it includes expectations and skills that support the transition into formal school. Identifying parent perspectives, beliefs, and misconceptions about kindergarten readiness can result in kindergarten experiences that are both supportive and empowering to young learners, teachers, and administrators as equipping leaners with a multifaceted skill set can result in visible benefits for all.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

History of Kindergarten

In 1837, Friedrich Froebel created the first kindergarten in Germany which was based on child-centered play using toys and games as avenues for delivery and social interaction. Froebel's philosophy was derived from the theory that kindergarten should serve as the transition period between infancy and childhood and between home and school (Feeny, Moravcik, Nolte, & Christensen, 2010). Parents play a vital role as they are the ones who frame the transition from home to kindergarten through attitude, expectations, and experiences (Carlton & Winsler, 1999). Routines, academic environment, and social relationships among kindergarten students and teachers can be much different than those between parents and children within the home (Walsh, Romo, & Jeo, 2018). As kindergarten has changed, it has increased the pace of growing up for most children. By not allowing children adequate time to play, we are limiting their opportunities for developing social skills, problem solving skills, and creativity (Curwood, 2007).

Once viewed as a time of play and a year spent developing skill sets for first grade, kindergarten has become a year where children are completely immersed in academic skills and learning experiences that are geared towards academic content (Bassok, Latham, & Rorem, 2016). Froebel's desire was for kindergarten to be a year that allows teachers to use a child-centered approach to instruction, and one that included play and discovery learning experiences for children. This child-centered approach supports Froebel's theory that kindergarten represents

a bridge that connects home and school. When academic skills and assessments are the primary focus on the kindergarten experience, the child-centered approach becomes entangled in a web of academic expectations and content (Dombkowski, 2001).

Research has shown us that it is vitally important to analyze the changes that have occurred in kindergarten because these changes can potentially have long-term implications and effects on a child's perception and attitude about school (Brown, 2013). When students struggle in kindergarten, studies show they tend to have a more negative attitude and perception about school for the long term (Bassok, Latham, & Rorem, 2016; Dombkowski, 2001). Obviously there has been an ebb and flow of changes within education for hundreds of years, but the changes in kindergarten seem to be more evident and exposed than other changes have been. A variety of factors has influenced the changes including education policies, increased pressure on teacher to prepare students for high-stakes tests in the third grade, and the thought that children can learn academic content at younger ages than once believed (Curwood, 2007).

Changes in Kindergarten

Over time, the year of early schooling known as *kindergarten* has gone through a plethora of changes in classroom design, academic skills, and readiness expectations. These changes have directly impacted teachers, parents, and children by causing increased pressures for academic readiness, everchanging teaching methods, and classrooms that resemble those of higher grades instead of classrooms that encourage play-based learning (Brown & Gasko, 2012). Many have asked the following question, "*What happened to kindergarten?*" The answers are varied and contain a complex rationale. It really depends on who you ask as to what answer you will receive. Teachers blame push-down academics and high-stakes assessments which ignore age-appropriate expectations for young learners (Curwood, 2007). Parents blame policymakers

and administrators who some argue don't understand what developmentally appropriate practice means and are only focused on minimizing the ever-increasing achievement gap (Freeman & Brown, 2008; Morin, 2020). That has left children in kindergarten classrooms striving to learn and be successful while actively developing social, emotional, cognitive, and physical skills (Dahl, 2016).

According to Dahl, in 1998, 31% of teachers believed that children should be able to read when they leave kindergarten, but by the year 2010, that percentage of teachers had increased to over 80%. Also, kindergarten classrooms in 2010 were 40% less likely to have discovery centers and play areas as compared to kindergarten classroom in 1998 (Dahl, 2016). These statistics are evidence that kindergarten has gone through changes over the past 2 to 3 decades, but not everyone believes the increased emphasis on high-stakes testing is the reason. Some teachers argue that more children are attending formal preschool programs which is resulting in children coming into kindergarten better prepared than children in the 1990s and early 2000s. Children are also enrolling in full day kindergarten programs instead of half-day programs which means teachers have more time to teach a variety of academic, emotional, social, and motor skills (Galuski, 2017). Whether talking with parents, teachers, administrators, or policymakers, there is a consistent conclusion: Kindergarten has undergone dramatic changes since the turn of the century which has resulted in kindergarten classrooms being more academic than ever before.

Kindergarten Before the Year 2000. Prior to the year 2000, kindergarten classrooms had a different look and what was taught in kindergarten classrooms was more play-based learning activities, experiences that taught and fostered social skills, and learning experiences that supported overall development of the child as a whole. There was an unspoken notion that kindergarten was a year of enrichment and not a year geared towards only academic achievement

(Hatcher, Nuner, & Paulsel, 2012). Kindergarten classrooms supported small-group instruction by grouping students together to develop social and interpersonal skills with classmates and to encourage exploratory learning (Almon & Miller, 2007). If you were to walk into a kindergarten classroom during the 1980s and 1990s, you would most likely find a home living center with baby dolls, a kitchen, and pretend food, a blocks center full of Legos and cardboard blocks, and a reading center stacked full of books, pillows, and beanbags (Morin, 2019). These centers were areas of creativity, areas that fostered oral language development, and areas that gave children opportunities to engage in authentic role playing (Brown, 2013). In 2001, the No Child Left Behind Act was passed resulting in a monumental change in early childhood education and the early years of school.

In the 1990s, kindergarten teachers said they used worksheets about 15% of the time but that percentage had increased to over 45% of the time by the year 2010 (Bassok et al., 2016). With the increase in worksheets and fewer play-based learning experiences, it has led researchers to search for reasons as to why this paradigm has occurred (Curwood, 2007). As researchers look to understand *what* caused the shift in kindergarten, it is important to consider new federal education guidelines which include the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB). According to Ansell, when federal education policies are enacted, the ripple effect is felt all the way from Washington, D.C. down to schools and into homes.

No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB). Ever since the passage of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) act in 2002, the trickle-down effects of push-down academics have been felt in every single grade even kindergarten and pre-k even though NCLB did not directly mandate skills and assessments for pre-K and kindergarten. In the late 1990s, the National Education Goals Panel (NEGP) proposed that by the year 2000, all children in American will

begin school ready to learn, but that proposal doesn't give any indication on how to close the gap between push-down academics and developmentally appropriate practice (Ansell, n.d.). There is an evident struggle between developmentally appropriate practice and academic skills and accountability which can cause a disconnect between pre-K curriculum and kindergarten readiness expectations (Morin, 2019).

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 was passed with the hopes of shrinking the achievement gap within literacy and math in schools across the nation (Ansell, n.d.). While the intent was one of hope and positive change, NCLB sparked a movement of push-down academics and an increase in high-stakes assessments for public school children (Little, Cohen-Vogel, & Curran, 2016). After the passage of NCLB, kindergarten was redefined as a year of academic preparation, and there was a large shift in the belief of what the purpose of kindergarten truly was. Kindergarten was now viewed as year where children would be taught skills and content that was normally taught in the first- and second grades (Whitney & Candelaria, 2017). There was a shift away from play-based, discovery learning to academic experiences that were centered around literacy and math. During this shift, the National Association of Early Childhood Specialists (NAECS) warned that young children were being exposed to "inappropriate grade-level skill acquisition in literacy and math" which did not support developmentally appropriate practice methods for young children.

According to The National Center for Fair and Open Testing (2017), studies are showing that teachers are narrowing curricula to strictly math and reading in order to deliver test preparation methods to their students. This type of instruction doesn't offer learning experiences that foster reasoning skills, exploration learning, and socioemotional development in young children (Candelaria & Whitney, 2017). A study completed in 2010 showed 45% of

kindergarten teachers use math and reading worksheets in their teaching on a daily basis (Bassok, Latham, & Rorem, 2016). This percentage was a 35% increase from 1998. Research shows that the implementation of NCLB has lessened the amount of time teachers have to devote to nonacademic subjects like art, music, creative dance, and theater because they are feeling the pressure to prepare young children how to perform well on high-stakes literacy and math assessments that will be given during the third-grade academic year (Meyers, 2018).

Preschool Programs as Kindergarten Preparation Tool

Many teachers and parents agree the transition from pre-K to kindergarten is one of the most monumental changes in a child's education. Whether the pre-K experience is within a daycare setting or a more formal preschool environment, the transition to kindergarten can cause parents and children to feel anxious and unprepared for what the expectations of kindergarten will be. Various programs and approaches have been created to make this transition smooth and as seamless as possible (LaParo, Kraft-Sayre, & Pianta, 2003). Typically, pre-K is less structured compared to kindergarten in these areas: academic curriculum, learning environment, and parental involvement. Researchers have investigated ways to make the transition one that supports peer relationships, learning expectations, and overall success in kindergarten (Little et al., 2016).

One question many try to answer is "Why does preschool matter?". The answer you receive will depend on to whom you are asking the question. Teachers, parents, administrators, and policymakers will all give an answer that supports their opinion. Researchers report that attending pre-K boosts a child's language, literacy, and mathematics skills for at least the short-term (Yoshikawa, Weiland, & Brooks-Gunn, 2016). Several suggest that exposure to pre-K education prepares incoming kindergarteners with social, emotional, and cognitive skills that

supports a successful transition to a formal school setting (Gray, 2015). Data from the Miami

School Readiness Project showed that ethnically diverse children who come from low-income

families showed obvious gains in their academic and social development after they attended pre-

K (Brown & Gasko, 2012). The Miami School Readiness Project also noted that children who

attended public pre-K made bigger gains than those children who attended a childcare-based Pre-

K. These gains were specifically identified in the areas of cognitive and language development

at the beginning of kindergarten and again at the end of the kindergarten year (Conger, Gibbs,

Uchikoshi, & Winsler, 2019).

Public pre-K is a large expense; therefore, the effects of pre-K should be evident

and adequately prepare young children for formal schooling (Viteiello, Pianta, Whittaker, &

Ruzek, 2019). A research study conducted by Rebecca Morcon found the academic advantages

of formal pre-K education in African American children from high-poverty homes were evident

at the beginning of kindergarten, but didn't last past the end of third grade; furthermore, the

initial advantages were reversed by the end of fourth grade. This was referred to as fade out and

put the costs of pre-K education into question. There is also little evidence that shows academic

and social benefits linked to public pre-K education last beyond elementary school (Robinson &

Diamond, 2013). Other research found children who attend pre-k that is housed within a public

school are more prepared for kindergarten than children who attend pre-K in daycare settings

(Conger et al., 2019). One specific issue identified with pre-k classes that are housed in public

schools is that they add additional costs to school systems that may already be tight on funding.

Because of this massive expense, many school districts are not able to offer any type of public

pre-K education. As more focus has been put on kindergarten readiness, teachers have pushed

for more children to attend some type of pre-K before entering kindergarten.

Quality Preschool Programs. Preschool education varies among structured preschool programs with an academic curriculum, daycare-type and home-based preschools that focus on social skills and play-based learning, and preschool program that encompass both academic skills and play-based learning. According to the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), there are certain criteria that quality preschool programs should provide to young children in order for optimal learning to occur as well as warning signs to parents that the preschool may not provide an education that helps young children become lifelong learners (NAEYC, 2018). Quality preschool programs offer opportunities for young learners to form relationships with each other and also with their teachers. Ways to promote and foster social relationships within preschool are helping young children learn how to play, work together and make friends as well as including the young child's family in as many school experiences as possible. Creating activities that encourage children to join in on is also a way to support social skills development in young learners (NAEYC, 2018; Morin, 2019). In a high-quality preschool, you will also see classrooms that support a young child's development and overall learning involvement by providing materials and manipulatives that interest the young children as well as encourage autonomy and efforts to expand their oral language development (NAEYC, 2018).

Curriculum and Assessment. Curricula that's chosen and implemented in preschool classrooms should meet the needs of most preschool children, and for those children who require modifications to that curriculum, teachers should be able to provide those accommodations. High quality curricula should push young learners to meet their individual learning goals, as well as provide opportunities for children to choose their own learning activities that are guided and facilitated by the teacher (Morin, 2019). At this young age, making

sure a child's interests are acknowledged and considered and skills are developed and enhanced is very important aspect to both short-term and long-term student success. While each child's learning occurs at each one's own rate, preschool teachers must use assessments so there is a clear picture of what each young learner can do, but assessment do not always need to be formal tests. Screening tests may be necessary at the beginning, during, and end of the preschool year, but year-long assessments should be focused on assessments methods that show what the child can do (NAEYC, 2018; Little et al., 2016). Examples of appropriate assessments are samples of the child's drawings and scribbles, anecdotal notes from observing the child active in a learning experience, and portfolios that are a visual representation of activities and completed assignments.

   Parental Involvement. Administrators and teachers have a strong desire to build trusting relationships with children and families (Little et al., 2016). Parents and caregivers are the most important people in a child's life, so it is important that teachers become partners with parents as they seek to teach and nurture children both in the home and at school. Preschool tends to be less intimidating to parents, so this is an opportune time to begin building relationships with parents where trust can be established (Mayo Clinic, n.d.; Gray, 2015). Listening to the parent's goals and concerns about their child's development is one way teachers can earn trust from parents; consequently, demonstrating a willingness to make authentic investments in the child to the parent. Often times preschool programs have opportunities during the year where families can visit the classroom or read a book to the class, so this is a great way to show parents they are welcome in the classroom and their presence is valued (Brown, 2013). As the diversity of races and cultures has expanded in classrooms across America, the need for multilingual parental communication is more evident now than ever before. High quality

preschool programs provide communication to parents in the family's native language which signifies the valiant effort and willingness to develop and nurture ongoing school to home relationships as to bridge any gap in communication efforts (Walsh, et al., 2018). Communication between the home and school should always be open and supported because roadblocks and confusion are counterproductive.

   Warning Signs. While there are many high-quality preschool programs that holistically work to prepare young children for kindergarten, some preschool programs do not provide a high-quality environment and education. If a child is not learning and developing in a preschool program, there may be signs as to why. Worksheets and flashcards are both tools that don't allow children to be creative, problem solve, and demonstrate autonomy in decision making skills (Mayo Clinic, n.d.; NAEYC, 2018). Another red flag is teachers who are not directly involved in children's activities and learning experiences because teachers ask questions, motivate students, and guide learning. Children watch their teachers closely, so a teacher's absence in learning indicates to the child that the learning is not worthy of the teacher's time. Another warning sign is when the teacher doesn't set clear expectations and boundaries for children. Children thrive on structure and routine, so when this is missing, children become agitated, disengaged, and misbehave (Hatcher et al., 2012). Along with clear expectations and boundaries, preschool classrooms should be organized and children should be actively engaged in learning activities. When classrooms are organized, children feel safe when they are exploring and participating in activities that require movement and wandering around the classroom (Mayo Clinic, n.d.). Disorganization leads to stress and children who quickly get off-task because they feel overwhelmed and underprepared (Brown & Gasko, 2012). Finally, high-quality preschools keep an open avenue of communication with parents so they are keenly aware of any concerns or

problems that may arise as well as when children meet learning milestones during the year. Communication between the home and school shouldn't be isolated to only negative comments, but also those times where learning and child development should be celebrated (NAEYC, n.d.).

Alignment and Misalignment of Classroom Experiences. Investigating the alignment and misalignment of classroom experiences in both pre-K and kindergarten classrooms is necessary to understand why the readiness expectations for kindergarten can be difficult, uneasy, and mysterious to parents and children. The results of aligning pre-K and kindergarten experiences and practices make kindergarten feel like a natural extension of pre-K instead of a shocking transition to an unfamiliar learning environment (Vitiello, et al., 2019). There are still questions about what should be aligned, how the alignment is implemented, and to what extent the alignments of pre-K and kindergarten should overlap. Earlier research has suggested that if pre-K outcomes are not supported by kindergarten learning experiences, then the pre-K outcomes are negated or lost (Walsh et al., 2018). For example, if math skills in pre-K are taught in a progression that moves from easier to more difficult skills; then, the same progression should continue in and throughout kindergarten.

Another particular area of alignment that researchers have analyzed is the class size of pre-K and kindergarten classes. Studies have shown that smaller class sizes are associated with greater academic gains especially in the elementary grades (Little et al., 2016). Pre-K classes tend to be smaller and more intimate than kindergarten classes which can result in a learning environment that doesn't feel as secure and personal; thus, causing young children to feel less valued and more disconnected than they felt in their pre-K class (Daniels, 2014). Teachers can plan more child-directed learning experiences when the class sizes are smaller. Larger class

sizes can cause difficulties such as generalized lessons focused on the average learner, an increase in behavior problems, and fewer opportunities for personal engagement in learning.

Predictable routines are a part of most classrooms no matter the age of the children. Routines provide structure and predictability for children which supports emotional development as well as cognitive and social skills. Both pre-K and kindergarten classes exist off of a daily routine that is centered around socializing and academic experiences. While there is still room for more research, it is clear that alignment in classroom experiences and learning opportunities between pre-K and kindergarten is beneficial to children and their success in kindergarten (Brown & Gasko, 2012).

What is Kindergarten Readiness?

What is kindergarten readiness? This term has been discussed by researchers, parents, teachers, and school administrators, and as a result, many have tried to compile a list of readiness skills that children should be able to do before entering kindergarten. Researchers Justice, Jiang, Khan, & Dynia define kindergarten readiness as "a multidimensional, theoretical construct representing children's preparedness for participation in formal schooling, which more often than not corresponds to kindergarten entrance in the twenty-first century". Looking back through the history of kindergarten, one would find most kindergarten curriculums made up of play-based environments supported by discovery and exploration learning opportunities (Ziegler, 2011). Over the past 10+ years, kindergarten curriculum has become centered around 2 academic areas- reading and math- which has led to more teacher-directed instruction and less opportunities for individualized instruction that meets developmental differences in young children. This leaves parents wondering how can they best prepare their child to be ready for kindergarten. The National Education Goals Panel identifies 5 correlated dimensions of development that should be

considered as a part of school readiness: approach to learning, language use, cognitive

knowledge, social-emotional development, and physical and motor skills development (Marshall,

2003).

 Kindergarten Readiness Skills. According to the National Household Education

Survey (2005), parents felt as though both academic and social skills were necessary for school

readiness. Both of these terms, academic skills and social skills, are both broad terms, so it is

necessary to investigate what specific readiness skills are equated with the *ready to learn* belief.

In 1998, only 18% of kindergarten teachers believed that children must know how to properly

hold a pencil before entering kindergarten. The same question was asked to kindergarten

teachers in 2010, and the answer was dramatically different.   In 2010, over 80% of teachers

believed that children entering kindergarten should know how to properly hold a pencil (Dahl,

2016). This is an example of how one kindergarten readiness skill has become more and more

necessary over time as academic content has increased in kindergarten classrooms.

 What are kindergarten readiness skills? Rohan stated the following:

> "Kindergarten readiness skills are not just about learning your letters, numbers,
> and shapes…..There is much more. We need to also look at social, emotional,
> cognitive, and language development skills in order to best prepare children for
> interactions and learning in the classroom."

Kindergarten readiness skills are those that are taught before the entrance into kindergarten.

These skills are meant to enable and promote a successful transition into kindergarten from either

preschool or the home. Parents play a very present role in this readiness skills process (Rohan,

2019).

 Kindergarten entry is determined by chronological age, and children are not denied entry

into kindergarten based off of mastering a list of readiness skills. With that being said, there are

ways children can acquire cognitive, emotional, physical, and social skills that will support and

foster a successful transition into kindergarten. Many of these ways can be introduced and

encouraged by parents and caregivers who are around preschool age children prior to entry into

kindergarten (Welchons & McIntyre, 2015). In order for children to develop social and

behavioral skills, they need to be around children their age as well as authority figures, so they

learn how to resolve conflict, follow directions, and understand the roles of communication

(Rohan, 2019). Alongside social and behavioral skills, children need opportunities to develop

their language skills. This includes listening, speaking, writing, and reading as these help

children understand the conventions and purposes of language. For physical development,

children need to play outside, use manipulatives, and exercise in order to develop fine- and

gross-motor skills necessary for holding a pencil, using scissors, do jumping jacks, and other

activities that involve physical engagement (Cameron et al., 2012). Cognitive development is

important for children because it is involved in every action; therefore, enhancing cognition is

necessary for the transition into formal school and further supports literacy, mathematics, and

other academic content. Finding ways to increase kindergarten readiness skills will help children

begin kindergarten on a solid footing favoring a smooth transition (Welchons & McIntyre,

2015).

Parent Perceptions about Kindergarten

It is a safe assumption that parents want their child to begin kindergarten equipped and

ready to have a successful year. What parents perceive as *ready* may be different from what

their child actually needs or what teachers consider necessary (Morin, 2019). Parents tend to

rely on the requirement of chronological age, but in today's fast-paced kindergarten classroom,

chronological age may not be the factor that parents need to be dependent on entirely (Curwood,

2007). The days of finger painting and learning to share have changed into learning to read, learning number recognition, and even more complex literacy and math skills (Morin, 2019).

  Delaying Kindergarten. With increased academic expectations in kindergarten, some parents have opted for their child to not begin kindergarten as a 5-year-old, but rather, wait a year under the assumption they will begin kindergarten more mature and have increased readiness skills. This is sometimes referred to as giving children "the gift of time" as it allows a child another year to mature emotionally, socially, cognitively, and physically (Morin, 2019). When parents tell kindergarten teachers that they are delaying kindergarten, parents should also provide a game plan as to what that child will be doing during that "gift of time" year in order to be better prepared for kindergarten. A child who remains at home or isn't enrolled in a structured pre-K program may become increasingly bored; therefore, enrolling that child in a pre-K program will provide that child with opportunities to interact socially with peers, develop gross- and fine-motor skills, and improve academic skills such as letter identification, number identification, and phonemic awareness skills (Morin, 2019; Mayo Clinic, n.d.).

  Maturationists as well as researchers have investigated if there are positive long-term effects to delaying kindergarten for reasons of immaturity and outdated beliefs about kindergarten readiness. A maturationist believes that allowing a passage of time will result in readiness, and typically supports delaying school entry especially for children whose birthday falls around the cut-off date of September 1st. Researchers have attempted to investigate *why* parents choose to delay kindergarten, but few studies are available on this topic. The National Household Education Survey found parents are more concerned with their child's preacademic skills more than behavioral skills as reasons to delay kindergarten (Marshall, 2003).

Research has found that in the early grades, the oldest child in the class is more successful than their younger classmates, but by the end of grade three, this advantage disappears (Hatcher, 2012; Curwood, 2007). So, is there a real advantage to delay kindergarten?   Over the past 15 years, there have been research studies conducted to analyze the academic benefits to delaying kindergarten, but most have upheld the beliefs of Shepard and Smith's study conducted in 1986. Shepard and Smith found that academic advantages were initially evident in the early grades, but disappeared by the end of grade 3 (Marshall, 2003; Shepard & Smith, 1986). Many parents believe their children will be socially more mature if they delay kindergarten, but research doesn't show this assumption to be true. In fact, the opposite has been found. By delaying entry to kindergarten, children are worried they have done something that made them fail, gain a poor attitude towards to school, and are not exposed to peer relationships at an early age (Marshall, 2003). While research doesn't validate parent choices about delaying entry into kindergarten, some parents still choose to delay kindergarten hoping for more optimal outcomes in their child's school experiences.

Perceptions about Kindergarten Rigor. Many parents correlate their kindergarten experiences with what children today experience in kindergarten classrooms, but kindergarten has undergone many changes. While parents may have heard how kindergarten rigor has increased, do they really understand what increased rigor means? Studies have shown that parents are aware of increased academic skills, specifically reading and math skills, but their understanding of how social, emotional, and physical development impacts kindergarten readiness is still limited (Rohan, 2019). Increased academic rigor in kindergarten classrooms exists because of the increasing pressure of push-down academics which moves skills down to earlier grades instead of considering developmentally appropriate practice. Informing parents

about increased kindergarten readiness expectations will help them prepare their children for a kindergarten experience infiltrated with preparation and support (Curwood, 2007; Rohan, 2019).

Ways to Prepare Children for Kindergarten. There are ways parents can help their child prepare for kindergarten even if their child has not attended a daycare nor preschool program. While the definition of *kindergarten readiness* is fluid, there are ways for parents to prepare their child: encouraging exploratory learning, engaging in social situations where children cooperate with friends, speaking and listening to people of all ages, and learning to follow directions, and control impulses (Rohan, 2019). While these are not academic specific, they are all skills that will enable their child to become acclimated to formal school and support kindergarten readiness skills development.

Social, emotional, physical, and cognitive skills develop over time and should be viewed as a process, not a single goal (Mayo Clinic, n.d.). A parent's role in preparing their child for kindergarten is to create an environment where their child feels secure, supported, and empowered. Participating in physical activity is important for fine- and gross-motor skills development as well as encouraging play and discovery learning opportunities (Morin, 2019). Exposing young children to literacy is also important for kindergarten readiness; therefore, parents should read books to young children, engage in vocabulary rich conversations, and read environmental print out loud such as road signs and names of restaurants (Rohan, 2019). Other ideas are visiting museums, zoos, and parks for exposure to life experiences and identifying the 5 senses (hear, taste, smell, touch, and see) in daily activities such as visiting the grocery store and traveling in the car. Learning and developing new skills shouldn't be contained within the walls of a classroom; rather, learning should be an on-going immersion in the world around us (Curwood, 2007; Morin, 2019).

Conclusion

It is clear that kindergarten has undergone a plethora of changes in classroom design, kindergarten readiness expectations, and implemented curriculum since it was first created; consequently, the intentions of kindergarten have also changed from a play-based intent to a more rigorous academic intent. The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 and its requirements caused push-down academics to infiltrate into kindergarten classrooms; thus, children are now expected to enter kindergarten with a developed, multifaceted tool set that supports academic, physical, emotional, and social skills. With these expectations comes a responsibility to inform parents how they can support and encourage their children before they actually enter into the walls of a kindergarten classroom.

There are a number of publications and resources that inform parents about suggestions on activities and tasks their child can do to begin developing academic, physical, emotional, and social skills that will be needed for the transition into kindergarten and success therein (Rohan, 2019; Curwood, 2007). Some studies also show that enrolling young children in quality preschool programs can assist children by exposing them to a semi-structured classroom environment and fostering a familiarity with academic and social expectations in kindergarten (Robinson & Diamond, 2013). On the contrary, there are research studies that have indicated exposing young children to academic expectations too early can result in a poor attitude about learning and a "burn-out" perspective about school (Vitiello, 2018). Finding a balance among the expectations and present reality is critically important so parents can make informed decisions about how to most effectively prepare their child for kindergarten.

Parent perceptions about kindergarten readiness have not been widely documented because research studies have focused more on teacher perceptions (Hatcher et al., 2012).

Parental involvement is a critical factor in student success, so putting stock in parent perspectives can be beneficial for both policymakers and teachers as they make complex decisions regarding curriculum development and academic expectations. Literature suggests that when parents feel they are a valued part of their child's education, they will be more likely to be actively involved and positive advocates for kindergarten preparedness and schooling expectations as it relates to their child's holistic development (Kim et al., 2005; LaParo et al., 2003). Since parents are the primary influences in a child's life from birth to age 4, understanding their perceptions about kindergarten readiness can begin to bridge the gap and evidence commonalities among teachers, administrators, and policymakers to result in more thought-out, developmentally appropriate practice methods in kindergarten classrooms.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

This qualitative interview-based study analyzed parent interviews to interpret what kindergarten readiness means to parents of pre-kindergarten students. The following research questions guided the proposed research study:

5. How do parents and caregivers view *kindergarten readiness?*

6. What are parents doing to help support early childhood experiences related to *kindergarten readiness?*

7. How do parents perceive preschool education influencing *kindergarten readiness?*

8. What are some identified misconceptions about *kindergarten readiness*?

Qualitative Methodology

Qualitative methodology is a well-suited design for research studies aiming to obtain perspectives, beliefs, and experiences from participants regarding a particular situation or context (Saldana, 2016). Qualitative research involves collecting non-numerical data to investigate concepts, experiences, and perspectives that participants share through surveys, interviews, observations, focus groups, and secondary research resources such as pictures, videos, and audio recordings (Hammarburg, Kirkman, & deLacey, 2016). In educational research, qualitative research methods typically address "why" and "how" research questions and seek to deepen the understanding of experiences, phenomena, and social constructs. While a researcher seeks to understand human experiences and perspectives, qualitative research allows questioning which results in answers that are not quantifiable or represented in a numerical value (Cleland, 2017).

Through exploration and investigation, qualitative researchers focus on the realities of a social phenomenon to extend and deepen understanding and knowledge about the phenomena.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework that guided this qualitative study is interpretivism. As an interpretivist, the researcher attempted to uncover truths about what parents believe *kindergarten readiness* means as it relates to their child, gain insight and acquire an understanding of why parents believe what they do about *kindergarten readiness,* and identify factors that influenced their beliefs. Supporting this theoretical framework, an interpretivist argues that the study of human societies must go beyond observations and objective evidence; consequently, the researcher will include subjective opinions, emotions, and views that can't be counted nor observed. These opinions, emotions, and views will be interpreted through the eyes of the researcher, known as insider perspective, resulting in a phenomenon that is not generalizable to the entire population.

Rationale

The rationale for using interpretivism as the theoretical framework is supported by the phenomenological interviews the researcher conducted to gain insight into the participant's constructed knowledge about *kindergarten readiness*. Interviews allow an individual the opportunity to articulate and clarify their opinions, beliefs, and perspectives; thus, allowing the researcher to migrate into the mind of an individual. Utilizing semi-structured interviews as the method of data collection allowed the researcher to be flexible in the act of asking questions and creating contexts that supported explanation and dialogue. Semi-structured interviews can result in data that is very detailed and of maximum quality (Aspers & Corte, 2019; Gill et al., 2008). As one of the most common methods for data collection in qualitative research, interviews can

be used to explore ideas, beliefs, and perspectives about specific subject matters resulting in a deeper understanding of the phenomena even more so than a solely quantitative study would provide (Gill et al., 2008; McGrath et al., 2018).

There have been numerous research studies focused on teacher perspectives about kindergarten readiness, but few research studies have investigated kindergarten readiness through the lens of parent perspectives (Hatcher et al., 2012). While teacher perspectives are worth considering, parents can provide specific, objective information about how they are preparing their child for kindergarten and if they truly understand the expectations young children are expected to have mastered before entry to formal school (Vitiello et al., 2018; Walsh et al., 2018). Various methodologies can be used to find out this specific information, but semi-structured interviews with parents will provide an authentic view into their thoughts, perceptions, and assumptions about kindergarten readiness.

Setting

The setting for this study was the Early Childhood Education Center (ECEC) which is a public, Title I early childhood center located in Tupelo, Mississippi. There are approximately 250 preschool students who attend ECEC each school year, and ECEC is open to all preschool age children who live within the residence zones of the Tupelo Public School District. All students attend a full day of preschool during the school year, and students, who are eligible, receive special education services by highly qualified special education teachers. The superintendent of the Tupelo Public School District and the principal of ECEC granted the researcher permission to conduct on-site interviews as well as interviews via Google Meet and Zoom as they are needed due to COVID-19 restrictions.

Participants

        After IRB approval was obtained, a total of 10 phenomenological interviews were

conducted. An informative letter (Appendix A) explaining this research study was sent to each

student's parent(s), and then a letter invitation (Appendix B) was sent out inviting willing parents

to participate in a semi-structured interview. (Parent is defined as biological parent or legal

guardian.) Once the names of all willing participants were received, the researcher used the

purposeful sampling method to choose 10 participants. The researcher used purposeful sampling

in order to obtain a sample that provided a representative sample of all willing participants and

helped the researcher answer the guiding research questions of this study (Palinkas et al., 2013).

Participants signed up for a date and time for their individual interview, and then, the researcher

confirmed each interview after it was scheduled. All participants had a child enrolled at ECEC

for the current 2020-2021 school year with the child's projected path moving into kindergarten

for the 2021-2022 school year. Each participant verbally agreed to the release form (Appendix

D) and answered demographic questions (Appendix E) prior to the beginning of the interview

questions. Each participant was identified as a number and their names remained anonymous

during the data collection and analysis. After each participant answered the demographic

questions, the researcher asked each participant the following question: "Do you have any

questions before we proceed into the interview?"

Data Collection

        The primary method for data collection was phenomenological interviews conducted by

the researcher. Data collection took place over the course of a two-week period as each

participant was involved in an in-depth, one-on-one semi-structured interview with the

researcher. Interviews were projected to last approximately 30 minutes, and each participant was

asked the same 10 questions (Appendix F). In qualitative research, interviews are used to attain information-rich responses which aid the researcher in understanding why participants hold particular beliefs, perspectives, and attitudes about a specific context or phenomenon. When each participant signed up for an interview, he/she had the option of choosing either in-person interview conducted in the conference room at ECEC or virtual interview using Google meet or Zoom. (Participants have used the Google meet feature for all teacher meetings and conferences during this 2020-2021 school year, so they are already familiar with its use.)

Before the interview began, each participant received a detailed explanation of participant risks, benefits, and their right to withdraw from the research study at any time. (Appendix C) Also, before each interview was conducted, each participant answered demographic questions which described each participant's gender, race, age, highest level of school completed, and gender, race, and age of their child as well as the primary language spoken in the home. Each interview was voice recorded using the recording feature in Google Meet or Zoom, and then transcribed into a written transcript by the researcher.

Data Analysis

Once the interviews were completed and responses recorded, each audio file was converted to text by the researcher which gave the researcher several exposures to the interview dialogue both visually and auditorily (Herrington et al., 2016). Prior to the transcription of each audio file, the researcher listened to the audio file of each interview to familiarize themself with the participant responses. Once the interviews were transcribed, the researcher analyzed the transcript text line-by-line. According to Christians and Gary (n.d.), qualitative data analysis is the process of breaking down text into units that result in relatable themes and stories. The researcher used open analysis coding methods to identify topics among the data (Saldana, 2016).

In the second cycle of coding, the researcher used pattern coding to identify categories, concepts, and relationships that occurred within the participant response. In the last stage of coding, the researcher used focused coding methods to begin narrowing down themes resulting in more meaningful findings (Ryan & Bernard, 2003). Once the data analysis was complete, the researcher reported the findings as it related to and answered the research questions.

Limitations

One limitation of the study was researcher bias influencing findings due to purposeful (judgement) sampling used in the data collection. Another limitation was the inability to generalize findings because the study consisted of ten participants and were chosen by purposeful sampling procedures.

Conclusion

Concerted efforts by school districts to make sure parents are informed what *kindergarten readiness* means have not been entirely successful nor implemented in a consistent manner (Rohan, 2019). One particular way to investigate what parent perspectives are regarding kindergarten readiness is to interview parents who have young children who will enter kindergarten in the upcoming school year. Interviews are an appropriate qualitative method to use when the researcher is attempting to understand a participant's perspective about an identified subject (McGrath et al., 2018). Semi-structured interviews using open-ended questions with parents are likely to yield responses that are rich and purposeful (Gill et al., 2008) In this particular study, the researcher sought to identify what kindergarten readiness means through the lens of parent perspective.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

The purpose of this qualitative study was to investigate the term *kindergarten readiness* through the lens of parent perspective. The guiding questions for this research study were:

1. How do parents and caregivers view *kindergarten readiness?*

2. What are parents doing to help support early childhood experiences related to *kindergarten readiness?*

3. How do parents perceive preschool education influencing *kindergarten readiness?*

4. What are some identified misconceptions about *kindergarten readiness*?

Methodology Review

Findings in this qualitative study are the interpreted results from the analytical coding methods used to analyze the semi-structured interviews given to ten parents of preschool-age children (Cappelloni, 2010). Each participant was chosen through purposeful sampling and interviewed using the same ten questions via Zoom or Google Meet in compliance with COVID-19 restrictions. Once each interview was complete, the researcher listened to the audio file of the interview multiple times, and then transcribed each audio file into a written transcript. The researcher did not use any type of transcription software aiming to have a more personal and direct interaction with each interview (Creswell, 2013). According to Saldana 2016 (p. 78), a code symbolically assigns a summative attribute for a portion of qualitative data. The researcher engaged in 3 analytical coding cycles, and during each cycle, new themes, patterns, and relationships emerged from the data as well as answers to the guiding research questions. This

section of the research study provides perspectives, thoughts, and understandings about

kindergarten readiness through the researcher's interpretations based on the participant's

responses.

Table 1.

Participant Information

Participant Number	Participant Gender*	Participant Race	Participant Highest Level of Education**	Participant Age	Number of Children Participant Has Currently Attending ECEC	Age of Participant's Child	Gender of Participant's Child	Race of Participant's Child	Primary Language Spoken at Home
1.	F	African American	HSD	38	1	6	M	African American	English
2.	F	Caucasian	SC	34	1	4	M	Caucasian	English
3	F	African American	ACD	47	1	5	F	African American	English
4	F	Caucasian	CD	36	1	4	M	Caucasian	English
5	F	Middle Eastern	CD	38	1	5	M	Middle Eastern	English
6	M	Caucasian	HSD	25	1	4	M	African American	English
7.	F	Caucasian	ACD	36	1	5	F	Caucasian	English
8	F	African American	ACD	42	1	5	F	African American	English
9	F	Caucasian	SC	41	1	4	F	Caucasian	English
10	F	Arabic	CD	38	1	5	M	Arabic	English

*M=Male   F=Female
** HSD= High school diploma   SC=Some college   CD=College degree
    ACD= Advanced college degree (above Bachelor's degree)

Interview Protocol

Before each semi-structured interview began, participants received a detailed explanation

of risks, benefits, and their right to withdraw from the research study at any time. (Appendix C)

Also, before each interview was conducted, each participant answered demographic questions

which described each participant's gender, race, age, highest level of school completed, and gender, race, and age of their child as well as the primary language spoken in the home. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with each participant and each participant chose to answer all ten open-ended questions without hesitation. Occasionally the researcher had to say, "Can you tell me more?" and "Can you explain that in more detail?" because the initial response given was vague or contained limited details. The researcher was seeking to gain a deep and meaningful understanding of the participant's beliefs and perspectives, so the follow-up questions allowed the participant to expand upon their previous response.

Topics that Emerged from the Data

Initial Cycle of Coding

Through purposeful sampling (Patton, 2015), the researcher chose participants that represented various family units, age, race, education, and personal experiences that shaped their understanding and perspectives about kindergarten readiness. While these demographics were different and varied, the participants shared some of the same beliefs and perspectives about kindergarten readiness. For example, all ten participants agreed that kindergarten readiness expectations have increased since they themselves were in kindergarten. Specific topics that emerged during the initial coding cycle are identified in List 1. The researcher approached the data without predetermined codes and allowed the topics to emerge during data analysis creating structure within the data; thus, the topics were identified using an open coding approach (Graduate Coach, n.d.).

Categories and Patterns that Emerged from the Data

      Second Cycle of Coding

      During the second cycle of coding, the researcher analyzed written transcripts line-by-line assigning additional codes to the topics identified in the initial coding cycle. The second cycle of coding allowed the researcher to begin to categorize the text and identify patterns among the participant responses (Saldana, 2016). For example, the researcher noticed that eight of the participants expressed nervousness about their child's adjustment to a structured routine and the daily demands of kindergarten. From the initial topic of 'kindergarten readiness', the researcher then created a subtopic of 'nervousness and apprehension' to specifically identify a category to house the parent's feelings about their child's adjustment to a structured routine and the daily demands of kindergarten. The initial coding topics and the categories identified within those initial topics during the second cycle of pattern coding are shown in table 2.

List 1.

Initial Coding Topics

1. Participant's kindergarten experiences

2. Preschool education

3. Kindergarten readiness

4. At-home preparation for kindergarten

5. Misconceptions

Table 2.

SECOND CYCLE PATTERN CODING CATEGORIES

INITIAL CYCLE TOPICS	SECOND CYCLE CATEGORIES AND PATTERNS
PARTICIPANT'S KINDERGARTEN EXPERIENCES	- Classroom Structure - Routine - Academics - Expectations - Attendance - Differences
PRESCHOOL EDUCATION	- Curriculum - Routine - Adjustment - Social skills - Teacher input
KINDERGARTEN READINESS	- Alignment of classroom experiences - Skills - Expectations - Child's age - Myth - Fact - Nervousness and apprehension - Excited
AT-HOME PREPARATION FOR KINDERGARTEN	-Writing - Reading - Workbooks - Oral language development - Play
MISCONCEPTIONS	- Academic skills - Teacher expectations - Assessments

Major Themes that Emerged from the Data

Third Cycle of Coding

Once topics, categories, and patterns were identified, the researcher engaged in a third

cycle of coding known as focused coding. In focused coding, the researcher finalized the set of

codes being used and interpreted the data with the projection of attempting to answer the

research questions that guided the study (Graduate Coach, n.d.; Saldana, 2016). With this

refined set of codes, relationships, patterns, and themes emerged from the participant responses.

Specifically, the researcher identified the following themes using an interpretivist lens to analyze participant responses:

Theme 1: Participant's Own Kindergarten Experiences

Theme 2: Defining Kindergarten Readiness

Theme 3: Preschool as Kindergarten Preparation

Theme 4: At-Home Preparation for Kindergarten

Research Results

Theme 1: Participant's Own Kindergarten Experiences

The theme *participant's own kindergarten experiences* was derived from the responses provided to the researcher by parents who were interviewed. The first question asked of each participant was "Did you attend Kindergarten?" and then the participant was asked to tell the researcher about remembered experiences in kindergarten. All ten participants said they attended kindergarten, and all ten participants agreed kindergarten has changed since they attended kindergarten specifically referring to nap time, play time, academic expectations, and classroom arrangement. Participant three stated:

"When I was in kindergarten we took naps and our classroom was full of play areas. In my older child's kindergarten classroom, there are desks and tables, but I didn't see many play areas like blocks or home living. I remember the home living center, reading corner with bean bags and a rocking chair, and art center in my kindergarten classroom. My older child doesn't take naps either so that is different from what I did in kindergarten. I think we took a nap for at least an hour or more."

She reminisced about her kindergarten experiences in such a way the researcher could visualize what her kindergarten classroom may have looked like. While her kindergarten experiences were

over thirty-five years ago, she provided explicit detail when discussing how her kindergarten classroom was set-up, the nap mats that she used during nap time, and the reading experiences she had with her classmates and teacher in the reading nook of the classroom. All of these experiences were positive and fostered an upbeat attitude about learning and school.

As the researcher continued to listen to the kindergarten experiences of participants, more details were discussed about personal participant experiences. Participant five reflected on how she didn't know many letters nor sounds when she entered kindergarten, and she could only scribble her first name, but her preschool child can now identify all twenty-six letters in the English alphabet and can say almost all of the sounds that each letter makes.

She stated:

"I could barely hold a pencil when I started kindergarten. My kindergarten teacher had to show me how to hold a pencil correctly. As far as the alphabet, I could only name the letters that were in my own name…Pretty sure I didn't know the individual sound that each letter made."

She went on to discuss how nurturing her teacher was and the affirmative learning environment her teacher created by making everyone feel smart and included in the classroom community. Relative to reading and math, participant five recalled completing a lot of worksheets and attempting to read paperback books with one sentence on each page. She also remembered nap time and having designated "play time" each day where the children could play games and do activities of their choice. Many of the participants recalled similar experiences and feelings they had when in kindergarten. The participants also conveyed their desire to the researcher for their own children to have kindergarten experiences that mirrored the positivity and collaboration their own experiences encompassed.

Participant ten conversed about how her kindergarten was a half-day program and the classroom was filled with desks and chairs lined in rows to support the teacher's direct, whole-group instruction. She remembered certain "play" areas in her kindergarten classroom and specifically identified the blocks area, reading corner, and kitchen area. Referring to classroom arrangement she said the following:

"My kindergarten teacher taught everything to us as a whole class. I don't remember any small group instruction, but there were only 11 kids in my kindergarten class. We sat in desks with metal framed chairs. I don't recall seeing any of the moon shaped tables that are in classrooms today. My kindergarten class was in an elementary school with other grades…I believe there were grades 1-6 also. It was a true neighborhood school. Oh! And I remember we had an assistant teacher named Mrs. Thomas. She stayed in our classroom all day long to help my kindergarten teacher Ms. Amy."

Participant two elaborated on her own kindergarten experiences emphasizing the amount of play and social interaction with classmates she had in kindergarten. As the children entered the classroom each morning, they were allowed to have open play time where they could talk and interact with classmates. Some of the open play options she remembered were puzzles, blocks, home living, Legos, tracing letters and numbers, and listening center. She also recalled snack time, lunch, and recess being times where the children could talk and laugh with other children which supported oral language development and exposure to conversation discourse and syntax (Glaser & Moats, 2011). Here is one poignant point she made:

"My kindergarten teacher encouraged talk and socializing during school. I don't remember her telling us to be quiet or not talk. I learned things from talking with my classmates. We had a Japanese kid in our class and he taught us about ramen and how to

say hi in Japanese…. I remember him teaching me that when we were playing together in

the Legos center of the classroom. Play time and talking are so important for young

children… It isn't just wasted time."

The researcher found it very interesting that the participant made a specific mention of how play

is not wasted time. Through interpretation, the researcher assumed this participant may have

been told that structured play time isn't beneficial to young children.

The NAEYC spends time with preschool parents explaining the cognitive, social, and

behavioral benefits of allowing preschool children opportunities to engage in free play. Play

supports a preschool child's transition into formal school as well as prepares them for long-term

school success (Bongiorno, 2018). Parents seem to better understand why babies and toddlers

benefit from free play, but as children get older, parents begin to question the need for and

benefits of play instead of engaging in more skills-focused activities. In preschool and

kindergarten, teachers develop specific learnings goals centered around children playing and

engaging in social interactions (Bongiorno, 2018; Jensen, 2010).

While participant two did not specifically identify ways play supports learning, the

NAEYC has identified specific ways. Play helps children develop thought processing and

problem-solving skills, language acquisition, ability to make predictions and inferences as well

as express their emotions. Early education educators align these skills with learning;

consequently, resulting in connections between play, the learning environment, and a child's

holistic development (Jensen, 2010; NAEYC; Cappelloni, 2010). These connections frame

transfers into positive experiences during the transition from preschool to kindergarten (Puccioni,

Baker, & Froiland, 2019).

Participant six started off his response briefly reflecting on his own kindergarten experiences, but then he began to discuss the differences between his kindergarten experiences and what his own children have experienced in kindergarten. He spent a good deal of time discussing his perspective that children are required to enter kindergarten with specific skills, and if they don't, then they quickly adopt the label of "behind" or "below grade level". These assumptions were based off of previous experiences with his older child. The National Education Goals Panel (NEGP) has pushed for a broader definition of "kindergarten readiness" so the academic and social expectations for young children entering kindergarten aren't so finite, but rather a willingness to engage in self-regulation behaviors that support learning. Parents are aware their children need foundational academic skills such as letter and number concept knowledge, but identifying specific literacy and math skills isn't as easy for parents to do as teachers hoped (Hatcher, Nuner, Paulsel, 2012; Puccioni, Baker, & Froiland, 2019).

The concept of children being "behind" or "below grade level" is often associated with a parent's misconception about the purpose of kindergarten and the role kindergarten plays in a child's educational journey. Making comparisons among today's kindergarten experiences and the kindergarten experiences from twenty to thirty years ago isn't a fair nor accurate depiction of expectations, skills, and experiences housed in today's preschool and kindergarten domains. While the configuration of kindergarten classrooms, student-teacher ratios, and classroom experiences has changed, parents readily acknowledge the idea that kindergarten is intended to a be a year of school that prepares young children and develops skill sets to prepare them for future grades (Barnett & Taylor, 2008).

The researcher redirected the conversation by asking the participant to describe his own kindergarten experiences as he best remembers. He then discussed his kindergarten teacher's

motherly qualities, having to complete a lot of worksheets during math time, and his favorite time of the day being free time where he would always play in the blocks center or listen to a book being read via cassette tape and headphones. Most of the participants recalled desks in their kindergarten classrooms, but participant six said he didn't remember any desks in his classroom. He remembered rectangle-shaped tables with chairs, four or five children sitting at each table, and a basket of pencils, scissors, crayons, and bottles of glue in the middle of the table for everyone to use.

While each participant was able to recall their lived kindergarten experiences, perspectives and events were varied as some recollections were detailed and others were more elusive. The researcher provided prompts and directive questions to keep the dialogue open so interpretations were rich and purposeful. Table 3 shows the percentage of participants that readily acknowledged each specific experience during their interview with the researcher.

Table 3.

Participant Kindergarten Experiences

Desks and Chairs	Reading Area	Play time	Naptime	Worksheets	Magnetic Letters	Home Living/Kitchen	Recess	Full day	Half day	Classroom Jobs	Writing
40%	70%	90%	70%	80%	40%	60%	40%	30%	30%	20%	30%

Total of 10 participants interviewed. 1 participant = 10%, 2 participants = 20%, etc.

Theme 2: Defining Kindergarten Readiness

Participants were asked the following question: What does the term *kindergarten readiness* mean? This question resulted in the greatest amount of wait time between the question and participant responses. The researcher had to tell three of the participants to be more specific with their answers because the answers given were very vague and fuzzy. Eight participants mentioned academic skills as the most important kindergarten readiness skills with six of those

eight participants distinctively identifying letter and number recognition, writing their own name, and being able to make rhyming words as mandatory skills to enter kindergarten. Other skills mentioned were social skills, conflict resolution skills, ability to follow one- and two-step directions, ability to listen and obey, and a willingness to follow a routine and daily schedule without resistance. Participants had varied responses; particularly, two participants discussed how kindergarten was actually the starting point for the acquisition of these skill sets.

Participant four stated:

"Kindergarten readiness means to what degree is my child ready for kindergarten. I know he needs to be able to tie his shoelaces, listen to his teacher, and get along with his classmates, but I really feel like kindergarten is where he will begin truly learning reading and math skills. Getting him ready for kindergarten has made me focus on other areas like being kind, learning to share, and obeying authority more than learning letters and numbers."

Participant seven had a very similar response.

"Kindergarten readiness means my child is ready to be successful in kindergarten. I don't think kids should go to kindergarten knowing everything. Kids learn in kindergarten, so they need to be mature enough to sit in a classroom and follow directions. I think my child will learn a lot in kindergarten because she has done good at ECEC this year. She can tell you what each letter is … most of the sounds. And even read a few really small words like me, I, and number words. She has gotten along with all of the kids in her class so that will help her adjust to kindergarten and be ready to learn."

Eight of the participants made specific mentions of their child needing to have academic, social, and emotional skill sets in order to make the transition from ECEC to kindergarten smooth.

Multi-faceted skill sets frame a child's potential with support that enables the transition into kindergarten to be as smooth as possible (Bettencourt, 2018). Making a correlation to why they enrolled their child at ECEC (interview question three), these eight participants identified specific skills they feel certain their child needs prior to the beginning of kindergarten.

Participant eight said:

"Kindergarten readiness means how much my child is prepared for kindergarten. She needs to know her letters, sounds, some math skills like numbers and counting, and know how to use a pencil. She can write her name and she knows most of the letters and sounds, but she may have a hard adjustment to a new schedule and new environment. I am hoping her teachers at ECEC will help her get prepared for a new school and a new teacher. Unfamiliar things make her behavior off. But knowing her alphabet and sounds, numbers….I think to at least 20, and reading small words like to, me, my…. makes her kindergarten ready to me."

Participant one gave a lengthy and detailed response.

"There is a lot of skills I think my child needs before he goes to kindergarten. He has learned a lot of them this year at ECEC, but we will keep working through the summer because I want him to be really ready for kindergarten. First are the academic skills…. letter recognition, numbers to 30, being able to hear sounds in words, writing his name, and sounding out small words when he sees them in books, at the store… you know, when they are in print. But academic skills are just a small part of what he needs to know. He has to be able to get along with others, follow directions, work through disagreements… and not freak out when he doesn't get his way…..Cutting and gluing. He has just learned

how to use small kid size scissors. These are all skills that he needs to make his moving on to big school more comfortable for him. And the teacher (participant laughs)."

The term *kindergarten readiness* has been discussed, analyzed, and defined by parents, educators, and stakeholders as kindergarten has been identified as a monumental event in a child's life (Curwood, 2007). One aspect of kindergarten readiness that has gained recent attention is the parent's role they play in the transitional practices children engage in before they actually enter the kindergarten classroom. Evidence shows that a parent's own kindergarten readiness experiences strongly influence their willingness, or lack thereof, to expose their own child to readiness experiences such as preschool and at-home learning activities (Barnett & Taylor, 2008). Through participant responses given during the semi-structured interviews, it became evident the parents are aware their children need the acquisition of various skills before they enter kindergarten. Specific skills mentioned were letter and number recognition, ability to follow a daily routine and one step directions, and the ability to write one's own name.

Theme 3: Preschool as Kindergarten Preparation

The fourth interview question asked parents why they decided to enroll their child at ECEC for preschool, and all ten participants expressed reasons centered around the idea that their child will be better prepared for entry into kindergarten by attending a full day, public preschool housed within the school district where their child will attend kindergarten in the upcoming school year. Several reasons were given such as children will already be adjusted to a structured school day, children will be able to identify the letters of the alphabet and corresponding sounds, and the children's foundation of math skills will be emerging and/or solid.

Participant four stated:

"I chose to enroll my child at ECEC because children are expected to enter kindergarten already knowing their letters and sounds… pretty much ready to read if not already reading. ECEC has provided my child with opportunities that he would not have gotten in a daycare".

Participants told specific ways preschool has prepared their child for kindergarten. These ways are listed in table 4.

Table 4.

NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS (OUT OF 10 TOTAL)	SPECIFIC WAYS PRESCHOOL HAS PREPARED CHILD FOR KINDERGARTEN
7	Letter knowledge/Sound-letter relationships
8	Follow a routine/schedule
8	Social skills development (conflict resolution strategies)
10	Listening skills development
9	How to hold a pencil correctly/Gross- and fine-motor skills development
6	Encouraging independence and individual decision-making skills
7	Identifying numbers 0-20 Counting to 20 Simple addition and subtraction concepts

As interviews progressed, the participants gave specific reasons and justifications about how they felt preschool would positively benefit their child in kindergarten. Seven participants acknowledged their child's ability to recognize letters and letter sounds would prove beneficial in kindergarten when learning to read and spelling simple two- and three-letter words. This was in comparison to children who had not learned to identify the letters in the English alphabet and

relate letters and sounds. Each participant made comparisons between their own child and other children who have not attended preschool as a baseline to visualize their child's potential for learning success.

Participant 6, the only male participant, expressed excitement in regards to his child's behavior improving when kept on a consistent daily routine:

"At ECEC, the kids have a consistent daily routine. That helps my child know what to expect and what each day will be like. My child is calmer and more agreeable when there is a consistent routine. He also knows what school teachers expect from him because he has gone to ECEC this year."

Participant 3 elaborated on how structure and routine are key to her child's daily success at school.

"We have a structured routine at home, so my children are used to that. ECEC also follows a daily schedule that gets the kids accustomed to moving from one activity to another as well as the children know what to expect as far as daily dos and tasks. I have read several research studies that discuss how structure and routine can result in improvements in off-task behaviors such as not paying attention, talking, and not finishing work. I am thankful that my child will already be used to a routine when kindergarten starts in the upcoming school year."

Routines provide young children with a strong sense of stability and security which leads to children becoming more engaged with their environment and trusting their caretakers, teachers, and parents. Through predictable routines, young children gain independence, challenging behaviors such as biting, hitting, and pitching tantrums decrease in occurrences, and power struggles between adults and young children occur fewer times (Kaufman, 2019).

According to the American Academy of Pediatrics (2004), anxiety in young children is seen less often when predictability, consistency, and clear boundaries are evident and expected behavior. Lifelong habits are formed by following routines; consequently, creating a scaffold for healthy and beneficial behaviors that positively impact long-term learning goals. Recognizing the need for structure and routines is advantageous for children, teachers, and parents (Wang, 2005).

Eight out of the ten participants discussed the importance of social skills and listening skills development as they relate to adjustment to formal school and learning potential. Social skills and listening skills both directly impact learning, collaboration, and independence. By enrolling their children in preschool at ECEC, all ten parents felt their child would be ready for kindergarten because of the intense, structured preparation they have received while attending ECEC.

Participant seven stated:

"My decision to enroll my child at ECEC was mainly based on my hope that she will be better prepared for kindergarten….and she will be more confident. I have been amazed at how much she has learned this year at ECEC, so I feel she is in a very good place to begin her real school in just a few months."

Theme 4: At-Home Preparation for Kindergarten

While preschool can provide children with kindergarten preparation, the years before preschool can be utilized in ways to encourage creativity, motivate curiosity, and embed learning in everyday living. Parents plays a vital role in this process as they are the primary caregivers beginning at birth and continuing through the early childhood years. The participants in this study were very vocal and specific about the ways in which they have prepared their child for kindergarten while at home during the early years. Some of the identified at home preparation

was done before entry into preschool while other ways are continuing simultaneously with preschool.

Participant nine provided distinct ways in which she has prepared her child for kindergarten. Specifically, she stated the following:

"At home preparation. We have done a lot. My husband and I talk a lot, so our children have always been talkers…. Almost to the annoying point. I am also very strict when it comes to my children keeping their rooms clean….that started before age 3. I haven't always focused on academics like letters and numbers, but really….. we have modeled behaviors that we want our children to emulate. Like, making our beds when we first get up. That teaches responsibility in my opinion. Getting dressed and brushing hair teaches kids to take pride in themselves. These are all life skills that are important for making productive citizens. I think more about those type skills than I do academics."

She went on to describe how responsibility and accountability will spill over into appropriate behaviors at school; consequently, behaviors that support learning.

Participant one spoke about the fine motor skills exercises her son has done since he was a year old. She said she gives him sponges in the bathtub to fill with water, and then tries to get him to squeeze all of the water out of the sponge. This helps the muscles in his fingers and hand become stronger which will help him grasp the pencil in a more confident manner (Cameron et al., 2012). She mentioned cutting play-doh as well as another way to strength hand muscles and coordination.

Along the idea of adjusting to a school routine and schedule, participant five told the researcher about their nightly routine as it relates to preparation for kindergarten. She sets aside twenty minutes on Monday through Thursday nights to review skills that are being taught at

preschool during that week and read a short decoder book. The purpose of reading the decoder books is for exposure to concepts about print, directionality of text, and hearing the correct syntax and prosody. By reviewing skills for a short amount of time, her child will be used to a "homework" time if and when she has homework in kindergarten.

All ten participants said they teach skills and behaviors at home with the intent of preparing their child for kindergarten expectations. Participant six said he approaches every single trip to the grocery store, a restaurant, and the mall as an opportunity to teach his child something new.

"I believe learning occurs everywhere. Since my child was 6 months old, I have had physical custody of him. My mom always made every day full of learning new things…. And that has been my outlook too for my son. Learning isn't just about reading, writing, and math. There is so much to learn … how to behave, how to walk down the hallway correctly, even how to talk to other people… show respect for adults even when you don't agree with them. This is all stuff that starts at home."

Participants identified a variety of skills, behaviors, and expectations that have been taught at home in preparation for life outside of the home. Academic skills as well as life skills were all deemed necessary by the participants especially for successful transition into school. Four of the participants thought of skills they want their child to be able to do before they enter kindergarten, so they jotted that down during the interview. For example, how to tie their shoe laces, put items into a backpack, wipe out their own lunchbox, and correctly use scissors to cut paper. While each participant had their own beliefs about what skills and behaviors are needed for kindergarten, it was a unified consensus that preparation for kindergarten begins at home and is the ultimate responsibility of the parent(s).

Research Questions

Research Question One

How do parents and caregivers view *kindergarten readiness*?

Through phenomenological interviews, as an interpretivist researcher, I uncovered several perspectives when it comes to kindergarten readiness. Participants were acutely aware kindergarten readiness encompasses behaviors and skills that assist a child in their transition to and adjustment in kindergarten. The majority of participants conferred academic skills are the most important skills to aid in kindergarten readiness, but participants agreed social skills development is also a necessary factor. Social skills serve a springboard to positive self-image, a child's willingness to take risks, and independence in a classroom full of unfamiliar territory (Liu, Karp, & Davis, 2013). In comparison to academic skills, social skills must also be taught and fostered in order for growth to evolve. Both social and academic skills are facets within a child's developmental domain that require instruction, support, and furtherance (Curwood, 2007; Liu, Karp, & Davis, 2013).

Participants viewed kindergarten readiness as the actions and concepts that enable a child to adapt and acclimate to the kindergarten classroom which can be an unfamiliar environment where new skills and competences are introduced. Based on interpretation from interviews, participants also acknowledged kindergarten readiness means their child is developmentally ready to attend school and engage in learning experiences that are meaningful and purposeful. Participants asserted their perspective about kindergarten readiness by discussing how they are preparing their child for the transition into formal school through early childhood experiences which is answered in research questions two.

Research Question Two

What are parents doing to help support early childhood experiences related to

kindergarten readiness?

Parents are doing a variety of things to help support early childhood experiences prior to the entry into kindergarten such as reading to their children at home, counting out loud with their child, identifying shapes, letters, and small words in real life contexts, and engaging in conversations to foster oral language development skills such as taking turns in a conversation. In several discussions, parents reiterated how important it is for their child to have positive and empowering early childhood experiences so they approach school with a positive attitude and an intrinsic motivation to learn. All ten participants mentioned enrolling their child in preschool as the most influential early childhood experience because the preschool experience is one of learning, socializing, and holistic development. In list 2, the researcher listed the specific ways parents are supporting early childhood experiences.

List 2.

Ways parents are supporting early childhood experiences

1. Reading to their child
2. Modeling how to correctly hold a pencil
3. Tracing and practicing writing letters and child's name
4. Counting (up to 20)
5. Identifying shapes in real world context
6. Teaching letters and sounds
7. Teaching child how to react when there is conflict
8. Role playing how to actively listen
9. Model how to follow one- and two-step directions
10. Teach child how to tie their shoes
11. Teaching child how to control emotions (reaction)

12. Demonstrating how to share

13. How to dress themselves

14. Demonstrates how to clean up area and stay organized

Research Question Three

How do parents perceive preschool education influencing *kindergarten readiness?*

Parents were adamant that preschool education is a framework that supports their child's individual kindergarten readiness and offers exposure to classroom expectations in an environment with smaller class size and small group instruction. A shared perspective of participants is that preschool education at ECEC has afforded their child the time, resources, and pillars of support to acquire new skills and behaviors that will benefit their transition to kindergarten. Parents also agreed that preschool teachers guide learning and offer learning experiences that are developmentally appropriate resulting in feelings of security and engagement. In this research study, all ten participants felt as though preschool education has provided benefits and advantages in academic, social, and emotional development domains for their child that they would not have if they had not attended preschool at ECEC.

Research Question Four

What are some identified misconceptions about *kindergarten readiness?*

There were no identified misconceptions about *kindergarten readiness* in the phenomenological interviews conducted with these ten participants.

Discussion

Kindergarten Readiness

The term kindergarten readiness encompasses the developmental domains within a child that impact the ability to transition into kindergarten successfully as kindergarten presents a new set of routines, expectations, and academic skills. School readiness houses a multitude of

competencies that children need to support the transition to formal school from daycares, preschools, or home environments (Jarrett & Coba-Rodriguez, 2019). Participants in this study were directly asked what kindergarten readiness means, and each readily recognized there are certain behaviors their child needs to make their transition to kindergarten prosperous. Several participants' responses aligned with research findings that a child should enter kindergarten ready to learn, but not necessarily expected to already know the letters of the alphabet, be able to read, or be able to count to 20 (Curwood, 2007). When children acquire social skills such as being able to carry on a conversation, following one-step directions, and a willingness to follow a routine with minimal resistance, they are more likely to encounter learning experiences with motivation and excitement (Bassok, Latham, & Rorem, 2016); thus, embracing the anticipation of learning.

Defining kindergarten readiness is complex because each child is unique and each child's skills set is completely different from that of their peers; furthermore, children mature emotionally, cognitively, socially, and physically at varying rates (Hatcher, Nuner, & Paulsel, 2012). There is no one-size-fits-all definition of kindergarten readiness, but by assessing each individual child, parents and educators are given information that is specific and distinctive about that child's individual development and readiness. This information can be used to make the kindergarten experience more individualized and meaningful (Ward, 2019). It is important to remember that kindergarten readiness includes all areas of development not just academic skills. For most children, there will be strengths and weaknesses identified among academic, social, emotional, physical, and cognitive domains of development (Griffin, 2019).

Misalignment of Readiness Beliefs

Parents, policymakers, and early childhood educators must collaboratively work together to align expectations and assumptions related to kindergarten readiness, so children enter kindergarten classrooms equipped for supporting the transition and fostering kindergarten experiences (Vitiello et al., 2019). Readiness beliefs among parents impact the occurrences in which children are exposed to meaningful early childhood experiences and involved in skill development that is efficacious in supporting readiness behaviors. The misalignment of readiness beliefs can be detrimental to a child's holistic development; thus, negatively impacting the multi-faceted skill sets children need (Dombkowski, 2001) to be successful in kindergarten. Participants in this study voiced their appreciation for the teachers at ECEC who communicate kindergarten readiness beliefs to them, so they are able to partner with their child's teacher to provide continuity among school and home. When readiness beliefs among educators and parents align, the young child becomes the nucleus of a working relationship.

Preschool Education

Parents often assume when their child is enrolled in a preschool program, their child is being adequately prepared for the kindergarten school year (Hatcher, Nuner, & Paulsel, 2012). While preschool is a pillar of preparation, parents can't entirely depend on preschool to teach their child every skill needed for kindergarten. Many preschools provide young children with opportunities to learn how to actively listen, follow directions, and build a foundation of academic skills such as letter and number identification, writing one's own name, and recognizing rhyming words. The sole purpose of preschool education isn't to prepare young children for kindergarten, but rather, begin building a holistic skill set that will make them productive people in both school and society (La Paro et al., 2003).

Participants in this study also identified both play and academics as reasons they enrolled their child in preschool education. According to one education expert, play and academics should co-exist in a preschool classroom instead of residing in opposite ends of the early childhood education spectrum (Petrunovic, 2018). Play and academics can be intermixed to provide young children authentic learning experiences that nurture academic skills attainment and social interaction. Many participants expressed their recollections about how they played in their kindergarten classrooms and how their social skills were manicured by engaging in play with their classmates. The misconception that play and academics can't co-exist causes detriment to teachers, parents, and students (Almon & Miller, 2007) as it directly impacts instruction, assessment, and skill development and acquisition.

Kindergarten Experiences

Participants discussed their own kindergarten experiences and compared their own experiences to what they predict their child will also experience in kindergarten. While all ten participants attended kindergarten, several voiced their concerns about how kindergarten has changed over the past decades. Since the early 1990s, kindergarten classrooms have increased math and reading instruction while decreasing exposure to music, art, and science (Dahl, 2016). This has raised concerns among parents about kindergarten readiness expectations especially since the readiness expectations have increased in number and rigor (Bassok et al., 2016) since their own kindergarten school year.

It is only natural for a parent to relate their own experiences to that of their child. As people, we relate to what we are most familiar with in terms of exposure and interaction. Many parents were very descriptive in their recollections of their kindergarten classroom set-up, the disposition and personality of their teacher, and the shared reading experiences they had with

their teacher and classmates. Many of the participants expressed their desire for their child's

kindergarten experiences to mirror their experiences in terms of positivity and support. While

shared experiences were discussed, participants were also keenly aware of differences between

their own kindergarten experiences and what their child may experience such as length of the

school day, absence of rest time, and more structured, skills-based play time. Both similarities

and differences among the kindergarten experiences of participants and their children are direct

results of policymakers ramping up academic standards, increasing assessments, and focusing on

math and reading while neglecting intentional teaching of problem solving and reasoning skills

(Curwood, 2007).

Parental Involvement

Because the preschool years are so important to cognitive development, it is imperative

that parents play an active role in their child's early childhood education experiences

(Spreeuwenberg, 2019). When a parent is met with a list of expectations and skills, parents can

become overwhelmed and often times shut down when it comes to being an active participant in

preparing their child for kindergarten (Robinson & Diamond, 2013). Over fifty research studies

found a positive correlation between parental involvement and academic achievement. Studies

went on to specifically state that increased parental involvement was correlated with higher

graduation rates and an increased likelihood of that student attending a post-high school

institution such as a two or four year college (Waterford, 2018). Many parents are submerged in

their own careers, so they leave teaching to day school teachers and babysitters without

optimizing the time they are with their child at home. As the parents in this research study

acknowledged, parental involvement in early childhood learning experiences is essential to

preparing children for their transition into kindergarten (Barnett & Taylor, 2008). By parents

being involved in teaching and learning outside of the classroom, children have more positive and engaging experiences within the classroom setting because they have prior exposure to routines, skills, and learning relationships (Spreeuwenberg, 2019). Participants acknowledged specific ways they have been actively involved in their own child's kindergarten readiness preparation such as reading books out loud to their child, reviewing the letters of the alphabet and numbers to 20, and reinforcing skills being taught in preschool at ECEC. By reinforcing skills from their child's classroom, parents are demonstrating that importance of what is being taught at school; therefore, strengthening connections among school and home. The National Center for Family & Community Connections with Schools (2017) found that many children describe school and home as two very different worlds with little interaction and connection. Participants in this research study discussed the motivation and willingness to be an active participant in their child's early education as well as their kindergarten school year.

Summary of Findings

The findings from this study answered the guiding research questions concerning how parents view kindergarten readiness. The participant's lived experiences are what has shaped their beliefs and perspectives about kindergarten readiness. Based on the themes that emerged from the data, participants understand what kindergarten readiness is, how preschool education influences kindergarten readiness, and ways parents can assist their child in developing skills to aid in their successful transition to kindergarten.

CHAPTER 5

SIGNIFICANCE, IMPLICATIONS, AND FUTURE RESEARCH

The purpose of this study was to investigate the term *kindergarten readiness* through the lens of parent perspective. This qualitative study addressed the following research questions:

1. How do parents and caregivers view *kindergarten readiness?*

2. What are parents doing to help support early childhood experiences related to *kindergarten readiness?*

3. How do parents perceive preschool education influencing *kindergarten readiness?*

4. What are some identified misconceptions about *kindergarten readiness*?

Through the interpretivist perspective (Gaus, 2013; Gill et al., 2008; Irby et al., 2013), the researcher engaged in phenomenological interviews with ten parents of children who are currently attending preschool in an attempt to find out what a parent's perspective is on kindergarten readiness. The researcher recorded each interview and then transcribed each recorded interview word-by-word to find out what participants believed about kindergarten readiness. The section of the research study is a discussion of the significance of the findings, implications for practice and future research, and a conclusion to the study.

Significance of the Findings

In this study, the researcher used interviews as an opportunity to gain deep understandings of how parents perceive kindergarten readiness. As an interpretivist, the researcher sought to uncover truths and personal beliefs about kindergarten readiness from the ten participants that were interviewed. The researcher assumed the findings were a result of the

participant's own kindergarten experiences as well as the early childhood experiences of their own child. Because each participant came to the interview with their own personal experiences, each participant provided an individual perspective. Through these perspectives, the researcher found both commonalities and differences among beliefs and ideas about kindergarten readiness.

The researcher found that all ten participants' own kindergarten experiences shaped their beliefs about kindergarten readiness even though kindergarten has undergone significant changes over the past decades (Dombkowski, 2001). The skills the participants were taught, learning experiences they encountered, and kindergarten expectations were all mentioned when discussing what kindergarten readiness meant to each participant based on their own lived experiences. These lived kindergarten experiences influenced what the participants believed their own child needed to know in order to make a successful transition into kindergarten and also what the participant supposes kindergarten readiness really means.

As mentioned earlier, participants were asked questions to investigate their beliefs and perspectives about how preschool education impacts kindergarten readiness. One of the most obvious and significant findings of this research study is that all of the participants who were interviewed felt as though preschool education positively impacts kindergarten readiness. Each participant identified specific ways preschool education prepares children for kindergarten which can be very informative and beneficial for other parents as well as preschool educators.

Another significant finding was the degree to which parents want to and are preparing their child for kindergarten through various activities, experiences, and day-to-day actions at home. With specificity, participants discussed the importance of parents playing an active role in getting their child ready for kindergarten and also supporting preschool teachers as they seek to teach children how to be an integral part of a classroom community. The researcher found that

the parents interviewed in this study acknowledge the importance of kindergarten readiness (Diamond, 2000; Loveless, 2009), the desire to play an active role in preparing their child for kindergarten, and the impact that preschool education has on kindergarten readiness as a whole (Ahmad & Hamm, 2013). The significance of these findings will inform teachers, practitioners, and educators of young children what parents believe, theorize, and assume about kindergarten readiness based on their own experiences as well as their child's experiences.

Implications for Practice

The knowledge gained from the findings of this research study can inform teachers and practitioners what parents believe about kindergarten readiness. These beliefs can greatly impact how a parent prepares their child for kindergarten which impacts a teacher's instruction and a child's transition from early childhood to formal school. It is important for teachers to take into account the learning experiences, or lack thereof, that children have before they enter kindergarten because these experiences are what aids in the development of cognitive, physical, emotional, and social skills (Cappelloni, 2010). The findings in this research study support the premise that parents are aware of what kindergarten readiness entails as well as their desire to support kindergarten readiness skills and behaviors.

Parent perspectives provide credibility for teachers as they seek to increase alignment between preschool and kindergarten (Bongiorno, 2018). By talking with parents about kindergarten readiness, educators can consider parent perspectives, expectations, and beliefs as they impact the way their child is prepared for kindergarten. Transitional practices can be created and implemented based on what young children have had prior exposure to and learning activities can be centered around developmentally appropriate practice (DAP) for both academic and social development (Puccioni et al., 2019).

Recommendations for Future Research

For future research, the researcher suggests interviewing teachers about kindergarten readiness to gain a teacher's insight to what kindergarten readiness means. A parent's perspective is important because parents are the ones who shape a child's life from birth until the start of school, but a teacher's perspective would be informative to parents because they are the ones who can provide quality early childhood experience that foster the acquisition of cognitive, social, emotional, and physical skills. When parent and teacher perspectives are aligned, expectations are clear.

Another suggestion for future research would be observing preschool children to document observed behaviors and skills sets. Then, interview the parents of those children to see if the observed behaviors align with what parents believe their child is capable of doing. Even though parents are consciously aware of kindergarten readiness skills, it would be interesting to see if their child exhibits those behaviors instinctively or just at home in the presence of the parent. Because the definition of kindergarten readiness is fluid, it is important for research to be ongoing so teachers can provide developmentally appropriate practice methods to meet the learning needs of all children.

Conclusion

Kindergarten is a monumental life event in all children's lives. Naturally, parents want to make sure their child is ready for this monumental event that signals the beginning of formal school experiences. Researchers have conducted many studies about teacher perceptions of kindergarten readiness, but in an attempt to understand parent perspectives, this research study

interviewed parents of preschool students to see what their beliefs, understandings, and perspectives are about kindergarten readiness. While all participants acknowledged the need for kindergarten preparation, each participant identified various ways to achieve that readiness. Whether specific to the academic, social, or behavioral domain, parents readily ascertain their crucial involvement in the preparedness of their child.

After interviewing parents, it is clear that these parents are willing to be active participants in their child's educational journey as partners, leaders, and pillars of support. It is important for preschool teachers to inform parents about kindergarten readiness, so every effort can be made to ensure preschool students are building a skill set that frames kindergarten in structure, nurture, and encouragement. The role that parents play in their child's early childhood experiences can't be minimized, but rather, should be strengthened and empowered. Since kindergarten readiness encompasses a vast array of developmental domains and skills, it is imperative that preparation for kindergarten begins at birth and is sustained through the early childhood years.

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APPENDIX A

PARENT INFORMATION LETTER

Appendix A

Parent Information Letter

Dear Early Childhood Education Center parents,

Dr. Picou, superintendent of Tupelo Public School District, and Mrs. Stewart, principal here at ECEC, have graciously granted me permission to send you this informative letter about a research project in which I am currently involved.

I am currently a doctoral candidate at the University of Mississippi and am currently involved in a research study looking at *kindergarten readiness* through a parent or caregiver's perspective. For this research study, I will need to interview parents of preschool students here at ECEC to help me better understand what parents and caregivers believe *kindergarten readiness* really means.

The interviews will be approximately 20-30 minutes long, and I will conduct the interviews on-site during school hours or via Google classroom(video conference). I have designed open-ended questions that ask you to respond on the topic of *kindergarten readiness,* but there are not definitive right and wrong answers. The interviews will be voice recorded using a voice memo app, and then, the recordings will be transcribed into written transcripts. The audio recordings will be deleted after they are transcribed.

If you are chosen to participate, your identity will remain anonymous during the acts of data collection, data analysis, and also in the publication of my findings. All recordings and written transcriptions will be kept completely confidential. Participation is completely voluntary.

Since you have children who will be entering kindergarten during the 2021-2022 school year, I value your opinions and thoughts as they relate to *kindergarten readiness*. In the near future, you will be given the opportunity to read, accept, and sign a participation consent form before I proceed with interviews. Once all willing participants have responded, I will randomly select 10 people to interview. You, as the participant, will have the chance to select an interview time slot that is convenient for you.

I appreciate your consideration of my request. If you need any additional information, please don't hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

Ashley B. Goralczyk
Doctoral Candidate
University of Mississippi
662-871-7645 Cell
abgoralc@olemiss.edu

APPENDIX B

INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE

Appendix B

Invitation to Participate
Dear Potential Participant,

You received an informative letter describing a research study I am currently involved with as a doctoral student at the University of Mississippi. I am sending you this formal invitation inviting you to participate in an interview where you can tell about your thoughts on the topic of *kindergarten readiness*. As a parent of a preschool student, I am curious to hear your thoughts about kindergarten readiness as it relates to you, as a parent, and your child who will attend kindergarten during the upcoming 2021-2022 school year. By accepting this invitation, you are saying that you are willing to be a participant in this research study.

Purpose of the study: This qualitative study seeks to interview parents of preschool students to find out their thoughts, ideas, and expectations about kindergarten readiness as it relates to their child. This study seeks to investigate kindergarten readiness through the lens of parent perspective.

Research Questions: These research questions will drive the research project.
1. How do parents and caregivers view *kindergarten readiness*?
2. In what ways have parents prepared or not prepared their child for kindergarten?
3. What are some of the commonalities and differences found among each parent's responses?

Participation: Your participation in this research study is voluntary. The interview will be voice recorded using the voice recorder app on my I phone, and then the audio recording will be transcribed into a written transcript. Once the written transcription is complete, the audio recording will be deleted. Interviews will be conducted by Ashley B. Goralczyk, the researcher, and the only ones present for the interview will be you (the participant) and me (the researcher).

Confidentiality: Your identity will be kept confidential throughout the entire study. You will be identified as a participant number such as participant #1, participant #2, etc. Your confidentiality will be protected in compliance with the University of Mississippi's research using human participants policies, procedures, and safeguards.

Compensation: There will not be any compensation paid to participants as participation is strictly voluntary.

Each interview will last approximately 30 minutes. If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and your participation, please contact me via email at abgoralc@olemiss.edu or via phone @ 662-871-7645.

If you choose to participate, please sign this form and return to your child's teacher. If you are chosen to participate, you will then select a convenient date and time for your interview. I appreciate your consideration to participate in this research study.

By signing below, I am agreeing to be a willing participant in the following research study if I am chosen.

_____   _____
Potential participant printed name   Date

Phone number: _____   Email address: _____

APPENDIX C

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Appendix C

Informed Consent Form

Dear Participant,

This information is given to you as you have agreed to and have been chosen to be a willing participant in the following research study: Kindergarten Readiness Through the Lens of Parent Perspective.

As a participant, you will complete an interview that will be audio recorded; thereafter, the audio recording will be transcribed into a written transcript. Your personal identifying information will be kept confidential at all times. Only I, the researcher, will know participant identifying information. The audio recordings and written transcripts will be kept on a computer hard drive that is password protected. Once the research study is complete, all audio recordings and written transcripts will be permanently destroyed.

Risks:
There are no risks involved with this research study. You do not have to answer any question or questions that you do not feel comfortable answering.

Benefits:
There are no benefits nor compensation, either monetary nor non-monetary, for participating in this study.

Right to Withdraw:
You do not have to take part in this study. You may stop participation at any given time. If you start the interview, and decide that you do not want to complete the interview, tell Mrs. Goralczyk in person, by letter, or by telephone.

Please sign the following consent acknowledging you understand the purpose and procedures of this research study.

I, _____, consent to willingly participate in this research study, Kindergarten Readiness Through the Lens of Parent Perspective.

_____   _____
Participant Printed Name   Participant Signature

_____
Date

Research contact information:
Ashley B. Goralczyk, Doctoral Candidate and Researcher
662-871-7645 Phone   abgoralc@olemiss.edu Email address

APPENDIX D

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE

Appendix D

The University of Mississippi

For valuable consider, I do hereby authorize The University of Mississippi, its assignees, agents, employees, designees, and those acting pursuant to its authority ("UM") to:

A. Record my participation and appearance on video tape, audio recording, film, photograph or any other mediums ("recordings").
B. Use my name, likeness, voice, and biographical material in connection with these recordings.
C. Exhibit, copy, reproduce, perform, display, or distribute such recordings (and to create derivative works from them) in whole or in part without restrictions or limitation in any format or medium for any purpose which The University of Mississippi, and those acting pursuant to its authority, deem appropriate.
D. I release UM from any and all claims and demands arising out of or in connection with the use of such recordings including any claims for defamation, invasion of privacy, rights of publicity, or copyright.

Participant Name: _____

Phone: _____

Printed Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date Signed: _____

APPENDIX E

DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONS

Appendix E

Interview # _____   Date: _____

Time Interview Began: _____ Time Interview Ended: _____

Participant Gender: _____ Male   _____ Female

Participant Race: _____ Asian   _____ Caucasian   _____Hispanic

                        _____ African American   _____Native American   _____ Other

Participant Highest Education: _____ Some K-12 schooling

                                _____Highschool diploma (GED)   _____Some college

                                _____ College Degree (bachelor's)

                                _____ Advanced college degree

Participant's Phone Number: _____

Participant's Email Address: _____

Participant's Age: _____20-25 years old   _____ 26-35 years old

                        _____ 36-45 years old   _____46-55 years old

                        _____ 56 years old and older

How many children does the participant have that are currently attending ECEC? _____

What are the ages of that child or children? _____ 4 years old   _____ 5 years old

                                        _____ 6 years old

What is the gender of child? _____ Male   _____ Female

What is the race of child?   _____Asian   _____African American   _____Caucasian

                        _____Hispanic   _____Native American   _____Other

What language is spoken at home? _____

APPENDIX F

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Appendix F

Interview Protocol

Researcher: Hello. As a reminder, I am a doctoral candidate who is doing a research study about *kindergarten readiness through the lens of parent perspective.* Your responses will be very valuable to me as they will provide a look at how you as a parent view kindergarten readiness. I will ask you 10 questions and allow you to answer each question. There is no right or wrong answer, and you do not have to answer all of the questions. If you prefer not to answer a question, let me know. This interview will be audio recorded and then transcribed into a written transcript. After I have each interview in a written transcript, I will then permanently delete the audio recording. There will not be any identifiable information about you released to anyone. You will be identified as participant #1, #2, etc.. Do you have any questions before we proceed?

Allow time for participant to ask any questions.

Researcher: Please fill out these demographic questions about you. Skip any questions you do not feel comfortable answering.
(Allow time for this.)
I appreciate your willingness to participate in this study. Once the research study is complete, you will be given the results of the study in a physical document.

Research questions:
1. Did you attend kindergarten? Tell me about your experiences in kindergarten.

2. What are your perceptions about kindergarten?

3. What influenced your decision to enroll your child in preschool at ECEC?

4. What does the term *kindergarten readiness* mean?

5. Have you ever discussed this term with anyone? If so, what did you say about the term

    kindergarten readiness?

6. What are some specific skills and behaviors you think a child needs to enter

    kindergarten?

7. What are some things you have done at home to prepare your child for kindergarten?

8. What are some things you need to do but you haven't done yet to prepare your child for

    kindergarten?

9. Have you had any formal parent education courses or have you read any books about

preparing your child for kindergarten? If so, what did you learn?

10. How do you feel about your child going to kindergarten? What excites you and what

makes you feel nervous or apprehensive?

As of now, this interview is complete. If I need any further information from you, do I have your permission to contact you using the contact information you listed on the participant invitation form? Do you have any questions regarding your participation? Again, you will be provided with the research study once it is completed. Thank you again.

VITA

2002	B.S. in Elementary Education	Mississippi State University
2006	M.S. in Curriculum & Instruction	University of Mississippi
2008	National Board Certification	
2021	Doctorate of Education	University of Mississippi
2002-09	Elementary classroom teacher	Tupelo Public School District
2010 – Present	Instructor in Teacher Education	University of Mississippi