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Kindergarten Teachers' Perceptions of Student Readiness for School

A dissertation

presented to

the faculty of the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis

East Tennessee State University

In partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree

Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership

by

James Anthony Wernke Jr.

May 2017

Dr. Virginia Foley, Chair

Dr. John Boyd

Dr. Donald Good

Dr. L. Kathryn Sharp

Key Words: Teachers' Perceptions, Kindergarten, Readiness

ABSTRACT

Kindergarten Teachers' Perceptions of Student Readiness for School

by

James A. Wernke Jr.

The design method for this study was non-experimental quantitative. The survey was distributed via email to Kindergarten teachers in two Northeastern Tennessee school districts. There were 69 Kindergarten teachers who responded to the survey.

The study revealed that Kindergarten teachers perceive that gender, socioeconomic status, and preschool experience have a significant impact on student readiness for school. Chronological age was not perceived to have an impact on student readiness for school to a significant extent. Kindergarten teachers perceived that preschool experience has the greatest impact on student readiness for school when asked to rank the order of impact from greatest to least.

Chronological age was perceived to have a greater impact on student readiness for school than either socioeconomic status or gender.

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my beautiful family which includes Lacey (wife), Tate (son), and Madeleine (daughter). Lacey: She is the reason why I am able to be as successful as I am. She gives me energy, motivation, and strength. I want to thank her for taking care of our kids. She is always making decisions that benefit our family, never thinking about herself, rather everyone else's happiness. Tate: He is a strong, physical, athletic, intelligent, and observant young boy. He is selfless and always wants to be perfect. He is a great brother as well. I look forward to the many great years and watching you develop. Madeleine: She is 18 months and already has us all wrapped around her finger. She has a strong personality and she knows exactly what she wants and how to get it. She always smiles and is caring like her mother. I look forward to watching her develop as well.

In addition, I would like to dedicate this to my father. He has always supported me in everything I have done without question. I appreciate how he has always worked his tail off for our family growing up. He is a model for how to be a supportive father.

To my mother: She is a rock. She never stops and I believe that is why she stays young. She has a vibrant personality that spreads through the room. She is the strongest person I know and has done an amazing job raising all five of her kids.

To my brother and three sisters: Michael, Beth, Shelly and Katie, I love you all and thank you for the support and guidance over the years.

To my mother, father, and sister-in-law: Gary, Vicky, and Leah Darnell have always been supportive and have had a hand in taking care of Tate and Madeleine.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Kindergarten teachers have one of the most challenging and demanding jobs in education today. They have the challenge of transforming children into students prior to entering first grade. To add to the complexity, federal guidelines, regardless of a child's prior experiences and developmental factors, are continually increasing demands and expectations. This leaves one to question whether factors such as chronological age, gender, socioeconomic status, and preschool experiences impact the readiness of a child before entering a Kindergarten classroom.

During the 1920s and 1930s, Arnold Gesell, a maturationist, studied child development through the evolution of Kindergarten. After an extensive study, he found a child's readiness for Kindergarten was biological, meaning as the child matures, he or she develops an understanding of the world. This biological knowledge allows for the child to be ready for future opportunities and challenges presented, regardless of time passed. Gesell described this period of the child's life as the *developmental age* rather than the *chronological age* (DeCos, 1997). However, throughout the history of Kindergarten, chronological age has been the prominent factor in determining whether or not a child is ready to enter school. Morrison (2007) discussed developmental appropriate practices as a significant role in early childhood practice. His recommendation was for all educators and parents to be aware of what is developmentally appropriate for children to be successful. In addition, all that is accomplished in the classroom must be appropriate for all children to adequately meet the needs of diverse levels of learning.

There are minor variances in age requirements for Kindergarten from state to state. Generally, to be eligible for Kindergarten in the United States, it is required that a child must be

5 years old on or prior to August 1st. However, some states may extend this deadline to as late as October 1st (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2014). Although states have a preset minimum age requirement, the question of readiness of children who enter Kindergarten is primarily out of the hands of state educators and is ultimately determined by parents. The difficulties of the Kindergarten curriculum expectations have resulted in an upward trend of parents holding their children out of school for another year for both academic and psychological concerns. This act of withholding a child from school for an additional year is commonly known as “redshirting.” Although “redshirting” has been around for many years, most parents still choose to send their child to school when they turn 5 years of age.

Clifford, Horm, and Maxwell (2004) described various factors that impact readiness for Kindergarten. Skills and development are influenced by families and communities. Different types of socialization occurs between boys and girls. Boys tend to learn, at an early age, that they receive positive attention when they are active and moving around; while girls tend to learn very early that it is important to sit quietly and listen respectfully. Clifford et al. explained that girls tend to have a higher reading level than boys, better social skills, and are less likely to engage in problem behaviors. Kindergarten classrooms were formerly places that facilitated children to learn problem-solving skills through active play, coloring, drawing, extended recess, and nap time. The dynamics of Kindergarten classrooms have changed dramatically over the past few decades. Now the Kindergarten classroom is an environment which supports a more standardized academic approach; it is more common to sit at a desk to focus on math and literacy than to color Thanksgiving turkeys. Finally, readiness assessments right before Kindergarten can help planning for different needs within the classroom.

Ransom (2010) discussed the increase in attendance of children in preschool at an early age. Parents are discovering that quality preschool programs are preparing children for the rigors of Kindergarten. As a result, children are learning essential skills in order to be prepared for the Kindergarten classroom.

One disadvantage of preschool is that many programs can be costly. Due to demand, there are many preschool programs now available for students who live in low-income households, as well as federally funded programs to help support families who have one or more working parents. Even with available assistance, there are still parents who choose not to send their children to preschool for various other reasons. The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) stated that the opportunity for all children to be ready for Kindergarten is available without the assistance of preschools. The experiences provided by their parents, environment, and interactions children have from contact with others are contributing factors to school readiness. However, children who lack these experiences without having these interactions supplemented by preschool could find themselves at a severe disadvantage when entering Kindergarten (National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2009).

Buchanan (2010) described how Kindergarten teachers have to prepare for many readiness factors, such as chronological age, gender, socioeconomics, and preschool experience prior to children entering the doors of the Kindergarten classroom. In spite of the readiness factors, Kindergarten teachers are expected to provide a high quality education daily. Teachers are required to implement important foundational skills and prepare all students for the rigors of educational standards. Buchanan concluded that, based on Kindergarten teachers' perceptions, parental involvement in supporting and

interacting with their children significantly impacts readiness. Furthermore, peer interaction, foundational academic skills, support for SES students, and consistency in routines are also essential for children to be ready for Kindergarten.

Statement of the Problem

The purpose of this study was to examine Kindergarten teachers' perceptions of how age, gender, socioeconomic status, and preschool experience impact the readiness of a child to enter Kindergarten. Chronological age is the most common entrance criteria for enrolling in Kindergarten. As children approach the age of 5, parents begin preparations for that child to enter Kindergarten. The actual cutoff date for enrollment of school varies by state; however, the majority of children turning 5 years old will be sent to Kindergarten regardless of their actual readiness (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2014).

Partially because most states depend on chronological age rather than developmental age of children, it is very difficult for Kindergarten teachers to meet the various developmental needs of these students. Students arrive at various levels of readiness due to the various timing of their chronological age. For example, some children may have just turned 5 years old; while other students have been 5 for almost an entire year.

Ackerman and Barnett (2005) reported that the various experiences of students entering Kindergarten are dependent upon multiple factors. Although children may meet the specific age criterion, students vary widely in how well prepared they are for the demands of today's Kindergarten. One aspect of development that heavily impacts readiness of Kindergarten is that children are developing more irregularly and episodically. This is partially due to considerable variation in their preschool education experiences in addition to life experiences. Thus, many

students enter Kindergarten with widely varying skills and knowledge. For example, some children may have participated in various out-of-home care experiences and had access to children's libraries and safe playgrounds while others have not. Some, but not all, are able to recognize letters, numbers, shapes, and tie their own shoes. Others may have grown up learning a language other than English at home. Some have not been read to frequently. Still others may have participated in the kinds of activities that would seem to promote success in Kindergarten, but have birthdates that make them considerably younger than their classmates due to age cut off dates for Kindergarten entry. Despite being chronologically eligible for Kindergarten, some teachers and parents question whether some children are ready for Kindergarten.

The chronological age of children is just one factor that could impact a student's readiness for school based on maturity. O'Brien and Devarics (2007) explained that low-income families often have children who fall behind their peers due to life experiences. Many states have tried numerous ways to bridge the gap between low-income households and children's readiness for school by developing certain preschool programs, including federally funded programs such as Head Start. The Head Start program is specifically designed to meet increasingly complex, intertwined, and difficult challenges of improving services for economically disadvantaged children and their families (Tennessee Head Start, 2014). The Tennessee Department of Education (2015) explained the requirements for preschools in Tennessee and the purpose is to provide free preschool experiences for those children that are in low-income households. However, there is a set of specific criteria that families must meet to be eligible for this benefit.

Morrison (2007) discussed that the public is in high demand for more high-quality early childhood programs. Parents want their children to have a good start in life. Morrison explained

that parents want their children to get along with others, be happy, and to be cared for and educated.

Research Questions

This study was guided by the following research questions:

1. Is there a significant difference between new and experienced teachers' perceptions of the importance of age as a factor for school readiness?
2. Is there a significant difference between new and experienced teachers' perceptions of preschool experiences as a factor for school readiness?
3. Is there a significant difference between new and experienced teachers' perceptions of socioeconomic status as a factor for school readiness?
4. Is there a significant difference between new and experienced teachers' perceptions of gender as a factor of school readiness?
5. Do teachers perceive that student age is a factor in readiness for school to a significant extent?
6. Do teachers perceive that preschool attendance is a factor in readiness for school to a significant extent?
7. Do teachers perceive that socioeconomic status is a factor in readiness for school to a significant extent?
8. Do teachers perceive that gender is a factor in student readiness for school to a significant extent?
9. Which of these factors are perceived to have the greatest impact on student readiness for school?

Significance of the Study

According to Hatcher, Nuner, and Paulsel (2012), preparing students to be ready is what school is intended for. Every year the level of complexity in the Kindergarten classroom increases. Lilles, Furlong, Quirk, Felix, and Dominguez (2009) discussed how important the transition to Kindergarten is since it sets the foundation for future academic achievement. Kindergarten teachers have a challenging task to bridge the developmental and academic gaps with students since students enter at different ages, gender, socioeconomics, and preschool experiences.

This study was undertaken to examine how age, gender, socioeconomic status, and preschool experience are perceived by Kindergarten teachers to impact children's readiness for Kindergarten. This study was also conducted to determine which factor had the greatest impact on a student's readiness for school as perceived by Kindergarten teachers. The results could provide assistance to teachers, parents, administrators, and lawmakers when making decisions about when a child should begin his or her education. Furthermore, the results could provide vital assistance in helping parents determine whether or not to send a child to school or if waiting an additional year is in the child's best interest. Also, the findings of this research could substantially impact instructional decisions on students in the classroom, while also impacting scheduling decisions and changes in preschool requirements.

Definitions of Terms

The following definitions provide explanations for terms specific to this study.

1. *Developmental age*: The measure of a child's development expressed in terms of age norms.

2. *Developmental Appropriate Practice*: Teaching grounded in research on how young children develop and learn and in what is known about effective early education (NAEYC, 2008).
3. *Differentiated Instruction*: An approach to teaching in which educators actively plan for students' differences so that all student can best learn (ASCD, 2017).
4. *Phonological awareness*: Individual's awareness of the sound structure of words.
5. *Preschool*: A school for children who are usually younger than those attending elementary school and before Kindergarten.
6. *Readiness*: The act of being prepared as well as the willingness to engage.
7. *Redshirting*: Delaying entry of a Kindergarten eligible child by one year with the assumption that it will allow the child more time to mature and develop (Weil, 2007).
8. *Vertical Alignment*: Aligning developmentally appropriate practice and curriculum content across grade levels.
9. *Zone of Proximal Development*: A level of development attained when learners engage in social behaviors (Blanton, 1998).

Delimitations

This study was confined by the following delimitations:

1. The participants surveyed were restricted to Kindergarten teachers who were employed in two rural Northeast Tennessee school systems; therefore, it is limited by the demographics of those school systems.

2. The two school systems used were located within the same county; therefore, it is limited by the demographics of the county; therefore the results of this study may not be generalizable to other settings.

Limitations

The limitations of the study include those listed below:

1. The number and type of participants who chose to respond might limit the study by not including others who had the opportunity to respond but chose not to.
2. My experience as a Kindergarten teacher might produce some bias that could limit the study.
3. My wife's experience as a Kindergarten teacher might produce some bias that could limit the study.

Chapter Summary

Many factors impact a student's readiness for Kindergarten. Chronological age has determined when students enter Kindergarten. Furthermore, controversies surrounding whether preschool should be required of all students emerge as children come to Kindergarten at various levels of readiness. In addition, gender is always a factor as boys and girls continue to be compared in readiness. Although there may never be a perfect system in allowing students to enter Kindergarten at just the right time, discrepancies exist and students enter at various levels of readiness. This quantitative study was conducted to examine how teachers' perceive the readiness of a child to enter Kindergarten as impacted by age, gender, socioeconomic status, and preschool experience prior to any interaction with the Kindergarten teacher.

Overview of the Study

This study is organized into five chapters. Chapter 1 includes the introduction, statement of the problem, significance of the study, and research questions. Chapter 1 also consists of definition of terms, delimitations, limitations, and the overview of the study. Chapter 2 reports the review of the related literature. Chapter 3 clarifies the methodology used in the study. Chapter 4 presents the findings and the data analysis. Chapter 5 presents the summary, findings, conclusions, and recommendations for this study.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

There is a wide range of literature associated with student readiness for school. The research discusses various types of pre-kindergarten programs and their success rate, age, socioeconomics, and gender.

According to Hatcher et al. (2012), preparing students to be ready is the purpose of school. The preparedness allows children to develop the literacy skills and establish routines. Their suggestion is to make sure that the communication to parents and teachers is thorough when determining a child's readiness for school.

Lilles, Furlong, Quirk, Felix, and Dominguez (2009) discussed how important the transition to kindergarten is as this impacts the students' academic achievement. The Kindergarten Student Entrance Profile (KSEP) is a school district developed universal screener used to assess children's readiness for school. Lilles et al. correlated the Kindergarten entry scores with those of grades 1 and 2. The results indicated that students who performed in the advanced levels on the KSEP screener had pre-kindergarten experiences. This was especially evident in minority populations. Lilles et al. also noted that the results of the KSEP provide teachers current levels of performance. This is reliable information to teachers and parents about a child's readiness for Kindergarten.

An initial test (screener) prior to students entering Kindergarten provides a valuable tool for teachers to use as they begin understanding individual student needs. Teachers are able to verify within the test if children have had preschool experience. Although these programs and tools are valuable, children still have other needs to enhance the social, emotional, cognitive, and physical development, especially students with disadvantaged backgrounds. Le, Natarah,

Barney, Setodji, and Gershwin (2006) discussed how important the investment is in non-academic readiness skills. The investment not only impacts students' skill levels needed for Kindergarten but also bridges the gap between minority groups and white children. On average, white students enter Kindergarten with better fine motor skills than do blacks or Hispanics, and are ranked higher in self-control, interpersonal skills, and approaches to learning than are blacks. The results showed that the black-white achievement gap in reading disappeared with the inclusion of nonacademic readiness skills in the regression model, which suggests that racial and ethnic differences in achievement might be narrowed if we could enhance the nonacademic readiness skills such as social and emotional development of minority students, particularly black students.

In a similar study, O'Brien and Dervarics (2007) found that children with a lower socioeconomic status are often further behind their peers academically and socially. As a result, many states have sought to bridge this readiness gap through pre-kindergarten programs. As noted previously, model studies such as High/Scope Perry and Chicago Child-Parent Centers have demonstrated achievement in promoting readiness of low-income children, particularly minorities. Among more recent studies, several have shown significant gains for pre-kindergarten among these low-income populations. A five-state study of pre-kindergarten programs found statistically significant gains for pre-kindergarten children in early language, literacy, and math development.

Ackerman and Barnett (2005) reported that children are put into situations that would seem to promote success in Kindergarten, but have birthdates that make them considerably younger than their classmates. Although children may be chronologically eligible for

Kindergarten, teachers and parents may question if children are “ready” for kindergarten based on their academic and social preparedness.

Parents who question whether their child is ready for Kindergarten may decide redshirting is the best option. Marshall (2003) discussed the possibility of delaying Kindergarten entry for students who are not quite ready. Marshall’s findings discussed how maturity levels of children have made several families delay the start date of Kindergarten. The families are influenced by the culture of the school community. On average, delaying Kindergarten entry has no long-term effect on academic achievement. By about third grade, any early differences disappear. Marshall concluded by saying the combination of youngness and low ability may have negative consequences for achievement.

Daniels and Shumow (2002) explained how teachers’ perspectives and knowledge about child development contribute to classroom practices. For example, “evidence suggests that teachers’ views of the child’s innate intelligence and natural propensity to learn and develop may shape how they view their roles as educators and their classroom practices” (p. 15).

Furthermore, teachers’ perspectives of the social child impact teaching practices. Daniels and Shumow told us how teachers must also understand that each student is an individual who is developing a sense of self and relationships in a variety of contexts, notably the family, the school, and the community. Taking this perspective should encourage consideration of a wide range of possible ways to intervene, adapt instruction, and respond flexibly to an individual child’s social and emotional needs as well as his or her intellectual needs. Finally, when it comes to cultural or diversity perspectives, teachers find themselves least knowledgeable.

Daniels and Shumow also indicated that novice teachers’ views of children are often inaccurate because they assume that their students possess learning styles, aptitudes, interests, and problems

that are similar to their own. Novice teachers' assumptions may create larger learning gaps as a result of this inaccuracy.

History of Kindergarten and Preschool

The first Kindergarten was established in 1839 in Blankenburg, Germany by Friedrich Froebel. Froebel was greatly influenced by the work of German, Roman Froebel, who was driven to establish early childhood education because of his difficulties in school at a young age. Although he struggled early on in his own education, he continued to study a variety of subjects including physics, mathematics, mineralogy, chemistry, natural history, and languages which restored confidence in learning. Froebel established a school in 1817 in Keilhau, Germany, based on the work of Swiss educator, Johan Heinrich Pestalozzi. In 1826, he wrote *The Education of Man* and *Mother Play and Nursery Songs*. This work laid the foundation for early childhood education. There were many years put into the development of the Kindergarten concept. Froebel created 20 educational materials and developed finger plays throughout this development (Moore, 2002). He stated that the classroom should be filled with plants and flowers which encouraged curiosity (Svensen, 2011). Froebel stated that the classroom should be a "child's garden," hence the name Kindergarten. In 1844, Froebel left the school to continue the Kindergarten movement throughout Europe (Moore, 2002).

Margarethe Myer Schurz, a German born woman who studied under Froebel, brought the idea of Kindergarten to the United States in 1856. Schurz came to America by marriage of Carl Schurz, and the couple settled down in Watertown, Wisconsin. Schurz led her own two children and three other neighborhood children in games, songs, and group activities in German. Schurz eventually moved into a small building where she continued until 1857. Because Carl Schurz

was a politician who travelled frequently, Schurz was able to spread the successes of Kindergarten's benefits. The families of the children who attended Kindergarten were so impressed with the behavior and leadership skills developed. The Kindergarten concept quickly spread (McCann, 1998). In 1859, Elizabeth Peabody met Schurz and was interested in Kindergarten education. Peabody went to Germany to further learn about Schurz's ideas to incorporate into an American Kindergarten. Upon her return, Peabody corresponded with William T. Harris, Superintendent of the St. Louis public schools, about the possibility of starting a Kindergarten. Susan Blow was Peabody's first Kindergarten student in the U.S. In 1873, the first American Kindergarten opened in St. Louis, Missouri under the direction of Peabody (Muelle, 2013).

By the early 1900s, the Kindergarten movement was progressive. Controversy over the Froebelian principles arose as some felt that the rules were too rigid. The care for all individuals to learn and grow is what will make up society. Dewey (1976) explained, as educational movements occur, it is important to take a broad or social view. This allows for those who are a part of the changes to make specific adjustments in the details along the way instead of radical change. Patty Smith Hill drew from John Dewey's concepts and contended that children's interests should correspond with major educational experiences. As a result, the new Kindergarten was developed and quickly spread throughout every major city. Teachers taught double sessions, were not able to interact with parents as much as they did before, and subject areas were introduced such as nature study, home and community life, literature, music, and art (Muelle, 2013).

Throughout the 1920s two groups debated over childhood education. Behaviorists, Edward Thorndike and John Broadus Watson, posited that motherly love in the classroom should

be replaced by learning objectives or habit formation. The opposing theory of Dewey focused more on social education. As a result, behavioral education became an emphasis and began to dominate (Shapiro, 1983).

By the mid-1900s, urgency in the U.S. educational system for improvement became of high interests to all as a result of the Russian launch of Sputnik in 1957. The acceleration of academic skills was included in the preschool and Kindergarten programs to prepare children for later academic success. Reading, arithmetic, and writing became the focus for some parents, but some still wanted to concentrate on the nature of the children and less on the process of learning.

In 1983, the U.S. Department of Education publication of *A Nation at Risk* focused on putting education first. The goal was to develop the talents and skills of all students from early childhood through adulthood. The report declared that expectations need to be raised within all school systems. The result focused more on academics within the Kindergarten classroom. By the late 1900s, enrollment of all five year old children in Kindergarten throughout the country had risen to 96% (Muelle, 2013).

On January 8th, 2002, President George W. Bush signed into law the No Child Left Behind Act (Hoffmann & Jorgensen, 2003). This law continued support for increasing academic rigor in the classroom by including accountability measures, local control, parental involvement, and funding. The purpose was to figure out how schools were performing and what supports schools needed to ensure they were performing at high levels. Although the *No Child Left Behind Act* required all states to assess third through eighth grade annually in achievement tests, the emphasis on rigor trickled all the way down to Kindergarten. The Kindergarten classroom of today is teaching what was once first grade material.

Curriculum Shifts

Froebel's original design of Kindergarten including play and building with blocks has transformed dramatically since the Kindergarten concept has been adopted in America in the last century. When Kindergarten was adopted in the U.S., the purpose was to prepare children for their academic future and to promote their natural development. Today, academic learning is the priority as some see this as the key to success (Bartolini & Wasem, 1985).

When Kindergarten first came to the U.S., Kindergartens were child-centered and focused on learning by doing, natural experiences, and development of the whole child through free play. The teachers focused on developing a curriculum around the needs and interests of the child. This type of curriculum is referred to as developmentally oriented curriculum (Bartolini & Wasem, 1985). As Kindergarten grew and became a part of the regular elementary school during the first half of the twentieth century, pressure to conform to the didactic, academic primary school model persisted (Cuban, 1992). Researchers and the public in general state that the earlier a child starts on academics, the greater the chances one has to have a successful academic future (Barnett, 2002). Goldstein (2006) examined the educational policies associated with the curriculum shifts over the years which include the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB). Goldstein claimed the challenges of mastering academic skills that have been primarily associated with the upper grades had trickled down to primary grades and have impacted what is being taught in Kindergarten. Kindergarten teachers are now teaching material that was once taught in first grade. Goldstein conducted a qualitative study that focused on two teachers who have taught before the push of academic standards in Kindergarten. The study compared the teachers' perspectives of Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP) versus standards. Goldstein concluded the difficulties lie in merging the two, academic rigor and natural

development through play, into a cohesive curriculum for Kindergarten students. The challenges are complex as the two teachers tried to adapt to the ways of state-mandated standards which constrains their use of professional judgment, limits their choice, flexibility, and freedom.

Kenny (2013) described how this change in education with the inclusion of Common Core for Kindergarten children takes the joy out of teaching and Kindergarten itself. Kenny described that children are breaking down into tears, anxious, and frustrated. The push of these academic standards lead to an increase of rote learning and a decrease in active play and exploration. The standards themselves were designed to evaluate the quality of instruction in our country; teaching students to think independently, work with complex texts, solve problems, and explain their thinking in a clear compelling way.

As new standards are continuously changing, the 21st century skills are as well. Tsoukalas (2012) conducted a qualitative study on understanding how 21st century learning of skills of collaboration, problem solving, effective communication, and decision making can be integrated into Kindergarten curriculum. She found that the role of the teacher must change to a facilitator and one who models appropriate behaviors and skills needed to be successful. Although the curriculum is more standards-based, it is important to balance the rote learning with discovery and problem solving development. Tsoukalas discussed this role as a Problem Based Learning Theory (PBL). In addition, the ideas also include learners encouraging and supporting one another throughout their experiences which leads to all learners being successful.

Grant (2015) studied Kindergarten teachers' attitudes, roles, and responsibilities toward implementing the standards-based core curriculum. This qualitative study examined the teachers' perceptions of meeting the demands of new curriculum standards. In conclusion to the study, many teachers found that they needed more support from their supervisors when taking on

new standards or any new ventures. Many of the teachers felt rushed and had little time to implement the standards effectively. Therefore, a recommendation to the administration would be to allow more time for teachers to plan effectively when implementing new standards. Additional professional development, additional planning time, and possible surveys to identify areas of support could be a step for administrators moving forward. An additional recommendation would be that professional development with a specialist who is skilled in working with the new set of standards may increase understanding and lessen anxiety of teachers.

Due to increased demands in academic rigor in Kindergarten, the risk of developmentally appropriate practice and assessment methods are questioned (Bobeczko, 2015). Participants in Bobeczko's (2015) study advocated for transition to a more child centered classroom which focuses on experimental learning with student interests and abilities as the catalyst for curriculum design. When examining standardized testing's effects on Kindergarten, the participants in this study overwhelmingly agreed that the basis for such curriculum, such as the Common Core State Standards, are extremely developmentally inappropriate for students of this age. Participants found an extremely large amount of content being assigned to the Kindergarten students. This puts a lot of stress and frustration, not only on the teachers, but students as well. Furthermore, teachers are being forced to teach students outside their zone of proximal development in an attempt to frontload test taking skills in the first two years of education. Bobeczko also found that there were no free play centers, no more play kitchens, wooden houses, and no more milk carton castles. Participants in this study confirmed that play activities are replaced by more seat time, counterproductive worksheets, computer time, and

individualized one-on-one assessment time with the teacher. Furthermore, there are limitations on student centered activities throughout Kindergarten classrooms.

The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC)

As a way to guide parents in making decisions in selecting early childhood programs such as preschool or Kindergarten, the NAEYC (2008) created a set of standards. The purpose of the NAEYC is to promote high-quality education for all young children from birth to age eight. The association has about 70,000 members. The vision of the NAEYC states: all young children thrive and learn in a society dedicated to ensuring they each reach their full potential. The NAEYC (2008) standards are as follows:

1. Relationships Program Standard: The program promotes positive relationships among all children and adults to encourage each child's sense of individual worth and belonging as part of a community and to foster each child's ability to contribute as a responsible community member.
2. Curriculum Program Standard: The program implements a curriculum that is consistent with its goals for children and promotes learning and development in each of the following areas: social, emotional, physical, language, and cognitive.
3. Teaching Program Standard: The program uses developmentally, culturally, and linguistically appropriate and effective teaching approaches that enhance each child's learning and development in the context of the program's curriculum goals.
4. Assessment of Child Progress Program Standard: The program is informed by ongoing systematic, formal, and informal assessment approaches to provide information on children's learning and development. These assessments occur within the context of

reciprocal communications with families and with sensitivity to the cultural contexts in which children develop. Assessment results are used to benefit children by informing sound decisions about children, teaching, and program improvement.

5. Health Program Standard: The program promotes the nutrition and health of children and protects children and staff from illness and injury.
6. Teachers Program Standard: The program employs and supports a teaching staff that has the educational qualifications, knowledge, and professional commitment necessary to promote children's learning and development and to support families' diverse needs and interests.
7. Families Program Standard: The program establishes and maintains collaborative relationships with each child's family to foster children's development in all settings. These relationships are sensitive to family composition, language, and culture.
8. Community Relationships Program Standard: The program establishes relationships with and uses the resources of the children's communities to support the achievement of program goals.
9. Physical Environment Program Standard: The program has a safe and healthful environment that provides appropriate and well-maintained indoor and outdoor physical environments. The environment includes facilities, equipment, and materials to facilitate child and staff learning and development.
10. Leadership and Management Program Standard: The program effectively implements policies, procedures, and systems that support stable staff and strong personnel, fiscal, and program management so all children, families, and staff have high quality experiences.

School Readiness

Ultimately, the teachers and parents make the decisions on whether children are ready for Kindergarten or not. Hatcher et al. (2012) conducted a qualitative study analyzing teachers' and parents' perspectives of student readiness for Kindergarten. Thirteen teachers and sixteen parents were interviewed.

According to Hatcher et al. (2012), the majority of participants advocated that preschool goals should align with kindergarten goals. Teachers and parents viewed preschool as preparation programs for Kindergarten. In addition, teachers and parents noted the importance of school routines such as waiting in line, following directions, and participating in large group activities to emulate academic environments.

Based on The Child Welfare League of America, an individual child's school readiness is determined in large part by the environment in which he or she lives and grows (High, 2008). The Welfare League of America concluded that a child should have five basic needs to be ready for school:

1. Proper nutrition, economic security, adequate clothing and shelter, appropriate education, and primary and preventative physical and mental health services.
2. Strong nurturing relationships with their families and communities.
3. Opportunities to develop their talents and skills to contribute to their community.
4. Protection from injury, abuse, neglect, and violence.
5. Need for healing and emotional support.

Furthermore, High (2008) discussed the inappropriate use of school readiness testing. High claims that there are six misconceptions regarding school readiness. These misconceptions are that learning happens only at school, readiness is a specific condition within each child,

readiness can be measured easily, readiness is mostly a function of time and maturity, children are ready when they can sit quietly at a desk, and children who are not ready do not belong in school. This has kept children out of school rather than ensuring they would be ready when they reach Kindergarten.

In a similar article relating to school readiness, Moreno (2013) discussed Kindergarten screening programs to determine readiness levels. In general, the readiness screeners measure the child's ability to follow structured daily routines, dress independently, play with other children, and follow rules. With this knowledge, Kindergarten teachers should be able to differentiate instruction according to each child's readiness levels.

Moreno brought to the table parental roles to help their children develop the necessary skills to be successful in school. Reading books on a daily basis, expecting children to listen and follow directions, providing games and toys that encourage interaction and problem solving, daily routines to help with consistency, social skills conversations, and discussing concerns with the child's pediatrician are among the few parental roles that Moreno described as beneficial to school readiness. If parents will act on a few of these practices, the readiness levels of their children will be enhanced for the academic challenges that face students when entering kindergarten.

On another note, although parental impacts have a large role in a child's readiness for Kindergarten, pre-kindergarten programs have benefits in the readiness levels as well. Many of the pre-kindergarten programs are fulfilling the lack of prerequisite skills that some children would miss if they were not to attend prekindergarten classes. Collett (2013) studied the impact on the social emotional development skills that are gained in pre-kindergarten programs in relation to school readiness. Collett found the perceptions of the six Kindergarten teachers who

were interviewed indicated that children who have pre-kindergarten experiences have higher levels of the seven social emotional development key ingredients of school readiness than students who did not attend a prekindergarten experience. The key social emotional ingredients Collett describes are as follows:

1. Confidence
2. Curiosity
3. Intentionality
4. Relatedness
5. Self-control
6. Cooperativeness
7. Capacity to communicate

The ability of children to have these seven social emotional ingredients is important prior to entering the Kindergarten classroom to have the opportunity to achieve optimal success.

Many children do not have the parental investment or prekindergarten experiences that would help with their developmental levels to be ready for Kindergarten. Ziol-Guest and McKenna (2013) described how early childhood housing instability impacts school readiness. They found that instability is not negatively associated with language and literacy outcome, but is with behavior problems among five year olds. Furthermore, the child's socioeconomic status is associated with greater attention problems, but only among poor children. Being able to relate, have self-control, and communicate appropriately are all important behavioral skills directly associated with readiness factors that impact student success. Without the parental investment or prekindergarten experiences, children are often learning these behaviors along with the academic

rigors in the classroom. This puts a significant burden on Kindergarten teachers and intensifies the importance of differentiated practices in the classroom.

Research has supported the impacts of parents, prekindergarten, and socioeconomic status on child readiness for Kindergarten. Another factor that might impact readiness levels is gender. It is a common understanding among educators that girls mature faster than boys. Whitehead (2006) argued that girls come to school better prepared to meet its demands than do boys. The various skills that girls experience prior to entering Kindergarten and the skills that boys are experiencing are completely different. Whitehead claimed that boys are mainly encouraged to engage in sports and physical activities as young children. Boys are typically actively involved in outdoor play, wrestling around, and riding bikes whereas girls are engaged in sophisticated communication skills and intellectual tasks. In addition, girls show more sex-role flexibility as stereotypical gender roles push boys further away from the fear of being too feminine.

Brockmeyer, Berkule-Silberman, Dreyer, Mendelsohn, and Morrow (2011) discussed the impact of student readiness factors on literacy development. They specifically looked at responsive parenting in the home to drive language development. The program that was used is the Parent-Child Home Program (PCHP). The program helped low and middle-income children develop language skills through structured play activities. The study indicated children and families who participated in the PCHP improved school readiness measured by cognitive skills. The program also had long-term impacts such as reduced high school dropout rates.

Additionally, Playing and Learning Strategies (PALS) was another program similar to PCHP that has demonstrated success in promoting school readiness. PALS representatives visited the homes of children who were of the low to middle-income households to have

conversations with parents about their interactions with their children. They worked on responsive parenting behaviors, video-taped the mothers' interactions with the children, and then had a reflection session to encourage self-reflection regarding parenting. The PALS program supports significant impacts on student readiness for school but the struggle lies in the cost of the program preventing interventions population wide (Brockmeyer et al., 2011).

Redshirting

In alignment with the previous research supporting that girls are more prepared for the rigors of Kindergarten, Bassok and Reardon (2013) found between 4% and 5.5% of children delay Kindergarten; most of them being boys. Whether the rationale for delaying children involves lack of self-control, communication skills, or a parent's intuition about their child's readiness, children are redshirted for a variety of reasons. In addition, schools that serve larger proportions of white and high-income children have far higher rates of delayed entry or redshirting. They further concluded that parents' decisions to retain children are dependent upon the relative position within the kindergarten cohort.

Academic redshirting has been used since the 1970s and rapidly grew in the 1980s. By 1995, an estimated 9% of first and second grade students had been redshirted (Graue & DiPerna, 2000). Graue and DiPerna (2008) explored several different issues about redshirting. Their study had a sample size of over 8,000 students in the state of Wisconsin. The results of the research found that a large percentage of many areas around the state were choosing to redshirt their children to meet the higher educational demands of Kindergarten. In addition, Wisconsin had a September 1st cut-off date for Kindergarten entry. The data showed that children with birthdays just before the cut-off date had a higher chance of retention prior to third grade.

Parents who redshirt their children often question whether their own children can be successful with the academic and social demands of today's Kindergarten classroom.

Many policymakers, educators, and parents disagree on the practice of academic redshirting being effective (McNamara, Scissions, & Simonot, 2004). The skill development obtained in Kindergarten plays a major role in the academic and social trajectories of young children. Reading achievement has been a major factor in determining the success in the development of emotional and social adjustment. Most children who are in question as to their readiness for Kindergarten often catch their peers by the time they hit the third grade.

McNamara et al. (2004) studied how the chronological age is associated with letter recognition and phonological awareness. They concluded that chronological age is associated with letter recognition but not with phonological awareness. These results indicated that there may be a skill that is required largely through experience with letters and their corresponding sounds. Although Kindergarten children that were younger compared similarly to older Kindergarten children in phonological awareness skills, younger children were less skilled in the areas of letter-sound relationships. The implications of this result is children who are redshirted will have a positive effect on letter-sound relationships only. Children who are not redshirted may have difficulties in letter-sound relationships but not phonological awareness.

Although academic screeners could support in decision making with academic redshirting, Kindergarten teachers do not typically advise parents on whether to redshirt their children or not. The decision to academic redshirt is ultimately up to the parent or guardian. The increase in academic rigor in Kindergarten, physical and social development concerns, and relative age implications have parents choosing to redshirt their children (Range, Dougan, & Pijanowski, 2011). Range et al. (2011) are unclear on the ramifications of whether redshirting is

beneficial to student outcomes. Also, schools must be clear with the parents on the readiness assessments or screeners. The information that the schools are awarded after completion of the readiness assessments or screeners will provide the parents the appropriate documentation as to whether their child is ready or not for Kindergarten. Any major concerns that come to light after completion of the readiness assessment or screener will need to be clearly communicated with parents. They recommend that it is the responsibilities of the schools to understand the outcomes associated with redshirting and share how the parents' concerns about maturity, social development, physical development, etc. would be handled in the classroom or via school personnel. Kindergarten teachers will need to develop differentiated lessons to meet all students and address all social and academic needs within the classroom regardless of who is redshirted.

Dougan (2014) studied how relative age affects the difference between the oldest and youngest children in class. Parents who are choosing to redshirt their children are doing so because they would like their children to be among the oldest group of children in class as opposed to the youngest group of children. Dougan's research found evidence that older children increase the potential for higher reading and math skills and lessens the child's risk of being retained in elementary school. Having said that, redshirting a child in Kindergarten does not have the same effect as retaining a child after Kindergarten. After children begin school, they find themselves socially and emotionally involved with a particular group of students resulting in more parents being supportive of redshirting in Kindergarten as opposed to retaining in grades after Kindergarten. Parents in this study found that the older the children are the better chance they have at being successful. Children's maturity levels, academic readiness, and social skill development is stronger. Furthermore, as children enter higher grades such as middle and

high school, they have a clearer opportunity to develop better coping strategies, handle peer pressure, and be involved in leadership opportunities to project their future.

Dougan recommended that a great deal of communication between parents and Kindergarten teachers, using specific and substantial pieces of evidence need to be made in order to make appropriate decisions that ultimately decide a child's path moving forward.

Furthermore, children who are redshirted are more comfortable with the decision when their parents and Kindergarten teachers are positive about redshirting. Framing the decision in a positive light is important and supportive to a more positive reaction from children. Parents who are uncomfortable about the decision to redshirt and decided to redshirt may negatively impact the decision process to redshirt their children.

Chronological Age

Gladwell (2008) discussed circumstances that revolve around extremely successful people. These extremely successful people are considered *outliers*. He claimed that if we want to understand how some people thrive and others do not, we need to look at various factors around them such as family structures, birthplace, and even birth age. One of his examples discussed an eleven year old Canadian hockey team called the Medicine Hat Tigers. In many sports there is strong competition and a system for selecting the best players. Players are evaluated from year to year and only the best of the best ultimately make the team. You cannot buy your way onto the team. It does not matter who your mother or father is or the business they run. If you have the ability and are working toward developing that ability then you will be successful. When deciding on the Medicine Hat Tigers team, the coach reviewed the roster and noticed something interesting. The majority of the players on the team had birthdays that were

January, February, and March. He did some further research and found that the majority of the teams in the Canadian Hockey league have players of that same birth month. In further research, the reason for this has everything to do with the cut-off date to play in the Canadian Hockey League, which is January first. A boy who turns ten on January second could be playing alongside with another boy who does not turn ten until the end of the year. Gladwell explained that there is a major discrepancy in the maturity of the two boys and that is the reason why those that are born in January have a significant advantage over those born later in the year.

Gladwell connected the previous discussion on the Canadian Hockey League to schools. He recommended that schools should recognize that the month a child is born is significant to their development and readiness. Elementary and middle schools should place students born in January through April in one class, May through August in another class, and September through December in the third class. The students would then be able to learn and compete with other students of the same maturity level. Gladwell claimed that the current educational system places students at a significant disadvantage.

Gladwell's ideas have not made it to the educational system yet but many states are recognizing the challenges younger children are facing and have changed the cut-off dates so that children can attend Kindergarten in the months of September and August resulting in children being older when entering Kindergarten. Teachers often cite age as a significant factor when describing children who struggle in Kindergarten (Furlong & Quirk, 2011). Furlong and Quirk (2011) conducted a study to determine if chronological age, gender, and preschool experience had an impact on student readiness for school for Hispanic children. The results of the study indicated that chronological age and gender had a slightly significant impact on school readiness upon Kindergarten entry whereas preschool experiences had a moderately significant impact on

school readiness upon Kindergarten entry. Children who had preschool experiences rated significantly higher in terms of their school readiness than those who had no preschool experience. Furthermore, the youngest children who had preschool experience were rated as more ready than older children who have not had preschool experiences. The implications of this study showed that preschool experience and chronological age were important influences on readiness upon entry; however, once children were able to get in the K-12 system, school readiness level was the primary factor that significantly predicted subsequent academic achievement. Furlong and Quirk's study does not support the practices of academic redshirting.

In another study relating to chronological age and readiness, the findings are similar. The National Center for Education Statistics report of an early childhood longitudinal study found that older Kindergarten children, for the vast majority, outperform students who are younger in reading. However, the study also found that few of the youngest children scored in the highest quartile of reading scores. Furthermore, the study concluded that the effects of chronological age lessened as time went on. By the time children hit the 4th grade, reading achievement of younger children was about the same as their older counterparts (McNamara & Simonot, 2004).

In contrast to McNamara and Simonot (2004), Elder and Lubotsky (2009) claimed that older children were able to achieve more academic progress while in Kindergarten than younger children. Specifically, the study showed that younger students had an increased chance of repeating in Kindergarten through second grade.

Watts (2010) discussed how chronological age does not indicate that a child is ready for school. Schools consider various behavioral and developmental factors that impact students' readiness. Watts claimed that developmental screening could and should be designed around developmental age instead of chronological age. Schools would have more success if they were

to place children in the appropriate developmental class. When considering factors of behavioral and developmental readiness, the whole child needs to be assessed. Whatever the chronological age is, the developmental age could vary based on social, emotional, and behavioral readiness factors.

Similarly, Shaw-Cohen (2003) explained that most experts agree that readiness is not guaranteed by chronological age or even a strong foundation of scholastic fundamentals, but based more on the development of the child as a whole. Show-Cohen used Grassland Elementary School as a model of how to determine if a child was ready for school. Parents, who were about to enroll their children at Grassland, participated in a variety of experiences prior to their child actually arriving at the school. Parents and their prospective students were scheduled to take a tour of the school, view classrooms and activities within the classroom, ask and answer questions during tours, ride the bus to and from school, look through curriculum materials including art and music, etc. The expectations were laid out for parents throughout the tour as to what children needed to be prepared for when entering the Kindergarten classroom. Children should be able to work independently, listen to a story in a group setting, write names, and have some knowledge of letter sounds. These expectations were all given to parents prior to each child's entry. From that point, the parents were able to make informed decisions that truly supported a smooth transition to the classroom. Some parents may decide at that moment whether it will be valuable to redshirt their child. Show-Cohen's example disregarded whether chronological age is important in deciding if a child is ready for school; the real focus is on the child's developmental age and readiness.

In looking further into a child's educational experience, a study conducted by McDaniel (2012) examined the effects of chronological age on math achievement scores in the seventh

grade. The study showed significant influences on gender and economically disadvantaged status. Students who were delayed or redshirted in Kindergarten performed significantly lower than the traditional cohort groups on the seventh grade math assessment. Also, there was not a significant difference between those students who were retained and those students that were redshirted. However, male students outperformed female students in all chronological age groups. Male students who were redshirted also performed more on level with male students of the traditional and accelerated groups rather than the retained groups. In contrast, girls who were redshirted performed similarly to those that were retained. The conclusions found that gender has a significant impact on whether a student should be redshirted in Kindergarten. Furthermore, redshirted students, not economically disadvantaged students, performed similarly to the whole chronological age groups. The decisions to use chronological age as a factor of readiness levels is an important decision for parents as this effects the lifetime of success throughout a child's academic careers.

Gender

Could girls have a significant advantage academically entering Kindergarten over boys? Below, Skinner, Fearington, and Sorrell (2010) conducted research on the gender differences in early literacy. They analyzed Kindergarten through fifth grade students on basic early literacy skill probes. This included 1,218 general and special education students; 606 males and 612 females. The results of their study suggested that the significant gender differences in earlier grades were not as significant in later grades. In addition, the results indicated that educators may want to implement procedures that address reading fluency skills in fourth or as early as

third grades. Furthermore, choice in reading material enhancing motivation will help in enhancing reading fluency skills.

Simerly (2014) conducted a quantitative study on teachers' perceptions of student readiness for Kindergarten. Her findings indicated that pre-kindergarten and Kindergarten teachers do not perceive that children's readiness for Kindergarten could be determined by gender. Simerly's findings support the notion that there is not a significant difference in readiness levels based upon gender.

Gropper, Hinitz, Sprung, and Forschl (2011) described the push-down approach to academics as a hindrance to the developmental capacities and needs of young children, especially young boys. Gropper et al. suggested that early childhood teachers need to find ways to address the needs of the whole child. They argued that too many early childhood school programs, including Kindergarten, were veering away from a play-centered curriculum and moving more toward a rote learning curriculum similar to first grade. This push-down approach to increase academic rigor in the early grades is a result of standardized testing beginning in the third grade. The high-stakes testing from third grade and beyond has put intense pressure on the entire educational process. Accountability measures are solely impacted by this on the state mandated assessments. The authors claimed that boys typically enter early childhood classrooms less developmentally mature than girls in terms of literacy and social skills. Play is extremely important for boys because it allows for the physical outlet necessary for development. It is important to allow all types of play to develop skills naturally. Furthermore, play-centered environments allow for many gross motor skills to be developed. These experiences could be attained through painting, working with clay, assembling puzzles, building with blocks, building with Legos, and other construction toys. These types of play have been stifled in recent years

due to the academic push-down approach. Furthermore, boys are not able to engage in play and develop those important skills as they are being forced to sit and listen. The result could lead to more behavioral issues.

The Alliance for Childhood identified 12 key modes of play which include gross motor skills, fine motor skills, mastery, rule-based, construction, make-believe, symbolic, language, arts, sensory, rough and tumble, and risk-taking (Miller & Almon, 2009). The Alliance encourages teachers to be aware of the modes and include them in their practices for the growth of all children. Teachers will have to balance how these skills and the academic skills will be taught and developed throughout the Kindergarten experience.

A study conducted by Ready, LoGerfo, Burkam, and Lee (2005), identified the challenges that boys have as the academics in Kindergarten have increased over the years. Girls, on the other hand, have had success with the academic shifts as girls play structures are different. The gender differences in children in Kindergarten literacy skills were substantial. Ready et al. assessed 16,883 Kindergarteners on their cognitive skills throughout structured phone interviews with parents and written surveys with children's teachers. The results supported girls having stronger literacy skills in addition to learning more over the entire Kindergarten year. The study also suggested that girls have a more attentiveness to task persistence in early literacy than boys resulting in a more focused approach and increased learning. This is a result of the gender differences in play structures.

Although research shows that there is a significant difference in readiness between girls and boys in entering Kindergarten, a study by Piotrowski (2011) showed no long term impact in a child's academic career. Piotrowski's study displayed the results of a mandated third grade reading test. The results indicated that there is no significant impact or evidence that girls

outperformed boys by the time they were in the third grade. However, the results indicated that younger students performed better on the reading section of the third grade reading achievement assessments than older students.

Kelly (2010) discussed school readiness factors among multiple contexts. The qualitative study examined the perceptions of educators on the factors of student readiness. One of those factors is gender. Through her qualitative study, she found that boys have been considered less able to meet school expectations for social competence and self-regulation than girls, are considered immature and less ready for school learning than girls, and girls are more conforming to school expectations and rules for appropriate behavior. However, boys are described as being more active and physical as compared to girls. Educators did determine that boys and girls needed to learn the same things; rather they just enter school with different competencies.

Preschool

The choice to send children to preschool has increased dramatically over the last decade. Both private and government supported agencies typically have a waiting list prior to entry of their program. A large part of this push is the increase in academic rigor in early grades including Kindergarten through third grade (Barnett, 2015).

There are various models of preschool that are available for children to attend. Morrison (2007) described various preschool models that are widely adopted which include; Montessori, High/Scope, Reggio Emilia, and Waldorf. The Montessori features include a prepared environment, self-directed learning, multiage environments, manipulating materials, working with others, and using all senses. High/Scope features include a plan-do-review as a teaching cycle, children determine curriculum, and a promotion of active learning. Reggio Emilia

features include and emergent curriculum that is based on children's interest and experiences, project oriented, active learning, and focused on art and design. Finally, Waldorf features include the development of the head, heart, and hands, arts, promotes imagination, teacher follows children through adolescence, learning by doing, noncompetitive, and each developmental phases of children are followed. Morrison explained that the most important aspect of early childhood education is the teacher and child working together in order to learn with and from each other.

Farran, Hughart, and Lipsey's (2015) study of the Voluntary Pre-K for Tennessee Act (TN-VPK) which has increased the state's investment and provided greater access to state pre-kindergarten programs, tracked 3,000 randomly selected children from pre-kindergarten through third grade. The study reported the effect of the TN-VPK each consecutive year until students took the TCAP. At the conclusion of pre-kindergarten, the results indicated that children had significantly higher achievement scores on all achievement subtests including literacy, language, and math. For each consecutive year, the results indicated less significant scores by the time the children reached third grade. Farran et al. concluded that over time, educators did not build on the skills children brought with them from year to year. However, this Act allowed 15,000 more children access to preschool.

Moore (2003) described the various impacts of preschool programs on Kindergarten readiness using the Metropolitan Reading Test (MRT). The MRT was analyzed to determine readiness levels of five areas. The five areas included visual discrimination of beginning consonant sounds, sound letter correspondence, quantitative reasoning skills/mathematical concepts, story comprehension, and visual discrimination. Of those that attended preschool, pre-reading skills were ranked in the 17th percentile above students who had not attended preschool

who ranked in the 7% percentile. However, story comprehension skill area had minimal differences in those that attended preschool and those that did not attend preschool.

Barnett (2015) discussed how preschools are not universally functioning at high levels to prepare students for Kindergarten. He mentioned the need for universal publically funded preschool programs for all children, not just the select few who qualify. Barnett argued that government preschool programs restrict the eligibility to children in low-income families only. Many middle class families are being restricted from access due to the high cost of private preschool programs. In addition, although government spending has gone up, the attendance in government preschool programs is minimally increasing. This shows differences between the government spending and enrollment in these programs. Regardless, the educational quality of preschool programs in both private and government owned programs needs to increase.

Cascio and Schanzenbach (2013) cited President Barrack Obama's 2013 State of the Union Address in which Obama's "Pre-School for All" initiative attempted to increase the number of 4-year-olds that attended public preschool programs. This particular initiative was said to be funded by \$75 billion as a federal investment over 10 years. In order to receive the funding, states would have to adopt certain benchmarks related to early learning standards, teacher qualifications, staffing ratios, and a plan for assessment. The intent of the preschool was to be free for low and moderate income families, but accessible to children from higher income families at a cost determined by the individual states.

Georgia and Oklahoma have state funded preschool programs already in place. These programs are not only high quality but they are available to all children within the age requirements. Georgia's and Oklahoma's preschool programs have shown significant improvements in academic achievement for African American and Hispanics and for low-

income children. However, the improvement for Caucasian children was minimal as compared to African American, Hispanics, and low-income children.

Most preschool programs lay the foundation by emphasizing pre-academic skills. Time that used to be spent on free play and physical activity is now designated for academics (Pate, O'Neill, Brown, McIver, & Howie, 2013). Howie and Pate (2012) examined the effect of physical activity on learning and behavior in younger children. They concluded that physical activity may affect learning more significantly in younger children than older children because younger children are still developing cognitive processes. This notion supports play structure that focuses on physical activity is more beneficial than academic structure in most preschool programs.

Claes (2010) discussed the impact of preschool on Kindergarten adjustments. Claes studied three different groups including preschool children in the same school in which they attend Kindergarten, preschool in a different school than they attend Kindergarten, and children who do not attend preschool at all. Children who attended preschool in the same building they attended Kindergarten were found to have easier adjustments to Kindergarten. Children who attended preschool in another building other than their Kindergarten transitioned moderately. The children who did not attend preschool had the hardest transition to Kindergarten. In addition, Claes found that regular education children who attended preschool were rated by teachers as having significantly higher levels of overall adjustment than children who did not attend preschool at all. Furthermore, children who attended preschool were rated with higher levels of maturity. In an indirect finding, Claes discussed how preschool attendance is becoming much more common. There are significant community influences in some areas that support the

increase in attendance. Overall, the results of the study found that preschool experience does have a significant impact on the Kindergarten adjustment for some students.

Lopez (2016) described an expansion of early-learning programs offered to public schools in Minnesota. The report explained that Minnesota should offer a universal preschool program ensuring all families have access to early-learning. The program was introduced in 2015, requiring an investment of 80 million dollars to fund the early-learning program. Lopez discussed that school districts have opposed the program as they had little space to house more students following the implementation. Although the program has not been fully implemented, tax credits have been implemented for low-income families. In addition, the credits may be enhanced from \$1,000 to \$3,500, and offered to low-income families to attend private institutions as well.

Kirk and Kirk (2016) discussed the effects of increased physical activity on early literacy skills in preschool children. Fifty-four African-American preschool children from low-socioeconomic urban Head Start programs participated in the study. Two groups were selected, one as a control group and one with the increase of physical activity. With the increase of physical activity group, three hundred minutes were added to each week over eight months. The results showed that rhyming significantly improved in the group that involved the extra three hundred minutes of physical activity. Alliteration was improved in the physical activity group as well. The conclusion of the results confirmed that physical activity was necessary to improving early literacy skills.

The majority of research has supported the notion that attending preschool has a significant effect on Kindergarten readiness. Roberts (2011) conducted a study that also supports preschool's positive impact. The study showed that children who attended preschool had a

significant effect on kindergarten readiness when measured by the Bracken School Readiness Composite. Of those that attended preschool, they typically scored in the average or very advanced ranges, which was on average nineteen points. The score of nineteen was considered on track for Kindergarten. Forty percent of the children who did not have preschool experience scored in the delayed or very delayed range. Children who did not score as well typically did not have the opportunities at home or in their communities to learn introductory skills, including recognition of letters and their sounds, basic shapes, spatial relations, and number concepts. The implications of the study suggested that children need to be a part of an early childhood program, and they need to be successful. Children who do not fare well in an early elementary setting have a larger dropout rate, suspensions, higher rates of delinquency, teen pregnancy, and are less likely to find employment in early adulthood. The study also suggested the impact of physical health is important for young children. Lastly, administration is referenced as being an important role in making sure preschools are well rounded environments including physical, emotional, and cognitive as these set the stage for learning.

Socioeconomic Status

Socioeconomic Status (SES) plays a major role in the readiness factors for children entering Kindergarten. Those students that fall under a lower SES tend to have limited resources available to them to aid in the development of the whole child to be ready for Kindergarten. Dotterer, Iruka, and Pungello (2012) examined the link between SES and school readiness. The purpose of this study was to test whether parenting and financial stress play a part in this association. The focus group of the study involved both African American and European American families. The results of the study indicated that financial stress does not solely impact

pre-academic readiness factors for children. Rather, the results indicated parenting behaviors in combination with financial stress were influential to pre-academics.

Similarly, Okado, Bierman, and Welsh (2014) found that low-SES samples indicated levels of support or learning simultaneously influence child school readiness. In addition, results validated the conceptualization of the two distinct domains of parenting, parental support for learning and parental learning along-side of children, as independent and significant influences on child school readiness among low-SES families. Low-income parents often face multiple stressors whether that is financial strain, social support, and struggling family or work conditions. Okado et al. found that 38% of parents reported a level of depressive symptoms that placed them above the clinical cut-off for depression, and 29% reported a lack of energy to follow through with consistent parenting plans. The results show the importance of a parents' relationship with their children, especially conversationally. Furthermore, the study suggested the importance of considering parental feelings and attitudes in the design of interventions to enhance a child's school readiness as a result of increasing parental support for learning.

While it may not be possible to raise a child's SES, it is possible to understand how family SES affects readiness for schooling. Stull (2013) claimed that family SES and parent involvement affects a child's academic achievement. For instance, parents' expectations of their children's success increase with higher family SES. Even high family SES of low-achieving students continue to expect their children to attain a Bachelor's degree unlike low to middle family SES parents of high-achieving students.

As a way to help with supporting low SES households many states are able to continue to raise funds to support Head Start programs. Senators Bob Menendez and Cory Booker announced in August of 2015, \$5,795,915 in Federal funding went to the Northwest NJ

Community Action Program and New Jersey Department of Education. The money supported Head Start and Early Head Start programs. Menendez and Booker (2015) stated that the level of income should not prevent a quality education to allow children to reach their full potential.

Tennessee's Head Start programs have served more than 20,000 children and families every year. Head Start is aimed at lower SES families, homeless children, and children with disabilities. Federal studies have shown that children report high levels of satisfaction with Head Start and the parents have given the program the highest rating of any government assisted program. In addition, parents reported that welfare assistance has declined since their involvement in Head Start. Furthermore, federal studies have shown that children who attend Head Start in Tennessee have narrowed the gap in vocabulary and writing skills, improved social skills, and improved word knowledge, letter recognition, and math skills relative to other children during the Kindergarten year (Tennessee Head Start, 2017).

Anderson (2015) discussed the impacts of parental stress in association with low-income on academic readiness. The study specifically examined financial strain, general strain, parent-child relationships, and child school readiness among impoverished black families. The families of the study reported that their levels of parental stress were not as predicted by the researcher. This also contradicted the feedback by the educators as they reported parental stress was associated in influencing academic readiness. With different variations of data collected, the results indicated that the parent and teacher reports were not correlated, were not similarly predictive of school readiness, and were therefore treated separately. The conclusion of this could be determined by the differences in behaviors in school and home.

Chapter Summary

Goldstein (2005) described that Kindergarten teachers in the United States are under increasing pressure as they deal with conflicting demands and challenging expectations for curriculum and practices. The realization of the increased pressure and multiple factors that have always been around including chronological age, gender, preschool experience, and socioeconomic status makes one question how Kindergarten teachers are able to meet the needs within the classroom. The majority of the research supports girls being more ready for Kindergarten than boys of similar age based on the differences in play activities. Research also supports that many parents would rather have their child as the oldest in the class as opposed to the youngest. Gladwell (2008) agreed with the importance of having children travel through cohorts of similar maturity levels to level the playing field.

In contrast, research shows that girls' readiness over boys' readiness and oldest child in class over youngest child in class become irrelevant in time as achievement test shows less significant results as a student progresses through school. In addition, the research supports the importance that preschool programs have in developing children to be ready for the academic demands of Kindergarten. Furthermore, many states are looking more and more at providing universal preschool programs to not only support low-income households, but to support all families. Ultimately, parents have the option to place their child in a readiness program such as preschool, redshirt their child if they determine he or she is not ready, or send them to kindergarten because they may be within the age cut-off requirements.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to examine Kindergarten teachers' perceptions of how age, gender, socioeconomic status, and preschool experience impact the readiness of a child to enter Kindergarten. The methodology for this study was non-experimental quantitative. Quantitative research requires explanations of how one variable affects another (Creswell, 2012). Numerical data were collected and analyzed. This chapter addresses the research questions and null hypotheses, the population, data collection, and the data analysis.

Research Questions and Null Hypotheses

The following research questions and null hypotheses guided the research.

Research Question #1

Is there a significant difference between new and experienced teachers' perceptions of the importance of age as a factor for school readiness?

Ho1: There is not a significant difference between new and experienced teachers' perceptions of the importance of age as a factor for school readiness.

Research Question #2

Is there a significant difference between new and experienced teachers' perceptions of preschool experiences as a factor for school readiness?

Ho2: There is not a significant different between new and experienced teachers' perceptions of preschool experiences as a factor for school readiness.

Research Question #3

Is there a significant difference between new and experienced teachers' perceptions of socioeconomic status as a factor for school readiness?

Ho3: There is not a significant difference between new and experienced teachers' perceptions of socioeconomic status as a factor for school readiness.

Research Question #4

Is there a significant difference between new and experienced teachers' perceptions of gender as a factor of school readiness?

Ho4: There is not a significant difference between new and experienced teachers' perceptions of gender as a factor of school readiness.

Research Question #5

Do teachers perceive that student age is a significant factor in readiness for school to a significant extent?

Ho5: Teachers do not perceive student age is a significant factor in readiness for school to a significant extent.

Research Question #6

Do teachers perceive that preschool attendance is a significant factor in readiness for school to a significant extent?

Ho6: Teachers do not perceive that preschool attendance is a significant factor in readiness for school to a significant extent.

Research Question #7

Do teachers perceive that socioeconomic status is a significant factor in readiness for school to a significant extent?

Ho7: Teachers do not perceive that socioeconomic status is a significant factor in readiness for school to a significant extent.

Research Question #8

Do teachers perceive that gender is a significant factor in student readiness for school to a significant extent?

Ho8: Teachers do not perceive that gender is a significant factor in student readiness for school to a significant extent.

Research Question #9

Which of these factors are perceived to have the greatest impact on student readiness for school?

Ho9: Teachers do not perceive there are any factors that impact student readiness for school.

Sample

The population of this study consisted of Kindergarten teachers employed in two rural Northeast Tennessee school systems. The researcher surveyed teachers employed by the school systems during the year of 2015-2016.

During 2015-2016, 90 licensed Kindergarten teachers were employed by the two Northeast Tennessee school systems. All teachers who were surveyed taught regular education classes. The Kindergarten teachers who returned the survey varied from first year teachers to teachers who have been teaching for more than twenty years. In addition, some Kindergarten teachers who have taught for several years were in Kindergarten for the first time. The sample had a wide range of teaching experience in addition to specifically Kindergarten teaching experience. As far as teaching experience, teachers who were in their first five years of teaching

were considered new teachers. Teachers who had six or more years of teaching were considered experienced. Twenty teachers were classified as new teachers whereas 49 were experienced. As far as Kindergarten teaching experience, 33 teachers had 0-5 years of experience, 15 teachers had 6-10 years of experience, 16 had 11-20 years of experience, and 5 had more than 20 years of experience. The sample was comprised of those teachers who returned useable surveys.

Instrumentation

The instrumentation for this study was an electronic survey using Google Forms. The survey consisted of 14 items. Items 1-2 were used to gather demographic information about the participants surveyed. Items 3-12 were used to gather information about Kindergarten teachers' perceptions of student readiness for school. A Likert Scale was used for those items. The purpose of using the Likert Scale was to gather data that measure Kindergarten teachers' perceptions of student readiness for school. The range of the scale was from strongly agree to strongly disagree. Furthermore, item 13 related to what Kindergarten teachers' perceive as the greatest factor of student readiness for school. Kindergarten teachers ranked the greatest factor to least factor using a 1 to 5. The possible options to this question were: age, gender, socioeconomic status, preschool experience, and other. The last item allowed for the participant to elaborate further on their responses (See Appendix A for the complete survey).

For validity and reliability purposes, a pilot test was administered to colleagues to determine what adjustments were needed. The results from the pilot allowed for revisions to be made which increased validity. In addition, having multiple colleagues test from various places increased the reliability of the survey. The feedback from the responses given was taken into consideration and revisions were made.

Data Collection

Before collecting data, permission was obtained from the Directors of Schools in both districts. These permission forms were sent out by email and fax. Permission was also granted by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of East Tennessee State University. A letter was sent to each principal with the link to the online survey (See Appendix B).

Upon approval from all necessary entities, an email was sent to each district's Director of Elementary Curriculum to be forwarded to all active Kindergarten teachers in both districts explaining the entire study, its purpose, and requesting their cooperation. The survey was distributed to Kindergarten teachers in two rural Northeast Tennessee School Systems. The survey was conducted using an on-line service, Google Forms. All participants were informed that their responses were confidential and voluntary in the directions of the survey and that they could skip questions if they chose to. Responses were populated into a spread sheet and saved via Universal Serial Bus (USB) in a locked safe for five years. Anonymity was upheld as the survey did not require the participants to provide any information regarding identity which increased the validity of the results.

Data Analysis

Data collected from the instrument survey were analyzed through statistical calculations using *Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS)*. Research questions were analyzed using a series of single sample t-tests. This allowed for the teachers' perceptions of each variable including age, gender, preschool experience, and socioeconomics and the relationship with school readiness to be determined. Simerly, (2014) conducted a similar study using a series of single sample t-tests. Simerly's study compared calculated means with a test value of 2.5 which represented neutrality. This study compared calculated means with a test value of 3.0 which

represented neutrality. The first eight research questions were analyzed at the .05 level of significance.

The ninth research question asked participants to rank factors of age, gender, socioeconomic status, preschool experience, and other in terms of which had the greatest impact on student readiness for school. Points were assigned and tabulated to rank order the factors in terms of perceived importance.

Chapter Summary

Non-experimental quantitative design was used as the methodology of this study. The objective of this study was to examine how Kindergarten teachers perceive age, gender, socioeconomic status, and preschool experience prior to Kindergarten entry. The researcher organized and analyzed the data through statistical calculations using *Statistical Package for Social Science* (SPSS).

Chapter 3 displays the methodology used throughout this study. Specifically, it presents the research questions and null hypotheses, sample, instrumentation, data collection procedures, and data analysis. Next, Chapter 4 will display the findings of each research question which includes figures and tables.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to examine Kindergarten teachers' perceptions of how age, gender, socioeconomic status, and preschool experience impact the readiness of a child to enter Kindergarten. Kindergarten teachers completed the Kindergarten Teacher's Perception Survey. Chapter 4 presents the results of statistical analysis of the research question that were identified in Chapters 1 and 3.

Data were gathered from two rural Northeast Tennessee school districts by form of paper-based or online survey supported by Google Forms. The survey was distributed to 90 Kindergarten teachers in the districts combined. Out of the 90 teachers to whom the survey was distributed, 69 responded and were, therefore, the participants in the study.

The survey consisted of 14 items. Items 1 and 2 were used to collect demographic data including total years of teaching, years teaching Kindergarten, and highest level of education. Of the 69 respondents, 20 indicated that they have taught between 0-5 years, 16 indicated that they have taught 6-10 years, 23 indicated they have taught 11-20 years, and 10 indicated they have taught more than 20 years. When asked about the number of years that they have taught in Kindergarten, 33 indicated that they have taught between 0-5 years, 15 indicated that they have taught 6-10 years, 16 indicated they have taught 11-20 years, and 5 indicated they have taught more than 20 years.

Items 3-12 examined the perceptions of Kindergarten teachers on the factors of chronological age, gender, socioeconomic status, and preschool experience. Item 13 ranked teachers' perception of the greatest impact to the lowest impact on student readiness for school.

Here, Kindergarten teachers had the option of choosing “other” indicating what their other factor may be. Item 14 gave Kindergarten teachers the opportunity to comment on the survey statements from above.

Nine research questions guided this study. The research questions, null hypotheses, and results of the analysis are presented below.

Research Question 1

Is there a significant difference between new and experienced teachers’ perceptions of the importance of age as a factor for school readiness?

H₀1: There is not a significant difference between new and experienced teachers’ perceptions of the importance of age as a factor for school readiness.

An independent sample t-test was conducted to determine if there was a significant difference in perceptions between new and experienced teachers as to the extent of age as a factor for school readiness. Age was the test variable and the grouping variable was Kindergarten experience. The test was not significant, $t(67) = .394, p = .695$. Therefore, the null hypothesis was retained. The η^2 index was .099 which indicated a medium to large effect size. The new teachers group ($M = 2.78, SD = .75$) perceived age as a factor in student readiness for school at approximately the same level as experienced teachers ($M = 2.78, SD = 1.09$). The 95% confidence interval for the difference between mean score was $-.371$ to $.554$. Figure 1 shows the distributions for the two groups.

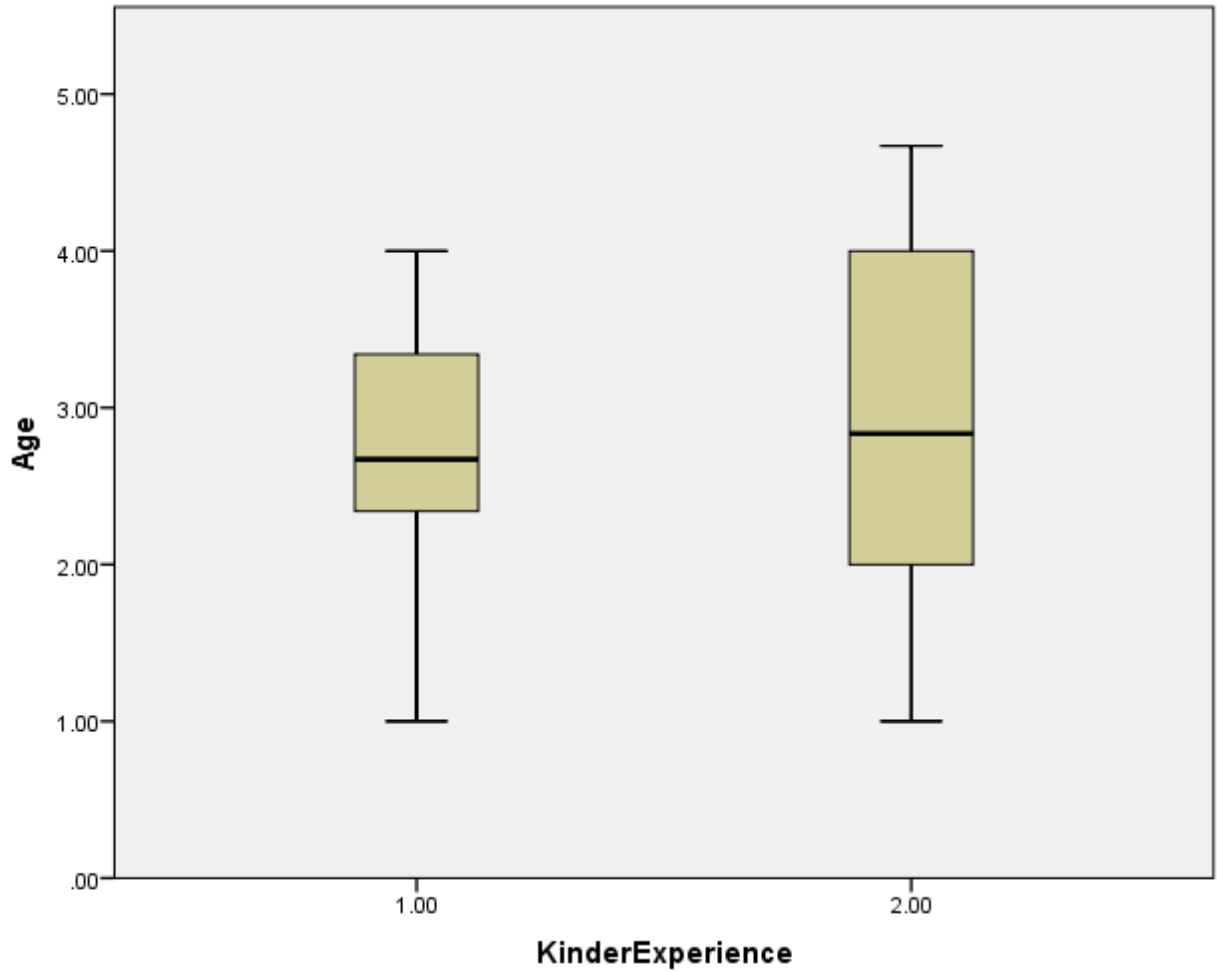


Figure 1. New and Experienced Kindergarten Teachers' Perceptions of Age as a Factor in Readiness for Kindergarten

Research Question 2

Is there a significant difference between new and experienced teachers' perceptions of preschool experiences as a factor for school readiness?

H₀2: There is not a significant difference between new and experienced teachers' perceptions of preschool experiences as a factor for school readiness.

An independent sample t-test was conducted to determine if there was a significant difference in perceptions between new and experienced teachers on preschool experience as a factor for school readiness. Preschool experience was the test variable and the grouping variable was Kindergarten experience. The test was not significant, $t(67) = 1.01, p = .316$. Therefore, the null hypothesis was retained. The η^2 index was .248 which indicated a small effect size. The new teachers group ($M=1.74, SD = .98$) perceived preschool experience as a factor in student readiness for school at approximately the same level as experienced teachers ($M = 2.00, SD = 1.12$). The 95% confidence interval for the difference between mean score was $-.769$ to $.253$. Figure 2 shows the distributions for the two groups.

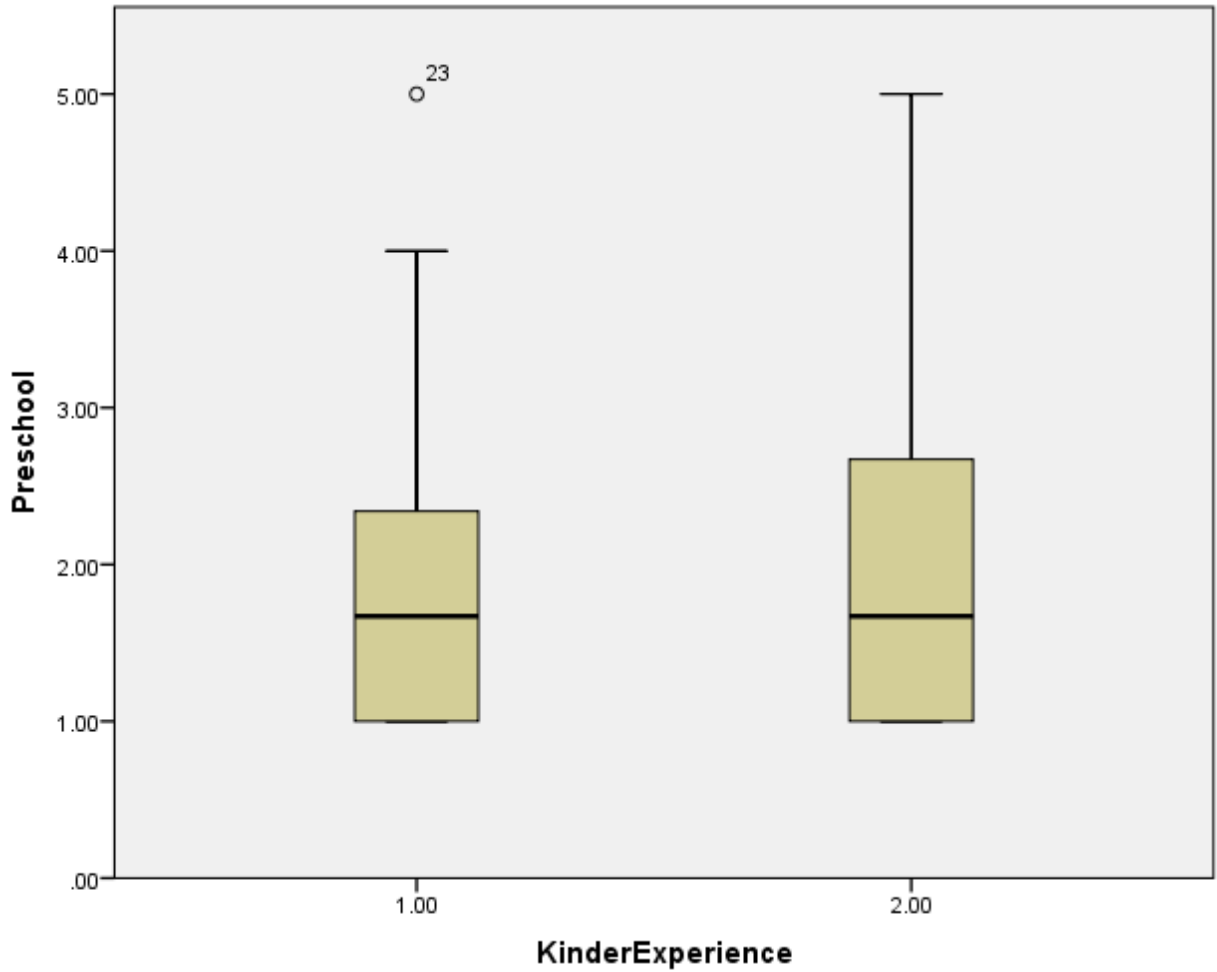


Figure 2. New and Experienced Kindergarten Teachers' Perceptions of Preschool Experience as a Factor in Readiness for Kindergarten

Research Question 3

Is there a significant difference between new and experienced teachers' perceptions of socioeconomic status as a factor for school readiness?

H₀3: There is not a significant difference between new and experienced teachers' perceptions of socioeconomic status as a factor for school readiness.

An independent sample t-test was conducted to determine if there was a significant difference in perceptions between new and experienced teachers on socioeconomic status as a factor for school readiness. Socioeconomic status was the test variable and the grouping variable was Kindergarten experience. The test was not significant, $t(67) = .267, p = .791$. Therefore, the null hypothesis was retained. The η^2 index was .019 which indicated a small effect size. The new teachers group ($M = 2.71, SD = .69$) perceived age as a factor in student readiness for school at approximately the same level as experienced teachers ($M = 2.72, SD = .80$). The 95% confidence interval for the difference between mean score was -.420 to .549. Figure 3 shows the distributions for the two groups.

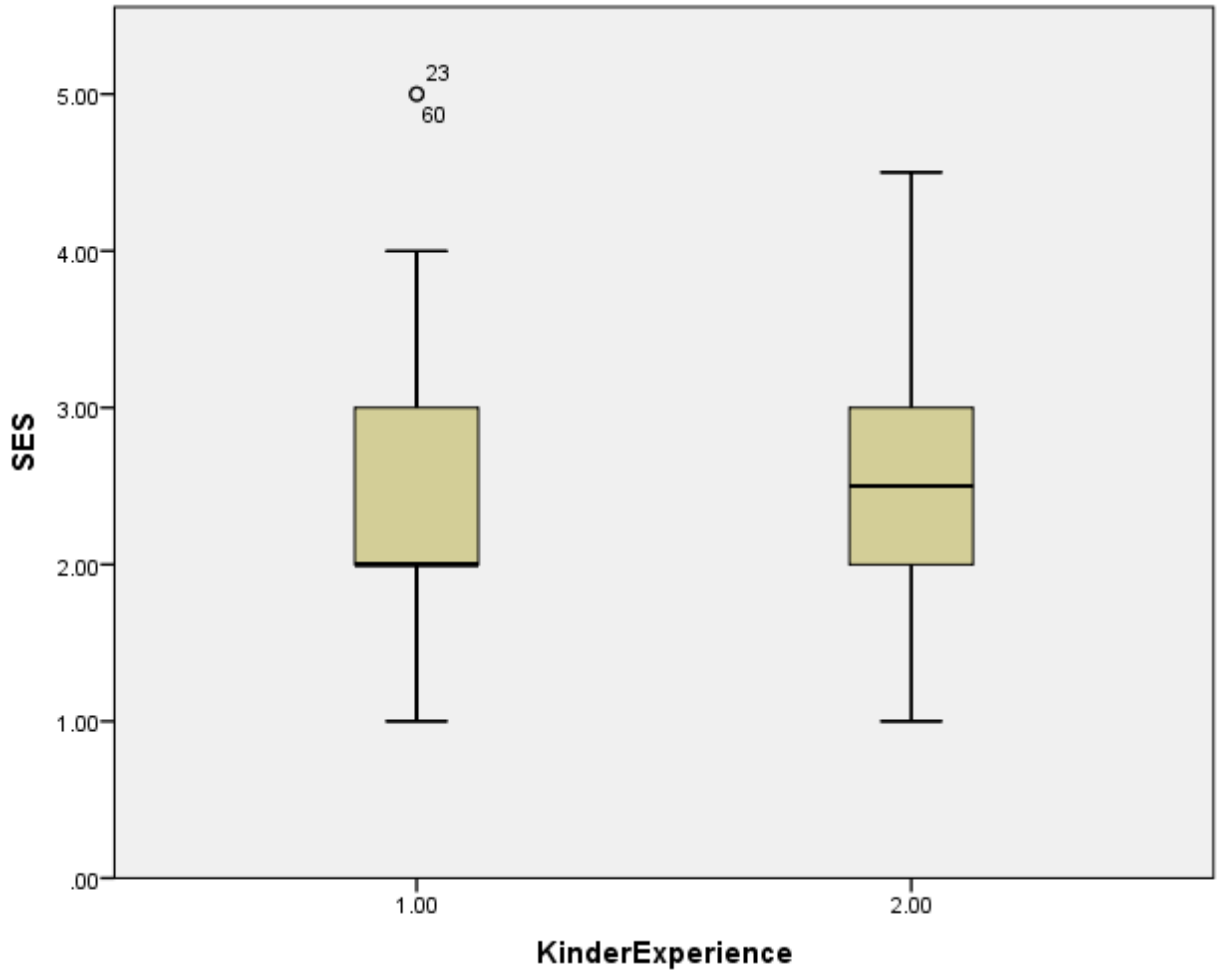


Figure 3. New and Experienced Kindergarten Teachers' Perceptions of Socioeconomic Status as a Factor in Readiness for Kindergarten

Research Question 4

Is there a significant difference between new and experienced teachers' perceptions of gender as a factor of school readiness?

H₀4: There is not a significant difference between new and experienced teachers' perceptions of gender as a factor of school readiness.

An independent sample t-test was conducted to determine if there was a significant difference in perceptions between new and experienced teachers on gender as a factor for school readiness. Gender was the test variable and the grouping variable was Kindergarten experience. The test was not significant, $t(67) = -.078$ $p = .940$. Therefore, the null hypothesis was retained. The η^2 index was .041 which indicated a small effect size. The new teachers group ($M = 2.56$, $SD = 1.09$) perceived gender as a factor in student readiness for school at approximately the same level as experienced teachers ($M = 2.50$, $SD = .92$). The 95% confidence interval for the difference between mean score was $-.419$ to $.429$. Figure 4 shows the distributions for the two groups.

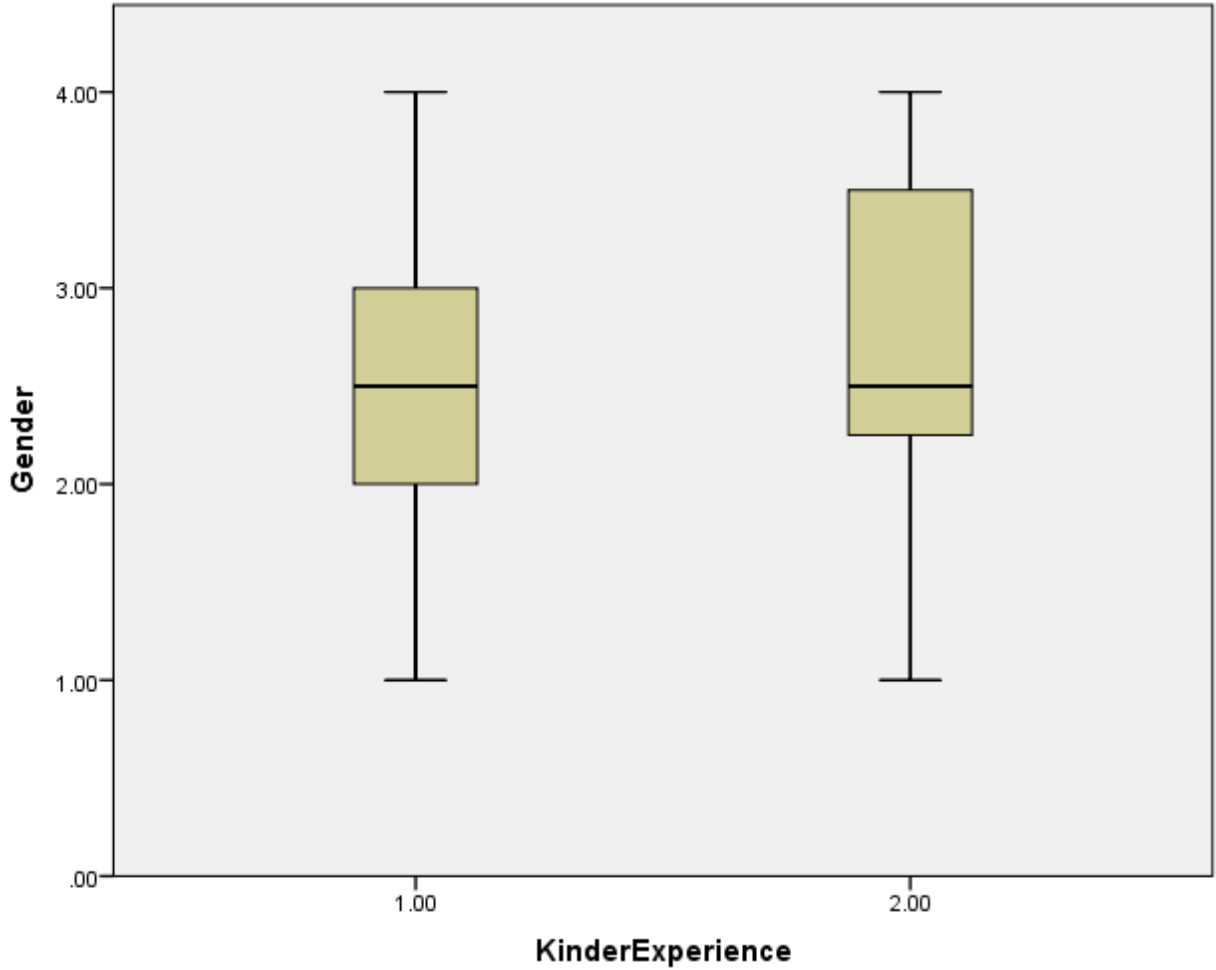


Figure 4. New and Experienced Kindergarten Teachers' Perceptions of Gender as a Factor in Readiness for Kindergarten

Research Question 5

Do teachers perceive that student age is a factor in readiness for school to a significant extent?

Ho5: Teachers do not perceive student age is a factor in readiness for school to a significant extent.

A single sample t-test was conducted to evaluate Kindergarten teachers' perception that there is a significant relationship between students' chronological age and readiness for school.

The scores for the survey items 3 through 13 were averaged to get a score that is used as the relationship between students' age and readiness for Kindergarten. The mean of 2.82 (see Figure 5 and Table 5) was compared to a test value of 3, which represents neutrality. The test was $t(68) = -1.53$, $p = .130$. Therefore, the null hypothesis was retained. The 95% confidence interval for the difference between mean score and the test value was $-.405$ to $-.053$. The η^2 index was 2.96 which indicated a large effect size. Therefore, the results indicated that Kindergarten teachers do not perceive that age is a factor in school readiness to a significant extent.

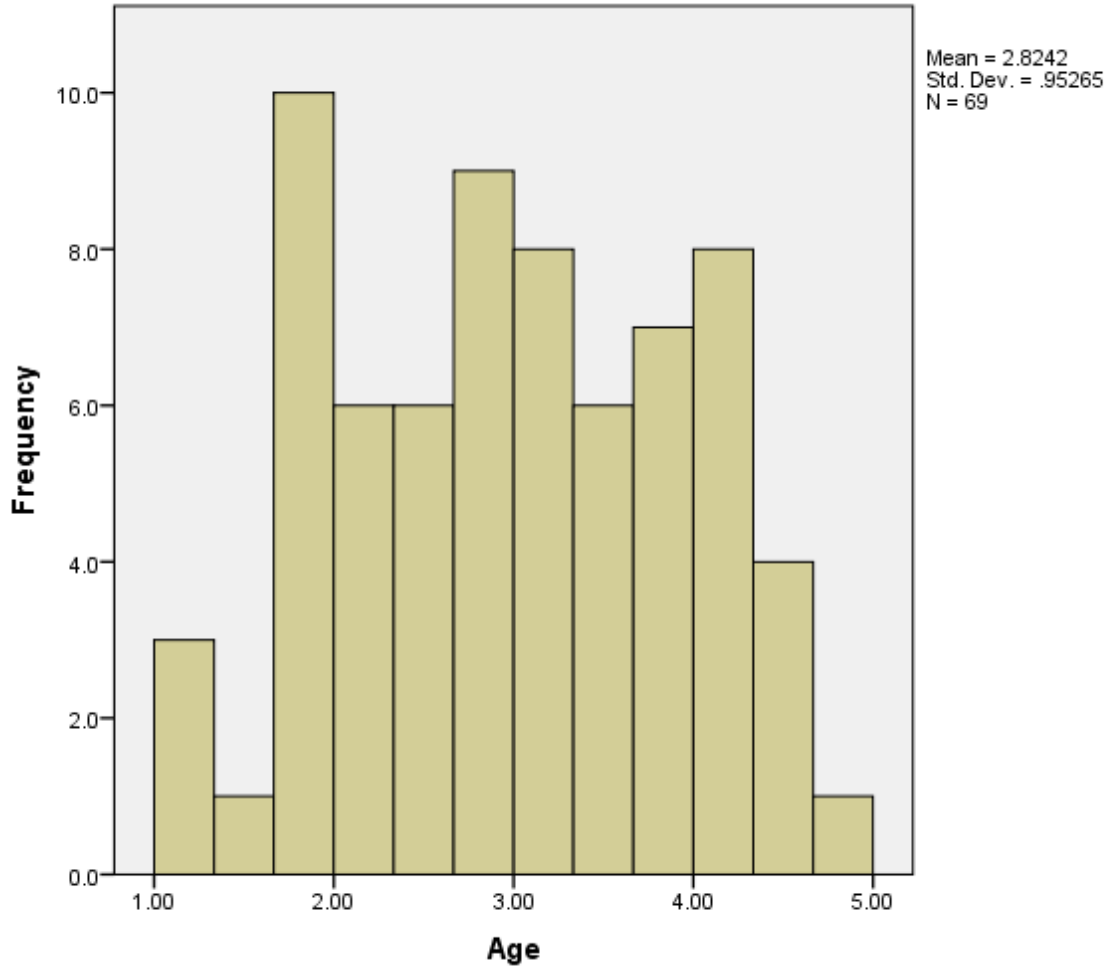


Figure 5. Kindergarten Teachers' Perceptions of Age as a Factor in Readiness for Kindergarten

Table 1.

Kindergarten Teachers' Perceptions Regarding Age and Readiness for Kindergarten

Survey Item	Strongly Agree	Somewhat Agree	Neutral	Somewhat Disagree	Strongly Disagree
3	12	15	20	20	2
4	10	23	18	13	5
7	8	18	20	15	8

Research Question 6

Do teachers perceive that preschool attendance is a factor in readiness for school to a significant extent?

Ho6: Teachers do not perceive that preschool attendance is a factor in readiness for school to a significant extent.

A single sample t-test was conducted to evaluate Kindergarten teachers' perception that there is a significant relationship between students' preschool experience and readiness for school. The scores for the survey items 3 through 13 were averaged to get a score that is used as the relationship between students' preschool experience and readiness for Kindergarten. The mean of 1.89 (see Figure 6 and Table 6) was compared to a test value of 3, which represents neutrality. The test was $t(68) = -8.75$, $p = .001$. Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected. The 95% confidence interval for the difference between mean score and the test value was -1.37 to -.860. The η^2 index was 1.78 which indicated a large effect size. Therefore, the results indicated that Kindergarten teachers perceive that preschool experience is a factor in school readiness to a significant extent.

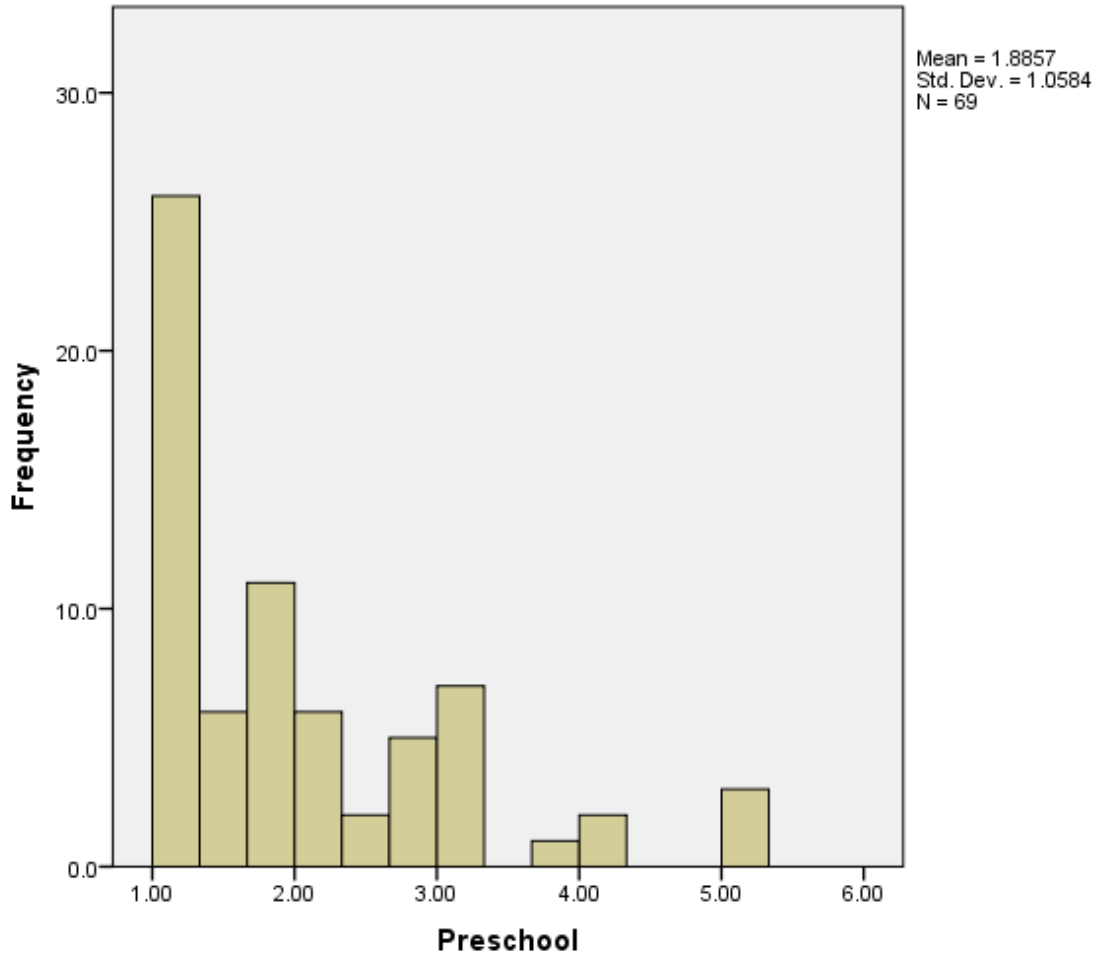


Figure 6. Kindergarten Teachers' Perceptions of Preschool Experience as a Factor in Readiness for Kindergarten

Table 2.

Kindergarten Teachers' Perceptions Regarding Preschool Experience and Readiness for Kindergarten

Survey Item	Strongly Agree	Somewhat Agree	Neutral	Somewhat Disagree	Strongly Disagree
6	35	21	5	4	4
10	27	21	9	5	7
12	45	8	5	7	3

Research Question 7

Do teachers perceive that socioeconomic status is a factor in readiness for school to a significant extent?

Ho7: Teachers do not perceive that socioeconomic status is a factor in readiness for school to a significant extent

A single sample t-test was conducted to evaluate Kindergarten teachers' perception that there is a significant relationship between students' socioeconomic status and readiness for school. The scores for the survey items 3 through 13 were averaged to get a score that is used as the relationship between students' socioeconomic status and readiness for Kindergarten. The mean of 2.72 (see Figure 7 and Table 7) was compared to a test value of 3, which represents neutrality. The test was $t(68) = -3.93$, $p = .001$. Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected. The 95% confidence interval for the difference between mean score and the test value was -.710 to -.232. The η^2 index was 3.62 which indicated a large effect size. Therefore, the results indicated that Kindergarten teachers perceive that socioeconomic status is a factor in school readiness to a significant extent.

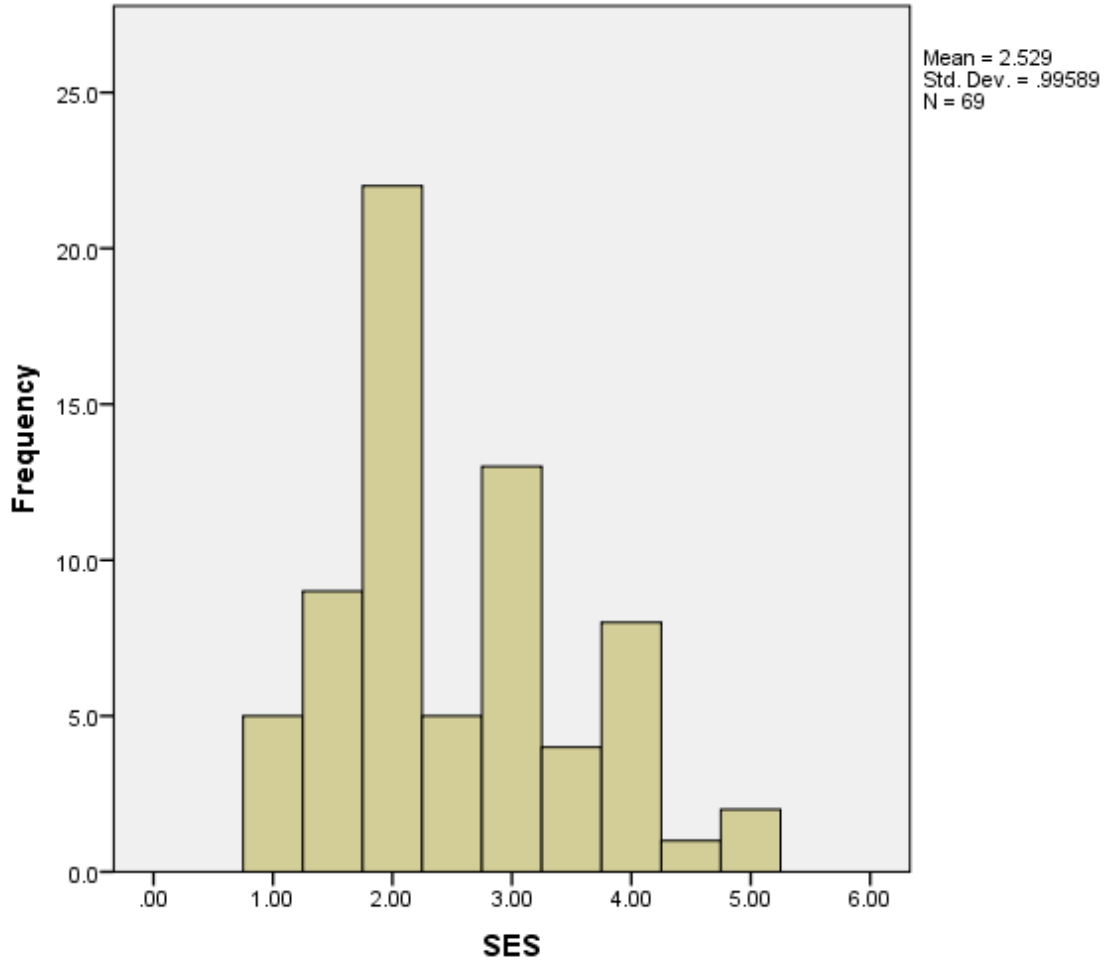


Figure 7. Kindergarten Teachers' Perceptions of Socioeconomic Status as a Factor in Readiness for Kindergarten

Table 3.

Kindergarten Teachers' Perceptions Regarding Socioeconomic Status and Readiness for Kindergarten

Survey Item	Strongly Agree	Somewhat Agree	Neutral	Somewhat Disagree	Strongly Disagree
9	14	24	16	10	5
11	8	28	20	11	2

Research Question 8

Do teachers perceive that gender is a factor in student readiness for school to a significant extent?

Ho8: Teachers do not perceive that gender is a factor in student readiness for school to a significant extent.

A single sample t-test was conducted to evaluate Kindergarten teachers' perceptions that there is a significant relationship between students' gender and readiness for school. The scores for the survey items 3 through 13 were averaged to get a score that is used as the relationship between students' gender and readiness for Kindergarten. The mean of 2.53 (see Figure 8 and Table 8) was compared to a test value of 3, which represents neutrality. The test was $t(68) = -8.10$, $p = .003$. Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected. The 95% confidence interval for the difference between mean score and the test value was $-.463$ to $-.103$. The η^2 index was 2.54 which indicated a large effect size. Therefore, the results indicated that Kindergarten teachers perceive that gender is a factor in school readiness to a significant extent.

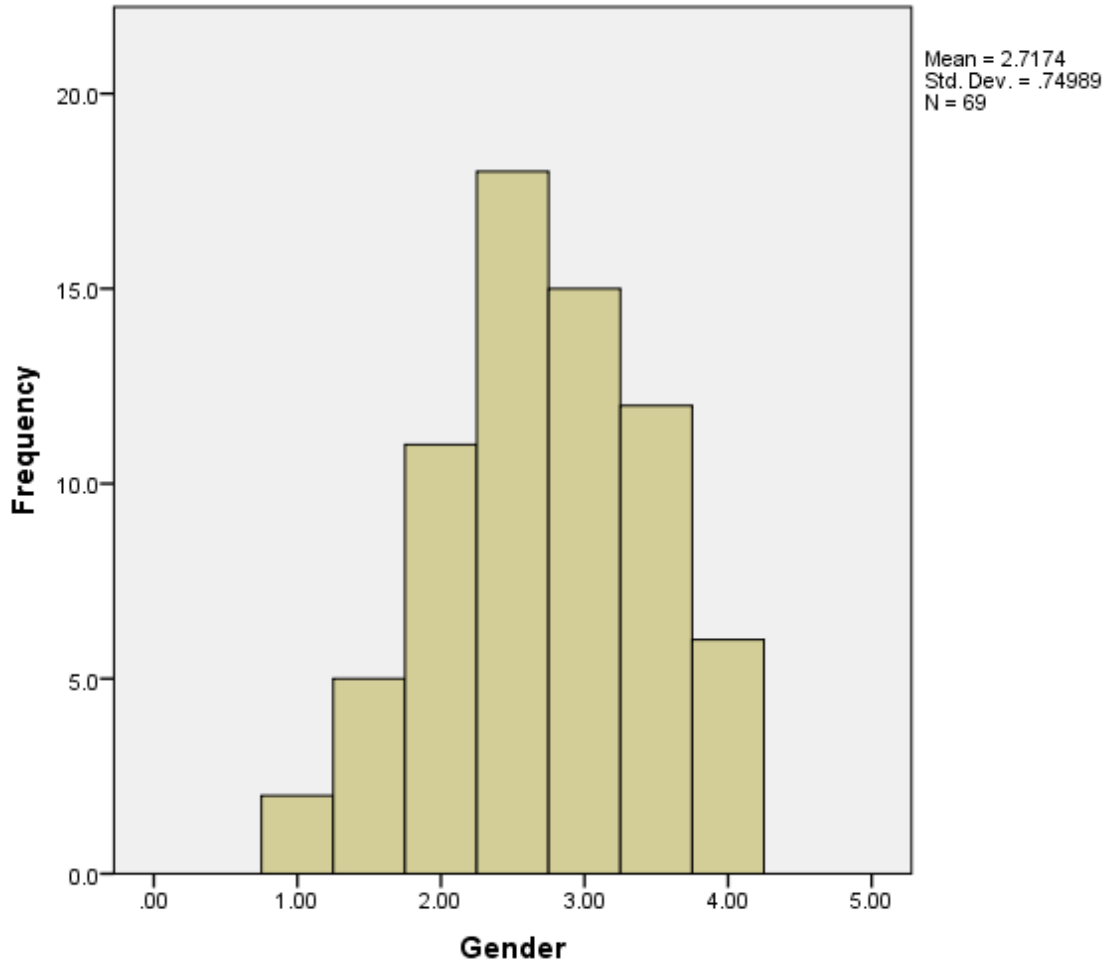


Figure 8. Kindergarten Teachers' Perceptions of Gender as a Factor in Readiness for Kindergarten

Table 4.

Kindergarten Teachers' Perceptions Regarding Gender and Readiness for Kindergarten

Survey Item	Strongly Agree	Somewhat Agree	Neutral	Somewhat Disagree	Strongly Disagree
5	17	20	20	8	4
8	8	13	30	10	8

Research Question 9

Which of these factors are perceived to have the greatest impact on student readiness for school?

Ho9: Teachers do not perceive there are any factors that impact student readiness for school.

Kindergarten teachers were asked to rank five factors from greatest 1 to least 5 to which they perceive to have the highest impact on student readiness for Kindergarten. The results are displayed in Table 5 below. The results indicated that Kindergarten teachers perceive preschool experience as having the greatest impact on student readiness for school. This was followed by chronological age. Gender was perceived to have the least impact on student readiness for school. Some participants had the option to include additional comments which they perceive have an impact on student readiness for school. Parental involvement, reading books, playing games, being around other children, and real life experiences were other factors that participants perceived as having an impact on student readiness for school.

Table 5.

Kindergarten Teachers' Perceptions of the Relationship between Chronological Age, Gender, Socioeconomic Status, and Preschool Experience and Readiness for School

Order	Factor
1	Preschool Experience
2	Chronological Age
3	Socioeconomic Status
4	Gender
5	Other

Chapter Summary

Chapter 4 presents the analysis of the data identified in Chapters 1 and 3 to examine how Kindergarten teachers perceive age, gender, socioeconomic status, and preschool experience prior to Kindergarten entry. A series of independent samples t-tests were used to analyze Research Questions 1-4. Research Questions 1-4 retained the null hypothesis. Single samples t-tests were used to analyze Research Questions 5-8. Research Question 5 retained the null hypothesis while Research Questions 6-8 rejected the null hypothesis. Research Question 9 was analyzed by using ranking order. In addition, Kindergarten teachers had an option to comment on any or all of the survey statements. Chapter 5 will display the summary, conclusions, and recommendations as a result of these findings.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of Chapter 5 is to report the findings and to provide recommendations for future practice. Furthermore, the information in this chapter will guide future researchers who are conducting similar research through recommendations. The purpose of this study was to examine Kindergarten teachers' perceptions of how age, gender, socioeconomic status, and preschool experience impact the readiness of a child to enter Kindergarten. The study used survey data that was collected via email by Google Forms. The population of the survey consisted of Kindergarten teachers at two rural Northeast Tennessee school districts.

Summary of Findings

The study was based around nine research questions first presented in Chapter 1. Research questions 1-8 had corresponding-null hypotheses. The data were analyzed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software program. Research Questions 1-4 were analyzed using an independent t-test. Research Questions 5-8 were analyzed using single samples t-test. Research Question 9 was analyzed by ranking order and displayed in Table 5. A total of 69 Kindergarten teachers participated in this study.

Research Question 1: Is there a significant difference between new and experienced teachers' perceptions of the importance of age as a factor for school readiness?

The findings indicated that there is not a significant difference between new and experienced teachers' perceptions that there is a relationship between students' chronological age

and readiness for Kindergarten. The findings are consistent with the research of Ensey Hover (2014). Ensey Hover found that parents have a reasonable right to redshirt their children or enroll them in Kindergarten based off of age and developmental factors. However, no matter the age of the child, results of the third grade Reading and Mathematics TCAP Achievement Test indicated that students who had summer birthdays performed as well as their peers. Ensey Hover concluded that all children should have an opportunity to succeed and their placement should be primarily based on their developmental needs regardless of age. On the contrary, the findings are inconsistent with the research of Gladwell (2008). Gladwell recommended that schools recognize that the month a child is born is significant to their development and readiness. Elementary and middle schools should place students born in January through April in one class, May through August in another class, and September through December in the third class. The students would then be able to learn and compete with other students of the same maturity level. He claimed that the current educational system places students at a significant disadvantage.

Research Question 2: Is there a significant difference between new and experienced teachers' perceptions of preschool experiences as a factor for school readiness?

The findings indicated that there is not a significant difference between new and experienced teachers' perceptions that there is a relationship between students' preschool experience and readiness for Kindergarten. New and experienced teachers found that preschool experience is beneficial to student readiness for school. These findings are consistent with the 2011 research of Roberts. Roberts' study showed that children who attended preschool had a significant advantage in relation to Kindergarten readiness when measured by the Bracken School Readiness Composite. Those who attended preschool typically scored in the average or

very advanced range which was on average 19 points. A score of 19 was considered on track for Kindergarten. Forty percent of the children who did not have preschool experience scored in the delayed or very delayed range.

In opposition, Barnett (2015) discussed the various challenges of preschools. Some preschools are not universally functioning at high levels to prepare students for Kindergarten. He mentioned the need for universal publically funded preschool programs for all children, not just the select few who qualify. Barnett argued that government preschool programs restrict the eligibility to children in low-income families only.

The Tennessee State Board of Education has guidelines to ensure early childhood education is annually reviewed by the pre-kindergarten advisory council in Tennessee. The council is composed of local school boards, parents, teachers, non-profit providers, for-profit providers, Head Start, the business community, and local government. The council provides guidelines for local programs which include staff organization and development, facilities and transportation, a developmental learning program, family engagement, health and nutrition services, services for children with disabilities, and governance and administration. The council can review the educational needs of young children and develop plans to address needs. The reviews are annual and recommendations are sent to local education agencies to ensure effectiveness (Tennessee State Board of Education, 2005).

Research Question 3: Is there a significant difference between new and experienced teachers' perceptions of socioeconomic status as a factor for school readiness?

The findings indicated that there is not a significant difference between new and experienced teachers' perceptions that there is a relationship between students' socioeconomic

status and readiness for Kindergarten. Both new and experienced teachers perceived that there is a relationship between students' socioeconomic status and readiness for Kindergarten. New and experienced teachers found that socioeconomic status does impact student readiness for school. This is consistent with the 2012 findings of Dotterer, Iruka, and Pungello. Dotterer et al. examined the link between SES and school readiness. The purpose of their study was to test whether parenting and financial stress plays a part in this association. The sample of the study involved both African American and European American families. The results of the study indicated that financial stress does not solely impact pre-academic readiness factors for children. Rather, the results indicated parenting behaviors in combination with financial stress are influential to pre-academics.

In addition, Strauss (2015) discussed Hart and Risely's 1995 study on the impact of language on young children, especially those in low-income households. Hart and Risely found that the lack of school readiness and poor academic achievement was due to a diminished early language environment. They claimed that children need to be exposed to 30 million words in the first three years of life. It is not just the quantity that matters, rather the quality as well. Hart and Risely's research found that children who were exposed to less words also were exposed to less complex vocabulary, more prohibitive speech, and less conversational back-and-forth.

Strauss (2015) concluded that the ability for a child to reach his or her potential begins before they enter the school environment. Parents need to recognize that intellectual ability, productivity, creativity, begins on the first day of life.

Research Question 4: Is there a significant difference between new and experienced teachers' perceptions of gender as a factor of school readiness?

The findings indicated that there is not a significant difference between new and experienced teachers' perception that there is a relationship between students' gender and readiness for Kindergarten. New and experienced teachers perceive that there is a relationship between students' gender and readiness for school. In addition, new and experienced teachers found that gender differences impact student readiness for school. Below et al. (2010) suggested that this may be initially true; however, significant gender differences in earlier grades were not as significant in later grades. Furthermore, the implementation of procedures that address reading fluency skills and the choice of reading material to enhance motivation as early as third grades may be beneficial.

Research Question 5: Do teachers perceive that student age is a factor in readiness for school to a significant extent?

The findings indicated that Kindergarten teachers perceive there is not a significant relationship between students' chronological age and readiness for Kindergarten. Although the extant literature shows that there is a significant difference in readiness between girls and boys in entering Kindergarten, by the time students reach the third grade there is not a significant difference on state mandated reading tests (Piotrowski, 2011). Piotrowski's results indicated that there is no significant impact or evidence that girls outperformed boys by the time they were in the third grade.

Kelly (2010) discussed school readiness factors among multiple contexts in a qualitative study. Although boys struggle in the initial entry of Kindergarten academically, boys are described as being more active and physical as compared to girls. Kelly's study indicated that

educators concluded that boys and girls needed to learn the same things, rather they enter school with different competencies.

Research Question 6: Do teachers perceive that student preschool attendance is a factor in readiness for school to a significant extent?

The findings indicated that Kindergarten teachers perceive there is a significant relationship between students' preschool experience and readiness for Kindergarten. Many states are beginning to expand early childhood programs to prepare children for Kindergarten. Lopez (2016) stated that in 2015 Minnesota introduced a program requiring an investment of 80 million dollars to fund the early-learning program. Lopez discussed that school districts have opposed the program as they had little space to house more students following the implementation. Although the program has not been fully implemented, tax credits have been implemented for low-income families. In addition, the credits may be enhanced from \$1,000 to \$3500 and offered to low-income families to attend private institutions as well.

Claes (2011) found that preschool experience and readiness is connected. If and where children attend preschool matters. Children who attended preschool in the same building they attended Kindergarten in have easier adjustments to Kindergarten. Children who attended preschool in another building than their Kindergarten transitioned moderately. The children who did not attend preschool had the hardest transition to Kindergarten.

Research Question 7: Do teachers perceive that student socioeconomic status is a factor in readiness for school to a significant extent?

The findings indicated that Kindergarten teachers perceive there is a significant relationship between students' socioeconomic status and readiness for Kindergarten. The research question was analyzed using items 9 and 11 on the Kindergarten Teacher's Perceptions survey. Okado et al. (2014) concluded that low-SES samples indicated demoralization and support or learning simultaneously influence child school readiness. Their results focused on two distinct domains of parenting, parental support for learning and parental learning along-side of children, as independent and significant influences on child school readiness among low-SES families. Low-income parents often face multiple stressors whether that is financial strain, social support, and struggling family or work conditions.

Stull (2013) claimed that it is more about the parents' involvement with the child, which affects academic achievement rather than solely socioeconomic status. Stull explained that even high family SES of low-achieving students continue to expect their children to attain a Bachelor's degree unlike low to middle family SES parents of high-achieving students.

Research Question 8: Do teachers perceive that student gender is a factor in readiness for school to a significant extent?

The findings indicated that Kindergarten teachers perceive there is a significant relationship between students' gender and readiness for Kindergarten. Girls tend to be more ready for Kindergarten than boys. In opposition, Simmerly (2014) found that preschool and Kindergarten teachers do not perceive that gender determines a child's readiness for Kindergarten. To support this claim, Sax (2008) found boys' and girls' brain development were similar until puberty.

Below et al. (2010) analyzed Kindergarten through fifth grade students on basic early literacy skill probes. This included 1,218 general and special education students; 606 males and 612 females. The results of their study suggested that the significant gender differences in earlier grades were not as significant in later grades. In addition, the results indicated that educators may want to implement procedures that address reading fluency skills in fourth or as early as third grades.

In contrast to Simerly's 2014 findings, Ready et al. (2005) found that the gender differences in Kindergarteners' literacy skills were substantial. Their results supported girls having stronger literacy skills in addition to learning more over the entire Kindergarten year. The study suggested that girls have a more attentiveness to task persistence in early literacy than boys resulting in a more focused approach and increased learning.

Research Question 9: Which factors are perceived to have the greatest impact on student readiness for school?

Research Question 9 was analyzed using responses to item number 13 on the survey which had Kindergarten teachers rank readiness factors including chronological age, gender, socioeconomic status, and preschool experience from greatest to least. In addition, Item 13 had an "other" option in order to allow for Kindergarten teachers to add a factor that was not present. Kindergarten teachers perceived that preschool experience had the most influence on student readiness for school. Chronological age was the next and gender showed to have the least impact on student readiness for school based on Kindergarten teacher's perceptions. As teachers had the opportunity to rank factors, chronological age showed as the second most significant factor. This is different than the results of research question five which showed that

Kindergarten teachers did not perceived chronological age as a factor in school readiness. This would suggest that Kindergarten teachers perceive that chronological age is slightly more significant than other factors in readiness for school in comparison.

Of all five items in rank, the “other” was chosen by relatively few Kindergarten teachers as being a factor in school readiness. Kindergarten teachers suggested that “other” factors that could impact students readiness for school include parental involvement, reading books, playing games, being around other children, and real life experiences. The results suggest that there are many factors that impact a students’ readiness for school.

Recommendations for Practice

The results of this study suggested that Kindergarten teachers perceive that chronological age, gender, socioeconomic status, and preschool experience have a significant impact on student readiness for school. Furthermore, the results suggested that new and experienced teachers’ perceptions are similar in regards to the significance of chronological age, gender, socioeconomic status, and preschool experience on student readiness for school.

It is important to know that multiple factors impact a child’s readiness for Kindergarten and some are more influential than others. One recommendation is for teachers to be more aware of the impacts of student readiness to school. Elementary schools that offer preschool should have vertical alignment meetings between preschool and Kindergarten. These meetings should discuss developmentally appropriate practices and curriculum progression. This will allow for a consistent progression of learning as children transition from one grade to the next. Also, Kindergarten teachers and school leaders should reach out to the local community, especially in low SES areas to provide information to parents about Kindergarten readiness.

Going to areas of the community to provide information will reach families who struggle with transportation and other forms of difficulties. Offering parenting classes in local community centers would allow for structure and guidance prior to children entering the school environment. Strategies for appropriate communication methods, how to access resources, and regularly meeting with families will allow for relationships to develop.

In addition, a recommendation is for school leadership to provide professional development to preschool and Kindergarten teachers. Professional development should center on developmentally appropriate practices, differentiation, and low SES. Providing professional development will allow for teacher to prepare and support students from all different levels and backgrounds. Stewart (2016) conducted a qualitative student exploring 16 teachers' perceptions of high-quality learning concerning Kindergarten readiness. Stewart's results indicated that teachers demonstrated a lack of understanding of structural quality and process quality in addition to believing that the current curriculum is outdated. As a result, a professional development program was developed for teachers intended to enhance their instructional practices in preparing early learners toward Kindergarten success.

Also, as this study found that Kindergarten teachers' perceive that preschool experience as a factor in school readiness to a significant extent, it is important for school districts to be aware of the importance of that finding and continue to develop and provide preschool opportunities.

Recommendations for Further Research

This quantitative study focused on four areas that include chronological age, gender, socioeconomic status, and preschool experience. All of which showed that Kindergarten teachers' perception of having an impact on student readiness for school. Other factors that impact student readiness for school could broaden the perception.

Furthermore, this research had a limited sample. Having a larger selection of participants including preschool teachers or other teachers not in Kindergarten may yield different results. The addition of multiple districts, districts of different demographics, and different district populations may aid the study.

In addition, long-term studies on a particular group of students with different experiences may prove to be beneficial. Tracking students who enter Kindergarten with different experiences over the course of several years could help identify if and where students begin to close the gap.

Another recommendation for additional study is to incorporate qualitative measures. In-depth interviews of Kindergarten teachers' perceptions of student readiness for school may yield results not discussed within this study. Mapson (2013) conducted a qualitative study exploring the teachers' beliefs of school readiness. Her in-depth interviews allowed for the researcher to report the reasoning behind the beliefs of the teachers. As an example, Mapson discussed how a teachers' belief centered on specific skills that students lacked. As the teachers explained those skills, they were also able to discuss the reasons why the students lacked the skills.

Finally, including parent views within the study may prove to be beneficial. Parents ultimately have the decision to send their children to school or not within a certain timeframe. Understanding the rationale for a parent choosing to redshirt a child or send the child to the next grade could prove to be valuable information.

Conclusions

Results of this study indicated that Kindergarten teachers who completed the survey perceived that chronological age, gender, socioeconomic status, and preschool experience did have a significant impact on a students' readiness for Kindergarten. New and experienced Kindergarten teachers had similar perceptions in regards to the significance of chronological age, gender, socioeconomic status, and preschool experiences on readiness for school.

No matter if a child enters Kindergarten fully prepared to meet the demands of the curriculum, Kindergarten teachers must be knowledgeable, skilled, and ready to address the developmental needs of all children. It is important that Kindergarten teachers are skilled in the area of differentiated practices as they play a key role in developing and preparing children for a successful academic career.

In addition, parents will ultimately be the ones to decide if their child is or is not ready for school. Redshirting a child continues to become more and more common as the standards and expectations continue to change and become more rigorous. Developing the whole child's physical, social, academic, and emotional needs must be always taken into consideration. Quality early childhood programs can help in meeting the needs of the whole child. Katz (1994) highlighted that successful early childhood programs are ones in which the administrators assess the setting, equipment, and staff of the program, how the community is served by the program, and the perceptions of the children, parents, and staff who participate in the program. Morrison (2007) further explained that the most important aspect of any early childhood program involves teachers and children working closely together in order to learn with and from each other.

Because of the various readiness levels of all children, ongoing professional development, collaborative teaching environments, and continually researching best practices have to be the staple of school systems to ensure that all children have an opportunity to succeed.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Kindergarten Teacher Perception Survey

The survey below involves research and will be used to examine kindergarten teacher's perceptions of student readiness for school. Please contribute to the survey by answering all of the following questions or statements. Although perceptions may differ, there is no right or wrong answer. Furthermore, all responses are confidential and voluntary. Completion of this survey grants permission for the researcher to use the results within the findings of the study. If needed, contact information is below.

James A. Wernke

wernkej@goldmail.etsu.edu

Please circle the appropriate letter for the following questions or statements regarding experience.

1. I have been teaching for _____ years.
 - a. 0-5
 - b. 6-10
 - c. 11-20
 - d. More than 20
2. I have been teaching kindergarten for _____ years.
 - a. 0-5
 - b. 6-10
 - c. 11-20
 - d. More than 20

For items 4-13, please place a check in the box to share your perception for the following statements.

- 1- Strongly Agree
- 2- Agree
- 3- Neutral
- 4- Disagree
- 5- Strongly Disagree

	1	2	3	4	5
3. Children who do not appear ready for school should wait a year prior to kindergarten.					
4. Older children are more successful in kindergarten than younger children					
5. Girls are more ready for kindergarten than boys of the same age.					
6. Children who attend preschool are more successful in kindergarten than children who do not attend preschool.					
7. Chronological age is a predictor for kindergarten readiness.					
8. Gender is a predicator for kindergarten readiness.					
9. Socioeconomic status is a predictor of kindergarten readiness.					
10. Preschool experience is a predictor of kindergarten readiness					
11. Children who come from a lower socioeconomic background are less ready for kindergarten than those children who come from a higher socioeconomic background.					
12. Children should have preschool experience prior to entering kindergarten.					

13. Rank the following predictors of student readiness for kindergarten in order from 1 being the greatest impact to 5 being the lowest impact.

_____ Chronological Age

_____ Preschool

_____ Gender

_____ Socioeconomics

_____ Other (please specify) _____

14. Please feel free to comment on any or all of the previous survey statements from above.

APPENDIX B

Letter to Principals

March 31, 2016

Principals,

Please forward the following email to all active Kindergarten teachers within your building.

Kindergarten Teachers,

My name is James A. Wernke and I am in the ELPA Doctoral Program at East Tennessee State University. I am currently in the process of dissertation research. My study topic is Kindergarten Teachers' Perceptions of Student Readiness for School. I have received approval from your districts Director of Schools to complete research. Since my topic includes Kindergarten teachers' perceptions, I would like you to be a part of the study as you are a Kindergarten teacher. The survey link below has 15 questions which will take approximately 10-15 minutes. The responses to the survey are completely anonymous and confidential. Furthermore, your participation in this study is voluntary. Completing the survey grants permission by the researcher to use the results within the study. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Click on the link below to access the survey.

<http://goo.gl/forms/pC9NHu96uj>

Sincerely,
James A Wernke
ELPA Doctoral Student
East Tennessee State University

VITA

JAMES ANTHONY WERNKE

Education: Ed.D., Educational Leadership , East Tennessee State University,
Johnson City, Tennessee May 2017

M.ED., Master of Education, Milligan College, Elizabethton,
Tennessee May 2007

B.A., Bachelor of Arts, Lincoln Memorial University, Harrogate,
Tennessee May 2004

Public Schools: Oak Hills School District, Cinicinnati, Ohio

Professional Experience: Assistant Principal, Ross N. Robinson Middle School; Kingsport
City Schools; Kingsport, TN 2016-present

Associate Principal, Sevier Middle School; Kingsport City
Schools; Kingsport, TN 2013-2016

Third Grade Teacher, John Adams Elementary; Kingsport City
Schools; Kingsport, TN 2009-2013

Third Grade Teacher, Johnson Elementary; Kingsport City
Schools; Kingsport, TN 2008-2009

Second Grade Teacher, QSI Quality Schools International Shekou;
Shekou, China 2007-2008

Professional Honors: Governor's Academy for School Leadership (GASL), Nashville,
Tennessee 2017-2018

Tennessee Center for Performance Excellence Examiner (TNCPE)
Nashville, Tennessee 2017