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Teachers' Perceptions of Students' Readiness for Kindergarten

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A dissertation

presented to

the faculty of the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis

East Tennessee State University

Johnson City, Tennessee

In partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree

Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership

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by

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May 2014

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Keywords: kindergarten, readiness, age, gender, preschool, socioeconomic status

ABSTRACT

Teachers' Perceptions of Students' Readiness for Kindergarten

by

Jennifer A. Simerly

The increase in the number of parents who decide not to enroll their children into a formal kindergarten once they become of age has triggered questions of what impacts readiness. The act of redshirting has doubled since 1980. Redshirting is simply delaying a child's entry into kindergarten by 1 year after they become age eligible to enroll. Parents want to make sure that with high stakes testing, a more demanding curriculum, and an increase in rigorous standards that their children are ready to start kindergarten with the best opportunity for success.

The purpose of this study was to examine how preschool and kindergarten teachers perceive age, gender, prior preschool experience, and socioeconomic status impact a child's readiness for kindergarten upon school entry. The study was also an examination of perceptions of preschool and kindergarten teachers as to whether or not readiness can be determined by a readiness test.

The design method chosen for this study was nonexperimental quantitative. Teachers responded to an online survey. The survey was distributed via email to preschool and kindergarten teachers who were employed in 2 rural east Tennessee counties. This study included the responses of 46 participants who chose to respond to the survey.

This study found to a significant extent that preschool and kindergarten teachers perceive that prior preschool experience, age, and socioeconomic status have an impact on kindergarten readiness. Teachers perceived prior preschool experience as having the greatest impact followed by age and then socioeconomic status. It was also found that both preschool and kindergarten teachers perceived that readiness could be measured by conducting a readiness test. Teachers did not perceive gender as having an impact on readiness.

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my wonderful parents who always encourage me to find my own self and to do what makes me happy. They always encourage me to follow through in everything I started no matter how tough it gets. My mom is my rock and my biggest cheerleader. She is the strongest most caring person I know. Mom: I am very lucky to have you as a mother and a great role model. My dad always taught me that I could succeed in anything I put my mind to. Although he will not be there to hug me on graduation day in person, I know he will be there with me in spirit and his guardian angel wings will be wrapped around me just as they were as I finished this journey. This daddy's girl knows he is very proud. I would like to thank both of my parents for showing me more love than I ever deserved.

To my Granny Belle in heaven: thank you for all the great memories. I can hear your sweet laughter now.

To my best friend Nikki: who has never left my side throughout this journey. She has always been a shoulder to cry on and a support to hold me up when I didn't think I could go any farther.

To my Bopsy twin Jessica: for sharing Kindergarten with me and always supporting me and helping me through the difficult times.

To my youngest supporters: India, Caleb, Marie, and Riley Jade, who I learn from each and every day. I hope that I have made an impact in your lives and that you know how much I love you.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Is my child ready for kindergarten? This is the looming question on the minds of many parents across the United States. The decision has become increasingly difficult with the rising emphasis on high stakes testing. School readiness is the developmental stage when a child has the ability to receive instruction and engage in particular assigned activities independently in a structured environment (Malone, West, Flanagan, & Park, 2006). Readiness is being able to listen attentively and have the ability to partake in the regular school curriculum (Anita, 2004). Ways of measuring readiness have varied over the years. In the Middle Ages, the apple - or - coin test determined whether a child was ready to start school. This test analyzed the child's ability to exhibit delayed gratification. The child was offered money or fruit, and when the child chose money, he or she was considered mature enough to begin school. The determining readiness factor for sending a child to school in 15th and 16th century Germany was the ability of the child to act rationally. In modern-day America, the child's birth date is the deciding factor for school entry (Weil, 2007).

States establish the age when students are eligible to attend school to prevent having a broad range of ages within a kindergarten classroom. There is generally a cutoff date establishing a deadline for children turning 5 to enter kindergarten; however, parents still have the choice of when to send their child within limits. Parents may not enroll their child early into a kindergarten program but may decide to delay his or her entry into kindergarten by 1 year if they feel that their child is not ready for the academic or social demands of school (Chen, 2009). Delaying a child's entry into school was originally labeled as the "graying of kindergarten"

(Bracey, 1989). As more parents delay their child's entry into kindergarten, the average age of kindergartners increase. Today this practice is known as "redshirting." The general assumption is that older students fair better than younger ones. Older children are stereotyped as generally more mature. Mature students tend to be capable of handling the demands of the kindergarten curriculum. They are equipped with the attributes needed in order to be ready to learn (Datar, 2006). The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) discounts this assumption; they criticize it for having little evidence to support the notion that older students are more successful (National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2009). Stipek (2003) also discounted the notion that age is a predictor of success.

The NAEYC affirms that children are not naturally "ready" or "not ready" for the academic demands of kindergarten. Instead, development is dependent upon the experiences provided to them by their parents, environment, and interactions they have from contact with others (National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2009). This leads to the perception that children of impoverished homes have an educational disadvantage. Jenson (2009) reported that neighborhoods overcome with poverty provide an inadequate environment. Affluent environments provide children with more social interactions, role models, social competencies, and resources (Jensen, 2009). Other inequalities for students from an impoverished community that may have an impact on school readiness are living in a single-parent home, having mothers who failed to complete their high school education, families dependent on welfare, and students coming from families who are non-English speaking (Children At Risk, 2005)

Statement of the Problem

The purpose of this study was to examine how preschool and kindergarten teachers perceive age, gender, prior preschool experience, and socioeconomic status impact a child's readiness for kindergarten upon school entry. The information gathered from the study was also used to examine perceptions of preschool and kindergarten teachers as to whether or not readiness can be determined by a readiness test.

Absolute age is the major determining factor for children entering school in the United States. Individual state legislatures determine the cutoff dates for kindergarten enrollment. These vary across states. The best age for school entry has been a topic of debate for some time and continues. Many states have reconsidered the school age of entry with the consensus being that older students are more prepared. Accountability pressures are also a major factor behind the reconsideration of school entry age (Marshall, 2003). Some parents, teachers, and administrators choose to consider other factors to determine school readiness instead of relying solely on age. A complete profile of the student is the best way to determine readiness because development among children takes place at different rates. Parents struggle with the possibility of increasing potential failure for their child if they make the wrong decision on when to send their child to school because those early experiences help setup for ongoing academic success (Smith, 2005). If there is a concern about readiness to begin school, the common practice is to redshirt children for a year (Chen, 2009).

Student success is also a priority for administrators and teachers. Educators want to see students succeed, but with each reauthorization of ESEA (The Elementary and Secondary Education Act) including Presidents Clinton's Goals 2000: Educate America Act and President Bush's No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act, the stakes have become higher, therefore, placing

more pressure on educational leaders. Goals 2000 stated that all children would begin school with the necessary skills needed for learning. This created the push for additional preschools that increased with the reauthorization of ESEA known as NCLB. The passing of NCLB in 2001 placed additional accountability on the states, which in turn set in motion a series of events that led to increasing the rigor of the curriculum within the school systems (U.S Department of Education, 2004).

Research Questions

The study focused on the following research questions:

1. To what extent do teachers perceive a child's readiness be determined by using a readiness test?
2. To what extent do teachers perceive that date of birth predicts a child's readiness for kindergarten?
3. To what extent do teachers perceive that gender predicts a child's readiness for kindergarten?
4. To what extent do teachers perceive that socioeconomic status predicts a child's readiness for kindergarten?
5. To what extent do teachers perceive preschool attendance as important for success in kindergarten?
6. Which factors are perceived as having the greatest impact on kindergarten readiness?

Significance of the Study

With the increasing academic content embedded in the kindergarten classroom, many lawmakers, parents, teachers, and administrators are facing the important decision of whether or not children are ready to enter kindergarten based on age requirements (Marshall, 2003). Many lawmakers and school districts are examining increasing the entry age when a child is eligible to enroll in a kindergarten program. It is a difficult but important decision to determine the time of a child's school entrance (Stipek, 2002).

This study was accomplished to study the perceptions of preschool and kindergarten teachers regarding the effect of entry age, gender, prior preschool experience, and socioeconomic status on the academic success of kindergarten students. The study was also conducted in order to survey preschool and kindergarten teachers' perceptions about whether or not readiness can be determined by a readiness test. The findings from this study could aid parents, teachers, and administrators who possibly may face readiness concerns. The results may provide assistance in determining whether to send a child to kindergarten when he or she become age eligible, or allowing that child 1 more year to develop.

Definition of Terms

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

1. *Absolute Age:* The age of a child determined by how many days a child has been alive (Stipek, 2003).
2. *Age eligible:* Students who meet the legal age requirement to enter kindergarten at the beginning of the school year (Graue, 2010).

3. *Developmental:* The process of mastering skills within a given time frame and within a certain sequential order (Weil, 2007).
4. *Readiness:* The act of being prepared as well as the willingness to engage.
5. *Redshirting:* Delaying entry of a kindergarten eligible child by 1 year with the assumption that it will allow the child more time to mature and develop (Weil, 2007).
6. *School readiness:* The act of being ready to learn and participate in school related activities. School readiness is individual to each child based on his or her background and experiences.

Delimitations

This study was confined by the following delimitations:

1. The participants surveyed were restricted to preschool and kindergarten teachers employed in two rural East Tennessee School Systems; therefore, it is limited by the demographics of those school systems.
2. The two school systems were comprised of public schools only; therefore, the student structure is limited to those enrolled within a public school.

Limitations

Limitations of the study are listed below:

1. The number and type of participants who choose 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.

Summary

The use of absolute age and birthday cutoffs have been the major determining factors of when a child should enter kindergarten, but this decision has not come without its controversies. If children are ready for kindergarten and when they are ready has been a concern among school personnel and legislators for years. Children go through developmental stages at differing rates. By using age as the guiding factor for kindergarten entry developmental differences are disregarded. This quantitative study was accomplished in order to examine preschool and kindergarten teachers' perceptions of how age, gender, prior preschool experience, and socioeconomic status have an effect on kindergarten readiness.

Overview of the Study

The 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 analyses. Chapter 5 presents the summary, findings, conclusions, and recommendations for this study.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Policymakers and parents appear to be major contributing factors promoting the growth of a curriculum that is more demanding and rigorous. Schools are responding to this by increasing the rigor of the curriculum at a record rate. Younger students are expected to know more than ever before (Svensen, 2011).

Policymakers have created the demand for a more rigorous curriculum (Chen, 2009). The push for high stakes testing has raised expectations in the kindergarten curriculum. President Bush's plan to improve the education system included increasing the number of children going to a preschool program (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2003). Parents of many preschoolers report that preschool provides socialization and character building as well as academic foundations; therefore, the kindergarten curriculum should be rigorous (Svensen, 2011).

The rising number of parents redshirting their children may be a contributing factor for the more intense curriculum within the kindergarten grade-level (Children Now, 2009). Some parents deem that the kindergarten curriculum is challenging and do not want to set their child up for failure. This leads parents to make the decision of holding children out another year to give them more time to mature (Weil, 2007). Redshirting students is producing a kindergarten classroom of older students that should be able to handle a more intense curriculum; therefore, school systems are increasing the rigor (Frey, 2005). This spiraling cycle is responsible for both the demanding curriculum and the age at which it is deemed appropriate for a child to enter kindergarten.

The success of a child starts from birth; therefore, it is very important to intervene early in his or her development. In the initial stages it is important for the child to remain healthy for proper development. Well-checks provide a foundation for the promotion of emotional, physical, and cognitive development (Children At Risk, 2005). The National Association for Education of Young Children (NAEYC) emphasizes the idea that it is essential for families to have access to resources and opportunities particularly for those considered at risk (National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2009). Judith Hoyer, specialist in early childhood education, additionally claimed that services should be accessible to families. In 2000 she started Judy centers in the state of Maryland (Schweitzer, 2009). The goal of Judy Centers was to interlock all family services together with education in one central location (Schweitzer, 2009). Judith Hoyer affirmed that the best designation for the meshing of the services is within Title I schools, but if this was not an available option, the services should be located in direct connection with the school (Schweitzer, 2009). According to Schweitzer (2009) the curriculum of Judy Centers included the following five prongs:

1. Health and social adjustment
2. Letter-sound relation, print, and understanding stories
3. Basic math
4. Role in the family and the community
5. Self-expression through creativity

In the state of Maryland Judy Centers have been successful (Schweitzer, 2009). There is at least one center located in each of Maryland's counties and there are four additional ones throughout the state, totaling 24 in all.

The underlying reality is that children's development will always occur at different rates and there will always be variations in maturity (Weil, 2007). Children appear to grow in patterns that are universal, but it is the rate at which children develop that is unique to each child (Zemelman, Daniels, & Hyde, 2005). The developmental differences can be attributed to many factors, but the truth is the child should not be held responsible for being "ready" to enter kindergarten; instead, it is the responsibility of the school to be prepared for all children no matter their age or development (Weil, 2007). Early educators should be prepared to teach all students individually according to their developmental stage or emerging capabilities (Zemelman et al., 2005). The educator should be prepared to use different teaching tactics to ensure he or she is reaching each child. All students are ready to learn no matter their absolute age, the key is to find what each child is ready to learn (Stipek, 2003).

History of Kindergarten

The kindergarten concept was created in the 1830s and gained familiarity throughout the world by the end of the 19th century. The first kindergarten classrooms were very different from the ones of today. The first kindergarten was established in Blankenburg, Germany, in 1839 (Weil, 2007). The founder was Friedrich Froebel (1782-1852), a German philosopher and teacher (Svensen, 2011). Froebel opened the kindergarten on the principle of Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Rousseau's premise was that "reading is the plague of childhood… books are good only for learning to babble about what one does not know" (as cited in Sax, 2001, p. 3). Therefore, Froebel's kindergarten only had blocks and games that were handmade, anything that consisted of letters and numbers was officially banned (Weil, 2007). It was also important to include music, nature study, and play (Beatty, 1995). Froebel believed that the classroom should

be a “child’s garden”, hence the name kindergarten. His idea of what a kindergarten classroom consisted of was one filled with plants and flowers and that encouraged curiosity among the children attending (Svensen, 2011). Creativity was the primary focus (Wollons, 2000). The beginning concept of kindergarten was a classroom in which children learn through play and exploration unlike today’s functional kindergarten (Wesley 2003). Using play allowed children to develop without restraint and at their own developmental rates (Meisels, 1992).

Margarethe Meyer Schurz, who studied under Froebel and followed his same principles, brought the concept of kindergarten to America in 1856 (America's First Kindergarten 150 years 1856-2006, 2006). She began a class with her two children and three others in her home in Watertown, Wisconsin. Schurz eventually moved to a small building where she continued to operate until she moved in 1857. The school was successful and continued to operate as a private school until the turn of the century when it became a component of the public school system. The first kindergartens were half-day programs (Miller, 2005). In mid 1990s the move toward a full-day kindergarten program became popular (Miller, 2005). The full-day program was widely accepted because it decreased the number of transitions the students had to encounter within a day. A full-day program also provided benefits socially and academically (Miller, 2005).

By the 1980s, kindergarten was required in 10 states. In 1989 Oregon passed the law that required kindergarten to be offered universally throughout the state. Oregon was the 49th state to require kindergarten. The last state to offer a statewide kindergarten program was New Hampshire (Child Welfare League of America, 2009). For 20 years New Hampshire remained the only state not requiring a universal kindergarten (Child Welfare League of America, 2009). It was finally legislated that all schools in New Hampshire must provide kindergarten by the year

2009. Although it is required for kindergarten programs to be offered in New Hampshire, children are not required to attend kindergarten.

Kindergarten, initially based on the premise of learning fair play and nice manners, has moved toward a curriculum of structured standards and testing. The original goals of kindergarten began to change in 1983 with the publication of "A Nation at Risk" by the National Commission on Excellence in Educations (Weil, 2007). This report by the commission declared that expectations within the school system be raised because we were a country moving toward a "tide of mediocrity" (Weil, 2007). This began the transition to an increasingly academic kindergarten classroom instead of one that was child-centered (Wollons, 2000). The decline worsened after 2002 with the passage of No Child Left Behind (Weil, 2007). No Child Left Behind (NCLB) caused the trickledown effect meaning kindergarten has become the new first grade. The kindergarten curriculum has become more rigorous and centered in depth on standards (Paul, 2010). Kindergarten is no longer a classroom filled with activities that encourage social development but one in which skills are now expected to be mastered (Hall & Williams, 2000). Kindergarten classes include worksheets and drills instead of learning through play. Due to the increasing demands, teachers report that 48% of incoming kindergarteners are having a difficult time handling the higher demands (Weil, 2007).

Shift in Curriculum

Throughout the educational system there has been a definite shift in curriculum. The kindergarten classroom was one that supported interests of the students. The elements of the classroom were noisy, messy, and playful. The kindergarten curriculum is no longer based on play and exploration as it once was, instead the course of study resembles expectations found in

a first grade classroom in past years (Graue, 2010). Initially kindergarten was intended to be a developmental year for children. When the first kindergartens were developed, they were done with the premise that children develop at varying rates (O'Donnell & Mulligan, 2008).

The shift in the kindergarten curriculum can be attributed to varying reasons, one reason being the changing world itself. In the 1950s when kindergarten was established children stayed at home with their mothers, only 21% age eligible children attended kindergarten. This has risen to nearly 100% in present time (Graue, 2010). Kindergarten is no longer the first formal school students receive. Graue (2010) reported the shift in family structure resulted in more students attending preschool before they enter into kindergarten. Therefore, preschool is now becoming the transition between home and school instead of kindergarten. Many parents of students who attended preschool do not want a play-based kindergarten because they view this as a repeat of preschool. They want their children to move forward and become engaged in a curriculum based more on academics.

The passing of NCLB in 2001, which requires testing in grades as low as third, resulted in increased pressures in the schools (Painter & Lincove, 2006). The pressure in the tested grades also caused anxiety in the lower grades such as kindergarten, first, and second (Painter & Lincove,2006). The demands of standardized assessment and accountability resulted in a look at existing curriculums within school systems and restructuring it to make sure it challenges the students at each grade level (Painter & Lincove, 2006). The administration of the school is held accountable for the success of the school based on test scores (Painter & Lincove, 2006). Many administrators expect to see instructional time used to the fullest extent in all grade levels including kindergarten. A school day should be filled with numeracy and literacy leaving play to something that happens at home (Graue, 2010).

School Readiness

Educators, parents, and lawmakers use the term "ready for school", but there are many interpretations for the meaning of that phrase. The definition of readiness has been debated for years (Scott-Little, Kagan, & Frelow, 2006). Readiness is a challenging concept to define because the meaning varies among those who are defining it. Teachers, parents, childhood professionals, and lawmakers all have a different perspective on what readiness actually implies. Lin, Lawrence, and Gorrell (2003) said that one's definition of readiness can be impacted by his or her income, ethnicity, and years of experience with early childhood education.

To some readiness is simply possessing characteristics needed to succeed in special tasks. In this case it would be the ability to succeed in the academic environment of school (Scott-Little et al., 2006). This is the maturational view. If children have not developed to a certain maturity level, they should not begin school (Stipek, 2002). Relying on maturation leads to favoring a readiness test in order to determine eligibility for kindergarten entry (Meisels, 1992).

Readiness expectations also vary from school to school, but this should be resolved through community discussion forums that involve all stakeholders to develop a common set of expectations (Hatcher, Nuner, & Paulsel, 2012). When considering the meaning of readiness, one should look at the beginning. The increased awareness of readiness lies with the National Educational Goals Panel (NEPG) (Hatcher et al., 2012). In 1991 the NEPG established six goals for the educational community. The development of the first national goal focuses on the true meaning of readiness. The first goal claimed, "By the year 2000, all children in America will start school ready to learn" (National Education Goals Panel, 2000 par.1). The NEGP continued to refine the definition of readiness until it was accepted by the early childhood community

(Wesley & Buysse, 2003). According to the NEGP (2000) readiness focuses on five different areas of development. The five areas are:

1. Motor development and physical well-being
2. Social and emotional development
3. Approaches toward learning
4. Language usage and the ability to communicate
5. Cognition and general knowledge

Development in one of the five areas affects development in all other areas (Children Now, 2009).

For others readiness is simply reaching a certain age (Kim, Murdock, & Choi, 2006). According to many school systems age is the best indicator of school readiness (Hatcher et al., 2012). The position of many school systems is that the only way to create a common and equitable standard among students is to use chronological age (Kagan, 1990). School systems use age cutoff dates for kindergarten entry making the child's absolute age the determining factor of whether or not he or she is ready to embark on the educational journey (Children Now, 2009).

Stipek (2003) opposed the concept of age being a good predictor of readiness. She posited that basing readiness on age does not take into consideration prior experiences, if they had attended preschool, and the concept that children do not develop at the same rate. She maintained the notion that some children could be ready at an earlier age if they have had exposure to worldly things. Parents who work with their children and travel with them may have children who are more prepared than others who have not been exposed to similar experiences; therefore, Stipek (2002) advocated that experience should be preferred over maturation.

Wesley and Buysse (2003) conducted a study involving 20 focus groups, 93 professional educators, and 25 parents to determine the ability to define kindergarten readiness based on chronological age. The biggest concern among teachers when discussing school readiness is the number of students who were unable to follow directions. This described about 50% of the class. The inability to pay attention and follow directions were not the only concerns among teachers. Over the years, the same concern is still expressed by teachers. Hatcher et al. (2012) conducted a study involoving 13 teachers and 16 parents to delve into beliefs and perceptions about kindergarten readiness. All 13 teachers who particpated in the study responded that readiness for kindergarten was being able follow a routine. Simple school routines would include waiting in line, following directions, and waiting their turn. They also stated that it was important for kindergarten students to be able to focus on the task at hand, show the ability to work in large groups, and know how to take directives from teachers.

According to the Minnesota Department of Education (2010), parents and educational professionals both agree that social and emotional development along with language and communication are important skills for development of kindergarten readiness. If students possess the readiness areas discussed above, it will be easier for them to learn academic skills (Minnesota Department of Education, 2010). This premise also reoccurred in the study of Hatcher et al. (2012). There were 29 participants in the study and 25 of them expressed being able to connect and communicate with their teachers and peers was crucial for acquiring kindergarten readiness (Hatcher et al., 2012).

The concept of readiness is not limited to students, but it is also for the educational community. Principals discussed that schools should be ready for kindergarten students by providing updated facilities with improved general maintenance (Wesley & Buysse, 2003).

Schools should be ready to assist the incoming kindergarten students by giving them time to adjust to the new environment. Some would suggest a staggered enrollment period for the beginning 2 weeks to allow students time to become familiar with the school before becoming overwhelmed (Wesley & Buysse, 2003). To help with the transition from home to school more assistants should be available. Wesley and Buysse also recommended that parents should be invited and welcomed in the school. Parents need to know that their child is receiving the best education possible, and that the school is one where everyone feels safe and encouraged to succeed and be a part of the learning process.

Prekindergarten teachers stated that an appropriate kindergarten should be one based on a developmentally fitting curriculum (Wesley & Buysse, 2003). The curriculum should appropriately suit every child of kindergarten age regardless of his or her readiness (Graue, 2010). Graue said the teacher does not dictate the students' learning but instead guides and facilitates it. Teachers themselves possess a commitment for continuing education in each child by building learning based on the child's individual experiences.

Kindergarten Birthdays

In the United States birthday cut offs have been the determining factor of when a child should enter kindergarten. Of the 50 states, only 16 require enrollment in a kindergarten program before attending first grade (National Center for Education Statistics, 2012). The state government controls guidelines of school entrance age and there is a variance of when students are allowed to enter kindergarten. Each state requires the student to reach the age of 5 years to attend kindergarten. The date in which they must turn age 5 varies from state to state. Five states require students to be age 5 before August 1. Fourteen states require the student to turn age 5

within the month of August. Twenty-two states require that students turn age 5 at any point within the month of September, this being the most common cut off month. One state has the cutoff date in October and one in January. Eight state governments leave the entry age decision up to local districts (Education Commission of the States, 2013). States that have compulsory age laws do not permit students to begin kindergarten earlier than the required limit, but delayed entry is permissible by a year (Weil, 2007).

Many lawmakers are pushing for a change in the kindergarten cutoff date that would allow students to be older upon entering kindergarten. Raising the minimum kindergarten age for entry is a reaction to the trend of students entering kindergarten later. This provides an increased chance the student will be ready to learn (Datar, 2006). Of the reporting districts between 1974 and 1997 more than one third increased their entrance age by 3 to 4 months (De Cos, 1997). The reasoning behind this move was to improve their states' chances in the academic race. These districts wanted their students to be able to compete with students across the United States on achievement tests. Moving the age limit was also a strategy to equip students to handle the increasing demand of the curriculum (Stipek, 2003). The NAEYC holds its position that this is not the correct response; instead raising the age could result in many children missing a year of exposure to an environment filled with high quality education (National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2009). Moving the birthday cutoff upon which a child may enter school will still produce kindergarten classrooms where some students are going to be younger than others, continuing the cycle of teachers continually complaining that their younger students are not as prepared as their older students (Weil, 2007).

State of Tennessee Requirements

The state of Tennessee has examined the kindergarten entry age and is working on legislation that would move the birthday cutoff date by 6 weeks. According to State Representative Glen Casada, kindergarten teachers reported that children who begin school at an older age have an advantage and are more likely to succeed. Casada advocated moving the cutoff date by 6 weeks to require that children entering kindergarten will have already turned age 5 (Sisk, 2012). The legislation changing the cutoff date passed the House on April 26, 2012, and went into effect on October 1, 2012 (State of Tennessee Public Chapter No. 991 (2012b). The House Bill No. 2566 requires the state of Tennessee to phase in the cutoff dates over a period of 2 years. The cutoff date for the year 2013-2014 was changed to August 31 and for the year 2014-2015 it moves to August 15 (State of Tennessee Public Chapter No. 991 (2012a). The cutoff date will remain August 15 every year after that which is 6 weeks earlier than the previous cutoff date of September 30 (State of Tennessee Public Chapter No. 991 (2012a).

There will be some exceptions to starting kindergarten. Some 4 year olds may prove they are ready to start based on their performance on an entry exam (Sisk, 2012). This method of entry goes against the position statements of the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) as well as the NAEYC. Both organizations are in opposition to using a screening test to determine a child's readiness for school (Frey, 2005).

Readiness Tests

The maturational view of readiness favors a readiness test. According to this view a child needs to develop certain maturity levels in order to begin school (Meisels, 1992). Proponents of readiness tests argue that examining the level of maturity should be completed by administering

a readiness test. Determining the right readiness test may prove to be difficult for some school districts considering there are more than 100 different types of readiness tests available. According to the National Center for Fair and Open Testing (2008), some of the more common readiness tests used are the Boehm Test of Basic Concepts, the Brigance Inventory of Early Development, the Gesell School Readiness Test, and the Metropolitan Readiness Test. We will take a closer look at each of the above mentioned testing inventories.

The Boehm Test of Basic Concepts is currently in its third edition (Boehm-3). Boehm-3 is standardized both in English and Spanish. It is used to evaluate students on 50 basic concepts that are most commonly intergrated in kindergarten through second grade classrooms. The test may be given in the fall in order to identify shortfalls a student may have. It can help aid in detecting certain areas that a student may need more help in. It may be given again in the spring to determine whether or not progress has been made througout the school year (Boehm, 2014).

The Brigance Inventory of Early Development II (IED II) can be used to test children starting at birth up to age 7. The test was standardized using 1,171 children from different areas throughout the country. The test also has a high degree of consistency, reliability, and validity. The IED II tests in five different domains. The domains are physical development, language development, academic and cognitive, daily living, and social and emotional. Within the domains there are subcategories. The domain of physical development includes fine motor and gross motor development. The language development domain tests both on receptive and expressive development. Math and literacy is tested within the academic, cognitive domain. Daily living tests the areas of self-help and prevocational. The social and emotional domain tests play and behavior skills (Glascoe, n.d.).

The IED II is a testing tool that can be used in differing ways. The test may be given at the beginning of a school year to identify students' strengths and weaknessess and aid in the development of indivualized educational plans. This test identifies developmental delays and language impairments. The IED II may be given a second time at the end of the school year to assess growth and progress (Glascoe, n.d.).

The Gesell Early Screener (GES) is suited for children ages 3 through 6. The GES tests development in the areas of cognitive; language; motor; and social, emotional, adaptive skills. The GES only scores a performance rate of age appropriate, emerging, or concern. In order to assess developmental age, the Gesell Developmental Observation-Revised (GDO-R) assessment must be used. The GDO-R is complementary to the GES. The GDO-R assesses in the same areas as the GES, but it also evaluates in the strands of developmental, letters and numbers, language and comprehension, and visual spatial. The GDO-R is completed through direct observation by a trained observer (Gessell Institute of Child Development, n.d.).

The Metropolitan Readiness Test (MRT-6) is currently in its sixth edition. It is a psychological test that tests reading and math skills. The test is geared for children ages 4 to 7. It tests in five different academic areas. These areas include visual discrimination, beginning consonants, sound-letter corresponcence, story comprehension, and quantitative concepts and reasoning . The MRT-6 is used to help in placing students in the correct grade placement. It also is used for advancement into first and second grades (Health Grades Inc., 2013).

According to Pyle (2002) screenings in kindergarten can help identify the needs of children as long as they are administered and analyzed correctly. Analyzing the screenings is hard to do with incoming kindergarten students because their environmental background should

be considered, but this cannot be included in screenings (Pyle, 2002). The National Center for Fair and Open Testing (2008) does not agree with testing readiness to determine entry into kindergarten. This was also stated earlier by the NAEYC. The NAEYC does find readiness screening beneficial in determining needs. According to the NAEYC testing in kindergarten should be used for identifying special needs, program evaluations, and accountability (Snow, 2011).

It is difficult to find a test that is reliable in testing young children. Children change so often that the outcomes are not always correct. According to The National Center for Fair and Open Testing (2008) readiness tests given to young children have a 50% rate of being wrong.

National Association For The Education Of Young Children

Founded in 1926, the NAEYC is a nonprofit organization that works toward the improvement of early childhood education in children from birth to age 8 (National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2009). The NAEYC disagrees with the notion that children should be ready to start kindergarten possessing certain skills and meeting expectations of the school. The association affirms that schools and their kindergarten classrooms should be ready to meet the diverse abilities and needs of all children who are entering (Svensen, 2011). The school should provide a curriculum that builds on prior knowledge, provides meaningful experiences, supports hands-on active learning, and is child-guided with teacher support (National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2009).

The NAEYC maintains the premise that development in children happens at different rates and in different ways (National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2009).

Not every student entering the same classroom door is equipped with the developmental readiness to follow the same course of study (Bounds, 2004). Using the information that each and every child is different in his or her development, the NAEYC declared that early childhood educators should complete training on how to teach young children and be conscious of individual differences each child possesses and how to address his or her individual needs (National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2009).

The NAEYC defines readiness as the expectations of children, within reasonable limits, upon entering school. Readiness does not only involve the child but must also include the family, community, early childcare, and schools (National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2009). Families are the children's first teachers. Readiness is dependent upon families to meet the basic skills needed for school success. Parents should take the initiative to expose their child to a variety of experiences and situations that can instill skills and knowledge that will be beneficial to the child in an academic setting. Wesley and Buysse supported the statement by saying, "Parents should expose the child to many environmental experiences" (2003, p. 362).

The education system has shifted away from Frobel's idea of learning through natural play (Svensen, 2011). The education system is also getting away from the position statement of the NAEYC. Teachers who advocate developmentally appropriate education are having a difficult time with the shift of the kindergarten curriculum. Classroom teachers argue that physical activity and outside playtime have been replaced by indoor seatwork. The shift is coming from legislators who do not have training in early childhood education (Wesley & Buysse, 2003). Such legislators suggest that in some situations students should be able and are expected to write their name at the initial kindergarten screening. Early childhood educators

sense they are losing the concept of developmentally appropriate education. (Wesley & Buysse, 2003). Instead of doing what is right for the students, educators must do what is legislatively mandated. Educators report that they are not benefiting the children as much as they could because of the increasing demands on kindergarten students. Educators maintain they could accomplish much more if the legislators would give regard to the fact that not all students are at the same level and that children do not learn at the same pace (Wesley & Buysse, 2003). The demands made by legislators are placing higher demands on children that may not be developmentally ready to take on such tasks (Wesley & Buysse, 2003).

Preschool

The passing of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001(NCLB) placed accountability of student success on the state (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2003). This in turn resulted in looking at the availability and structuring of preschools. NCLB identified the importance of available preschools because of the benefits earned from children being enrolled in educational programs starting at an early age (Stipek, 2003). Love (2010) also confirmed the benefits of an early program by looking at the effects a Head Start program would have on children entering kindergarten. Love found that the impact of a Head Start program was significant in that it helped limit unwanted behaviors that were aggressive in nature while increasing a student's attention span and willingness to be engaged. Early education opportunities also had an impact on parents as well. Parents whose children attended a Head Start program were inclined to read more with their children and to use more opportunities as teachable moments. Love studied Head Start programs, but the findings are also relevant to other preschool programs. The overall inference of the study is that a high quality early program

assists the neediest of families with educational opportunities. According to Children Now (2009) an early opportunity in a preschool program has been proven effective on improving graduation rates.

Hatcher et al. (2012) established that problem solving skills were key to kindergarten readiness according to parents and teachers alike. Hatcher et al. found that children who attended a preschool program were better equipped to use problem solving skills academically, with others, and interpersonally. Students who attended a preschool prior to attending kindergarten were also equipped with the skills to better express themselves with their teachers as well as their peers.

Although there have been major accomplishments with the development of high quality, state financed preschools for children who are economically disadvantaged, additional improvements need to be made. In spite of all the efforts a need for more preschools that serve the disadvantaged is still evident (Weil, 2007). One problem is that preschool is only offered to families of exceptionally low-income (Weil, 2007). In turn, families who still are unable to afford preschool but are not in the economic bracket of receiving help are left out (Weil, 2007). Those students may have the opportunity to gain knowledge from parents, but they do not have access to an environment that would help them obtain social skills and familiarity with an academic setting (Weil, 2007). Preschools mandated by states are having a positive impact on the educational process for some children, but redshirted children are not eligible to attend those preschools. Students who are age appropriate to attend kindergarten do not meet the requirements to be enrolled in publicly financed preschools (Weil, 2007).

Redshirting

The increasing importance on academics within the kindergarten curriculum has caused an escalating concern among parents trying to decide if their child is ready for kindergarten when he or she meets the age requirement. With the demanding rigor of the kindergarten curriculum, the trend of redshirting has doubled since 1980 (Chen, 2009). The term *redshirting* comes from the practice of delaying college athletes so that they can become bigger and stronger in order to be more competitive (Paul, 2010). When referring to redshirting an incoming kindergarten student the term is associated with delaying a child's entry into kindergarten by a year. Redshirting is a form of retention, only it happens before the child begins school (National Association of Early Childhood Specialist in State Departments of Education, 2000).

Parents feel as though they are assisting their child with the "gift of time" (Bounds, 2004). Redshirting has also become popular with the push for students having good self-esteem. Weil (2007) stated that wanting everything in their children's life to be pleasant is the trend among parents. Those who are worried about their children's self-esteem believe that delaying entrance into kindergarten by a year may keep them from experiencing social and emotional harm (Weil, 2007). Decreasing the possibility of their child receiving a label by educators is another reason parents redshirt their child (Weil, 2007). Both advantages and disadvantages are associated with redshirting.

Teaching has become increasingly difficult with the new phenomena of redshirting. The age gaps between students have grown progressively farther apart (Carlson, 2009). Using birthday cutoff dates as the predictor of enrolling a student would limit the average age span within a classroom to 12 months, but redshirting can produce classrooms with age spans of 16 months or more (Bounds, 2004). Teachers find it difficult to address the needs of every student

when there is such a large range. As redshirting is increasing, the age of the classroom is also increasing causing concern for the younger students. Teachers are modifying their instruction to the older students, therefore not meeting the needs of the younger ones (March, 2005).

Redshirting does allow students time to become a year older, but it does not necessarily allow them time to become better prepared. The premise of parents who redshirt their children is giving them more time to develop in order to succeed in school (Carlson, 2009). The birth date of someone does not measure success, but the quality of stimulation provided by the child's environment does (Chen, 2009). In other words, parents who deny their child entry into a kindergarten program and do not change their child's environment and daily routine could cause an adverse effect. When an athlete is redshirted he or she still attends team practices and participates in training, but this is not true for school-aged children who are academically redshirted (Katz, 2000). Yes, the child would be older, but this does not automatically mean he or she will be better prepared. Some feel that instead of "the gift of time", it would be time wasted (Hu, 2011). It would be better to enroll the student into the kindergarten program because the school setting will provide the stimulation needed for emotional and intellectual growth (Chen, 2009). Another thing to consider is the possibility that the child's delay may be due to a disability. Redshirting would be a disadvantage to a child with a disability because it would deny him or her a year of early diagnosis, early intervention, and special education services (Denham, Hatfield, Smethurst, Tan, & Tribe, 2006).

Redshirting tends to broaden the gap between children of differing socioeconomic statuses (Bounds, 2004). Families that are economically disadvantaged cannot afford to redshirt their children. In most cases of this nature, students are of black or Hispanic descent (Hu, 2011). The youngest students in the class tend to feel emotionally inferior because they are smaller and

may not excel in physical education and sports (Paul, 2010). Redshirted students who have experienced outside educational activities are inclined to get bored and act out more (Bounds, 2004). Students at an older age due to redshirting have a tendency to feel awkward when they mature and hit puberty before their classmates (Katz, 2000). The National Association of Early Childhood Specialists in State Departments of Education maintains that any form of retention affects the social emotional aspect of a child in a negative way (2000). Redshirted children may develop poor attitudes toward school due to feeling that they have failed (Graue & DiPerna, 2000). Looking ahead, redshirted students tend to have a higher dropout rate (Hu, 2011). Redshirting also postpones entry into the workforce, therefore lowering income of some adults and having a negative impact on social security (Deming & Dynarski, 2008).

Supporters of redshirting affirm that children go through stages of developmental milestones. They argue that children achieve the milestones when they are ready regardless of exposure to environmental stimuli. In this sense neither educators nor parents have any bearing on accelerating development (Katz, 2000). Advocates maintain that redshirted students tend to adjust better socially and emotionally than their younger counterparts as well as being developmentally prepared (Carlson, 2009). According to Bedard and Dhuey (2006) redshirting provides an academic edge and the performances of those students are higher. According to Dalton (2011) entering students who are younger perform lower academically than do their older peers. Dalton also stated that by the end of third grade, students who are younger still perform lower in reading ability.

There is not a right or wrong answer when it comes to making the decision to redshirt a child; the reality is that it is a personal choice that should be resolved on an individual basis considering all available circumstances (Chen, 2009). Parents should not make the decision

alone but should include input from their pediatrician, teachers, principals, and others who know the child (Chen, 2009). Looking at the development of the child is not the only thing to consider when deciding on whether or not to hold a child out for another year. Certain aspects of the school should be considered. For example, one area to examine within the school is the school setting and how capable the school is at meeting diverse needs of every child no matter the developmental level (Weil, 2007).

Boys vs. Girls

Research tends to prove that there is a difference in readiness between boys and girls. The National Institutes of Health conducted a study that found brain development in boys and girls to be different (Sax, 2008). This study discounts initial findings by Sigmund Freud who found that brain development was the same among boys and girls (Sax, 2008). Freud coined what he called the "latency period", the duration in children that boys and girls are gender mutual. This period lasts until puberty (Sax, 2008). The institute contradicts Freud's findings by declaring that brain development in boys and girls is very different. Boys mature at a slower pace than girls do (Sax, 2008). It is also evident that the area in the brain that is responsible for language develops later in boys than it does in girls (Sax, 2006).

The environment and society also have an impact on gender differences. Many elementary classrooms favor girls' preference in reading. Boys would rather read nonfiction material. They benefit from reading information based on fact. Fictional materials are more commonly found in most elementary classrooms (Below, Skinner, Fearington, & Sorrell, 2010).

In 2001 Zill and West stated that boys are often considered less mature, are academically lower, and do not maintain the social skills as girls of the same age. Looking at brain

development may explain the earlier findings by Zill and West. Girls are not as prone to engage in unwanted behaviors as boys the same age. Self-monitoring develops earlier among girls. Being able to self-monitor aids in obtaining the skill to control impulses. Because self-monitoring and impulse control develops later in boys, they may be viewed as more physically aggressive that girls of the same age (Gurian, 2011).

The difference in maturation between boys and girls may contribute to the higher percentage of boys diagnosed with attention deficit disorder (ADD) and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) (Sax, 2008). Boys were many times more likely labeled ADHD as girls. Sixty-seven percent of boys were diagnosed while only 2.5% of girls were (Pastor & Reuben, 2008). According to Sax (2008) boys are often misdiagnosed with ADD and ADHD. He claimed boys are placed in developmentally inappropriate environments causing them much stress, hence the misdiagnosis.

Kindergarten-aged boys demonstrated lower academic performance than girls did of the same age (Malone et al., 2006). Looking at the academic differences of boys and girls entering kindergarten 70% of girls knew their letters compared to only 62% of boys. Girls also had a slight advantage over boys being able to produce the sounds that each letter represents. Thirty-two percent of girls were able to do this while only 26% of boys were able to match sounds to the letters they represent. Entering into kindergarten, boys possess weaker reading skills (Below et al., 2010). The gender differences in readiness found in kindergarten usually increases by first grade (Camarata & Woodcock, 2006). Dalton (2011) found that gender had a direct effect on reading ability by the end of third grade..

Boys also tended to struggle more than girls did when it came to showing interest in the day-to-day activities within the classroom. Boys were inclined to be bored and disengaged in

school activities (Sax, 2008). The 2007 National Household Education Survey program reported that parents planned to redshirt boys more than girls at a percentage rate of 9 % to 4 % (O'Donnell & Mulligan, 2008). Boys with summer and autumn birthdays are more likely to be redshirted (March, 2005).

Kindergarten teachers should be aware of the differences among genders and must provide different reading materials within the classroom (Below et al., 2010). The teacher should continuously move throughout the room and ought to speak in a louder, but nonthreatening, voice (Sax, 2008). Constant questioning is a way to make certain that students are engaged in learning (Sax, 2008). These simple tasks can ensure that the teacher is making an effort to bridge the gap among genders (Sax 2008). By using these simple tasks teachers can ensure they are doing their best to benefit each student regardless of gender. Teachers can impact each child by incorporating different materials that may enhance the learning process in both boys and girls (Below et al., 2010).

Socioeconomic Status

Some may ask if the socioeconomic status in which a student is reared cause variances in readiness. According to Copple and Bredekamp (2009) differences in readiness do exist. Differences among children and their ability to demonstrate school readiness may begin as early as the birth of the child. A child's health can contribute to areas of development. Developmental problems are more prone in children with a low birth weight. (Haskins & Sawhill, 2009).

The linguistic and cognitive skills of a child from many low-income families are limited due to inadequate environmental opportunities. The decreased exposure is evident when

entering kindergarten. Students of low-income families are usually 12 to 14 months behind the norm in language and prereading skills (Currie, 2005). Four year olds who live in poverty are on average at least 18 months behind developmentally than other children their age who were not reared in an impoverished home (Copple & Bredekam 2009). Households of low-income students tend to have a limited number of books within the home. Children reared in low-income homes are read to less frequently. Verbal interaction among the parents and child at an early age is minimal (Brooks-Gunn & Markman, 2005). A link between inadequate interaction and weak language skills, memory, and cognitive skills is evident (The Institute of Child Health and Human Development, 2000). Miles and Stipek reported that students of impoverished homes also lack the readiness they need in social and emotional skills such as managing emotions, sharing, taking turns, working cooperatively, taking responsibility, and completing assigned tasks (2006).

The developmental difference between students in low income and others students can contribute to the achievement gap (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009). Kindergarten has changed over the years and does not allow as many opportunities for disadvantaged children of poverty to overcome the readiness skills they are lacking as much as kindergartens based on Froebel's model did (Lascarides & Hinitz, 2000). The Head Start Program, which began in 1965, focuses on diminishing the readiness gap between students of different economic statuses (Wollens, 2000). It provides students of low-income families the exposure they need to overcome the differences in developmental readiness (Lascarides & Hinitz, 2000).

The efforts of Head Start and preschool programs in decreasing the readiness gap are shrinking with the increasing trend of redshirting. The majority of students redshirted are those of middle and upper income families that are able to provide educational enhanced opportunities

(Crosser, 2007). This places the youngest students in classes being those of lower-income families (Hu, 2011). Lower-income families are financially unable to hold their children out of school a year (Hu, 2011). If students of lower-income families are redshirted, they are most likely to be placed in the situation they have grown up, which is one of limited environmental opportunities for growth (Chen, 2009).

Conclusion

"By the year 2000, all children in America will start school ready to learn" was the first goal out of six established by the NEGP in 1989 at the Education Summit (National Education Goals Panel, 2000 par.1). . Soon after the summit the goals were expanded to eight (National Education Goals Panel, 2000). The NEGP also developed a set of objectives to help ensure the goal was met. The objectives included that all children have the availability to benefit from a high quality preschool program, support be offered and obtainable by parents, prenatal care accessable to all, and that children receive the proper nutrition, health care, and physical movement needed in order to support a healthy mind. (National Eduction Goals Panel, 2000) It is debateable if children will be ready for kindergarten if they meet the criteria. No matter what we do as a nation, the truth is that all children do not develop school readiness skills at the same time (National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2009).

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to examine how preschool and kindergarten teachers perceive age, gender, prior preschool experience, and socioeconomic status impact a child's readiness for kindergarten upon school entry. The study was also completed to examine perceptions of preschool and kindergarten teachers as to whether or not readiness can be determined by a readiness test. The methodology for this study was nonexperimental quantitative. Quantitative research and positivist research is comparable given that numerical data are collected and transferred into numerical analysis (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2003). The relationship was studied without direct manipulation to any of the conditions, thus it was nonexperimental (Hopkins, 2000). This chapter provides a depiction of 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

To what extent do teachers perceive a child's readiness for kindergarten could be determined using a readiness test?

Ho1: Teachers do not perceive that a child's readiness for kindergarten could be determined using a readiness test to a significant extent.

Research Question #2

To what extent do teachers perceive that date of birth predicts a child's readiness for kindergarten?

Ho2: Teachers do not perceive that date of birth predicts a child's readiness for kindergarten to a significant extent.

Research Question #3

To what extent do teachers perceive that gender predicts a child's readiness for kindergarten?

Ho3: Teachers do not perceive that gender predicts a child's readiness for kindergarten to a significant extent.

Research Question #4

To what extent do teachers perceive that socioeconomic status predicts a child's readiness for kindergarten?

Ho4: Teachers do not perceive that socioeconomic status predicts a child's readiness for kindergarten to a significant extent.

Research Question #5

To what extent do teachers perceive preschool attendance as important for success in kindergarten?

Ho5: Teachers do not perceive attending preschool predicts a child's success in Kindergarten to a significant extent.

Research Question #6

Which factors are perceived as having the greatest impact on kindergarten readiness?

Population

The population for this study consisted of preschool and kindergarten teachers employed in two rural East Tennessee School Systems. The researcher surveyed teachers who were employed by the school systems during the 2012-2013 school year.

During the 2012-2013 school year there were 103 certified preschool and kindergarten teachers employed in the participating school systems. The survey was emailed to all 103 preschool and kindergarten teachers. The participants taught regular education in a self-contained preschool or kindergarten level classroom.

Instrumentation

The instrument used for this study was a survey distributed by email. The survey consisted of 18 items. Items 1-4 were used to gather demographic information about the subject completing the survey. A Likert Scale format was used for items 5 – 16. The purpose of using a Likert Scale format was to gather data in order to measure attitudes (McLeod, 2012). The scale allowed participants to indicate their degree of perception ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree". Item 17 asked participants to identify what they believe to be the most important factor for kindergarten readiness. Their choices were: age, gender, prior preschool attendance, and socioeconomic status. They also had the option of choosing "other" in item 17. Item 18 allowed further explanation if needed (See Appendix B for the complete survey).

To enhance reliability and validity of the survey, a pilot test was completed. It is important when using an attitude scale to enhance reliability and validity (Hopkins, 2000). The pilot test was given to a group of nine students attending a graduate course in education. The comments and suggestions were taken into account and the survey was revised accordingly.

Data Collection

Prior to beginning the research, permission was obtained from the Director of Schools of both counties to include the school systems' preschool and kindergarten teachers in the study (See Appendix A). Permission was also granted to use the counties' email system to contact the preschool and kindergarten teachers and distribute the research survey. Permission was also granted from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of East Tennessee State University to conduct the research.

Targeted participants were first contacted via email to discuss the study, its purpose, and to request cooperation. Precontact was made because it has been found that contacting the participants before sending the actual questionnaire increases the rate of participation (Hopkins, 2000). The survey instrument was sent to the participants via an on-line service, Survey Monkey. Participants were informed via email that if at any time a statement made them feel uncomfortable, they were not required to provide a response for that statement and could simply proceed on to the next statement. All responses to the survey were confidential, and the identity of the participants will remain undisclosed. Anonymity was upheld to protect the participants by using an online survey system that did not require the participants to identify themselves and can be taken from any computer. Maintaining anonymity also increased the validity of the results.

Data Analysis

Data collected from the instrument survey were converted into statistical calculations using *Statistical Package for Social Sciences* (SPSS). Research questions 1 through 5 were analyzed with series of single sample t-tests comparing calculated means with a test value of 2.5

which represents neutrality. Data for the first five research questions were analyzed at the .05 level of significance.

Research question 6 asks participants to choose which factor will have the greatest impact on kindergarten readiness. They were asked to choose from the following: age, gender, prior preschool, and socioeconomic status. They also had the opportunity to include their own their own factor by choosing other and then explaining their answer. The results for research question 6 were analyzed by identifying, according to mean rank, the factors teachers chose as most important.

Summary

Chapter 3 conveys a description for the methodology of this study. It also explains the research design, selection of the population, and the data collection procedures. The research questions and null hypotheses are provided as well as information concerning population, instrumentation, data collection, and data analysis.

CHAPTER 4

ANALYSIS OF DATA

The purpose of this study was to examine how preschool and kindergarten teachers perceive age, gender, prior preschool experience, and socioeconomic status impact a child's readiness for kindergarten upon school entry. The information gathered from the study was also used to examine perceptions of preschool and kindergarten teachers as to whether or not readiness can be determined by a readiness test. Chapter 4 presents the results of statistical analyses of the research questions identified in Chapters 1 and 3.

Data were gathered via an online survey supported by SurveyMonkey. The survey was distributed to preschool and kindergarten teachers employed in two East Tennessee Counties via email. The survey was disseminated to 103 recipients. Out of the 103 recipients, 46 or 44.66% chose to respond and participate in the survey.

The first four items of the survey gathered demographic information about the participants. Item 1 was used to determine how many respondents were preschool teachers and how many were kindergarten teachers. Of the 46 participants who responded, 10 were preschool teachers or 21.24% and 36 were kindergarten teachers or 78.26%.

Item 2 on the survey gathered data on the total number of years each participant had taught. The choices were broken down into four different ranges for years of experience. The years ranged from 0 – 3 years, 4 – 10 years, 11 – 20 years, and more than 20 years. Teaching experience for the majority of participants was equally distributed between 11 – 10 years and more than 20 years with each having 15 participants or 32.61%. Teaching experience of 0 – 3

years had the fewest number of participants with three or 6.52%. This was followed by 13 participants or 28.26% having 4 – 10 years of teaching experience.

Item 3 on the survey also gathered information about years of experience, but it asked for years of experience actually spent teaching in preschool or kindergarten. The ranges of time in which the participants could choose from were broken down into the same four ranges as stated in item 2. Ten of the participants or 21.75% taught in their preschool or kindergarten position in the range of 0 – 3 years. Eighteen participants or 39.13% taught in their preschool or kindergarten placement for 4 – 10 years. Ten participants or 21.74% taught 11 – 20 years, and there were eight or 17.40% who have taught more than 20 years in the area of preschool or kindergarten.

Item 4 on the survey gathered information regarding the participants' level of education. There were 20 participants or 43.48% who stated they had received their bachelor's degree. Twenty-three participants or 50% had received their master's degree. There were three participants or 6.52% who hold the education specialist degree. None of the participants had obtained their Ed.D. or Ph.D.

Analysis of Research Questions

There were six research questions that guided this study. The research questions, null hypotheses, and results of analysis are listed below.

Research Question #1

To what extent do teachers perceive a child's readiness for kindergarten could be determined using a readiness test?

Ho1: Teachers do not perceive that a child's readiness for kindergarten could be determined using a readiness test to a significant extent.

A single sample t-test was conducted to evaluate the extent to which teachers perceive that kindergarten readiness can be determined by using a readiness test. The scores for survey items number 5 and 13 were averaged to get a score of 3.08 that is used as the measure of using a readiness test. The mean of 3.08 (see Figure 1 and Table 1) was compared to a test value of 2.5 which represents neutrality. The test was significant, $t(45) = 7.42$, $p<.001$. Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected. The 95% confidence interval for the difference between the mean score and the test value was .42 to .73. The effect size of $d = 0.74$ indicates a large effect. Therefore, the results indicate that preschool and kindergarten teachers perceive that children's readiness for kindergarten could be determined using a readiness test to a significant extent.

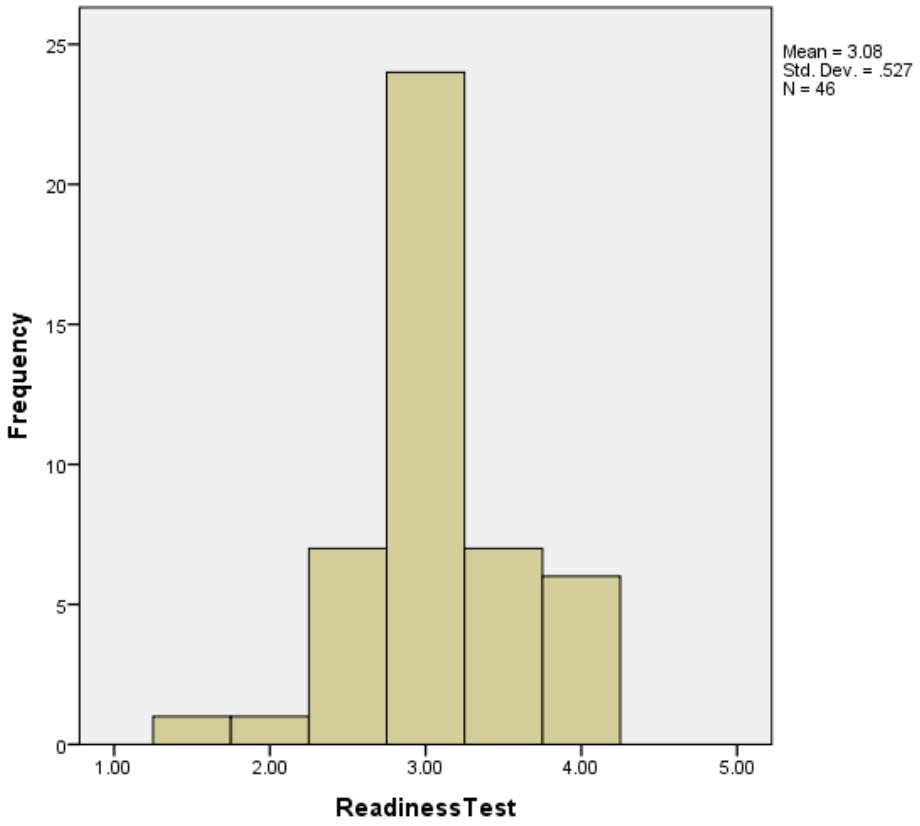

Figure 1. Teacher perceptions of the extent to which kindergarten readiness can be determined by using a readiness test

Table 1

Teachers' Perception of Using a Readiness Test to Determine Readiness

	Strongly Agree	Somewhat Agree	Somewhat Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Item 5	9	33	4	0
Item 13	11	26	7	1

Research Question #2

To what extent do teachers perceive that date of birth predicts a child's readiness for kindergarten?

Ho2: Teachers do not perceive that date of birth predicts a child's readiness for kindergarten to a significant extent.

A single sample t-test was conducted to evaluate the extent to which teachers perceive that kindergarten readiness can be determined by date of birth. The scores for survey items number 7 and 14 were averaged to get a score of 2.93 that is used as the measure of date of birth. The mean of 2.93 (see Figure 2 and Table 2) was compared to a test value of 2.5 which represents neutrality. The test was significant, $t(45) = 4.62$, $p<.001$. Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected. The 95% confidence interval for the difference between the mean score and the test value was .25 to .62. The effect size of $d = 0.57$ indicates a medium effect. Therefore, the results indicate that preschool and kindergarten teachers perceive that children's readiness for kindergarten could be determined by date of birth to a significant extent.

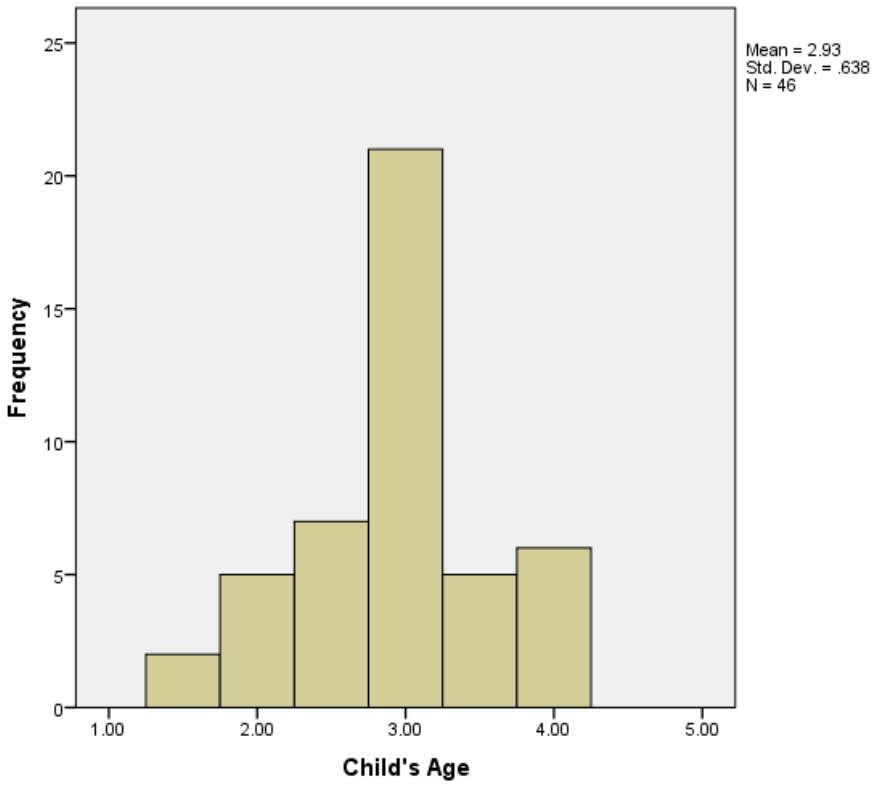

Figure 2. How teachers perceive a child's age affects readiness for kindergarten

Table 2

Teachers' Perception Regarding Age and Readiness

	Strongly Agree	Somewhat Agree	Somewhat Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Item 7	11	23	10	2
Item 14	8	28	9	1

Research Question #3

To what extent do teachers perceive that gender predicts a child's readiness for kindergarten?

Ho3: Teachers do not perceive that gender predicts a child's readiness for kindergarten to a significant extent.

A single sample t-test was conducted to evaluate the extent to which teachers perceive that kindergarten readiness can be determined by gender. The scores for survey items number 9 and 15 were averaged to get a score of 2.65 that is used as the measure of gender. The mean of 2.65 (see Figure 3 and Table 3) was compared to a test value of 2.5 which represents neutrality. The test was not significant, $t(45) = 1.48$, $p = .146$. Therefore, the null hypothesis was not rejected. The 95% confidence interval for the difference between the mean score and the test value was .06 to .36. The effect size of $d = 0.22$ indicates a small effect. Therefore, the results indicate that preschool and kindergarten teachers do not perceive that children's readiness for kindergarten could be determined by gender to a significant extent.

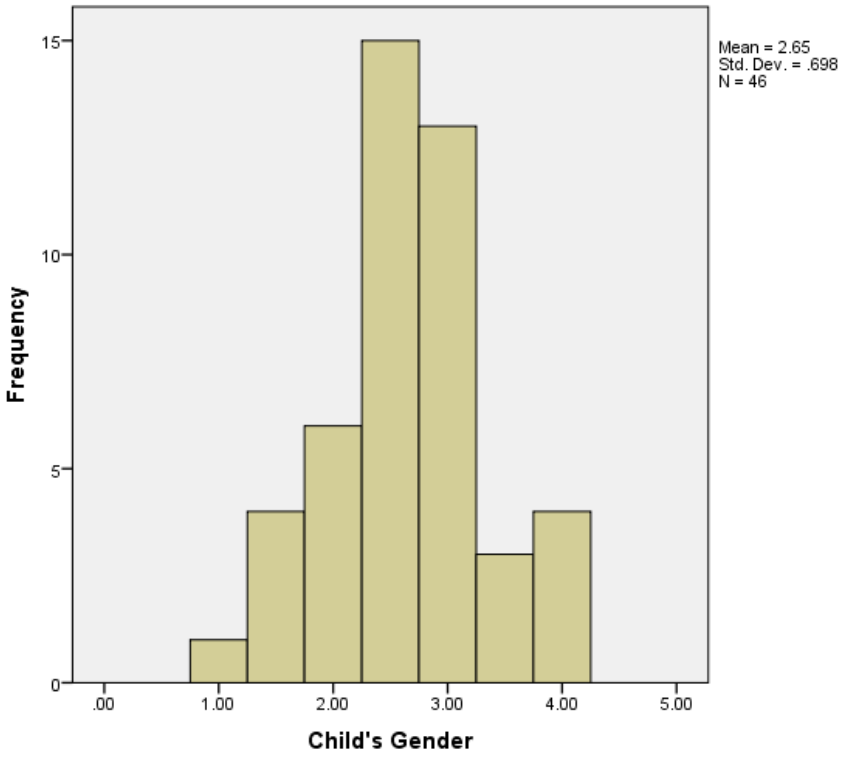

Figure 3. How teachers perceive gender affects kindergarten readiness

Table 3

Teachers' Perception Regarding Gender and Readiness

	Strongly Agree	Somewhat Agree	Somewhat Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Item 9	7	22	11	6
Item 15	5	22	17	2

Research Question #4

To what extent do teachers perceive that socioeconomic status predicts a child's readiness for kindergarten?

Ho4: Teachers do not perceive that socioeconomic status predicts a child's readiness for kindergarten to a significant extent.

A single sample t-test was conducted to evaluate the extent to which teachers perceive that kindergarten readiness can be determined by socioeconomic status. The scores for survey items number 10 and 16 were averaged to get a score of 3.38 that is used as the measure of gender. The mean of 3.38 (see Figure 4 and Table 4) was compared to a test value of 2.5 which represents neutrality. The test was significant, $t(45) = 16.23$, $p<.001$. Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected. The 95% confidence interval for the difference between the mean score and the test value was .77 to .99. The effect size of $d = 0.92$ indicates a large effect. Therefore, the results indicate that preschool and kindergarten teachers perceive that children's readiness for kindergarten could be determined by socioeconomic status to a significant extent.

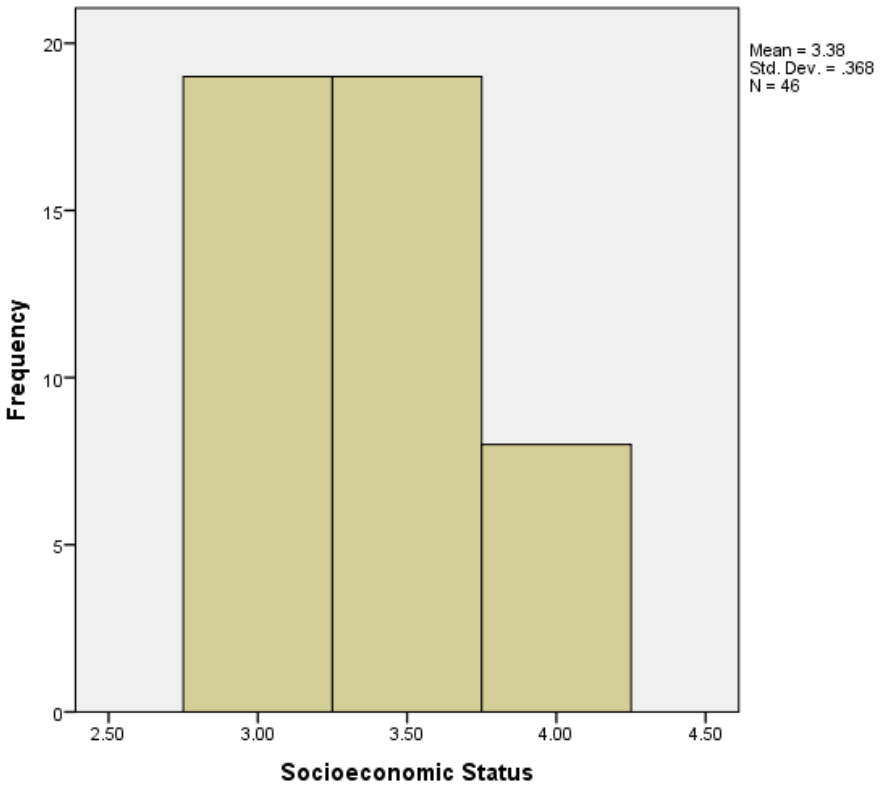

Figure 4. How teachers perceive socioeconomic status affects a child's readiness for kindergarten

Table 4

Teachers' Perception of Socioeconomic Status and Readiness

	Strongly Agree	Somewhat Agree	Somewhat Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Item 10	24	22	0	0
Item 16	12	33	1	0

Research Question #5

To what extent do teachers perceive preschool attendance as important for success in kindergarten?

Ho5: Teachers do not perceive attending preschool predicts a child's success in Kindergarten to a significant extent.

A single sample t-test was conducted to evaluate the extent to which teachers perceive that kindergarten readiness can be determined by prior preschool attendance. The scores for survey items number 8, 11, and 12 were averaged to get a score of 3.71 that is used as the measure of preschool attendance. The mean of 3.71 (see Figure 5 and Table 5) was compared to a test value of 2.5 which represents neutrality. The test was significant, $t(45) = 19.85$, $p<.001$. Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected. The 95% confidence interval for the difference between the mean score and the test value was 1.09 to 1.33. The effect size of $d = 0.95$ indicates a large effect. Therefore, the results indicate that preschool and kindergarten teachers perceive that children's readiness for kindergarten could be determined prior preschool attendance to a significant extent.

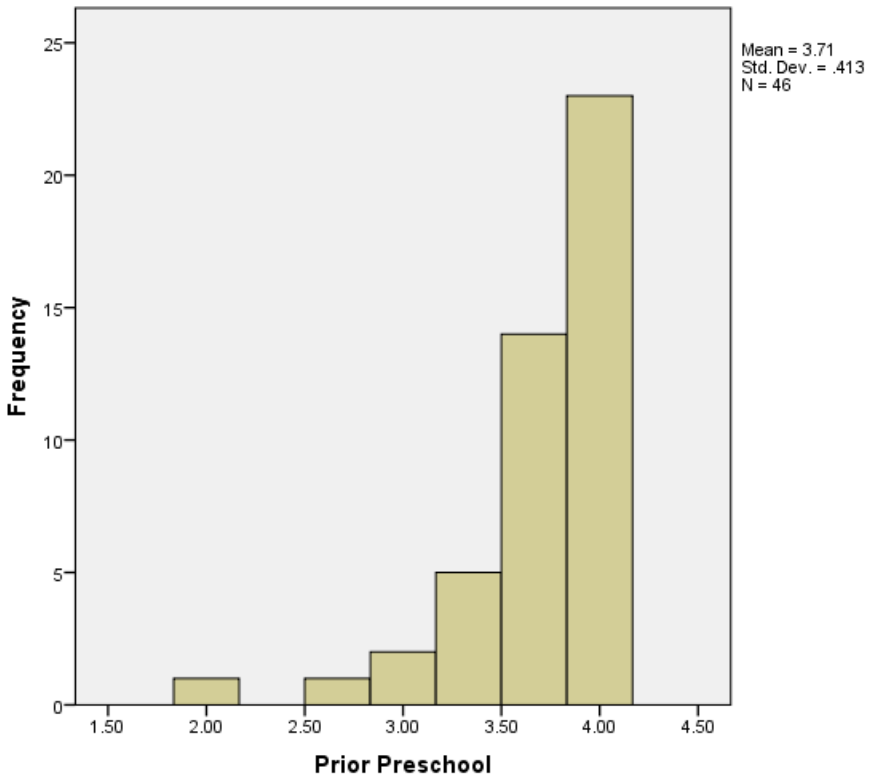

Figure 5. How teachers perceive attending a prior preschool program affects a child's kindergarten readiness

Table 5

Teachers' Perception of Prior Preschool Experience and Readiness

	Strongly Agree	Somewhat Agree	Somewhat Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Item 8	43	3	0	0
Item 11	24	18	2	2
Item 12	39	6	0	1

Research question #6

Which factors are perceived as having the greatest impact on kindergarten readiness?

Teachers were asked to rank five factors in the order from greatest to least in which they perceive has the highest impact on kindergarten readiness. The results indicated that teachers perceive prior preschool as having the greatest impact on children's kindergarten readiness. The impact of prior preschool was followed by age of child and then by socioeconomic status. Gender was perceived as having the least impact on kindergarten readiness according to the teachers who participated in this study. The participants added home environment as a fifth factor that impacts kindergarten readiness, particularly parental involvement.

Table 6

Teachers' Perceptions of Factors in Order From Having the Greatest Impact on Readiness to Having the Least Impact

Order of Ranking	Factor	Mean Rank
1	Prior Preschool	2.06
2	Age	2.36
3	Socioeconomic Status	2.70
4	Gender	3.57

Chapter 4 presents the analysis of data for the research questions identified in Chapters 1 and 3. A single sample t-test was used to analyze five of the research questions. Research question 6 was analyzed using a ranking order. .

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter contains the findings, conclusions, and recommendations for readers who are interested in the perceptions of teachers about readiness of students entering kindergarten. It is intended to help those who are facing readiness concerns about enrolling school aged children. The purpose of this study was to examine how preschool and kindergarten teachers perceive age, gender, prior preschool experience, and socioeconomic status impact a child's readiness for kindergarten upon school entry. It also included teachers' perception of whether or not a child's readiness could be determined using a readiness test. This study used data collected via an online survey. The study's population consisted of preschool and kindergarten teachers employed in two rural school districts in east Tennessee.

Summary of Findings

The statistical analysis reported in the study was based on six research questions presented in Chapter 1. Each research question had one null hypothesis. The findings were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software program. Research questions 1 thru 5 were analyzed using a single sample t-test. Question number 6 was analyzed by using a ranking order. The total number of participants in the study was 46.

Research Question 1

To what extent do teachers perceive a child's readiness for kindergarten could be determined using a readiness test?

It was found that preschool and kindergarten teachers perceive a child's readiness for kindergarten could be determined using a readiness test to a significant extent. This research question was analyzed using the responses to items 5 and 13 in the online survey. This is in opposition to the beliefs of the AAP and NAEYC organizations. Both organizations stated that it is not beneficial practice to use a screening test to determine readiness (Frey, 2005). The position of the NAEYC is that not every child has the same opportunities and life experiences. Using some type of test to determine readiness for school entry is unfair to the child. It faults the children for something they are not able to control. Children should not be held accountable for missed opportunities (NAEYC, 1995).

Research Question 2: To what extent do teachers perceive that date of birth predicts a child's readiness for kindergarten?

It was found that preschool and kindergarten teachers perceive date of birth could have an effect on a child's readiness for kindergarten to a significant extent. This research question was analyzed using the responses to items number 7 and 14 on the survey. Datar (2006) agreed that the age of children entering kindergarten has an effect on their readiness to begin school. He stated that the older child is more equipped to handle the learning process. Stipek (2003) also agreed with the fact that entering kindergarten at an older age is more beneficial because older children are able to handle the more rigorous demands of the curriculum.

The NAEYC (2009) does not support the change in entry age. The organization reported that students would academically benefit by being in the classroom and by changing the date some students will have to wait another year before entering into a formalized school setting.

Research Question 3: To what extent do teachers perceive that gender predicts a child's readiness for kindergarten?

Out of the five research questions analyzed using a single sample t-test, this was the only one in which the null hypothesis was retained. Therefore, the results indicate that preschool and kindergarten teachers do not perceive that children's readiness for kindergarten could be determined by gender to a significant extent. The effects of gender on readiness was analyzed by looking at items 9 and 15 on the survey completed by the preschool and kindergarten teachers. This corresponds with the finding of Freud. According to Sax (2008) Freud found that brain development in boys and girls were no different until puberty. Boys and girls matured at the same rate and exhibited the same readiness for school upon entry (Sax, 2008).

This was also confirmed in response to item 17 by the participants' ranking of gender as having little impact. This is in contrast to results found by Below et al. (2010). They found that there was a diffence among boys and girls entering kindergarten and that boys are not as ready as girls of the same age.

Research Question 4: To what extent do teachers perceive that socioeconomic status predicts a child's readiness for kindergarten?

It was found that preschool and kindergarten teachers perceive socioeconomic status had an impact on kindergarten readiness to a significant extent. This was found by analyzing responses to items number 10 and 16 on the online survey. Much of the literature cited in Chapter 2 on socioeconomic status impact on school readiness also supports this idea. Copple and Bredekamp (2009) stated that children of lower socioeconomic status are usually considerably developmentally behind students the same age who are from a higher

socioeconomic status. Their delays can be attributed to many issues starting at birth. Brooks-Gunn and Markman (2005) attributed development delays in children reared in low socioeconomic status households to the fact that resources are limited. The resources could include health care, books, and outside experiences as well as verbal communication with adults. Exposure to books and experiences helps to build a knowledge of prior experiences. Once a child has a good foundation of prior knowledge, broadening his or her depth of knowledge comes with greater ease.

Research Question 5: To what extent do teachers perceive preschool attendance as important for success in kindergarten?

It was found that preschool and kindergarten teachers perceive prior preschool experience had an impact on kindergarten success to a significant extent. This was found by analyzing the responses to items 8, 11, and 12 on the online survey. Hatcher et al. (2012) also stated that preschool attendance helped in prepearing children for kindergarten. According to Hatcher et al. a good preshcool program can serve as a foundational piece in reading, writing, and math. They also stated that students who attended a preschool program were equipped with better problem solving skills and social skills that are both important in succeeding in the kindergarten year. Love (2010) found that Head Start programs had a positive impact on kindergarten readiness. According to Love students who attended a Head Start program prior to kindergarten started kindergarten better equipped to exhibit listening skills needed for learning to take place. Love stated that his study could also be applied to preschool programs and was not limited to Head Start programs.

The online survey also had an item that asked teachers to rank factors from most to least considering their impact on kindergarten readiness. Attending preschool in a structured setting was found to be perceived as having the greatest impact on kindergarten readiness among the four choices.

Research Question 6: Which factors are perceived has the greatest impact kindergarten readiness?

Research Question 6 was analyzed using responses to item number 17 on the survey that consisted of the participants ranking four items in order from what they perceived as having the greatest impact on kindergarten readiness to what they perceived as having the least. Prior preschool experience was perceived among the participants as having the greatest impact on kindergarten readiness. Gender was perceived as having the least impact. The other two items were age followed by socioeconomic status.

The participants had the opportunity to include other factors they perceived affected kindergarten readiness. Five participants chose to include additional factors they perceived had an impact on kindergarten readiness. All five participants included home environment as another factor that affects kindergarten readiness. Some participants specifically mentioned parent influence on teaching expectations such as self-control and respect. Others stated that it was important for children to be read to at home in order to acquire the language and vocabulary foundational skills needed for success. Along with the foundational skills, participants commented that parent involvement was key in children being able to acquire motor skills needed in kindergarten. It was also included that parent knowledge was important in order to guide their children in the right direction.

Recommendations for Practice

The results of this study suggests that preschool and kindergarten teachers perceive that age, prior preschool attendance, and socioeconomic status have an impact on the readiness of entering kindergarten students. It also suggests that preschool and kindergarten teachers perceive that readiness can be determined by administering a readiness test. These perceived differences are found in everyday classrooms. Knowing that there are readiness differences among children entering kindergarten, it is important for teachers to be equipped with the knowledge and strategies in order to reach every child. Teachers should continue to participate in professional development that addresses differentiated instruction. Not only is it important for teachers to be equipped with the ability to reach every student, but it is also essential that school districts choose wisely when making curriculum purchases. Classrooms should be equipped with the materials that foster differentiated instruction (National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2009). A curriculum of "one size fits all" does not support a thriving classroom filled with learners (National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2009). . The school and district must also have a support system in place to help with students who enter the education program perceived as not being as ready as other students

Recommendation for Further Research

Increasing demands in standards and curriculum have parents, teachers, school districts, and lawmakers concerned with students entering kindergarten with the readiness skills needed to succeed. More research should to be conducted on the long-term effects of students starting school who are deemed as not ready. The research could also include the long-term effects of redshirting students if they are viewed as not possessing the readiness skills to succeed. It is also

recommended that this study be replicated using a larger population or in other school districts. Another recommendation for further research is that this study be replicated using data gathered from teachers who are teaching other grade levels besides preschool or kindergarten. The perceptions of teachers over a long-term period can be helpful in understanding if the readiness differences among students entering kindergarten have an impact long term. This study consisted of teachers' perceptions. Further research could be conducted comparing quantitative data on the factors of readiness with teacher perceptions of those factors. Analysis of student performance on standardized tests could be analyzed looking at characteristics of age entering kindergarten, preschool experience, socioeconomic status, and gender.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to examine how preschool and kindergarten teachers perceive age, gender, prior preschool experience, and socioeconomic status impact a child's readiness for kindergarten upon school entry. Data were collected using a survey that was given to preschool and kindergarten teachers in two rural east Tennessee counties. It was found that preschool and kindergarten teachers who completed the survey perceived that age, prior preschool experience, and socioeconomic status did have an impact on a child's readiness for kindergarten. They did not perceive gender as having an impact. It is important to remember that children come to school having different background experiences and with different levels of readiness. The school systems and teachers must be prepared to meet the needs of each individual child no matter his or her readiness level.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Letter to Director of Schools

May 10, 2013

Director XXXXX,

I am currently working on my doctorate in Educational Leadership at East Tennessee State University. My dissertation is on teachers' perceptions of students' readiness for kindergarten. I would like to request permission to survey preschool and kindergarten teachers employed within the school system about their perceptions of kindergarten readiness as it relates to age, gender, socioeconomic status and previous preschool experience.

The survey will be taken anonymously and the identity of teachers will not be available to me and therefore not be disclosed in any way. I will refer to the school district as "a rural school district in East Tennessee."

I am enclosing a working draft of the first three chapters of my dissertation as well as the survey. Upon completion, I will be happy to share the results of my study with you.

I appreciate you taking the time to consider my request. If you have any questions about my research, please contact me by phone at (423)327-0061 or via email at jennifer.simerly@hck12.net.

Thank you,

Jennifer Simerly
Mooresburg Elementary School

APPENDIX B

Teacher Survey

Several studies indicate the numerous factors that can affect a child's school readiness. This survey will be used to examine the perceptions of kindergarten teachers. You can contribute to the research by answering the following questions as carefully as you can. There is no right or wrong answer. All responses are confidential. By completing this questionnaire, you give permission for your answers to be included within the findings of the study.

Select the letter below that corresponds to the answer that best describes your teaching experience.

1. How many years have you been teaching?

   A. 0-3 years

   B. 4-10 years

   C. 11-20 years

   D. More than 20 years

2. What is your current teaching assignment?

   A. Preschool

   B. Kindergarten

3. How many years have you taught preschool or kindergarten?

   A. 0-3 years

   B. 4-10 years

   C. 11-20 years

   D. More than 20 years

4. What is your highest level of education?

A. Bachelor's Degree

B. Master's Degree

C. Educational Specialist

D. Ed.D. /Ph.D.

For items 5-16, please select the number below that best reflects your perception .

1 – strongly disagree

2 – somewhat disagree

3 – somewhat agree

4 – strongly agree

	SD	D	A	SA
5. A child's readiness for kindergarten could be determined using a readiness test.	1	2	3	4
6. If a child does not appear to be ready for kindergarten, I would suggest he/she wait a year before enrolling.	1	2	3	4
7. A child's age is a predictor for kindergarten readiness.	1	2	3	4
8. Readiness for kindergarten can be increased among students by attending a quality preschool program.	1	2	3	4
9. Boys are not as ready to enter kindergarten as girls of the same age.	1	2	3	4
10. Socioeconomic status has an impact on kindergarten readiness.	1	2	3	4

11.	Attending preschool is important for success in kindergarten.	1	2	3	4
12.	Readiness for kindergarten can be increased among students by attending a quality preschool program.	1	2	3	4
13.	A readiness test should be used to decide whether or not a child is ready to enter kindergarten.	1	2	3	4
14.	Younger students are not as prepared as older students to attend kindergarten.	1	2	3	4
15.	Gender plays a role in kindergarten readiness.	1	2	3	4
16.	Students from different socioeconomic backgrounds demonstrate differing level of readiness.	1	2	3	4

17. Rank the following factors in order from greatest to least impact on kindergarten readiness.

_____ Age

_____ Gender

_____ Prior Preschool in a structured setting

_____ Socioeconomic Status

_____ Other (please specify) _____

VITA

JENNIFER ANN SIMERLY

Education:	Ed.D., Education Leadership, East Tennessee State University, Johnson City, Tennessee 2014
	Ed.S., Curriculum and Instruction, University of Tennessee, Knoxville, Tennessee 2002
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	Physical Education Teacher, Pre-School Teacher, & After School Counselor, All Saints' Episcopal School; Morristown, Tennessee 1996-1997

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