School Readiness: Parent Perceptions, Behaviors, and Child Ability Related to Ethnicity and Socioeconomic Status

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SCHOOL READINESS: PARENT PERCEPTIONS, BEHAVIORS, AND CHILD ABILITY RELATED TO ETHNICITY AND SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS

A Specialist Project
Presented to
The Faculty of the Department of Psychology
Western Kentucky University
Bowling Green, Kentucky

In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Specialist in Education

By
Courtney Nicole Baldwin

May 2011
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SCHOOL READINESS: PARENT PERCEPTIONS, BEHAVIORS, AND CHILD ABILITY RELATED TO ETHNICITY AND SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS

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53 pages

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This project used data from the School Readiness Survey (SR) of the 2007 National Household Education Surveys Program collected by the National Center for Education Statistics Institute of Education Science. A subsample of 1,712 to 2,622 subjects who participated in the survey was used for this project. The purpose of the study was to examine parent perceptions, behaviors, and reported child ability related to school readiness and the effect ethnicity and socioeconomic status (SES) had on each comparison. Variables from the existing data were matched to one of the five domains of School Readiness: Health and Physical Development, Social and Emotional Development, Approaches to Learning, Communication, and General Knowledge. Data were analyzed by means of Pearson correlations and Moderate Multiple Regression analyses. Findings revealed weak, but significant, correlations among parent perceptions, parent behaviors, and parent reported child ability in specific domains. SES and ethnicity were found to be a moderator of parent perceptions and parent behaviors. SES was also shown to affect the relationship between parent behaviors and parent reported child ability in the domains of communication and general knowledge. Several limitations are presented, including possible reasons for the significant but weak results. Findings from this study suggest much more can be learned regarding parent perceptions across ethnicity and SES and the influence it has on school readiness.
Introduction

Simply put, school readiness describes particular factors that contribute to a student being successful in school. However, school readiness is not a simple concept. The readiness of a child to enter school is not just about what pre-academic skills (e.g., writing their name, counting, naming colors) the child can and cannot do as compared to other individuals his or her age. It is more multifaceted than that, and includes the child’s resources and experiences at home, child-care, and or preschool settings in which the child attends. Additionally, the amount of resources within the community to support appropriate parenting and child-care influences a child’s readiness to learn. The elementary school also plays a large role and the extent to which it is connected with the family and early learning experiences of the child is important. This complex and systemic definition of school readiness helps support the notion that in order to enhance school readiness, individuals must begin to understand it is broadly based and includes all those resources and experiences children have encountered from a very early age (Pianta, 2002).

The National Education Goals Panel (NEGP) was developed in accordance with a National Education Summit proposed by President Bush in 1989. The NEGP proposed a set of eight goals designed to reform both instruction and learning in America’s system of education by the year 2000. As discussed by DeRousie and Durham (2008), the first goal explicitly illustrates the importance of school readiness by stating, “By the year 2000, all children will start school ready to learn” (p. 299). Obviously, this time has passed and yet issues in the readiness of young children starting kindergarten are still being addressed. A particular advancement that has been made within the area of school
readiness, however, is the understanding that parents and early childhood environments play a critical role in the preparedness of children entering school (Booth & Crouter, 2008).

Some evidence exists supporting the notion that both ethnicity and parental social class are factors related to the discrepancy between Caucasian and African American children’s school readiness (Booth & Crouter, 2008; Brooks-Gunn & Markman, 2005; Coley, 2002; Vandivere, Pitzer, Halle, & Hair, 2004). Numerous variables have been found to be associated with ethnicity and socioeconomic status (SES), including participation in arts and crafts, performing arts, sport/clubs, and educational trips; parental school involvement; age at which children enter kindergarten; number of books in the home; and the existence or lack of a computer in the home. More specifically, lower levels of parental involvement have been found among African Americans and parents of lower socioeconomic statuses (Farkas & Hibel, 2008). The debate over reasons behind such disparities is an ongoing process, but the probability that a lack of resources among these groups contribute to lower levels of school readiness is quite possible, especially considering black children tend to face far more poverty than do white children (Magnuson & Waldfogel, 2005).

In general, the discrepancy between children’s school readiness among ethnic and social class groups remain a continuing problem. Peters and Ridgeway (2008) note that while reforms have focused on tackling this dilemma through programs such as Head Start, research is continually suggesting these programs alone will not produce the long lasting effects educational leaders desire. More reforms are believed needed to assist
those children that are most at risk for not being ready for school. As stated by Peters and Ridgeway (2008):

Developing high-quality early learning and family support systems will go a long way toward finally reaching the national goals of assuring that all children will enter primary school ready to learn and that no child will in fact be left behind. (p. 281)

DeRousie and Durham (2008) concluded that indeed the family is an extremely important component in the development of a child’s school readiness and differences do exist in parents’ abilities. However, whether those differences are related to limited education, parenting skills, or social and economic class, all parents can provide children with essential experiences to aid in their school readiness. DeRousie and Durham further imply that through “culturally sensitive, evidence-based, multi-level interventions” (p. 314), we can eliminate the school readiness gap between groups of children. In order to develop such high quality programs and interventions dedicated not only to the child but their families, it is extremely important that research begins to look more explicitly at families of differing ethnicity and SES so that support can then be tailored according to each group’s common needs. If indeed a better understanding can exist of commonalities in needs among particular populations related to social class and ethnicity, then individuals and organizations will be better able to assist such families. A vital component in understanding different groups of families as regards to school readiness, is acquiring knowledge about parents’ attitudes and practices related to the preparation of their children entering school.
Therefore, the purpose of the current thesis was to explore parent perceptions of school readiness and how closely they match parental behaviors in the home as well as the relationship of parent perceptions and parental behaviors with their children’s current abilities. Additionally, the purpose of this thesis was to examine what these attitudes and practices look like across levels of socioeconomic status and ethnicities; specifically, Caucasian and African American families. In understanding potential existing patterns among these groups, individuals will be better able to prepare and educate parents on the ways in which common attitudes potentially drive their behaviors within the home and, thus, influence their children’s preparedness for school.

The direction of the literature review is structured to discuss the potential link between school readiness and the influence of ethnicity and socioeconomic status as regards to parents and the home environment. First, definitions and domains of school readiness are addressed. Next, research concerning educators’ perceptions of school readiness is covered. The paper then focuses on environmental factors including ethnic and socioeconomic differences in school readiness and parental influences in regards to ethnicity and social class. Finally, literature addressing parent perceptions and practices concerning school readiness is discussed. To conclude the literature review, research questions are proposed. The research questions are then addressed through a statistical analysis of data from the National Center for Education Statistics, Institute of Education Science’s Parents’ Reports of the School Readiness of Young Children from the National Household Education Survey Program of 2007.
Literature Review

School Readiness

School readiness is a complex concept that researchers have more recently organized into five main domains: (a) physical well-being or health and physical development, (b) emotional maturity or social and emotional development, (c) social confidence, sometimes referred to as approaches to learning, (d) language richness or communication, and (e) thinking and general knowledge (Pianta, 2002; Wynn, 2002). Each of these domains are essential parts of the overall school readiness of a child and are influenced by multiple factors.

Wynn (2002) defines and describes the importance of each domain and provides several ways in which parents can help to enrich their children’s skills and abilities within each category. For example, health and physical development is a vital component of school readiness because it provides the child with the ability to concentrate on school while having the appropriate energy to be successful in the school environment. Factors that contribute to a child’s readiness in health and physical development include a healthy diet, appropriate and regular bedtimes, consistent physical check-ups, up-to-date immunizations, and providing the child with ample opportunities to use and develop fine and gross motor skills.

The social and emotional component of school readiness is considered important because children who enjoy being with others, who feel good about themselves, and are confident in their abilities, are more likely to not only be successful at school, but enjoy the schooling experience in general. Factors that contribute to a child’s social and emotional development include being around other children in both group and one-on-
one settings, practicing skills like taking turns and following directions, learning to dress themselves independently, and following home routines and schedules. Additionally, children who are provided with tasks that guarantee success, while being given appropriate encouragement and praise for completion, are more likely to feel confident in their skills (Wynn, 2002).

Children who approach learning in a positive way and are successful at school enjoy learning. Therefore, to enhance a child’s approach to learning, the third core domain of school readiness, it is important to provide children with opportunities to explore their curiosity. Children also need a chance to be creative and learn basic problem solving skills. Encouraging children to express how they think and feel about their work and play will help them take responsibility for their learning and in turn will enhance their future approach to learning (Wynn, 2002).

Communicating clearly is a fundamental part of a child’s school readiness and can be developed in several ways. Listening to children and encouraging them to listen to others is a key skill to increase as well as conveying their needs to others. Telling children stories and having them tell their own stories helps to enhance communication. Children must also learn limits and can do this through clearly set expectations and rules. Finally, children communicate in various ways and need plenty of opportunities to write, scribble, and draw using multiple tools including crayons, markers, paints, and pencils (Wynn, 2002).

The final domain of school readiness includes thinking and general knowledge. Children come to kindergarten with some degree of prior knowledge. This knowledge can be increased by taking children on trips throughout the community and neighborhood
for informal learning experiences. Children also gain a vast amount of knowledge by being read to from a variety of books as well as engaging in play with materials that promote thought, such as puzzles, and those that illustrate patterns and connections (Wynn, 2002).

Educators’ Perceptions of School Readiness

While research has provided a way in which to categorize important necessary skills for children to possess in order to ensure adequate school readiness (Pianta, 2002; Wynn, 2002) educators may potentially offer some of the best insight into this understanding. One school readiness study was designed to address just that. The Illinois State Department of Human Services Head Start State Collaboration Office (ISDHS, 2002) conducted the School Readiness Study to explore successful strategies that help foster school readiness in early child care facilities as well as early childhood and kindergarten teachers’ perceptions of school readiness. Participants included 144 early childhood teachers from several of Illinois’ Child Care and Head Start programs as well as 74 kindergarten teachers. Participants were selected using random selection methods. A survey was established to address several components related to what teachers felt were important skills for children to have in order to be successful at school. The survey also obtained questions designed to measure teacher opinions about best practices and strategies to prepare children for school. Participants completed the survey either by Internet or via mail.

Authors of the School Readiness Study (ISDHS, 2002) found that early childhood teachers and kindergarten teachers generally agree on the importance of several best practices that are perceived to enhance school readiness. These factors included reading
to children on a daily basis, use of a language literacy curriculum, using open-ended questions, teaching songs with repetitive rhymes, having children retell stories, providing writing table activities, and taking dictation from children’s comments. Furthermore, both groups highly valued skills in physical development and health, social and emotional development, math, science, and creative arts. These findings echo the earlier suggestions of Wynn (2002) in regards to preparing children for school within the five domains of school readiness.

A similar study was conducted to address teachers and principals perceptions of school readiness with a focus on schools with a population of low-income and at-risk students. Wright, Diener, and Kay (2000) selected 11 inner city schools in the Salt Lake City School District that were considered to have the highest poverty rates in that school system. Eight of the 11 principals participated in the study along with 22 of the 30 kindergarten teachers. Each participant was interviewed using open-ended questioning methods so that information could be obtained on what each individual felt were important skills for school success. The kindergarten teachers also administered a state mandated Pre-Kindergarten Assessment to each student during the first two weeks of school to assess their current school readiness abilities. This assessment was designed to primarily measure the children’s literacy and numerical skills. Portions of the assessment were questions directed towards the parents and caregivers of the students to gain knowledge about the extent to which they were engaging their children in school readiness activities.

Wright et al. (2000) found that overall, principals, were more inclined to emphasize children’s social and emotional skills as being essential for school readiness,
while teachers emphasized literacy as a requirement for school success. Information from the Pre-Kindergarten Assessment, however, revealed inconsistent findings with what educators valued as important skills and what children actually possessed during the first week of kindergarten. One-fourth of the students were unable to identify the front of a book while two-thirds of the children were uncertain where to start when reading a book or what direction to read in. These results are not surprising considering fifty percent of the children’s parents reported seldom reading to them at home and that they had taken them to visit a library only once, if at all. Authors of this study concluded that their findings not only demonstrated there is a gap between what educators deem as important skills for school readiness and what skills children actually have upon entering school, but that this creates a considerable problem for teachers and policy makers.

It is important to consider why such discrepancies exist and what external factors likely play into the readiness or lack of readiness of children when entering school. For example, ethnic and economic factors are considered environmental influences that impact parents and children in their preparation for school. Moreover, parental influences are considered external factors that can affect a child’s overall school readiness. The more understanding there is about these factors, the more likely educators and policy makers will be able to create proactive methods and intervention strategies to bridge the existing gap in school readiness.

**Factors Influencing School Readiness**

It is well known that a child’s development in the first few years of life is not only rapid, but considered a critical period of growth. Children’s level of preparedness in cognition, linguistics, behavior, and emotion when entering school are drastically
affected by the resources and interactions those children are exposed to in these vital preschool years (Ramey & Ramey, 2004). Because not every child can be exposed to the same amount and quality of resources and engagements, it is not uncommon that we find differences among school readiness when looking at all students entering school.

The debate on nature vs. nurture concerning the development of children has somewhat been claimed by the ecological view of child development. Such a theory is not necessarily concerned with which component is more dominant, but how these two factors interact to influence overall development (Snow, 2008). Therefore, it is important to look at not only how environmental factors influence children’s readiness for school, but also how these factors are truly imbedded into their world through interaction.

Vandivere et al. (2004) used the nationally representative study, Early Childhood Longitudinal Study- Kindergarten Class of 1998-1999 (ECLS-K), to analyze data concerning children’s school readiness and how this varied among socioeconomic and demographic subgroups. The data were collected by the National Center for Education Statistics and included information on over 20,000 children who attended kindergarten in the 1998-1999 school year. Information was periodically collected through 2004 and was done so using direct assessment of children and teacher, parent, and school administrator interviews. Researchers found that regardless of socioeconomic status and ethnicity, generally all children made gains in school readiness indicators within the first two years of schooling. These indicators included school engagement, social skills, physical wellness, mathematics, reading, and general knowledge. However, even though the majority of children tended to improve in these areas, several subgroups of children entered school underprepared and, more alarming, unable to catch up with their same-
aged peers in later grades. These subgroups included children of lower SES, racial or ethnic minorities, parents who spoke limited English and children who were disabled. These findings further support the notion that environmental factors such as SES, ethnicity and parental characteristics influence the readiness of children to enter school.

**Ethnicity and social class influences.** Possibly the most prominent factors within a child’s environment that have been found to influence school readiness are those that contributed to the child being considered high-risk or economically disadvantaged. Those children that come from economically poor families with limited education have been found to be at a greater risk of insufficient school readiness due to limited knowledge and skill (Ramey & Ramey, 2004). Furthermore, ethnicity has been found to be a significant factor among gaps in school readiness (Brooks-Gunn & Markman, 2005).

Similar to Vandivere et al. (2004), Coley (2002) also used The Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, Kindergarten Class (ECLS-K) of 1998-99 to assess inequality in school readiness. According to one of the earlier reports of results, many concerning findings emerged in regards to school readiness discrepancies among ethnicity and social class. For example, Asian and White children were more likely to be proficient across all reading and mathematical tasks than children in other racial groups. Children in higher SES groups were reported as being more skillful in these areas as opposed to those in lower SES groups. Asian and White children were noted as outperforming other children in the areas of letter, number, and shape recognition, beginning and ending sounds of words, ordinal sequencing, and relative size. In contrast to American Indian/Alaska Native, Black, and Hispanic children, White children were better able to perform addition and subtraction. In regards to home reading experiences, Asian and White parents as
well as higher SES groups tended to read to their child everyday as opposed to Black parents and those parents in lower SES groups. Additionally, kindergartners in the higher SES groups often looked at picture books outside of the classroom setting whereas lower SES children did not.

Aside from academic discrepancies, poor adjustment skills have also been found to be a factor in a child’s readiness to learn and also thought to be influenced by the child’s home environment. Campbell and von Stauffenberg (2008) used the National Institute of Child Health & Human Development’s (NICHD) Study of Early Child Care to assess child characteristics and family processes that predict behavioral readiness for school. The NICHD study assessed children’s self-regulation during laboratory visits at 36 months and 54 months of age. Campbell and von Stauffenberg used data on 1,063 children and families. Among this sample they found that children of minorities and those living in single-parent homes, or having parents of lower SES and educational status, have a harder time with self-regulatory skills in regards to behavioral expectations and demands of school.

There are many factors within the home environment that are thought to influence both cognition and social aspects of a child’s development. Home environments are believed to influence children cognitively as evident by overall intelligence, literacy, reading, and math skills and achievement. Social competence with peers and other adults is also influenced by particular factors within the home. Some of the most significant indicators in the home that are thought to positively affect school readiness include adequate resources for cognitive stimulation and opportunities to learn within the community, such as taking trips to the park or zoo (Landry & Smith, 2008).
Children’s resources and opportunities may be highly affected by the daily lives of families in regards to social class. Lareau and Weining (2008) conducted a study with 88 families using qualitative interviews as well as detailed observations of 12 of the families to assess social class differences in time use in family life. The researchers found that middle-class families actually tend to have a hectic pace of life, primarily because they operate around the busy schedules of their children who are typically involved in a number of activities. However, because of the hectic pace, children in families of higher SES tend to be exposed and have greater opportunities to participate in activities that promote cognitive and social development. In contrast, working-class and poor families were found to live in a more relaxed pace of life. Children from these families typically played outside and/or watched television for long periods of time. Because of this, it was found that family structures in this social class were not driven by a hectic schedule centered on their children. Furthermore, when parents in this social class did have free time, researchers found that little focus was placed on enhancing their child’s skills through structured activities.

Brooks-Gunn and Markman (2005) conducted an extensive literature review to further understand ethnic and racial gaps within school readiness. These researchers found supporting evidences among the literature that language use, including exposure to vocabulary and conversational interactions in the home, have been observed as being highly affected by ethnicity and SES. Furthermore, children in families with high socioeconomic backgrounds have been shown to engage in significantly more conversations and have larger vocabularies than children in middle and low SES families. These differences tend to accelerate during the early years of development which results
in a broad gap by the time children enter into school; leaving children who are economically disadvantaged, and usually of an ethnic minority, further behind in school readiness than their more advantaged peer group. Brooks-Gunn and Markman also discovered through their literature review that when considering materials and resources, particularly for literacy, Black and Hispanic children as well as low SES homes tend to have less reading materials than children from White homes.

Overall, many factors within a child’s environment related to ethnicity and social class contribute to their development and consequently their readiness to enter school. While this section of the literature review is far from comprehensive, it does provide an adequate picture as to how the early years prior to school are greatly influenced by the environment to which the child is exposed. One factor within the environment that is quite possibility the most influential component in a child’s development is that of the parent (Landry & Smith, 2008). The next section will address parental influences on school readiness and how these relate to ethnicity and socio-economic status.

*Parental influences related to ethnicity and SES.* The act of parenting has been defined according to the interactions of parents between themselves and their children, as well as their engagement in activities that are either directly with, or purposely for, their children. Researchers have examined how to categorize parental characteristics and while several styles exist, one research study focused on looking specifically at seven of these factors (Brooks-Gunn & Markman, 2005).

As mentioned previously, Brooks-Gunn and Markman (2005) conducted an extensive literature review to not only address ethnic gaps in school readiness, but to further understand how parenting contributes to these gaps. After careful review of their
widespread sample of literature, the authors decided to concentrate specifically on the seven factors of nurturance, discipline, teaching, language, monitoring, management, and materials. The authors examined the literature to further understand how these characteristics are defined and measured. They found not only that these factors strongly contributed to the readiness or unreadiness of children to enter school, but that ethnic gaps in school readiness narrowed by 25-50 percent when researchers controlled for these factors in parenting. Such results show that parental characteristics do indeed play a large role. Furthermore, the characteristics also appear to be influenced by ethnicity. Brooks-Gunn and Markman found within the literature that on five of the seven factors of parenting, Black mothers scored lower than White mothers on nurturance, discipline, teaching, language, and materials. Positive findings from their literature review revealed that center-based intervention programs that include a parental component increase both school readiness and parenting in general. Additionally, literacy programs specifically geared toward families of minority and low SES, demonstrated increases in school readiness for children in these populations. Overall, the authors conclusive review offer possibilities into decreasing the ethnic gaps in school readiness.

Brooks-Gunn and Markman’s (2005) literature review offers further support that the ethnic and SES gap among school readiness may be attributed to parental characteristics. For example, Black mothers have been shown to have lower levels of sensitivity, and at times, score lower on the Home Observation for the Measurement of the Environment (HOME) warmth scale, which taps into the dimension of nurturance. Black mothers have also been documented through observational videotapes as having negative regard, intrusiveness, and detachment as compared to White mothers. In
considering discipline, Black mothers tend to use spankings while White mothers often reason with their children.

In addition to parental characteristics, it is likely that parental perceptions and attitudes about school readiness are connected to parent behaviors and interactions with their children and therefore highly influence their children’s readiness to enter school. For example, when considering the role of parents in the development of children, there is little understanding about the cause behind parent behaviors. McLeod (2008) suggests that we may be missing a key component in our understanding of parent behaviors that seems to contribute to school readiness, such as providing appropriate resources in the home. Furthermore, McLeod states that these parenting behaviors “…may be proxies for other characteristics of parents - abilities, attitudes, and motivations - that influence their likelihood of providing those resources…” (p. 53). Therefore, the importance of understanding parent perceptions and beliefs about school readiness, and more specifically the causes behind providing home resources or lack thereof, further supports the need to investigate this issue.

**Parent Perceptions and Practices**

Personal characteristics of parents, including their beliefs about the needs of their children regarding their development and school readiness, are typically correlated with parent behaviors and thus, child outcomes (Landry & Smith, 2008). More specifically, “Caregivers who do not believe they are important as a ‘teacher’ for their child but rather attribute this role to others (i.e., teacher, childcare workers) or to ‘luck’ are less likely to provide cognitively rich experiences” (Hess & Shipman, 1965, as cited in Landry & Smith, 2008, p. 95). Therefore, the ways in which parents perceive school readiness
likely influence their behaviors and interactions with their children that either directly or indirectly contribute to the children’s overall readiness to enter school. Similar to many of our routine behaviors, our beliefs, attitudes, and perceptions influence our choices and actions.

West, Hausken, and Collins (1995) reported on a study supported by the U.S. Department of Education’s National Center for Education Statistics that was conducted to examine possible differences between kindergarten teacher and parent beliefs about what is important for child school readiness. In order to collect national data, two particular surveys were used: The 1993 National Household Educational Survey (NHES: 93) and The Fast Response Survey System (FRSS) Kindergarten Teacher Survey on Student Readiness. The NHES: 93 was distributed to parents of preschoolers, ages three to five, while the FRSS was given to kindergarten teachers in public schools. Each survey asked individuals to rate how important they felt certain items were for school readiness. Items in each survey were broken into two groups, behavioral and school-related items. It was found that parents and teachers generally agreed that it is very important for a child to be able to verbally communicate their own needs and wants, and that children should be able to approach new learning opportunities with excitement and curiosity. Discrepancies between parents and teachers were found in that parents believed far more than teachers that it is important for their children to know letters, count to 20 or higher, and be able to effectively use a pencil and paint brush. Additionally, while only 42 percent of teachers reported that paying attention and sitting still is a very important skill for school readiness, 80 percent of parents believed this to be an essential ability for their children to possess.
McBryde, Ziviani, and Cuskelly (2004) conducted a second study to address parent perceptions in relation to teacher perceptions on school readiness. In this study, researchers recruited a total of 215 children and their families from various levels of socioeconomic status at 75 separate preschool centers. Additionally, 75 preschool teachers and childcare workers at those centers were recruited to participate. A variety of assessment methods were used to collect data on each child’s behavior, temperament, and readiness for school, as well as the perceptions of both parents and teachers. Methods of data collection included interviews, observation, questionnaires and standardized measures. Researchers specifically wanted to know what factors influence teachers and parents to feel that children are ready for school. Chronological age, self-developed social skills, level of adaptability, and the ability to persist with an activity until complete, were found to be the most influences factors related to parents and teachers reporting school readiness for children. This article concluded that several factors play into the perceptions of parents and teachers that are not necessarily related solely to academic types of behaviors and skills. While the article considers levels of socioeconomic status in relation to school readiness, it does not address ethnicity or the possible link to parent behaviors.

While some research has looked at the differences in parents’ beliefs and attitudes about school readiness among ethnic groups (Diamond, Reagan, & Bandyk, 2000), between parents and teachers (McBryde et al., 2004; West et al., 1995), and among low-income and predominantly African American families (McAllister, Wilson, Green, & Baldwin, 2005), few studies have examined how these differences influence parent behaviors that contribute to their children’s school readiness. Furthermore, as noted by
Barbarin et al. (2008), few studies have addressed what these differences in behaviors look like between different ethnic and social groups. It is understood that parents hold their own perceptions regarding school readiness but “parents often articulate beliefs that contradict their practices” (Hughes, 2008, p. 195). Therefore, it will be beneficial to investigate how parents’ beliefs correlate with parents’ behaviors and how these are potentially related to ethnicity and SES. Such an investigation would contribute to the limited research in this area of school readiness.

Similar research was conducted by Diamond et al. (2000), who used a data set from the National Household Education Survey (NHES) conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics to explore parents’ conceptions of school readiness and their relationship to ethnicity and child development. The survey was administered to households nationwide using random-digit-dialing methods and data were collected using computer-assisted telephone interviewing techniques. The survey had a specific school readiness component which included 168 items aimed to address parents’ beliefs about school readiness, their children’s participation in preschool based programs and the degree to which they engaged in home and community activities. These researchers used a subsample of 2,509 participants to include only those individuals who had children four to six years of age and had not yet entered kindergarten. Several of the factors the authors statistically analyzed included reported academic and behavior development in children, kindergarten readiness beliefs of the parents and home-learning opportunities, and how these related to ethnicity. Additionally, they considered parents’ reported concerns about the readiness of their children to enter school.
Diamond et al. (2000) found that Black, Hispanic, and other parents of color reported more concerns about their children’s readiness for school than White parents. Findings also revealed, that in general, parents reported engaging their children in home and community activities regardless of ethnicity. Furthermore, ethnicity was not found to affect the perceptions of parents on the importance of academic and behavior skills related to school readiness. More specifically, the average response across ethnic groups was “very important” meaning parents perceived these skills to be essential for their children to possess before entering kindergarten. While this study addressed parental perceptions about school readiness across ethnicity, it did not address potential relationships to socioeconomic status. This study also reported possible differences in the degree to which parents provide their children with educational opportunities, but failed to test for any relationship related to SES. While the study did examine perceptions and parent behaviors, it did not attempt to make an explicit link between the two, nor did it draw in the component of the children’s current skills and abilities related to these two factors.

As previously mentioned, West et al.’s (1995) report on the National Center for Education Statistics study of 1995, “Readiness for Kindergarten: Parent and Teacher Beliefs,” offered an understanding about the differences in perceptions among parents and teachers in relation to school readiness. However, because the study only specifically addressed differences among parents of varying levels of educational completion, no relationships were analyzed to understand parent differences among varying ethnic groups. Furthermore, these perceptions were not studied to determine potential links to parent behaviors or the children’s current abilities and skills. Another
limitation included the lack of knowledge about how these perceptions related to parent and teacher behaviors. As the authors themselves stated, “If we are to understand more fully how beliefs about children’s readiness influence practices, researchers need to examine the relationship between beliefs and actions” (p. 6).

McAllister’s et al. (2005) study, focused primarily on examining “…the perspectives and experiences of low-income, predominantly African American families regarding children’s school readiness” (p. 617). The research was conducted using various qualitative methods with a sample of 150 families in the greater Pittsburgh metropolitan area. Of these 150 families, 91% had reported having incomes that were less than the federal poverty line. Furthermore, 104 of the participants were African American, 41 Caucasian, and five were identify as biracial. Researchers conducted 150 qualitative interviews with the primary caregiver and completed ethnographic case studies from seven of the 150 families. It was found that these parents largely valued social and emotional health for both the parent and child when referring to school readiness. This finding led the authors to emphasize the importance of psychological and environmental influences on school readiness and how these issues should be viewed as a public health concern. Certainly this understanding of parent perceptions of school readiness serves as a vital component, but it still lacks a broader understanding of how these perceptions relate to other ethnic and socioeconomic groups as well as parent behaviors and child ability.

Few studies, such as Barbarin et al.’s (2008), were found in a search of the literature that aim to look at parent beliefs of school readiness and the link between all three variable of ethnicity, SES, and child ability. In this research study, the primary goal
was to understand parent beliefs while examining these three variables. By randomly selecting families whose children were already enrolled in pre-K programs across the country, researchers were able to collect mainly qualitative data to examine parental perceptions.

Findings suggested that parents perceive nominal knowledge, such as knowing letters and numbers, as more important for school readiness than inferential thinking, which refers to more complex cognitive skills. Furthermore, findings showed that parental perceptions were not linked to SES and only minimally linked to ethnicity. The study did reveal that there is a clear link between parental beliefs of school readiness and child outcomes. However, there were several limitations and holes in this research that have left an incomplete picture of the link between parent perceptions and these three factors. For example, while the sample does include families from various states throughout the country, it is still a limited sample with only 452 participants from five different states. Furthermore, SES groups were split into either poor or non-poor as opposed to low, middle, and high SES. When looking at children’s outcomes, it is important to note that all children of the participating parents were currently enrolled in pre-K programs. It is likely that the skills and abilities possessed by these children were not solely influenced by parental perceptions of school readiness but rather their active, daily participation in a structured, school-like setting. Finally, the data are qualitative, and while qualitative data are very beneficial, such an important issue could certainly be supplemented with more concrete, quantitative findings.

Overall, there are several things that have been made clear through the existing research and possibly the most common conclusion is that school readiness is complex
and multidimensional. Research has revealed that even after gaining greater understandings of factors contributing to gaps in school readiness, ethnic and social class discrepancies still exist in children’s preparedness to enter school (Brooks-Gunn & Markman, 2005; Campbell & von Stauffenberg, 2008; Coley, 2002; Lareau & Weininger, 2008; Peters & Ridgeway, 2008). Researchers have noted that not only do parental characteristics influence a child’s school readiness, but also these characteristics are different across ethnicity (Brooks-Gunn & Markman, 2005). Finally, it is known that parental beliefs regarding school readiness do indeed correlate with parent behavior (Landry & Smith, 2008). Each of these finding are important in understanding independent pieces of school readiness, but the body of research undoubtedly lacks a collective understanding of how these assumptions relate to one another. While it may be somewhat obvious that each component is linked to the next, to date, very few studies have examined these factors of school readiness in a more holistic manner and attempted to make a clear and explicit link between them (Barbarin et al., 2008).

**Purpose**

Therefore, in reviewing this literature collectively, it is expected that there will be differences among parent perceptions of school readiness, parent behaviors, and child ability across socioeconomic status and ethnicity including Blacks and Whites. Differences in beliefs could be explained by a number of factors including the culture of an ethnic group or culture of a social class. Discrepancies between what parents believe to be important and their actual behaviors of implementing these variables within the home might also be attributed to these same factors. For example, parents from a lower socioeconomic class may feel it is important to expose their children to a number of
resources such as books, computer, or organized activities within the community, but may not have the financial means to do so (Hughes, 2008). This would surely illustrate a discrepancy between what they report to be important for their children’s school readiness and what they actually do in the home. Either way, the purpose of this thesis was not to necessarily discover the reasoning behind these discrepancies, but to discover if these discrepancies even exist and if so, were there patterns within SES and ethnic groups.

Several questions were proposed in this specialist project:

1. Do relationships exist between parent perceptions and parent behaviors within the following domains of School Readiness: Health and Physical Development, Social and Emotional Development, and General Knowledge? Furthermore, are there differences related to ethnicity and SES?

2. Do relationships exist between parent perceptions and parent reported child ability within the following domains of School Readiness: Health and Physical Development, Social and Emotional Development, and General Knowledge? Furthermore, are there differences related to ethnicity and SES?

3. Do relationships exist between parent behaviors and parent reported child ability within the following domains of School Readiness: Health and Physical Development, Social and Emotional Development, Approaches to Learning, Communication, and General Knowledge? Furthermore, are there differences related to ethnicity and SES?
Method

This thesis used current existing data, previously collected and available for public analysis from the National Center for Education Statistics Institute of Education Science. The particular data under examination came from the School Readiness Survey (SR) of the 2007 National Household Education Surveys Program (O’Donnell & Mulligan, 2008). Parent reports are the primary source in the SR data and provide current information on preschool-aged children concerning their developmental status and readiness for school.

Participants

Participants for the 2007 National Household Education Survey (NHES: 2007) included parents of children aged three to six who were not yet enrolled in school and are considered to be a nationally representative sample. The completed number of surveys was 2,633. The sample is representative of several different ethnicities including: White non-Hispanic, Black non-Hispanic, Hispanic, Asian or Pacific Islander non-Hispanic, and Other ethnicity non-Hispanic. This thesis research was only interested in the potential differences between the White non-Hispanic and Black non-Hispanic groups. Of the total sample, 2016 children were reported as being either White non-Hispanic (85.7%) or Black non-Hispanic (14.3%). Demographic characteristics of the sample are presented in Table 1. The two groups of participants of interest (i.e., Whites and Blacks) were very comparable in terms of the gender of their children and the ages of their children. However, the income level of the two groups was very disparate. Approximately two-thirds of Whites reported an income level higher than $60,000 while approximately two-thirds of Blacks reported an income level less than $60,000.
Table 1

Demographic Characteristics of Sample

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Whites</th>
<th>Blacks</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender of children</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boys</td>
<td>847 (49.0%)</td>
<td>138 (47.8%)</td>
<td>985 (48.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Girls</td>
<td>880 (51.0%)</td>
<td>151 (52.2%)</td>
<td>1031 (51.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean age of children</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>3.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income of parents</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&lt; $60,000</td>
<td>683 (39.5%)</td>
<td>184 (63.7%)</td>
<td>867 (43.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt; $60,000</td>
<td>1044 (60.5%)</td>
<td>105 (36.3%)</td>
<td>1149 (57.0%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Instrument

The Institute of Education Sciences: National Center for Education Statistic’s Parents’ Reports of the School Readiness of Young Children from the NHES: 2007 was used as the data source (O’Donnell & Mulligan, 2008). The primary purpose of this survey was to gather a variety of information across the nation, according to parent reports, on childhood school readiness including the current developmental status of preschool-age children. The survey was designed to include information on the demographic nature of children and parent/guardian and household characteristics. Overall topics addressed through the SR survey included:

- the participation of young children in preschool or other types of center-based care or education arrangements; parental plans for kindergarten enrollment and an assessment of what parents should do to prepare their children for kindergarten;
children’s developmental accomplishments and difficulties, including emerging literacy and numeracy; family activities with children in the home and outside of the home; and children’s television-viewing habits. (O’Donnell & Mulligan, 2008, p. 1).

Procedure

A social science research firm called Westat was responsible for collecting the data for the SR survey. The sample for the SR data was selected using random digit dial (RDD) methods while the actual data were collected through means of computer-assisted telephone interviewing (CATI) from January 2nd to May 6th, 2007. During the first stage of sampling, researchers selected telephone numbers in areas that generally have higher populations of Black or Hispanic residents than areas with lower populations of minority residents. Additionally, researchers selected telephone numbers that could be consistently matched with current addresses to increase overall efficiency of the sample. A screener interview was conducted that included a set of initial questions to determine the eligibility of the household to participate in the SR survey. Of the 54,034 households contacted for the screener interview, 52.8 percent responded. From this the SR interviews were completed and resulted in a total sample size of 2,633 participants.

Approximately 326 variables were included in the SR data; most of the variables are specific questions asked of the participants while others address demographic data collected by the researchers. Demographic data used for this study consisted of ethnicity and socioeconomic status. Questions on the SR survey used for the purpose of addressing the current study’s research questions are considered by this author to fall within the categories of (a) parent perceptions, (b) parent behaviors in engaging their
child in particular activities, and (c) parent reports of their children’s current abilities. Questions in each of those three categories were then matched by this author to one of the five main domains of school readiness assessed through the survey (i.e., Health and Physical Development, Social and Emotional Development, Approaches to Learning, Communication, and General Knowledge). As a result, a total of 31 questions from the SR data were extracted.

Once the questions were matched to their respective domain, a total score for that domain was calculated by summing responses for all questions in the domain. For example, when considering the first category of parent perceptions, this author, based on information in the current literature review, chose to extract and analyze six questions that appeared to be congruent with three of the five domains. For the first category, no questions were deemed to address the other two domains (i.e., Approaches to Learning and Communication). The second category (i.e., parent behaviors) resulted in 15 questions addressing all five domains while the third category (i.e., parent reported child ability) resulted in 11 questions addressing all five domains. Figure 1 illustrates how questions from the five domains were categorized and compared across categories of interest for statistical analysis. Appendix A lists all questions used from the SR data for each category and domain.

Permission to conduct this research project was granted by Western Kentucky University’s Human Subjects Review Board (see Appendix B). To address the research questions, data were statistically analyzed using Pearson Correlation and Moderate Multiple Regression methods. Before running any statistical analyses, several modifications were made. In order to make the coding of each variable consistent with
Figure 1. Comparisons between domains of school readiness. Codes in parentheses beneath domain names refer to the survey questions used in the existing data bank. When more than one question is present, the scores from the questions were added together to form one number, or variable, to represent that domain.
the rest, some variables needed to be re-coded in reverse order so that high numbers represented a more or greater amount. Therefore, the higher the number, the more parents perceived something as being important, the more parent behaviors, more reported ability of the child, and the higher the income. On the SR survey, participants indicated their income level, which was placed into one of 14 categories. For the Moderate Multiple Regression analyses, all 14 categories of income were used. For the purpose of describing the sample, an income of $60,000 was used as a cutoff level between the two groups because approximately half of the participants for the total sample reported incomes above or below $60,000.
Results

Questions from the SR data set were matched to one of the five domains of school readiness (i.e., Health and Physical Development, Social and Emotional Development, Approaches to Learning, Communication, and General Knowledge) under each category of interest (i.e., parent perceptions, parent behaviors, and parent reports of children’s ability). For domains that contained more than one question, scores for those questions were added together to form one score for that domain. For the purpose of this study, two-tailed tests were used for all analyses with the level of significance set at \( p < 0.05 \).

Research Question 1

The first research question sought to determine if any relationship exists between parent perceptions and parent behaviors within three domains of School Readiness (i.e., Health and Physical Development, Social and Emotional Development, and General Knowledge). Pearson correlations were used to examine the relationships between perceptions and behaviors. Table 2 provides a summary of the correlation coefficients from each analysis with the top part of the table addressing the first research question.

As can be seen from Table 2, all correlations were positive but small. When comparing parent perceptions and parent behaviors, correlations in the domains of Social and Emotional Development and General Knowledge were statistically significant. The correlation in the domain of Health and Physical Development was not statistically significant. A Moderate Multiple Regression analysis was used to consider the impact of ethnicity or SES but revealed no significant differences.
Table 2

*Correlations of Parent Perceptions, Behavior, and Reported Ability Within the Five Domains of School Readiness*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Health/Physical</th>
<th>Social Emotional</th>
<th>Approaches to Learning</th>
<th>Communication</th>
<th>General Knowledge</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Parent Perceptions-</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent Behaviors</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health/Physical</td>
<td>.026</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Emotional</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>.082*</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gen. Knowledge</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>.114*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Parent Perceptions-</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child Ability</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health/Physical</td>
<td>.086*</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Emotional</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>.082*</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gen. Knowledge</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>.183*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Parent Behaviors-</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child Ability</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health/Physical</td>
<td>.098*</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Emotional</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>.138*</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approaches Learning</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>.035</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>.142*</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gen. Knowledge</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>.183*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(p < .05.\)
Research Question 2

The second research question sought to determine if any relationship exists between parent perceptions and parent reported child ability within three domains of School Readiness (i.e., Health and Physical Development, Social and Emotional Development, and General Knowledge). Pearson correlations were used to examine the relationships between parent perceptions and children’s ability. The middle portion of Table 2 provides a summary of the correlation coefficients for this question.

Although weak, all correlations were positive and significant. A Moderate Multiple Regression analysis was used to consider the impact of ethnicity or SES. The Moderate Multiple Regression analysis revealed significant results when using parent reported child abilities as the dependent variable and parent perceptions as the independent variable. Parent reported child ability and parent perceptions in the Social and Emotional Development domain was shown to vary as a function of SES, \( p = .050 \). Specifically, high income resulted in a positive and significant effect on this relationship with a positive regression coefficient of .135. This means that participants in the higher income group showed stronger positive correlations between their perceptions and reported child ability within the Social and Emotional Domain than those in the lower income group.

Parent perceptions and parent reported child ability in the General Knowledge domain was shown to vary as a function of ethnicity, \( p = .047 \). Specifically, while both White and Black groups were shown to be a significant moderator of parent perceptions and parent reported child ability in this domain, Blacks showed a stronger relationship, with a regression coefficient of .456 for Blacks and .250 for Whites. This means that
Black participants showed stronger positive correlations between their perceptions and reported child ability within the domain of General Knowledge than did White participants.

**Research Question 3**

The third research question sought to determine if any relationship exists between parent behaviors and parent reported child ability within all five domains of School Readiness (i.e., Health and Physical Development, Social and Emotional Development, Approaches to Learning, Communication, and General Knowledge). Pearson correlations were used to examine the relationships between parent behaviors and children’s ability. The bottom portion of Table 2 provides a summary of the correlation coefficients.

Although weak, four of the five comparisons resulted in correlations that were positive and significant. The correlation in the domain of Approaches to Learning was the one area that was not statistically significant. A Moderate Multiple Regression analysis was used to consider the impact of ethnicity or SES. The Moderate Multiple Regression analysis showed two significant results when parent reported child ability was used as the dependent variable and parent behaviors as the independent variable. Parent behaviors and parent reported child ability in the domain of Communication was found to vary as a function of SES, $p = .001$. Specifically, the low-income group had a significant positive effect with a regression coefficient of .120. This means that individuals who reported lower incomes showed a stronger positive correlation between their behaviors and reported child ability in the domain of Communication than those in the higher income group. SES was also shown to be a moderator in the domain of General
Knowledge, $p = .002$. Specifically, while both income groups were shown to be significant moderators of parent behavior and reported child ability in this domain, the low-income group displayed a higher regression coefficient of .722, while the high-income group showed a significant but weaker effect of .320. This means that individuals in the low-income group revealed stronger positive correlations between their behaviors and reported child ability in the General Knowledge domain.
Discussion

The first purpose of this study was to determine if parent perceptions of school readiness related to parent behaviors in engaging their children in activities that promote school readiness. It was predicted that positive correlations would exist between the two, implying that the more parents perceived a skill to be important, the more likely they would be to engage their children in activities that would help promote those skills. While some significant correlations did emerge, the correlations were very weak and likely statistically significant only due to the relatively large sample size.

Results indicated a number of findings. For those parents that perceived they taught their children to share and disciplined them when they misbehaved, they were also more likely to engage in family activities that promoted social and emotional development, such as eating dinner together. For parents who felt it was important to teach their children the alphabet, to teach them how to read, and to teach them numbers, they were also more likely to engage in activities with their children that promoted general knowledge. These activities included such things as visiting libraries, bookstores, plays, concerts, live shows, art galleries, museums, historical sites, zoos, aquariums, athletic or sporting events outside of school, and events sponsored by a community, religious, or ethnic group.

Non-significant results, or significant but weak results, may be due to a variety of reasons, many of which will be addressed when discussing limitations of the current study. One possible reason, however, is that although individuals view something as being an important indicator, they may not always support this perception with actions. Physical activity is a good example. While many individuals know this positively
impacts their physical health, it does not always mean they will be involved in daily or even weekly exercise. This same concept was further explored by Hughes (2008) and found that underlying reasons for this contradiction between parent perceptions of school readiness and parent behaviors were often related to financial and psychological resources. Additionally, as cited in Landry and Smith (2008), Hess and Shipman (1965) noted that parents might not feel that they play an important role in “teaching” their children skills that promote school readiness, but rather such actions are best left up to teachers and childcare workers.

Neither SES nor ethnicity were found to be a significant moderator variable when considering parent perceptions and parent behaviors. Such findings are consistent with earlier ones presented in this thesis. Specifically, Diamond et al. (2000) concluded that regardless of ethnicity, parents reported engaging their children in home and community activities that promote school readiness. Furthermore, parents’ perceptions of the importance of academic and behavior skills related to school readiness did not differ by ethnicity.

The second research question proposed in this thesis aimed to address the relationship between parent perceptions and parent reported child ability. The study revealed significant but weak findings in the domains of Health and Physical Development, Social and Emotional Development and General Knowledge. This implies, for example, that the more parents perceived certain skills, such as teaching their children to hold a pencil, as being an important part of school readiness, the more likely they were to report that their children could hold a pencil with their fingers, rather than grip it with their fists. They also were more likely to report that their children were able
to write their first name (including writing with reversed letters). Parents that perceived teaching their children the alphabet, numbers, and how to read as important factors of school readiness, also reported higher ability in their children to identify basic colors, recognize letters of the alphabet, count, rhyme words, recognize the beginning sound of a word, and read story books on their own.

SES and ethnicity were found to influence the relationship between parent perceptions and parent reported child ability. Specifically, SES was determined to be a significant moderator in the Social and Emotional domain. Parents who reported higher incomes were more likely to report higher levels of consistency between their perceptions and reported child ability in the social and emotional development area. These findings are similar to those of Campbell and von Stauffenberg’s (2008) who found that children of lower SES groups had a harder time with self-regulatory skills when considering behavioral expectations and demands of school. In Brooks-Gunn and Markman’s (2005) extensive literature review, ethnicity had a significant impact on the ways in which Black and White mothers nurtured, disciplined, and spoke with their children, all relating to the emotional readiness of their children to enter school. This study did not find ethnicity to have an impact on the social and emotional domain; however, ethnicity was determined to be a significant moderator when considering the relationship between parent behaviors and parent reported child ability in the General Knowledge domain. Specifically, a stronger positive relationship between parent perceptions and parent reported child ability in the General Knowledge domain was shown among Black participants than White participants; meaning Black participants reported more consistency between the two variables.
The final purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between parent behaviors and parent reported child ability. Several significant but weak relationships were found in all of the domains except Approaches to Learning. Examples of results indicated that parents who engaged in activities to help promote communication, including telling their children stories, were more likely to report higher ability in their children’s communication skills. In addition, parents who engaged their children in activities that support the domain General Knowledge also reported higher ability in their children to identify basic colors, recognize letters of the alphabet, count, rhyme words, recognize beginning sounds of a word, and read story books; all of which are considered general knowledge skills that lead to school readiness. Overall, parents who perceived skills in the General Knowledge domain as being important to teach for school readiness, also were more likely to engage in activities with their children that promote general knowledge, and were more likely to report higher ability levels of their children in skills related to general knowledge.

Other significant findings for this particular question revealed that SES served as a moderator for parent behaviors and parent reported child ability in the domain of Communication. Specifically, low-income individuals had relatively stronger positive correlations between their behaviors and reported child ability in school readiness skills associated with communication.

SES was also shown in this current project to be a moderator for parent behaviors and parent reported child ability in the General Knowledge domain. Specifically, while both low and high-income groups were shown to have a positive effect on the relationship between parent behaviors and reported child ability, low-income participants
actually showed stronger positive correlations in the General Knowledge domain as opposed to high-income participants. This means that low-income parents showed more consistency between their behaviors and reported child ability in this domain. The impact of SES on school readiness is quite possibly the most common finding when considering previous literature. For example, Vandivere et al. (2004) and Coley (2002) found that SES significantly affected parent behaviors and children’s overall readiness for school; but, children in lower SES groups were found to be less proficient in reading and mathematical tasks as compared to their higher SES peers. Furthermore, parents from lower SES homes tended to read to their children less than those of higher SES.

Several limitations are likely to contribute to the weak findings in the current project. Possibly the most unfortunate limitation is the inconsistency in the number of questions that represented each domain among parent perceptions, parent behaviors, and parent reported child ability. While some domains consisted of several questions added together to form a total, many domains consisted of only one or two questions. This meant that responses from only one or two specific questions represented that entire domain, thus limiting the variability in scores.

Another limitation with the variables was the criteria used to match them with their respective domains. While the author believes that matching was done in the most efficient way possible and based on previous literature, it was still a matter of opinion as to where each variable most appropriately fit in a category of interest under a specific domain. Furthermore, when correlating specific variables, they did not always assess the exact same issue. For example, while feeling that it is important to teach their children to share and provide appropriate discipline are both parent perceptions within the Social and
Emotional domain, those two items do not specifically match the questions in the parent behaviors category (i.e., played board games or did puzzles with child, and eating dinner together). While both concepts might indirectly relate to one another, it is likely that this lack of direct relation contributed to non-significant or weak results. It is possible that with more questions, and more questions directly related to each other, stronger correlations would be found.

Because the purpose of this study was to focus largely on the perceptions of parents in relation to school readiness, another limitation to the current study could be considered the lack of questions pertaining specifically to those perceptions. While the current data set offered excellent data concerning various aspects of school readiness, it was limited in the actual number of questions geared toward understanding the participants’ perceptions.

A primary limitation to interpreting the results of the current study relate to the sample. While the proportion of boys to girls and the ages of the children were equivalent for both Black and White groups, the income level was very disparate. Over 60% of White participants reported having an income greater than $60,000 while almost that same percent of the Black participants (i.e., 63.7%) reported having an income less than $60,000. This lack of consistency between the two groups could possibly be the biggest limitation when comparing the results from the two groups. Furthermore, the examination of moderator variables was exploratory in nature. Thus, all findings related to SES level and ethnicity are tentative.

Although positive correlations for some comparisons were found, they were weak but considered to be statistically significant only because of the relatively large sample
size. Overall, this study, unfortunately, provided very limited information about the relationships between parent perceptions, parent behaviors, and parent reported child ability regarding school readiness. However, it is the author’s opinion that further research consideration should be given to these factors involving school readiness. Ideally, future research would use a greater number of survey items or variables addressing parent perceptions and a more balanced sample of participants related to ethnicity and SES. There is no doubt that school readiness is an issue of continuing concern and more exploration of this topic could potentially open the door to an even greater understanding. With these efforts, it is hoped that researchers, parents, teachers and others involved in the development of a child will better understand how to provide every child with a fair chance to enter school as ready as the next.
References


Appendix A

Survey Questions by Category and School Readiness Domain
Parent Perceptions

- Health and Physical Development
  1. Variable PO1E: How important do you think it is for (you/any adult in your household) to teach your child to hold a pencil?

- Social and Emotional Development
  2. Variable PO1B: How important do you think it is for (you/any adult in your household) to teach your child to share?
  3. Variable PO1F: How important do you think it is for (you/any adult in your household) to discipline your child when he/she is misbehaving?

- General Knowledge
  4. Variable PO1A: How important do you (the parent) think it is for (you/any adult in your household) to teach your child the alphabet?
  5. Variable PO1C: How important do you think it is for (you/any adult in your household) to teach your child to read?
  6. Variable PO1D: How important do you think it is for (you/any adult in your household) to teach your child numbers?

Parent Behaviors

- Health and Physical Development
  1. Variable PO11E: In the past week, has anyone in your family done the following things with (child)? Played sports, active games, or exercised together?
2. Variable PO11D: In the past week, has anyone in your family done the following things with (child)? Did arts and crafts, for example, coloring, painting, pasting, or using clay?

➤ Social and Emotional Development

3. Variable PN11F: In the past week, has anyone in your family done the following things with (child)? Played board games or did puzzles with (child)?

4. Variable PN14#: In the past week, how many times has most or all of your family eaten dinner together, either at home or somewhere else?

➤ Approaches to Learning

5. Variable PN15A: In the past month, has anyone in your family done the following things with (Child)? Visited a library?

6. Variable PN15B: Visited a bookstore?

7. Variable PN15C: Gone to a play, concert, or other live show?

8. Variable PN15D: Visited an art gallery, museum, or historical site?

9. Variable PN15E: Visited a zoo or aquarium?

10. Variable PN15F: Attended an event sponsored by a community, religious, or ethnic group?

11. Variable PN15G: Attended an athletic or sporting event (outside of school) in which (child) was not a player?

➤ Communication

12. Variable PN11A: In the past week, has anyone in your family done the following things with (child)? Told (him/her) a story?
General Knowledge

13. Variable PN11B: In the past week, has anyone in your family done the following things with (child)? Taught (him/her) letters, words, or numbers?

14. Variable PN11C: Taught (child) songs or music?

15. Variable PN2: How many times have you or someone in your family read to (child) in the past week?

Parent Reported Child Ability

Health and Physical Development

1. Variable PE7: When (child) holds pencil, does (he/she) use fingers to hold it, or does (he/she) grip it in (his/her) fist?

2. Variable PE4: Can (child) write (his/her) first name, even if some of the letters aren’t quite right or are backwards?

Social and Emotional Development

3. Variable PN9-#: How many times in the past week has (child) read, (or pretended to read) to you or someone in your family?

Approaches to Learning

4. Variable PN8: Although (child) doesn’t yet read books on (his/her) own, does (he/she) ever look at a book with pictures and pretend to read?

Communication

5. Variable PE9: When (he/she) speaks, how often is (child) understandable to a stranger?
General Knowledge

6. Variable PE1: Can (child) identify the colors red, yellow, blue, and green by name?

7. Variable PE2: Can (he/she) recognize letters of the alphabet?

8. Variable PE3: How high can (child) count?

9. Variable PE5: Can (child) rhyme words?

10. Variable PE6: Can (child) recognize the beginning sound of a word?
   For example, can (he/she) tell you that the word “ball” starts with the “buh” sound?

11. Variable PN6: Is (child) able to read storybooks on (his/her) own?
Appendix B

Human Subjects Review Board Approval
In future correspondence, please refer to HS11-260, April 1, 2011

Courtney Baldwin
c/o Dr. Myers
Psychology
WKU

Courtney Baldwin:

Your research project, School Readiness: Parent Perceptions, Behaviors, and Child Ability among Ethnicity and Socioeconomic Status, was reviewed by the IRB and it has been determined that risks to subjects are: (1) minimized and reasonable; and that (2) research procedures are consistent with a sound research design and do not expose the subjects to unnecessary risk. Reviewers determined that: (1) benefits to subjects are considered along with the importance of the topic and that outcomes are reasonable; (2) selection of subjects is equitable; and (3) the purposes of the research and the research setting is amenable to subjects’ welfare and producing desired outcomes; that indications of coercion or prejudice are absent, and that participation is clearly voluntary.

1. In addition, the IRB found that you need to orient participants as follows: (1) signed informed consent is not required; (2) Provision is made for collecting, using and storing data in a manner that protects the safety and privacy of the subjects and the confidentiality of the data. (3) Appropriate safeguards are included to protect the rights and welfare of the subjects.

This project is therefore approved at the Exempt from Full Board Review Level.

2. Please note that the institution is not responsible for any actions regarding this protocol before approval. If you expand the project at a later date to use other instruments please re-apply. Copies of your request for human subjects review, your application, and this approval, are maintained in the Office of Sponsored Programs at the above address. Please report any changes to this approved protocol to this office. A Continuing Review protocol will be sent to you in the future to determine the status of the project. Also, please use the stamped approval forms to assure participants of compliance with The Office of Human Research Protections regulations.

Sincerely,

[Signature]
Paul J. Mooney, M.S.T.M.
Compliance Manager
Office of Research
Western Kentucky University

cc: HS file number Baldwin HS11-260