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Preparing for Kindergarten: An In-Depth Look at the Lived Experiences of Parents Preparing a Child for Kindergarten

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PREPARING FOR KINDERGARTEN: AN IN-DEPTH LOOK AT THE LIVED
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Abstract

The purpose of this multi-modal phenomenological study was to examine the lived experiences of parents preparing their first child for kindergarten and to evaluate the sources of information used to inform these experiences. Eight parents of rising kindergarteners were sampled for interviewing from preschool and homeschool settings in North Carolina. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to explore participant experiences and participants identified sources of information to be gathered for content analysis. The interview transcripts were analyzed using van Manen's approach to identify units of meaning. Four major themes emerged from this study: emotions about kindergarten readiness, an emphasis on social and emotional skills, learning at home, and the impact of the current context. The sources of information utilized by parents fell into categories that closely aligned with the systems of influence identified by Bronfenbrenner in his Bioecological Systems Theory. The content was collected from various social media platforms and physical sources. Most of the content was related to fine motor activities and artistic expression. The content aligned with the North Carolina state readiness standards but several skills were not covered. The findings provide insight into how parents prepare their children for kindergarten and how current contextual factors like school choice and Internet access are impacting the school readiness process. Further research is necessary to increase transferability and determine the impact certain sources of information have on parent experiences with kindergarten readiness.

Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my grandmother, Barbara. A picture of her teaching me to read sits

above my desk and is a constant reminder of my own school readiness journey. I aspire to

provide the children in my life with the same loving, constant, and joyful presence that she was

for me.

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Being your teacher has been the greatest joy and honor of my life. You are the reason I am on this journey today and I am so grateful to have been a part of your lives. To the families of these children, who have taught me so much over the last nine years. Thank you for your support, kindness, and vulnerability. You inspired this work.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Introduction

The transition to kindergarten is a critical period in the development of a child (Tobin et al., 2023, Korucu & Schmitt, 2020). Several studies have shown that students who successfully navigate the kindergarten transition have a higher chance of success throughout school and life. These students are observed to have higher graduation rates, more financial success, and are more productive citizens (Alade et al., 2023; Farran, 2011; Gill et al., 2006). On the other hand, students who struggle with their kindergarten transition are more likely to be retained in school, receive special education services, and fail to graduate (Ferretti & Bub, 2017). The significant impact of the kindergarten transition has led to several researchers labeling it as a "sensitive period" for children and families (Brinkley et al., 2023; Jose et al., 2022; Wildenger & McIntyre, 2012). Most research indicates that having a certain set of kindergarten readiness skills before starting kindergarten is necessary to navigate the transition successfully.

Kindergarten Readiness

Kindergarten readiness has multiple definitions and local communities still differ on how to determine kindergarten readiness. Chronological age, developmental factors, academic performance, and social skills have all been used to determine whether children are ready for kindergarten.

The confusion over the definition of kindergarten readiness stems from differing views on the role of kindergarten and how children learn. The role of kindergarten has changed significantly since it was established in Germany in 1837 by Freidrich Froebel (De Cos, 1997). At its inception, kindergarten was a place for young children to learn through exploration and play. In the 1900s, the role of kindergarten in the United States changed and the focus shifted to

prioritize the socialization and Americanizing of young children, especially those of immigrant and working parents (Brewer et al., 2011). Kindergartens provided childcare, free meals, and often clothing so that parents could focus on working. Around this time, kindergarten was also absorbed into the elementary school system. Pressure to prepare children for future schooling began to impact the curriculum used and the structure of the school day (Repko-Erwin, 2017).

In the 1960s, the space race, the civil rights movement, and the war on poverty increased the pressure on public school systems to increase academic rigor (Pavelski-Pyle, 2002). During this time Head Start was established, preschool enrollment increased substantially, and educational programming like Sesame Street was being created (De Cos, 1997). These milestones in early education led to an increase in kindergarten readiness expectations as students had more exposure to traditional kindergarten skills before starting school (Pavelski-Pyle, 2002). Since this time, the focus of kindergarten has slowly shifted away from social skills and play towards primarily the development of academic skills (Kim et al., 2005). This shift in curriculum has caused great debate among educational professionals, researchers, politicians, parents, and other stakeholders but continues to persist (Repko-Erwin, 2017).

The release of A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Education Reform, a report by the National Commission on Excellence in Education in 1983 and the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) law established in 2002 led to a push to standardize instruction and another increase in the academic content required in kindergarten classrooms (Repko-Erwin, 2017). Post-NCLB the amount of time kindergarten students spend engaging in play-based activities is significantly limited, and in some schools, play has completely disappeared from the kindergarten classroom (Lyons, 2024; Pyle et al., 2020; Repko-Erwin, 2017).

Views on Development

Conceptualizations of how children learn have also contributed to the debate over what it means to be kindergarten-ready. Arnold Gesell introduced a maturationist view of child development in which children had to reach a certain level of maturity before they could be considered ready to learn (Pavelski-Pyle, 2002). People who hold this view believe that students who are not prepared for kindergarten need more time to mature and often advocate for the practice of "redshirting" (Kim et al., 2005). Redshirting is the practice of delaying the start of schooling by at least a year to allow a child more time to mature or prepare for kindergarten.

An interactionist or constructivist perspective on child development posits that children learn through experiences and interacting with the world (Miller & Kehl, 2019). This perspective argues that all children are ready to learn and views readiness assessments as punitive and discriminatory. Constructivists believe that the responsibility of readiness is shared between the child, families, and schools (Rouse et al., 2023).

A behavioral view of development emphasizes learning as a progression of skills and students who lack prerequisite skills are considered not ready for school (De Cos, 1997). This view is supported by readiness assessments and is used by most school districts to label students upon kindergarten entry. People with a behaviorist view of kindergarten readiness advocate for intervention for students who are not ready and often blame factors outside of school, like family, context, and characteristics of the child, for the lack of readiness.

Currently, the most widely used definition of kindergarten readiness centers on the behaviorist idea that children should enter school "ready to learn". This definition involves a multidimensional view of kindergarten readiness (see Fig. 1). Even though chronological age is often the only formal requirement for kindergarten entry in the United States, informally children

are being labeled as "kindergarten ready" when they display mastery of certain skills (Miller & Kehl, 2019). Readiness assessments test students for skills in the following domains: social-emotional, cognitive, behavioral, and physical (Tobin et al., 2023; Barnett et al., 2020; Coba-Rodriguez et al., 2020). The list of necessary kindergarten readiness skills varies by state and often by school district but typically includes emergent literacy and numeracy skills, basic fine motor control, self-regulation skills, and prosocial skills among many others (Jahromi et al., 2023, Coba-Rodriguez et al., 2020). A child who is considered ready for kindergarten in most states knows most of the letters of the alphabet, can rote count to at least ten, color in the lines, legibly write their name, attend to a task for at least ten minutes, and sustain a conversation for at least 4 turns, among other skills (Farran, 2011). A child who is not considered kindergarten-ready is lacking one or more of these skills.

Children who start kindergarten without these prerequisite skills tend to lag behind their peers (Padilla & Ryan, 2020, Rowe et al., 2015). Some argue that not being able to catch up if you start behind, indicates that the schools are not functioning effectively (Farran, 2011). Some parents believe that students should learn all the necessary foundational skills in school and that they should not be involved in the kindergarten readiness process (Korucu & Schmitt, 2020). The concept of requiring a certain set of skills before school entry has been challenged by those who hold a constructivist view of child development and those who believe it places many students at a disadvantage (Miller & Kehl, 2019). Educators, researchers, and policymakers struggle to agree on the definition of kindergarten readiness and what role parents and early childhood educators play in the transition process (Liang et al., 2022).

For this study, kindergarten readiness was defined as a construct that involves the demonstration of skills in the social-emotional, cognitive, physical, and behavioral domains

(Miller & Kehl, 2019) This definition of readiness primarily reflects the behaviorist perspective and was chosen for this study as it aligns with the expectations of the public schools in North Carolina (where this study took place).

Figure 1 - *Kindergarten Readiness Skills Diagram*

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                                          ┌──────────────────────┐
                                        ┌─┤ Emotional Regulation  │
                     ┌──────────────────┤ └──────────────────────┘
                     │  Social-Emotional ├─┤ Peer Relationship Skills │
                     │                   │ └──────────────────────┘
                     │                   └─┤ Teacher Relationship Skills │
                     │
                     │  ┌──────────┐      ┌──────────────────┐
                     ├──┤ Cognitive ├──┬──┤ Language Skills   │
                     │  └──────────┘   └──┤ Mathematical Skills │
 ┌──────────────┐    │
 │ Kindergarten │────┤  ┌──────────┐      ┌──────────────┐
 │  Readiness   │    ├──┤Behavioral├──┬──┤ Attention Skills │
 └──────────────┘    │  └──────────┘   ├──┤   Motivation     │
                     │                 └──┤  Cooperation     │
                     │
                     │  ┌──────────┐      ┌──────────────────┐
                     ├──┤ Physical ├──┬──┤ Fine Motor Skills │
                     │  └──────────┘   └──┤ Physical Health   │
                     │
                     │  ┌──────────┐      ┌──────────────────┐
                     └──┤Maturation├─────┤ Chronological Age │
                        └──────────┘      └──────────────────┘
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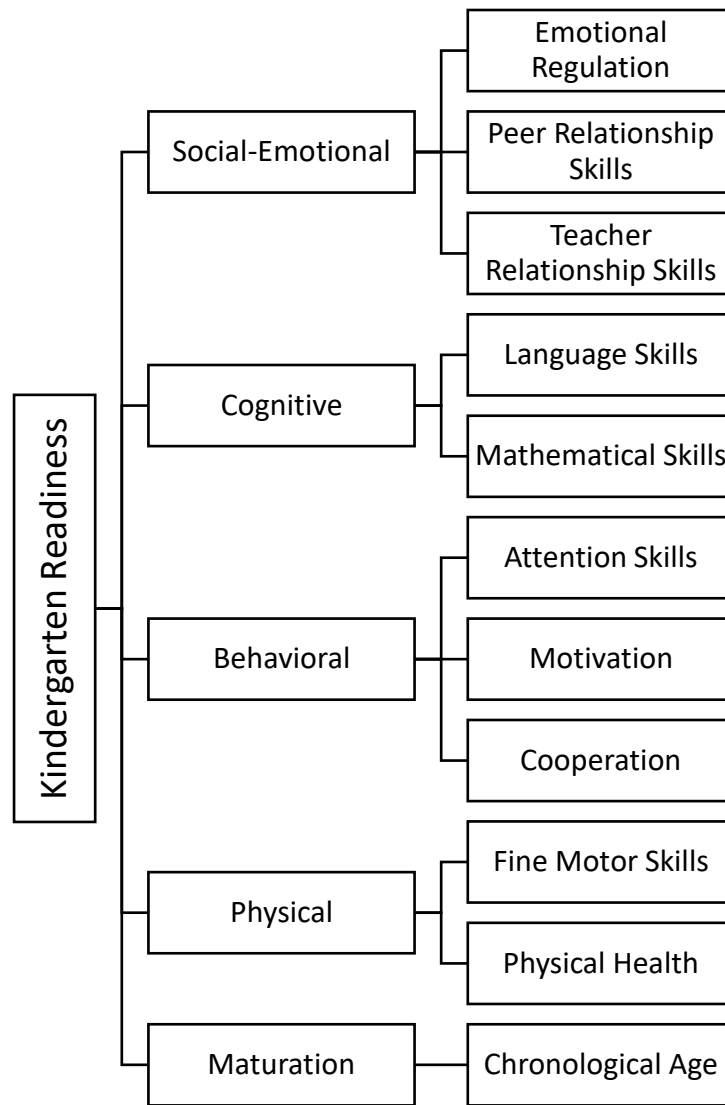
Importance of Readiness

Research indicates that possessing readiness skills at kindergarten entry strongly correlates with later literacy and academic success. Children who are labeled as "not ready" for kindergarten are more likely to struggle in school socially, behaviorally, and academically

(Jahromi et al., 2023). Students who have mastered kindergarten readiness skills before kindergarten are more likely to have higher academic performance throughout schooling than their peers who are not considered kindergarten-ready on entrance exams (Slicker et al., 2021). Because of its significant impact on future school success, kindergarten readiness has been listed as a high-priority goal in national, state, and local education policies. It has led to the development of several public prekindergarten programs and a significant increase in children enrolled in public and private preschools (Hatcher et al., 2012).

Parent Role

According to Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Systems Theory, the home environment is the most impactful context for child development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Parents are children's first teachers, and they are pivotal in supporting the development of kindergarten readiness skills (Coba-Rodriguez & Jarrett, 2022). There are multiple ways that parents can impact student readiness skills. Providing children with emotional support in addition to learning materials at home has been linked to developmental and cognitive gains for young children (Jahromi et al., 2023). Parents who read with their children daily and talk with their children about books support the development of literacy and language skills in their children and promote later academic success (Foster et al., 2016). Research also demonstrates that when parents work on numeracy skills with their children at home, children's mathematics performance improves and some literacy skills are promoted (Liang et al., 2022). Parent engagement in early learning with their children strongly correlates with acquiring kindergarten readiness skills and early academic success (Gennetian et al., 2019).

Parents also play a critical role in developing children's social-emotional skills (Ren et al., 2019). Children with strong relationships with their parents are less likely to demonstrate

concerning behaviors and have stronger peer relationship skills (Ren et al., 2019). The quality of parent-child relationships has been shown to have a strong impact on students' kindergarten transition and their subsequent academic achievement (Caughy et al., 2020).

A study by Tobin et al. (2023) found that the kindergarten transition requires both children and parents to make significant adjustments and acquire new skills. Parents often feel a large responsibility for preparing their students for school. They may also experience a loss of control over what is happening during their child's day as their child spends more time in the school setting. Parents are taking on a new role in the transition process and more information from schools about what is expected of them would be helpful as they navigate their changing role (Tobin et al., 2023).

Children who are considered "not ready" often struggle with the transition to kindergarten; gaps across readiness domains can increase as children progress through school (Brinkley et al., 2023). Given the important role that parents play in supporting the development of kindergarten readiness skills, a deeper understanding of parents' experiences as they prepare their children for school is necessary. Gathering more information on how parents approach learning at home, identifying skills to target, and accessing information about kindergarten readiness expectations could help provide insight into what parents need to help their children successfully transition. Identifying ways to help parents navigate the process successfully could lead to an increase in children who are prepared for kindergarten and a narrowing of achievement gaps before they become insurmountable.

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the lived experience of first-time parents as they prepare their children for kindergarten and the factors, such as context and social

networks, that influence their experiences. There is substantial evidence indicating that parents play the most significant role in preparing a child for kindergarten and in turn have the potential to impact student success substantially (Tobin et al., 2023). However, more information is needed about what preparing a child for kindergarten is like for parents and what factors can influence the process. The current study addressed gaps in the literature about what specific sources parents use to inform the kindergarten readiness process and how the information shared with parents aligns with state readiness expectations (Gennetian et al., 2019).

Studies have demonstrated that parents increasingly turn to social media for information and parenting advice about health-related issues (Appleton et al., 2014; Bryan et al., 2019; Pretorious et al., 2019). There is a current lack of research regarding how parents use social media to inform their kindergarten readiness experiences and what information is being accessed (Olszewski & Cullen-Conway, 2021). The current study addressed this gap in the literature and investigated the role that social media plays in informing parent experiences. This study used interviews and content analysis to explore how parents experience their child's transition to kindergarten and what may have impacted their experience.

Research Questions

This study attempted to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the lived experiences of first-time parents who are preparing a child for kindergarten?

2. What sources of information do parents consider when forming their kindergarten readiness beliefs?

3. How does social media influence parent kindergarten readiness experiences, if at all?

4. How does the information parents use to prepare their students for kindergarten align with North Carolina state readiness standards?

Overview of Research Design

While parents have been identified as critical to the development of school readiness skills and a successful kindergarten transition, little research has examined the process from the parent's perspective and what factors influence the process (Jahromi et al., 2023). To better support parents as they navigate kindergarten readiness with their children, more information is needed about what this process entails for parents and what sources of information they are turning to for support.

This study employed a mixed-model design. The study's first phase used a hermeneutic phenomenology approach to examine the lived experiences of parents preparing their first child for kindergarten. The second phase of the study used a comparative content analysis approach to explore the sources of information that parents considered during the kindergarten readiness process to determine how they align with state readiness guidelines. During the first phase of the study, eight parents were recruited from local preschools and home school settings. These parents participated in semi-structured interviews to gain insight into their experiences. Follow-up interviews were conducted as necessary to clarify initial statements and gather source material. Participants were asked to list or describe the sources of information they considered while preparing their child for kindergarten. Their responses were used to inform the content analyzed in the second phase.

In the second phase of the study, the sources that participants identified in phase one were collected and analyzed for content. The content of specific sources was analyzed and compared to the parent guidelines for kindergarten readiness preparation produced by the North Carolina

State Department of Education. Themes in sources and content were then identified and described.

Rationale and Significance

Quantitative studies on home learning and kindergarten readiness have provided valuable information about the connection between parent involvement and student academic achievement (Padilla & Ryan, 2020; Peterson et al., 2018; Slicker et al., 2021). These studies, with fixed variables and close-ended questions, can fail to represent the full scope of kindergarten readiness practices and can lead to assumptions about certain demographic groups. (Coba-Rodriguez & Jarrett, 2022). Much of the current research on the parent's role in kindergarten readiness does not factor in the 'funds of knowledge' that children gain from their experiences with their families at home (Liang et al., 2022). Qualitative research studies that have taken a more person-centered approach to parent experiences have found that families engage in a wide range of home learning activities and use various tools and resources to support the development of kindergarten readiness skills (Coba-Rodriguez & Jarrett, 2022). The current study used a person-centered approach to represent the process of each participant more accurately.

Despite their important role, little research has focused on parents' experiences in the home, and many current insights were drawn from studies conducted two decades ago, which might not accurately reflect the realities of parenting today (Padilla & Ryan, 2020). The sociocultural context of today may impact how parents raise their children and how they interact with schools (Tobin et al., 2023, Caughy et al., 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic, parent's rights movements, and the rise in internet access have significantly impacted the current social and educational climate. Parents' experiences with kindergarten readiness are likely to be different

today than they were decades ago. The current study addresses this gap in research by considering the contextual factors, like school choice, and increased access to the internet, that impact parent experiences when conducting interviews with parents about what it is like to prepare a child for kindergarten today. Research is needed to determine what factors support and hinder parents' use of the information gained from different sources about kindergarten readiness (Barnett et al., 2020).

Studies have demonstrated that the internet and social media are frequently used to inform parenting decisions concerning child health (Appleton et al., 2014; Ashfield & Donelle, 2020; Bryan et al., 2019; Deuitch et al., 2021). On any given day, more people are turning to the internet for health information than visiting a doctor with their concerns (Appleton et al, 2014). The same might be true for parents seeking kindergarten readiness information but there is currently a significant gap in research in this area. More information on whether and how parents are engaging with the internet to support the kindergarten readiness of their children is needed to determine the impact of social media on the kindergarten readiness process. Information is also required to determine the source and quality of the information parents access on social media as research in this area is also limited (Frey et al., 2021).

Positionality and Subjectivity

As a practicing kindergarten teacher, my perception of kindergarten readiness, which aligns with the behaviorist view held by the schools, may be different than the participants in this study. This perception is based on years of schooling in early childhood education, experiences with students who have and have not been prepared for school, and the skills that I value as important (behavioral and social-emotional skills). For me, students who are ready for school come with some academic skills, they can follow one-step directions and independently

complete simple tasks, they have developing social skills, and can interact with their teachers and peers with minimal support. Students who are prepared for kindergarten are also interested in learning new things and are comfortable making mistakes. Students who are not prepared for kindergarten struggle to interact with their teachers and peers without significant support, they have few independent skills and struggle to follow single-step directions without support, they fear making mistakes and are resistant to trying new things.

In nine years of teaching, three parents have cried during parent-teacher conferences and expressed frustration with the kindergarten readiness process. All three parents felt like they were doing everything they could to prepare their children for school but when they entered kindergarten they were labeled as behind on readiness assessments. These parents had participated in at-home learning activities and their children went to childcare centers that they believed were working on academic and social skills. Yet their children struggled with the transition to formal school. Identifying ways to help these parents, before the start of kindergarten, became one of the driving motivations for this study.

I have had many other parents who have expressed a sense of anxiety about their role in the process, unsure about the steps they had taken and the skills they prioritized. I had a parent ask me if it was ok that they had not yet taught their child to read, another asked if I felt like they had made the right choice in preschool. The parents I have encountered as a teacher are craving information and are often seeking reassurance for their prior kindergarten readiness decisions. I also have heard several parents state they "wish they had known that sooner" regarding skills that I expect students to have upon school entry.

Definition of Key Terminology

Bioecological Systems Theory – a framework that examines the interpersonal relationships within ecological systems including the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1979)

Chronosystem – The impact of time and contextual influences on an individual (Bronfenbrenner, 1979)

Ecological Transition – a shift in the ecological environment that occurs as a result of a change in an individual role, setting, or both (Bronfenbrenner, 1979)

Exosystem – the norms and values held by an individual (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

Funds of Knowledge – the unique knowledge and resources children develop in their home microsystems (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992).

Hermeneutic Phenomenology – also known as interpretive phenomenology, is an approach to examining the lived experience of participants navigating a phenomenon (van Manen, 1990)

Kindergarten Readiness – a multifaceted construct that involves demonstrating skills in various developmental domains including, physical, cognitive, social-emotional, maturational, and behavioral (Miller & Kehl, 2019).

Macrosystem – the environments that indirectly impact an individual including culture, socioeconomic status, political beliefs, education, and the media (Bronfenbrenner, 1979)

Mesosytem – the interrelations between two or more ecological settings in which the developing person actively participates (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

Microsystem – contexts in which the individual has direct contact (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

Social Capital – the resources available to parents and families through social connections (Tobin et al., 2023).

Social Media – any website that allows for the social interaction of users is considered a social media site. The most commonly accessed include Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, Pinterest, YouTube, TikTok, Reddit, and parenting blogs (Haslam et al., 2017).

Techno-subsystem – influences of media (internet, TV, social media, advertisements) on an individual (Johnson & Puplampu, 2008),

Summary

This chapter is an overview of a study designed to explore the lived experiences of parents preparing their first child for kindergarten. This study examined how parents experience the kindergarten readiness process and what factors influence their experience. This study also considered the sources of information parents used to inform their process. These sources were analyzed to determine how closely the information provided to parents aligned with state expectations. The data was collected during the first phase using semi-structured interviews and interpreted using a hermeneutic phenomenology approach. Physical and digital sources of information identified by parents during the first phase were collected and analyzed using a comparative content analysis approach during the second phase.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

This phenomenological study explored the experiences of parents who were preparing their first child for kindergarten. This chapter describes the current research on parent experiences with kindergarten readiness that was used to shape the present study. This chapter also describes the gaps in the literature that require further research to understand how parents are navigating the transition to kindergarten. This chapter includes the theoretical framework and literature review used to guide this study from formation to completion.

Theoretical Framework

While Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Systems Theory is typically used to understand a child's development it can be applied to understand how the multiple ecological systems impact the development and experiences of all people (see Figure 2). For this study, it was used to understand how parents made sense of their experiences with the kindergarten transition and what ecological factors influenced their experiences.

According to Bronfenbrenner's theory, children are primarily influenced by their immediate contexts, home, and school (Barnett et al., 2020, Padilla & Ryan, 2020). Parents have experienced more ecological transitions and have contact with more systems of influence. There are more systems to consider when interpreting parents' experiences and the factors that shape their lives (Rowe et al., 2015). Parent practices during the kindergarten transition are influenced by context, personal life, parent identity, and role construction as they experience the shift (Tobin et al., 2023). The kindergarten transition is impactful ecologically for parents as well as children (Korucu & Schmitt, 2020). The parenting role changes from one of the primary teachers in a child's life to a partner in education with their child's kindergarten teacher. This shift in role, or

ecological transition, can influence parent experiences directly and indirectly have an impact by introducing new microsystems (like school and new peers) to parent systems of influence.

Research has demonstrated differences in parenting knowledge tied to culture, educational experiences, and both combined (Rowe et al., 2015). The macro- and exosystems contain the cultural influences and norms that impact an individual (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Cultural norms and values are likely to have a stronger influence on parents than children as they are more internalized. Differences in parenting behaviors across cultural groups reflect differences in goals, beliefs, and lived experiences rather than a deficit in parenting as suggested in several comparative studies (Caughy et al., 2020; Ren et al., 2019). Parenting beliefs and practices have been passed down through generations and are specific to different cultures (Rowe et al., 2015).

Research has also demonstrated that parenting practices have been influenced by the experiences that parents had as children (Caugy et al., 2020). The influence of past experiences makes sense when using Bronfenbrenner's theory because past experiences occupy the individual circle at the center of the model and have a strong impact on the experiences of the individual (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). The sociocultural context that occupies the chronosystem and the macrosystem may also impact how parents raise their children and how they interact with schools (Tobin et al., 2023, Caughy et al., 2020). There has been relatively little research on the impact of context on the kindergarten readiness experience. This study addressed that gap in the literature by asking parents to describe the factors that shape their process.

The techno-subsystem is a layer of the ecological model, introduced by Johnson and Puplampu (2008). The interaction with technology for the purposes of communicating with others, gaining information, or recreation can impact an individual's direct and indirect

environments (Johnson, 2010). The digital divide has closed rapidly in recent years. Current research demonstrates that nearly 96% of households in the United States have access to the Internet on at least one device (Ashfield & Donelle, 2020). The potential impact of the techno-subsystem on a person's experiences is increasing as access to technology expands. Recent research has shown that interacting with social media has the potential to impact parenting behaviors (Olszewski & Cullen-Conway, 2021). Little research has explored the role that social media and the techno-subsystem play in parent experiences (Pretorius et al., 2019). This study investigated how parents use social media to inform their kindergarten readiness experiences.

Figure 2 - *Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Systems Model*

Individual- age, gender, past experiences

Microsytem- Direct or immediate environemnt (home, school, work, family, friends, church, neighborhood

Mesosystem- Interaction between systems

Macrosystem- Indirect environments (culture, socioeconomic status, media, politics, education

Exosystem- Norms and values

Techno-subsystem – internet, TV, media

Chronosystem – Time and contextual influence
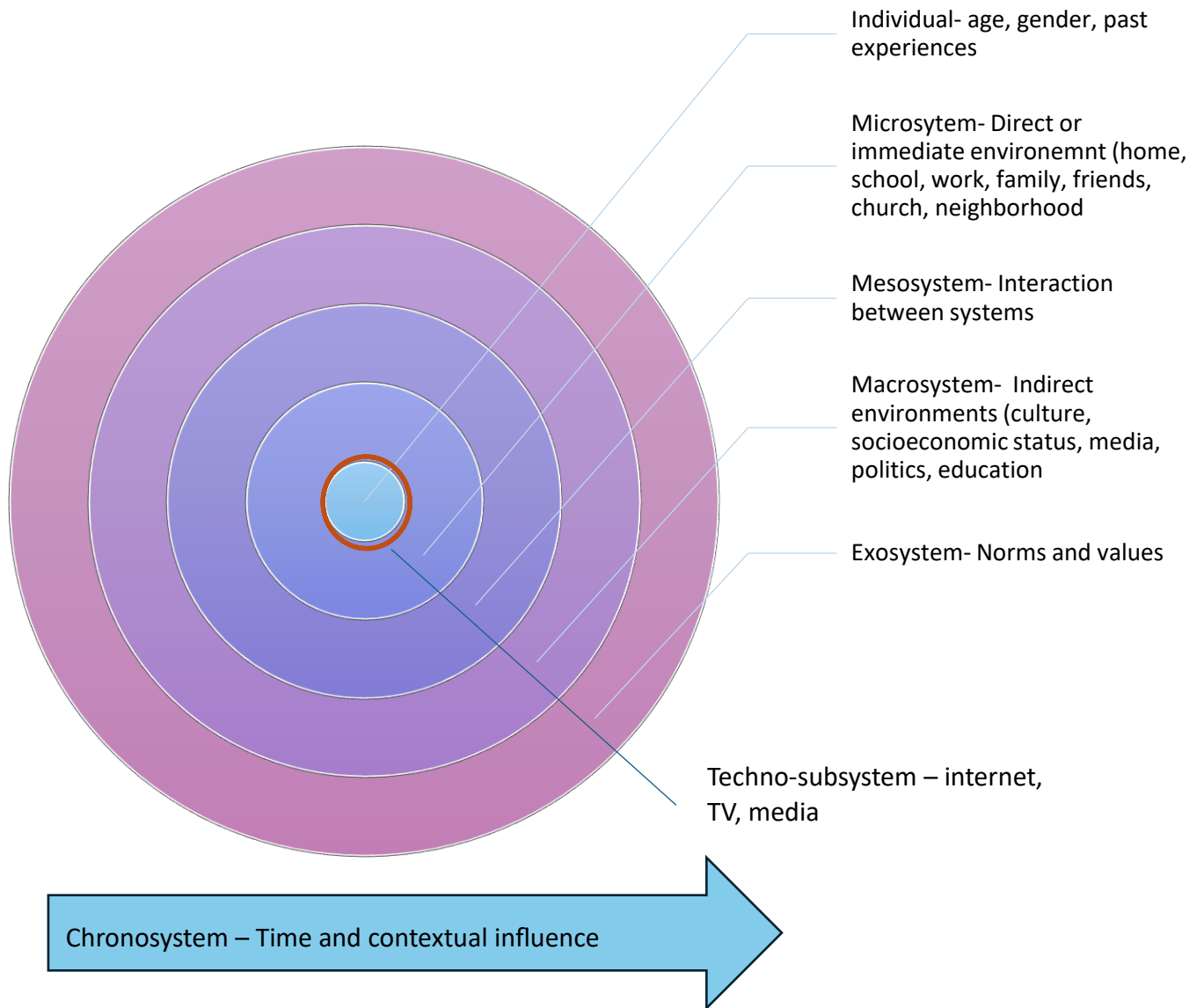
Review of the Literature

Methodology

This literature review was conducted using the following set of parameters. Articles were included in the review if they were (1) from a peer-reviewed journal; (2) published between 2012 and 2023; (3) focused on parents and the kindergarten transition; and (4) used rigorous research methods. Kindergarten readiness is a widely researched topic and this review narrowed the literature by focusing on the experiences of parents during the transition. The wide range of research on the kindergarten transition was also the rationale behind limiting the search to articles published between 2012 and 2023. Social media research was also accessed to inform the third research question. No articles were found when the parameters above were used to access social media research. Search parameters were broadened to include parent decision-making but without emphasizing kindergarten readiness.

The systematic literature search was performed over the process of a month. The database EBSCOHost and all affiliated sources were used to perform the search. Key words searched included "kindergarten readiness", "school readiness", "parent role", "parent beliefs" "kindergarten transition", "social media", and "parenting" From the 436 articles found from the systematic search, 85 articles proved to be relevant to the topic and are included in the review for discussion.

Results

The results from the analysis of these 85 articles are presented below. The main themes of the articles related to parent experiences with kindergarten readiness include (a) parent role in the kindergarten transition, (b) at-home learning, (c) approaches to learning, (d) supportive home environment, and (e) barriers to involvement. Themes related to how parents identified and used

sources of information included (a) personal experiences, (b) family members, (c) children's role, (d) preschool, (e) contextual factors, (f) culture, and (g) other factors. The last theme identified was parent use of social media.

Parent Role in the Kindergarten Transition

Before entering kindergarten, children's educational and developmental lives are shaped by their parents; therefore, parents are critical in promoting school readiness. Supportive parenting and involvement in their child's early learning have been shown to improve developmental and academic outcomes for young children (Gennetian et al., 2019). Parent involvement is often separated into two categories: (a) at-home involvement, and (b) school involvement. At-home involvement considers factors like parenting characteristics and the home learning environment. School involvement includes (a) volunteering in the classroom, (b) attending meetings, (c) chaperoning field trips, and (d) school attendance. Research has demonstrated that the quality of at-home parent involvement is significantly linked to student academic achievement and transition success (Tobin et al., 2023). School involvement is not strongly correlated to school readiness or student achievement (Barnett et al., 2020).

Recent studies have demonstrated that parenting and the quality of the home learning environment are powerful predictors of school success (Slicker et al., 2021; Barnett et al., 2020; Payne, 2020). These two factors account for almost half of the school readiness gaps between low- and middle-income household students (Payne, 2020). When examining the results of the 1998-99 ECLS-K survey, Slicker et al. (2021) found that the impacts of supportive parenting and enriching environments can not only help students be ready for kindergarten but the effects of these efforts have been linked to academic achievement in middle childhood and beyond. They found that the frequency of at-home learning experiences strongly impacted student motivation,

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attention, and vocabulary in kindergarten and that these positive impacts lasted through elementary school. Parental engagement in early learning can also be a protective factor and help students overcome some of the factors associated with the income and racial educational gaps (Coba-Rodriguez et al., 2020). Parents play a pivotal role in their child's school readiness success. Given the significance of this role, a thorough understanding of how parents support their children through the kindergarten transition is necessary.

At-Home Learning

Children whose parents engage in regular at-home learning enter school with stronger cognitive skills even if risk factors, including low socioeconomic status and non-English speaking parents, are present (Baker, 2018). Families who engage in literacy activities such as (a) shared book reading, (b) telling stories, (c) playing games, (d) singing songs, (e) talking about letters and numbers, and (f) doing arts and crafts, promote literacy skills by engaging in language-rich interactions (Marcella et al., 2014). Parents who regularly participate in home learning activities with their children play a key role in developing kindergarten readiness skills (Barnett et al., 2020). Parents can positively impact student's literacy skills and attitudes toward learning by simply demonstrating an enjoyment of reading or learning (Jahromi et al., 2023).

In a study by Barnett et al. (2020), the association between participation in quality home learning activities and student kindergarten readiness was more significant than demographic factors and preschool attendance. This emphasizes the importance of home learning even for students who are attending preschool programs. Padilla & Ryan (2020) found that for children of Hispanic immigrant parents who regularly participate in home learning activities, the home environment might be more impactful academically than attending Head Start.

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Children with a supportive and stimulating home environment have higher cognitive and social skills (Korucu & Schmitt, 2020). In recent years, due to the increasing demands placed on children entering kindergarten, parents across demographic groups are increasing the amount of early learning activities in their homes (Slicker et al., 2021). Supportive parental activities in the home include playing games, reading books, and conversing with their children (Gannetian et al., 2019). Parents can also support their children by directly teaching foundational academic skills, providing high-quality learning materials, and participating in arts and crafts (Korucu & Schmitt, 2020).

Approaches to Learning

In quantitative research, approaches to at-home learning have been divided into two distinct categories, (a) the skills-based approach and (b) the play-based approach. The skills-based approach focuses on the direct teaching of academic skills through repetition, memorization, and direct practice. Parents who use this approach list activities like (a) letter tracing, (b) letter and number flashcards, and (c) practice with name writing when describing their at-home learning activities. The play-based approach involves (a) interactive storybook reading, (b) gameplay, and (c) storytelling. Research into these two approaches has shown that the play-based approach is associated with strong emergent literacy skills including (a) phonological awareness, (b) comprehension, and (c) word recognition. In contrast, the skills-based approach is not positively correlated with any emergent literacy skills (Jarrett et al., 2015 Lynch et al., 2006; Serpell, et al., 2005). This means that despite the best efforts of some parents, their home learning environment might not be as supportive as they intend.

Recent qualitative research has demonstrated that sorting at-home learning into distinct categories can be misleading and can result in deficit thinking about certain demographic groups

(Sawyer et al., 2018). A study by Coba-Rodriguez and Jarret (2022) investigating the perspectives of Latina mothers transitioning a child to kindergarten found that most low-income families participated in a range of positive at-home literacy activities, both play-based and skills-based, including directly teaching letters, storytelling, and taking trips to the library. They also discovered a wide range of educational materials present in the homes of their participants.

Children benefit from both formal and informal home learning opportunities, yet there is little research on the informal learning opportunities children engage in with their parents (Brinley et al., 2023). This focus on formal and academic learning opportunities in research favors families with the cultural and economic capital to participate in these activities. It downplays or dismisses alternative methods of at-home learning. Participants in a study by Coba-Rodriguez et al. (2020) also listed daily activities they used as teachable moments, like cooking and doing the laundry. They discussed incorporating counting, sorting, questioning, and conversations into these activities. Informal teaching methods, like the ones described by these mothers, can significantly impact the development of kindergarten readiness skills across domains but show up infrequently in readiness research.

Supportive Home Environment

Despite the holistic nature of the behaviorist kindergarten readiness definition used by most of the public schools in North Carolina, cognitive or academic skills are often prioritized in research and parent conceptions. When reporting on supportive home learning environments, parents frequently describe the activities used to promote literacy and math skills but rarely articulate how they support the social, emotional, physical, and behavioral aspects of readiness (Dunaway et al., 2021). Students who begin school behind in the social and behavioral domains of readiness are more likely to be suspended, retained, or expelled from school (Bettencourt et

al., 2023) and deficits in these areas at school entry are predictive of risky behaviors as students grow (Mollborn et al., 2018).

Several studies have found that parents who use a responsive parenting approach, characterized by consistent, supportive, developmentally appropriate care that is sensitive to the needs of children, are more likely to promote the development of positive social, emotional, and behavioral skills (Korucu & Schmitt, 2020, Douglass et al., 2021). Using parenting strategies like (a) developing routines, (b) setting limits, (c) using praise and encouragement, and (d) using natural consequences to manage behavior can be effective ways to support kindergarten readiness, especially in the social and emotional domains (Jarrett & Coba-Rodriguez, 2019, Bettencourt et al., 2023). Positive parenting can reduce the impacts of socioeconomic stress on the development of kindergarten readiness for young children (Douglass et al., 2021). On the other hand, using harsh or negative parenting techniques can result in low levels of social competence in young children (Joy, 2016). Children who experience maltreatment can demonstrate delays across readiness domains which can have a significant impact on their ability to transition to kindergarten successfully (Turgeon et al., 2022). Research suggests that providing parents with parenting instruction can significantly impact the social and behavioral development of young children and positively impact academic outcomes (Bettencourt et al., 2023).

Providing children with a safe and stable home environment can significantly impact the development of kindergarten readiness skills (Dunaway et al., 2021). Research into adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) has identified several direct experiences such as abuse, mistreatment, and neglect as well as environmental factors like financial instability, household stress, and neighborhood safety that can significantly impact child development (Loomis, 2021). Children who are exposed to ACEs before kindergarten are more likely to have difficulty

adjusting to the social and behavioral expectations of schooling (McDoniel & Bierman, 2023).

Residential and familial stability can impact young children's development and readiness for

kindergarten (Mollborn et al., 2018). Children who go through several environmental changes, at

home or childcare, at a young age can experience stress that impacts development, especially in

the social, emotional, and behavioral domains. Children who grow up in neighborhoods where

there are high rates of child maltreatment can experience adverse effects, even if they are not

experiencing abuse or neglect (Turgeon et al., 2022).

The physical and mental well-being of both parents and children can impact school

readiness across all domains (Bettencourt et al., 2023) Children who are well-fed, well-rested,

and healthy are more likely to be able to engage in academic opportunities and many

kindergarten teachers stress the importance of the physical health domain of kindergarten

readiness (Steyer et al., 2023). Hunger, tiredness, and chronic illness are all linked to lower

outcomes in all kindergarten readiness domains and students with physical health concerns may

struggle to overcome deficits due to increased school absences which often accompany these

issues. Chronic illness, depression, and anxiety in parents have all been linked to high rates of

absenteeism in early childhood education programs that persist as children enter kindergarten

(Bettencourt et al., 2023). Parents who support the health and well-being of their children

through preventative and proactive measures (e.g., doctor and dental visits), can significantly

impact the development of kindergarten readiness skills.

Barriers to Involvement

Several barriers exist for parents trying to help their children prepare for kindergarten.

Parents who speak a language other than English may have difficulty accessing information

about readiness and feeling confident about assisting children with school skills (Coba-

Rodriguez et al., 2020). Work barriers, like scheduling, can also impact parent involvement in early childhood education (Peterson et al., 2018). Access to resources is a barrier that affects many families, especially those with low socioeconomic status (Tobin et al., 2023). These resources may be physical (e.g., books, flashcards), financial, contextual (e.g., time), or social (e.g., support network). Parents who struggle to access any of these resources may have difficulty engaging in the school readiness process.

In a study focused on the perspectives of low-income Latino parents and the barriers they face regarding kindergarten readiness, the most significant barrier parents reported was a lack of knowledge about what students needed to know and work on at home before kindergarten (Peterson et al., 2018). Research consistently reports that parents across demographic groups express a lack of knowledge about how to prepare their children for school best (Merideth et al., 2022, Barnett et al., 2020, Payne et al., 2020). One study showed that 68% of parents want more information on supporting their children with school-readiness skills (Bérubé et al., 2018). The skills that parents prioritize at home may not match the priorities of the school, which may negatively impact a child's transition (Tobin et al., 2023). For example, students from ethnic minority families may be taught a set of socialization norms and beliefs that do not align with the standards in educational settings, which typically align with Euro-American customs (Barbarin et al., 2010).

Overwhelmingly, parents have expressed a desire to be involved in their child's transition to kindergarten (Peterson et al., 2018; Macleod & Tett, 2019; Slicker et al., 2021). Parents are aware that kindergarten has changed and the expectations for children have increased, and many have expressed fear that their children are not ready (Brown & Lan, 2018). Supporting parents

during the kindergarten transition is critical; more research must be done to identify how best to provide that support.

Sources of Information

Very little current research focuses on the sources of information parents consider as they navigate the school readiness process. What is known about the sources of information parents consider has primarily been identified in the context of larger qualitative studies about the role parents play in the kindergarten readiness process. Research on parents' beliefs about kindergarten readiness shows that they were based on their previous experiences with school, what they had heard about kindergarten from peers, and assumptions made from representations of kindergarten in the media (Liang et al., 2022). Tobin et al. (2023) found that parents want more information about what to expect from their child's new teacher and school and actively seek resources to promote school readiness at home. This indicates that parents are searching for more information or advice and are accessing different sources to meet their needs. The current study addressed the research gap specifically focused on sources of information and attempted to provide a clearer picture of who and what parents are reaching out to for support during this process.

Despite the lack of research on this area, it has been acknowledged that several ecological systems and factors can impact parents' practices (Gennetian et al., 2019). These factors include personal experiences, microsystems like family members and preschool interactions, and contextual factors. Funds of Knowledge research emphasizes that social, historical, and cultural interactions shape and influence knowledge and values. A deeper understanding of these factors is critical to ensure that all families are represented and supported (Abarca et al., 2023). More research is needed to better understand what factors contribute to parent experiences with school

readiness. Once these factors have been identified, interventions can be targeted to increase the spread of accurate information.

Personal Experiences

Some research indicates that parents rely on their personal experiences with education or those of close friends and family members to inform their kindergarten readiness practices (Hatcher et al., 2012). In a study of low-income mothers' at-home literacy practices, Sawyer et al. (2018) found that mothers' own schooling experiences may impact the home learning environment they create. Repeated practice and memorization of letters and words reflect teaching practices that may have been common when parents were learning to read as children. The difference between what parents experienced when they were in kindergarten and the reality of kindergarten today can be difficult for parents to reconcile (Merideth et al., 2022 Negative school experiences can also impact at-home practices for parents. Mothers who had negative math experiences in school often have more anxiety and negativity toward math which may result in limited at-home math opportunities for young children (Beltrán-Grimm, 2022).

Mothers with higher education levels may better understand the skills students need to succeed in school (Jahromi et al., 2023). This increased awareness may lead parents to provide targeted at-home learning experiences to prepare their children to navigate formal schooling. Negative experiences with school may impact parents' information about the transition process and their attitude and affinity for getting involved in their child's education (Tobin et al., 2023). According to the Bioecological Systems model, personal experiences should greatly impact how parents navigate their experiences. Additional research on how personal experiences impact parent participation in the school readiness process is necessary to fully understand the past's role in current parenting decisions.

Parenting and discipline also seem to be heavily influenced by past experiences. In a study by Navarro-Cruz (2021), mothers expressed a strong desire to replicate or avoid the discipline practices they experienced as young children. Many of the mothers in the study had experienced spanking as a child and did not want to spank their children.

Family Members

In a study on the home literacy practices of low-income mothers of preschoolers attending Head Start, participants identified their parents and siblings as support when preparing a child for kindergarten (Jarret et al., 2015). These family members helped by buying home learning supplies and participating in home learning activities like shared reading and writing practice (Sawyer et al., 2018, Jarrett et al., 2015). A study of parenting knowledge by Rowe et al. (2015) used data from the 2001 ECLS-B survey and found that when asked who they would most likely ask for parenting advice, 61% of mothers indicated their parents, 46% indicated their spouse or partner, 27% indicated their family doctor and 27% said their brother or sister. They also found that White parents were more likely to seek advice from health professionals and immediate family members than Black and Latino parents. Black parents were more likely to ask extended family members for support than White or Latino parents. More research is needed to determine family members' role in the school readiness process, both as participants and as sources of information.

Children's Role

A study by Marcella et al. (2014) found that parents often shift their practices to meet the interests and competencies of their children. Children who express interest in reading or literacy activities frequently increase their exposure to such tasks by prompting parents (Sawyer et al.,

2018). Children's role in their kindergarten readiness process is understudied and more research in this area would be beneficial.

One study by Tobin et al. (2023) identified family context can impact parent beliefs. For example, parents experiencing the transition to kindergarten for the first time hold different beliefs than parents with a child in formal schooling. They found less variation in school readiness beliefs across demographic domains, and between home and school once an older child is in school. This indicates that home-school connections are forged when children are in school and information about school expectations is more accessible for all families. Parents demonstrate a shift in literacy beliefs and practices after experiencing the transition to schooling with an older child (Sawyer et al., 2018). Parents with children in school are more likely to focus on social and emotional kindergarten readiness skills than first-time parents who often prioritize academic skills (Tobin et al., 2023). Older children also help extend parent social networks through school activities and their friends' families This increased social capital may increase parent access to information and activities related to school readiness.

Considering the significant impact older children can have on the school readiness process and parents' perceptions, this study focused specifically on first-time parents to eliminate this factor from the parent experience. This helped to understand how parents understand the kindergarten readiness process without the influence of having a child already in school.

Preschool

Early childcare enrollment has risen consistently over the past 20 years. Over half of the nation's children are enrolled in an early childhood program before kindergarten (Mamedova et al., 2015, Wildenger & McIntyre, 2012). Participation in a high-quality early childcare program

can strongly impact a child's successful transition to kindergarten and academic success (Belfield & Garcia, 2014, Wildenger & McIntyre, 2012).

Parents who engage with their child's preschool setting and teachers might learn more about child development and learn how to support their child at home (Barnett et al., 2020, Korucu & Schmitt, 2020). Observing teacher practices in preschool settings has been linked to increased parent engagement in at-home learning activities (Barnett et al., 2020). Participation in preschool settings may help to model quality at-home learning practices to parents who did not experience these practices as children or in other contexts (Barnett et al., 2020). Another study found that most parents learned about school readiness expectations through their child's preschool (Brown & Lan, 2018).

One of the founding goals of Head Start was to engage parents in their children's education by providing parents with the resources and information needed to support their children at home (Merideth et al., 2022). Early childhood educators are often trained and encouraged to facilitate the at-home learning of their students (Liang et al., 2022). Research has also shown that parents relied on preschool assessment information to determine if their child was ready for school (Hatcher et al., 2012).

Parents from more affluent communities are likely to access information about school readiness from teachers, school administrators, or other parents in their social network. In contrast, parents from less affluent communities are more likely to rely on their own experiences in elementary school to inform their beliefs about school readiness (Tobin et al., 2023). There is a significant lack of research on parents' experiences who did not send their child to preschool and how they gained information about school readiness, even though this population represents almost half of all families with children in kindergarten (Merideth et al., 2022). The current study

attempted to address this gap by recruiting participants who homeschool their children and parents who chose formal preschools.

Contextual Factors

Parents may be limited in their ability to provide a high-quality home learning environment, even if they believe in its importance (Barnet et al., 2020). Financial hardships, family stress, work requirements, lack of transportation, access to materials, and other factors can significantly impact the ability to provide at-home learning opportunities (Barnett et al., 2020, Sawyer et al., 2018). Additional barriers exist around access to school readiness activities for families with differing levels of social capital (Tobin et al., 2023).

Choosing an early learning program can be challenging for a variety of reasons. In a study examining the family literacy practices of low-income Latino families, Marcella et al. (2014) found that cost, flexibility of hours, and location were all factors listed by parents as limits to accessing early childhood education programs.

The current societal context plays a role in parent experiences with kindergarten readiness (Liang et al., 2022). Immigration laws, schools with English-only policies, and standardized curricula that prioritize traditionally White narratives can have an impact on how families from diverse cultural backgrounds approach preparing for school (Figueroa et al., 2015). Public school backlash regarding masking and parents' rights movements have impacted parents' trust in the school system. The shutdown of the public schools in March of 2020 and the continued shutdown in some states into the 2020-2021 school year caused a significant disruption in the lives of parents and children. A study by Musaddiq et al. (2022) found that post-pandemic there has been an increase in parents considering alternatives to public school such as homeschooling and private schools. In their study of Michigan families, they saw a noticeable

decline in public school enrollment in the fall of 2020, especially for kindergarten students. The pandemic has led to an increase in internet access and usage. Parents also had more time with their children to engage in home learning activities. These contextual factors may have an impact on the school readiness experiences of parents and more studies that examine current experiences are necessary to understand the role that context plays in the process.

Culture

Many parents look to their cultural values to inform their parenting styles, child development beliefs, and educational goals for their children (Abarca et al., 2023). These values also inform the home learning environments that parents create and the routines they establish (Abarca et al., 2023). In a study by Beltrán-Grimm (2022), all of the Latina mothers interviewed stated the importance of preserving their Spanish language and encouraging their children to embrace their identities as Latinos.

Other Sources

Friends, church members, parenting classes, and print materials were frequently mentioned as sources of information accessed by parents seeking parenting advice or information. Some parents reported directly looking for the information, searching for something specific, or asking direct questions, others learned information informally, by hearing about it on the news or watching parenting interactions in public (Navarro-Cruz et al., 2021).

Parent Use of Social Media

Parents are searching for information and support in various ways and finding the most effective and accessible ways to reach parents is critical. Social media provides an innovative and easily accessible way for parents to find information (Olszewski & Cullen-Conway, 2021).

Social media is defined as any form of electronic communication where users share content and information on an online platform (Pretorious et al., 2019). Parents in all socioeconomic and racial groups regularly access social media to seek parenting information (Frey et al., 2021). Recent studies indicate that 83% of all parents have at least one social media account (Pretorious et al., 2019). Research on how social media is used to impact parenting is relatively new and most of the current studies focus on how parents use social media to inform health-based parenting decisions such as vaccination, breastfeeding decisions, and treatment plans for children with serious diseases (Olszewski & Cullen-Conway, 2021). More research is needed to determine how parents use social media to inform school readiness decisions.

Parents have identified several benefits of using social media for health-related information. These benefits include the lack of time constraints on content, the ability to access the opinions of a wide range of people, and increased social support (Appleton et al., 2014). Participants also noted the lack of travel and the ability to passively participate as benefits of using social media for information (Cowie et al., 2018). Social media sites effectively synthesize and display information in a way that is more accessible to all audiences (Appleton et al., 2014). Information shared on social media can also be displayed using pictures and videos which makes it accessible to wider audiences (Olszewski & Cullen-Conway, 2021 Parents reported that the health information they found on Facebook was more specific, practical, and current than the information they received from other sources such as pamphlets from their healthcare providers and health websites (Maslen, 2023). Many of the benefits of social media could offset the barriers identified by parents when describing parental engagement in school readiness. Research into how parents access information about school readiness on social media is necessary to determine if it can be used to increase parental involvement.

Current trends show families as more insular and less reliant on communities for support, especially during and post-pandemic (Maslen, 2023). Many parents now turn to social media platforms to answer questions, rather than peers in their immediate social network. A study by Appleton et al. (2014) showed that parents reportedly sought health advice from social media in addition to speaking with family members and health professionals. They also found that parents were more likely to turn to social media for health advice after receiving contradictory advice from health providers and peers or disagreeing with the information provided. Parenting advice from the internet may also be considered more credible than advice from family and peers because it has been shared publicly and is often considered more current (Cowie et al., 2018). Parents also indicated that using social media for health-related support increased their social networks and social capital (Appleton et al., 2014). This increase in social capital could be significant for parents navigating the kindergarten transition, as greater social capital has been linked to greater involvement and confidence in school readiness decisions (Tobin et al., 2023). More research is needed to see if parents value social media information the same amount when considering school readiness advice.

Unfortunately, the advice shared on social media sites is not always accurate and sometimes contradictory to health professionals' recommendations (Appleton et al., 2014). In addition to inaccurate information, social media posts may contain unfounded promises and promote commercial interests (Cowie et al., 2018). In a study by Frey et al. (2021), researchers found that accessing inaccurate information may create confusion for parents and could disrupt or delay parenting actions. They also noticed that parents found it challenging to identify which information shared on social media sites was accurate and where it originated (Frey et al., 2021). This is significant because if parents prioritize the information they learn on social media over

what they hear from other sources and cannot discern credible information, they could place themselves and their children at risk. There is a lack of research on the accuracy of information shared with parents on social media sites (Cowie et al., 2018). Research is needed to determine the accuracy of the school readiness content parents interact with on social media. Despite the drawbacks of social media, it is becoming an increasingly popular source of information. In addition to determining how parents get their information, it is also necessary to ensure that they can decipher accurate information from inaccurate.

While social media has become an increasingly popular way for people to gain information, there is a lack of research on how it has been used to impact parenting decisions. Most of the research on social media use centers around the medical field and how parents access information and support (Appleton et al., 2014). Research on how parents use social media has also primarily focused on babyhood and has not examined how usage may change as children age (Maslen, 2023). There is a significant gap in the research regarding how parents use social media to inform parenting decisions regarding school readiness. Understanding how parents are using social media to support parenting may help disseminate more accurate information to a widespread audience.

Summary

School readiness is a topic that has been studied extensively over the last several decades and yet there is still so much that we do not know about how children are prepared for school. Parents play a significant role in helping their children develop school-readiness skills. Understanding how parents experience school readiness is critical, yet research is lacking in this area. It is important to identify the sources of information parents use to inform their school readiness experiences. Once the sources of information are identified, interventions can be

created to target misinformation and to ensure that parent conceptions of school readiness match school expectations. Social media is a potential source of information parents use to support their kindergarten readiness process. There is much to discover about social media's role in informing parenting decisions, especially regarding school readiness. Research is needed to determine what content is accessed by parents, who produces it, and how accurately it aligns with school expectations. Research is also necessary to determine how parents use social media and its impact on their beliefs and decisions.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction

This mixed model phenomenological research study aims to explore the lived experiences of first-time parents as they prepare their children for kindergarten. One of the main objectives of this study is to examine the factors that influence parent experiences, including the impact of social media. This study also focused on how the sources of information parents consider about school readiness compare to the information produced by the North Carolina Department of Education.

This chapter describes the methodology that was used throughout the study. This chapter includes information about the (a) study design, (b) research setting, (c) research population, (d) data collection methods, (e) timeline for data collection, (f) data analysis methods, and (g) study limitations.

Rationale for Research Design

This study is a mixed model or multimethod qualitative study. It used two forms of qualitative data, interviews, and content analysis, to answer the research questions (Silverman, 2020). Using a mixed model design helped to strengthen the quality of the research by allowing the parent experience of kindergarten readiness to be examined from different angles (Crotty, 1996). This study employed a hermeneutic phenomenology research design. Phenomenology was selected for this study because the investigated problem required an in-depth exploration of the participants' experiences. Understanding parental experiences during the kindergarten transition is important because parents play a critical role in preparing their children for school (Gennetian et al., 2019). A hermeneutic approach, developed by Heidegger and furthered by Gadamer and other scholars, was used to interpret parent experiences (Polkinghorne, 1983).

Hermeneutic or interpretive phenomenology allows for considering context and involves using a reflective stance to identify essential themes of the experience (van Manen, 1997). Context was important to this study, especially focusing on factors influencing parent experiences, like social media. Removing the school readiness experience from the context of the current educational and political climate would limit the insights that can be gained. It would offer less perspective on how to support parents in the future. Hermeneutic phenomenology also allowed for the perspective of the researcher and participants to be combined to interpret parent experiences (van Manen, 1997).

The focus of this study was not on the participants themselves but rather on their experience with the kindergarten readiness process. For this reason, phenomenology was more appropriate than other qualitative methods, like ethnography or case study which focus heavily on the participants in the study (Mirriam, 2007). Several studies have demonstrated the importance of the parent's role in the transition process. Yet little research focused on the experience of preparing a child for kindergarten or what factors impact the process (Tobin et al., 2023). Much of the research in the past few decades has used the same set of quantitative data, limiting the conclusions that can be drawn (Jarrett et al., 2015). Although quantitative research allows for the examination of large populations it also simplifies the experiences of participants and limits the description of experiences (Coba-Rodriguez & Jarrett, 2022). Standardized assessment tools do not always highlight the unique funds of knowledge that all families bring to the transition experience (Jahromi et al., 2023). The research design of this study addressed a lack of qualitative studies examining parental beliefs about school readiness (Coba-Rodriguez et al., 2020).

Semi-structured interviews provided a detailed examination of how parents experience the kindergarten transition and what sources they turn to for information. Interviews allowed for the unique experiences of families to be told and described. Comparative content analysis provided a deeper understanding of the information that parents received about school readiness and how it relates to state expectations. These processes were used together to understand better the factors that shape parental experiences with the kindergarten readiness process and how best to support parents during this transition. This study used a sequential process as outlined in Figure 3. The content analysis focused on sources identified by parents during interviews. This was done instead of digital keyword searches, which have been used in much of the social media research in the past, to provide a more representative analysis of the sources used by the participants in the study (Paige et al., 2015; Sabus et al., 2019).

Figure 3 - *Study Design*

Phase 1: Identify Participants	• Survey local preschools and homecare groups • Obtain permission
Phase 2: Conduct Interviews	• Conduct interviews -record interviews and take field notes • Collect physical kindergarten readiness information artifacts from participants • Transcribe interviews and code participant responses for recurring themes and sources of information used
Phase 3: Identify Information Sources	• Use the results of interviews to identify sources of kindergarten readiness information • Locate and collect physical kindergartenreadiness information artifacts • Identify and locate digital sources of information
Phase 4: Analyze Content	• Analyze content of physical and digital sources of information • Code content based on kindergarten readiness information provided and the source of the information • Compare the content codes to the information provided in the *Let's Get Ready!* document to determine accuracy
Phase 5: Compare and Connect Results	• Interpret the results of the content analysis • Compare information learned during content analysis to information learned during interviews sessions • Discuss the impact that digital sources of information had on parent conceptions of kindergarten readiness and the accuracy of the information accessed.

Research Setting/Context

The participants of this study were parents of rising kindergarten students from Crest County in North Carolina. Crest County is one of the largest school districts in the United States and serves an area that includes a large city, several suburbs, and rural communities. The population in the area is diverse in (a) ethnicity, (b) race, (c) immigration status, (d) education level, and (e) socioeconomic status.

Crest County School District offers several school choice options for both preschool and elementary school including public, private, charter, magnet, and alternative options. The homeschool community is significant and active with 8,768 registered homeschools and 14,009

registered students in Crest County as of May 2023 (NC Department of Administration, 2023). In addition to general kindergarten preparation, parents in Crest County must decide what school setting will be most appropriate for their child and navigate a complicated school selection process. The school selection process in Crest County can involve attending magnet school fairs, touring prospective schools, and using a complex application system. Parents who choose to send their child to a school outside their base must apply for magnet status and select schools based on interest and location. Consultants can be hired to help parents with the process and increase a student's chances of getting into certain schools. Private schools in the county also have a rigorous application process and often require kindergarten readiness testing before acceptance. Selecting a school for kindergarten typically begins in November, the year before school entry.

Recruitment flyers were sent home with students at 15 local preschools and were displayed in three public libraries. Recruitment information was also posted on homeschool and preschool parenting Facebook groups. Thirteen parents responded to recruitment flyers, eleven met the criteria required for participation in the study and eight were selected for participation. The eight participants were selected based on their school choice decisions and representative sampling was used to ensure the inclusion of diverse perspectives. Four parents who sent their children to preschool and four parents who were preparing for kindergarten at home were chosen for the study. Much current research on kindergarten readiness and parent experiences has focused on participants whose children attend Head Start programs (Coba-Rodriguez & Jarrett, 2022). There is a significant gap in research involving participants from other preschool programs and almost no research on parents who homeschool instead of preschool (Coba-

Rodriguez et al., 2020). This study addresses this gap by intentionally sampling from these populations.

Research Population, Sample, and Data Sources

The participants of this study were eight parents of rising kindergarten students from Crest County. The number of participants selected for this study was guided by principles of phenomenology, which emphasize the use of smaller samples to conduct a more in-depth analysis of the experience (Moustakas, 1994). This study used criterion-based sampling. To be included in the study, participants had to have a child attending kindergarten in the fall of 2024 and be experiencing the transition to kindergarten with their first child. Participants had to reside within Crest County and attempts were made to select participants who had made a wide range of schooling decisions for their children. Parents had to be experiencing the transition to school with their oldest child because research has shown that parents with children already in school feel much more confident in their school-readiness choices and are less likely to seek outside support (Tobin et al., 2023).

The study included one male and seven females. Four participants had their child enrolled in preschool and four were currently homeschooling their child. Two of the participants sent their children to public preschool and two sent their children to private preschool. Four participants plan to send their child to public kindergarten during the 2024-2025 school year, one to send their child to private kindergarten, and three to continue homeschooling. Participants were all married and belonged to a middle-class socioeconomic status. The participants ranged in age from 29-46 and had 1-3 children each. Seven participants were white, and one participant was Asian.

Thirteen participants responded to recruitment material, and eleven met the recruitment criteria. The eight participants selected for participation represented the widest range of school choice decisions including four parents who sent their children to preschool and four who chose to homeschool before kindergarten. Attempts were made to recruit a more diverse sample of participants racially and socioeconomically by soliciting preschools with diverse populations and contacting local groups on Facebook. Recruitment attempts with these populations were largely unsuccessful except for the one Asian participant included in the study. The participants sampled represent a wide age range. One male participant was found to provide the perspective of a father experiencing the transition to increase the diversity of the perspectives included in the study.

Table 1 - *Summary of Participant Demographics*

Participant	Age	Relationship status	Child(ren)	2023-24 school choice	2024-25 school choice
Andrew	42	Married	1	Public preschool	Public kindergarten
Susan	40	Married	3	Private preschool	Private kindergarten
Elizabeth	32	Married	1	Private preschool	Public kindergarten
Katherine	36	Married	3	Public preschool	Public kindergarten
Annie	46	Married	1	Homeschool	Public kindergarten
Miranda	38	Married	3	Homeschool	Homeschool
Allison	29	Married	2	Homeschool	Homeschool
Julia	44	Married	3	Homeschool	Homeschool

Pilot Study

A pilot study was conducted with two participants before the start of the current study. Participants met the criteria described above but lived outside of the research setting. The interview protocol (Appendix 1) was revised following the pilot study to address issues that

arose during these interviews. Warm-up questions were added to the protocol to help participants feel comfortable and to establish a rapport between the participants and the interviewer. Questions were modified to be more open-ended to increase participant responses. Additional questions were added to address all the domains of readiness rather than simply academics. Results from the pilot study were also used along with prior research to form a code book (See Appendix 5) for data analysis.

Data Collection Methods

Following the study's approval by the Clemson Institutional Review Board, recruitment flyers (Appendix 3) were distributed, and potential participants were contacted through email. The informed consent form (Appendix 4) included details regarding the study's purpose, data collection methods, duration, confidentiality, and potential risks and benefits. Participants signaled their willingness to participate by signing the informed consent form.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted in person and through Zoom, a virtual platform that enables interviews to be performed remotely. The initial interviews ranged from 45 minutes to 90 minutes depending on the length of participant responses. The interview questions were designed to elicit detailed information about the parent's experience preparing a child for kindergarten (Appendix 1). Participants were also asked to describe the sources of information they considered regarding kindergarten readiness and why they had selected those resources. The open-ended interview questions encouraged participants to expand on their responses and provide a detailed description of their experiences. Participants were often asked to provide specific examples of the experiences that they were describing to enhance clarity and ensure that their lived experiences were being understood.

Follow-up interviews were conducted with each participant to allow for sources of information to be shared and to ask clarifying questions. Participants were allowed to read the transcript of their initial interview before the follow-up interview and provide any additional information regarding their experiences (See Appendix 2). Participants were also asked to bring sources of information to follow-up interviews including specific digital or physical sources. Follow-up interviews ranged from 10 to 30 minutes depending on the amount of source material the participants shared and additional information provided by participants.

Sources of information mentioned by participants in initial or follow-up interviews were analyzed for content during the study's second phase. Participants were asked to identify or describe the digital sources of information such as social media posts, content creators, online groups, or virtual resources used to inform kindergarten readiness experiences. Usernames, accounts, and information threads were collected, and participants were asked to share any screenshots or saved videos if possible. Physical sources were collected from participants during follow-up interviews or accessed from the original source mentioned by participants. Digital sources of information were identified, and groups were joined. Information posted by these sources in the last six months was collected. The analysis was limited to posts from the previous six months as prior research has shown that social media users are less likely to interact with older posts due to search/scrolling fatigue (Stellefson et al., 2019). Posts were screened and those unrelated to kindergarten readiness were removed. Digital data was collected using a manual data collection approach involving screenshots and screen recordings of all kindergarten readiness-related posts (Mazer et al., 2025). Video sources were screen-recorded and field notes were taken to ensure content was accessible for the duration of the study. A database was created to organize and list all the data collected and a chain of evidence was maintained to ensure

dependability. The content was not shared publicly and was used exclusively for data analysis.

All content was numbered and named to reflect the source to provide accurate data analysis.

Table 2 - *Research Question Alignment*

Research Question	Data Collection Method	Data Analysis Method	Study Phase
What are the lived experiences of first-time parents who are preparing a child for kindergarten?	Semi-Structured Interviews	van Manen's Data Analysis approach	Phase 1
What sources of information do parents consider when forming their kindergarten readiness beliefs?	Semi-Structured Interviews Content Collection	A priori coding and emergent coding Code book (See Appendix 5)	Phase 1 Informs Phase 2
How does social media influence parent kindergarten readiness experience, if at all?	Semi-Structured Interviews	van Manen's Data Analysis approach	Phase 1
How does the information parents use to prepare their students for kindergarten align with North Carolina state readiness standards?	Content Analysis	A priori coding and emergent coding Code book (See Appendix 6)	Phase 2

Phase One

Semi-structured interviews were transcribed and compared to notes taken by the researcher during the interview. Notes were added to the transcripts in the margins to ensure the interview discussion was completely analyzed. Transcripts were then analyzed for information addressing the first three research questions. This study utilized van Manen's approach (1982) to thematic analysis to address the first research question (What are the lived experiences of first-time parents who are preparing a child for kindergarten?) and third research question (How does social media influence parent kindergarten readiness experiences, if at all?) and the analysis progressed across stages. The steps involved uncovering thematic aspects, isolating thematic

statements, composing linguistic transformations, and gleaning thematic descriptions (van Manen, 1982). Interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed, and listened to multiple times to identify emergent themes. An iterative process was used to ensure consistency between audio recordings and typed transcripts. Participants were involved in member-checking the transcriptions and the identified themes to provide the most accurate representation of their experience (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). As themes emerged, thematic statements were isolated from the data to describe further the experience of preparing a child for kindergarten. Thematic statements were highlighted and color-coded on typed transcripts for further analysis and interpretation.

Linguistic transformations were performed after all interviews were transcribed and highlighted (van Manen, 1982). A comparative analysis was conducted on the thematic statements to identify commonalities across interview transcripts. Themes were written out and compiled on a participant data matrix. Matrices for all participants were compared and common themes were identified and highlighted. Once common themes were identified, participants' words were used to create holistic terms to capture the essential themes of the kindergarten readiness process for parents. Terminology was developed to help capture the common themes across transcripts and was established after comparing transcripts and journaling to describe the lived experiences described by participants (van Manen, 1982).

Themes were then interpreted, and thematic descriptions were created to develop a phenomenological understanding of the kindergarten readiness experiences of the participants. Interpreting participant experiences involved referring to previous literature on the kindergarten readiness process, continued conversations with participants, and journaling.

Essential themes were highlighted when multiple participants referred to a particular issue and comments related to the research questions. Visual representations of the data, especially profile matrices, helped to organize participant responses, identify overall units of meaning, and reflect the Bioecological Systems Theory framework by keeping the participant at the center and exploring the influencing factors. Units of meaning were analyzed across participants and summarized.

The processes of bracketing and journaling were used throughout the data analysis process to develop an understanding of how the data were being analyzed and interpreted (Moustakas, 1994). This method was used as an iterative process through which an evolving understanding of the kindergarten readiness process was documented in journal entries as the data was analyzed (Tufford & Newman, 2012). Journaling and peer debriefing were also used to identify personal biases and subjectivities that arose during the data collection and analysis process (Crotty, 1996).

Member checking was used to increase the study's trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985. Participants were asked to review interview transcripts to ensure an accurate representation of their beliefs was collected. Pseudonyms were used and only demographic information that was relevant to the study was collected and shared.

Phase Two

The sources of information described by participants during the initial and follow-up interviews during phase one were collected and analyzed during phase two of the study. Content analysis was performed on the physical and digital sources shared by participants to answer research question four (How does the information parents use to prepare their children for kindergarten align with the North Carolina state readiness standards?). Content analysis consists

of four main steps: (a) selecting content, (b) determining codes, (c) developing categories, and (d) analyzing the data (Mazer et al., 2025). Content analysis was conducted on all physical sources of information parents identified during interviews that could be accessed. Social media information was gathered in person during the interview and accessed online. Social media posts from the last six months were analyzed to ensure the content was current and to bind the amount of data analyzed. This study considered the theme(s) of each source as the unit of analysis (Mazer et al., 2025). The theme of each source was analyzed for domains of kindergarten readiness addressed (i.e., physical, social/emotional, cognitive), and the type of information provided (i.e., at-home learning activities, developmental milestones). A codebook (Appendix 5) was developed using the *Let's Get Ready!* document and was modified as new codes emerged. The frequency of each of these codes was calculated. A code form was used to code information quickly (Mazer et al., 2025).

The information provided to parents was then compared with the information provided in the *Let's Get Ready! A Family's Guide to Supporting Kindergarten Readiness* packet that the North Carolina Department of Education produces. This document was used as a comprehensive standard of kindergarten readiness information for residents of North Carolina. The content of physical and digital sources was compared to the *Let's Get Ready!* document to determine the alignment of the information and the frequency codes were used to identify any readiness information that was emphasized and lacking from information provided to parents. Frequency codes related to the type of information supplied were used to determine what information parents are seeking and what gaps exist in the information provided to parents. Interview transcripts and content analysis data were then synthesized to strengthen the conclusions drawn about what information parents access regarding kindergarten readiness.

Trustworthiness

To enhance the trustworthiness of this study, purposive sampling was used to select participants from different contextual backgrounds to represent the experience of preparing a child for kindergarten as widely and accurately as possible. Member checking was conducted during the data analysis phase to ensure that parent experiences were represented accurately. Peer briefing and journaling were used throughout the data analysis process to ensure data were analyzed as objectively as possible (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). An audit trail of interview questions, transcripts, code books, collected content, and data was created throughout the process to increase the study's dependability. A database of content to be analyzed was also developed.

Audio recordings and transcripts were stored in a secure folder without personal identifiers to protect participant's privacy. All participants were assigned a pseudonym for the analysis and reporting of the study.

Limitations and Delimitations

The sample size (n=8) used for this study was small, limiting the results' transferability. A small number of participants was used intentionally to allow for individual perspectives to be explored at a deeper level, but the perspectives shared may not be representative of the broader population. Representative sampling allowed for the examination of more diverse perspectives but not all parent voices were represented in the study sample. Despite efforts to recruit a diverse sample, the participants in this study were primarily White and from a middle-class background. This limits the represented perspectives and the transferability of the results to broader populations. The results of the content analysis may be more generalizable as digital sources of information have the potential to reach a wider audience.

Only print materials and social media information were collected and analyzed. The data analysis phase did not include other sources of information that parents use, such as friends and family, which potentially carry more weight when informing decisions. These sources of information were highlighted and described during the analysis of the interviews, but the content was not compared to the North Carolina state standards.

Sources of information were compared to the North Carolina kindergarten readiness expectations which may limit the transferability of the results to populations in other states. Kindergarten readiness expectations often vary across state lines so information may be considered in line with state expectations in some states but not others (Akaba et al., 2020). Some digital content analyzed in this study may have been created using other state guidelines. Content was analyzed using broad categories of kindergarten readiness and discrepancies in information were coded and described in the discussion section.

This study also does not explore how the information given to parents impacts parenting practices. Current research shows that parent perspectives about kindergarten readiness impact parenting and at-home learning practices (Tobin et al., 2023). Further research is needed to explore how different sources of information, especially social media, impact parenting practices.

The transition to kindergarten is a process that takes place over several months if not years (Merideth et al., 2022). This study explored parent experiences at one point in time during this process. A longitudinal study exploring parent experiences at different points throughout the kindergarten transition process might provide valuable insight into how experiences change as parents move through the process. The study timeline could impact if parents have already begun considering the transition to the kindergarten process and the skills that parents prioritize when

working on kindergarten readiness. This study was conducted from January to March, several months before the parents interviewed experienced the transition to kindergarten with their oldest child. This gap between interviews and the start of kindergarten could impact how families think about and prioritize kindergarten readiness.

I am not a parent and therefore lack the personal experience in preparing a child for kindergarten. I have not supported a child through the kindergarten readiness process and have not had to seek out information on how best to prepare a child for school. This area represents a gap in my knowledge and may make me susceptible to bias or misinterpreting my participants' experiences. Frequent member checks with participants and peers were necessary to ensure that my personal experience with kindergarten readiness did not impact the research conducted.

Summary

The current study used a hermeneutic phenomenology approach to explore the lived experience of first-time parents experiencing the phenomenon of kindergarten readiness. This study used semi-structured interviews and comparative content analysis to explore parent experiences. This person-centered approach was used to identify the commonalities parents experience while preparing their children for school and to determine the factors that impact the process most. Sources of information were analyzed to identify what types of information parents are searching for and how accurately it aligns with state readiness expectations.

The participants of this study were recruited from local preschools and home school settings. Preschools other than Head Start are an understudied sampling context and home-schooling families represent a gap in participant recruitment when considering kindergarten readiness (Coba-Rodriguez et al., 2020). A representative sample was collected from these locations.

Chapter 4: Analysis and Results

Introduction

The purpose of this multi-modal phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of parents preparing their eldest child for kindergarten. This chapter describes the data collection and analysis process and the results of this study. This chapter includes information about the study results. A description of the data from the interviews, the data organization process, and the emergent themes from the participants' shared experiences were included in the development of the analysis and results. The study's findings were aligned with the research questions and the theoretical framework.

Research Questions

This phenomenological study was designed to answer the following questions based on the findings from the data that was collected:

1. What are the lived experiences of first-time parents who are preparing their child for kindergarten?

2. What sources of information do parents consider when forming their beliefs about kindergarten readiness?

3. How does social media influence parents' kindergarten readiness experience, if at all?

4. How does the information parents use to prepare their students for kindergarten align with North Carolina state readiness standards?

Results

The findings of this study are broken down into themes by research question. Themes were considered significant when they were mentioned or implied by at least five participants, or emphasized significantly by more than one participant as they described their experiences. There

are four main themes related to the first research question about the lived experiences of parents which include (a) emotions about kindergarten, (b) the importance of social-emotional skills, (c) learning at home, and (d) the impact of the current context. Themes related to the second research question regarding the sources of information parents considered are organized using the Bioecological Systems theory model including (a) the microsystem and (b) the macrosystem. The third research question addressed the techno-subsystem and participants' use of social media. The themes for this question are broken down by participants who used social media and those who did not.

The fourth research question is, how does the information parents use to prepare their children for kindergarten compare with North Carolina state readiness standards? was analyzed using content analysis. Print and digital sources mentioned by participants were collected and stored in a source database. A total of 1319 sources were collected from the parents including (a) parenting books, (b) Instagram posts, (c) school newsletters, (d) YouTube videos, (e) Pinterest boards, (f) Facebook posts, and (g) podcast episodes. After removing content that did not relate to kindergarten readiness, 986 sources were analyzed for content using the North Carolina school readiness standards outlined in the *Let's Get Ready!: A Family's Guide to Supporting Kindergarten Readiness* document produced by the North Carolina Department of Early Learning. Source content was analyzed across readiness domains and frequency tables were produced. Once the content analysis was completed for all sources, trends in the data and missing data were identified.

Research Question 1. What are the lived experiences of first-time parents who are preparing their children for kindergarten?

Four major themes emerged related to the first research question, what are the lived experiences of first-time parents preparing their child for kindergarten? The themes included (a) emotions around kindergarten readiness (b) the importance of social-emotional skills, (c) learning at home, and (d) the impact of the current context

Finding One: Emotions around Kindergarten Readiness

The kindergarten readiness process evoked a wide variety of emotions from the participants in this study. Participants were anticipating a transition for their children and their role as parents with the upcoming start of school. The overwhelming feelings discussed by most parents were excitement, confidence, and anxiety. The pervasive tone of excitement in all the interviews was interesting as it is largely absent from other kindergarten readiness literature. Hearing parents describe how the whole family looked forward to going through the process together was heartwarming. Most participants voiced steady confidence that their child would easily manage the transition to kindergarten. Anxiety was an expected finding although these participants clarified that they were anxious not about their child's ability to succeed but about the unknown world of schooling ahead of them. The following subthemes are described in detail below (a) enjoying the process, (b) having confidence in their children, and (c) being nervous about the transition.

Enjoying the Process

All parents described the excitement of watching their child grow and prepare for kindergarten. Many parents added that going through the process with their oldest child was especially exciting. Elizabeth said, "I'm excited to experience this together and move through it."

Katherine echoed this sentiment and stated she was excited to start the "whole process" with her oldest child. Most participants (n=6) were enjoying the process and making the most of this period with their children. Miranda mentioned several times that she was having a lot of fun and enjoying the freedom of the early years. For her, the enjoyment of the period led her to homeschool. When she saw her friends putting their children in preschool she said, "I like being with them [my children] and I was like, we can do that at home." Susan said, "I get to do these things that I love, like the beginning of emerging math skills and reading skills."

Confidence in their Children

Most parents also described confidence in their child's ability to manage the upcoming transition. Annie confidently stated "I do not have any concerns about her" when explaining how she thought her daughter would manage kindergarten. Elizabeth described feeling "really confident" and "really good" about the transition. The three parents who planned to homeschool their children for kindergarten noted that the transition would be very subtle, almost unnoticeable for their children. Julia noted that the transition would "feel like an extension" of her son's already well-established daily routine. While Allison referred to the transition as a "total continuation of what we do now." Miranda mentioned that because of her son's late birthday, she has "a year to not really do anything and see what he picks up before I really worry about anything." Only one parent, Andrew, expressed concern about how his child would fare in kindergarten. He said he is worried that the experience is going to be "jarring and it's going to be difficult, particularly for somebody with severe ADHD like he has." Andrew commented that he felt he would be "decidedly less nervous if he did not have an IEP" and that the school system is not designed for children like his son.

Nervous for the Transition

Despite parents' overall enjoyment of the readiness process and their confidence in their children, most participants expressed anxiety about the upcoming transition. Katherine described her feelings about the transition by saying "I think she's going to be just fine, but I still will feel nervous about sending her off." Most of the anxiety seemed to stem from the newness of sending their first child to kindergarten and the fear of the unknown. Elizabeth noted "It's always scary to start something new" and Susan brought up the fact that "there is just a ton of unknown" about the next steps in the process. The homeschooling parents had less anxiety about the transition but still had concerns about whether they were doing it right. Allison said she occasionally worries "we should, probably, you know, be doing more" regarding kindergarten preparation. Annie had opposite fears. She said, "I mean maybe we've overdone it for kindergarten, I don't know." The sense of anxiety was present in all parents although as Julia noted "I think that's kind of part of being a parent."

Finding Two: The Importance of Social-Emotional Skills

All parents described social-emotional skills as important elements of kindergarten readiness. Most of the parents emphasized these skills above academics or other readiness elements. Susan captured what many parents expressed when she said:

Listen, my kids are not perfect, I'm not trying to say that they are, but if I can send a kid that knows how to behave, knows how to listen, knows how to take direction, even if it's not what they want to do. For me, part of sending a kid that's ready is sending a kid that knows how to behave and get along.

The participants had a strong sense of what they felt their children would need to succeed in the classroom; for many, it was social and emotional skills. As a teacher, this emphasis was

surprising but matched my own thoughts about what students need in the classroom. It was encouraging to hear parents describe the importance of these skills and their work to promote them before kindergarten. Participants emphasized two main subthemes (a) social skills and (b) emotional intelligence as critical skills.

Social Skills

All parents emphasized the importance of teaching social skills before kindergarten and providing children with as many opportunities to practice social skills as possible. All parents discussed setting up playdates and intentionally supporting their children with peer interactions. Katherine mentioned that because her daughter was shy, she is trying to "set up playdates for her and work on our conversation skills. We talk a lot just to get her comfortable". She also noted that supporting her daughter with social skills was a motivating factor for starting preschool at age 3. Elizabeth also mentioned that social skills were "why we started [preschool] early, like at two years old because we just felt like it was the easiest way to get it done."

All preschool parents noted that preschool was a key social arena for their child. Susan described a very close friend her child made at preschool. She also talked about how his time at preschool has allowed her son to interact with peers differently than if he was at home with her. She noted that she would have taken him places with other children but "the interaction would have been so much more limited because when he's with me, he just is with me, you know, like he doesn't necessarily branch out to be with other kids." She was grateful to his preschool for allowing him to form his own relationships.

All homeschooling parents felt like their children had plenty of opportunities to practice their social skills with peers and adults. They all described intentionally finding as many ways as possible to provide social opportunities for their children. Miranda noted that her children "have

close friends at church, and then at co-op, and then we play town sports." Annie mentioned that she was able to provide her daughter with opportunities to interact with her peers at extracurricular activities and camps. She tries to provide her daughter with many opportunities to "go into these environments and just, make new friends, which she does with ease." Julia discussed how her daughter "needs to work on talking to peers and getting more comfortable doing that". She also mentioned that "adult conversation is one of the beautiful things about homeschooling because it really helped her conversational skills." All parents strongly emphasized social skills and were seen as a critical piece of the readiness process.

Emotional Intelligence

Each parent also emphasized the importance of teaching emotional intelligence and regulation skills at home. Elizabeth stressed the importance of teaching emotional regulation and empathy over everything else. She said:

> When I first started, I was like she has to be able to read when she's two and she has to play all these instruments and do all this stuff and then I'm like stop, what we need to do is build a foundation and that foundation is heartwork.

Heartwork is a term she picked up from the show Bluey and while no other parents referred to it in this way, most echoed the same sentiment. Andrew talked about helping his son "develop skills for managing big feelings and giving him strategies to use when he gets upset." Andrew felt that working on these skills at home was critical, especially for his son, who has specific school goals around emotional regulation.

Annie described the strategies she used to help her child when she was struggling. She discussed creating a barometer of feelings and an activity where her daughter made a feelings cloud. She said she couldn't remember what specific event prompted the feelings cloud drawing

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but "it involved me, so I was in the cloud, and it helped her to communicate that about me." She, like Andrew, felt it was important to give her child strategies to use when she was feeling upset or angry. A few parents also talked about modeling emotional intelligence for their children. Allison discussed "trying to have an open dialogue and admitting to her when we aren't showing respect." Providing children with examples of emotionally stable and regulated parents was mentioned by both Annie and Susan.

Finding Three: Learning at Home

Supporting their children through the kindergarten readiness process led parents to try different activities at home. While each parent had a unique style and routine, most participants incorporated similar elements into their day to support kindergarten readiness. I was surprised to see that despite the wide range of parenting styles and schooling choices, most parents participated in relatively the same learning activities. The participants all understood the importance of preparing a child for kindergarten but emphasized the simplicity of the process. Miranda spoke matter-of-factly about what the kindergarten readiness process entails. She said, "Really it's just reading and playing is all." Julia echoed this thought by saying, "You don't have to buy a thing, you don't need actually anything to do it, it's just conversations and helping them play." Many of the strategies participants used for at-home learning commonly appear in kindergarten readiness research. Themes present in learning at home included (a) read-alouds, (b) math activities, (c) a mixture of techniques, and (d) conversations about kindergarten.

Read Alouds

All participants mentioned that reading was a large part of their home routine. Miranda said, "I think reading aloud is the cornerstone of our homeschool." She emphasized how often reading, whether independently, reading aloud, or listening to audiobooks was a part of their day.

Each parent detailed their reading routine, sharing how many books they read each day, the different academic skills they taught, and how they tried to foster a love of reading in their children. Julia dismissed that reading aloud was a part of the kindergarten readiness process and emphasized that it was just part of the family culture stating, "I mean we read books, but that's just part of our family things that we do." Reading aloud as often as possible was an important and loved part of the process for everyone. Interestingly, all parents mentioned read-alouds as an important part of their daily routine, but none of them mentioned any children's books in particular.

Math Activities

Many parents mentioned playing math games or teaching math concepts as an aspect of their at-home learning, Susan talked about incorporating math into the walk to preschool saying, "We'll sometimes skip count, or we'll sometimes just count to 100 or he'll ask for math facts on the way to school." She emphasized the importance of providing "math literacy as well as language" which she felt was not as well advertised as it should be. Allison highlighted the math her children were naturally doing while they were playing, by stating "When we're playing sports outside keeping score, you know, that's math!" Andrew talked about intentionally incorporating "subitizing games, counting games, things like that" into his son's play. Other parents were less intentional about their math activities, but everyone discussed math activities as part of their routine. Even parents who felt like they were not doing a "ton of math", like Elizabeth, described math conversations and games as a regular part of their day. She talked about how her husband has always spoken to her daughter mathematically, asking questions like "I have this and how many if I took this away?" Math concepts were incorporated into everyday activities and gameplay regularly by parents.

A Mixture of Techniques

The parents all described using various techniques when working with their children at home. Andrew described using a mixture of direct instruction and integrated play to teach his son different concepts. He used direct instruction to introduce concepts and then integrated "whatever comes up in play. I have particular math concepts that I want him to work on but it's not like scripted or anything." Other parents described a similar approach. Annie talked about primarily allowing her daughter to freely explore the concepts and materials that were interesting to her, but one day a week they did more structured activities. Once a week they would go to a coffee shop together and her daughter would "go through her learning workbooks working on her letters or working on math." Julia described a very structured morning routine that involved handwriting practice and math games, but the afternoon was set aside for free play and field trips. Each parent had a unique way of blending structured learning with informal play-based experience and they all emphasized the value of both.

Conversations about Kindergarten

Many parents described talking with their children about what to expect in kindergarten. Parents had conversations with their children about what kindergarten would look like and looked for opportunities to prepare them for what was coming next. Katherine said, "I am a firm believer in prep. Prepping your kid is the best way to make them comfortable." She talked about driving by the school, eating lunch from a lunchbox, talking to neighbors who were already in kindergarten, and talking about what might happen in the classroom next year. Susan also had preparatory conversations with her son. She explained that because he was continuing at his private school, he already knew who his teacher would be and that he felt comfortable in the building. Other parents commented on how it is a little challenging to prepare when they do not

know who the teacher will be and won't know until the week school starts. Andrew talked about taking his son to his potential schools but because they did not know yet where he was going to kindergarten, he explained that he will "ramp up prep a bit as we move towards summer." Annie, whose daughter will be transitioning from homeschool to public school talked about signing her up for 12 camps over the summer to help her prepare for "whatever her classroom will be like, whatever the teacher will be like, she will be ready." Providing opportunities for children to prepare for kindergarten was important to all parents involved in the study.

Finding Four: Impact of Current Context

Context played a significant role in the kindergarten readiness process for many parents. This was a surprising result for me as it was not mentioned by any pilot study participants and is minimally addressed in current literature. All parents mentioned school choice options as a factor in their process, with some being significantly influenced by school choice and others just being aware of their options. Many parents also mentioned COVID as a factor in their decision-making. I had not expected COVID to be as impactful given that the children of the participants were 1-2 years old during school closures. The participants were insightful about what settings and situations would work best for their children and used current contexts to help meet those needs. Parents emphasized (a) school choice and (b) COVID as significant themes impacting their process.

School Choice

School choice played a large role in the kindergarten readiness process for most of the parents. Many parents shared concerns about whether or not the public school setting was the right fit for their child during the preschool years. Some parents chose to use a private school setting for kindergarten, others decided to homeschool, and some held their children out of

school for a year believing that preschool was more developmentally appropriate. Andrew toured several elementary schools and asked questions about management style and social-emotional development. He felt strongly about selecting a school that was the right fit for his son rather than preparing him to be the right fit for all school environments. He noted, "There are sort of classroom management styles that I think will work well for him and there are others we're just sort of not into him experiencing." Susan also mentioned the lack of developmentally appropriate instruction happening in public school kindergarten. Her son will attend transitional kindergarten at his preschool instead of traditional kindergarten because she has more faith in the teachers there. She said she noticed at her neighborhood school "there were some teachers that are a little bit more old school in some of their methods and they just don't seem like a great fit for this particular child." She also talked about intentionally finding a preschool that allowed her son to play and develop more naturally and in a smaller group setting than traditional public schooling.

Elizabeth and Miranda decided to redshirt their children and keep them out of kindergarten for an extra year. Elizabeth chose to do an additional year of preschool to ensure her child had "a good foundation coming in and so the maturity level was better." Miranda started a pre-kindergarten curriculum with her son at home and realized that her son "just didn't care, he wasn't interested" so she decided to wait. She said this year when they tried it again, "we went through the whole curriculum in like three months, and by the end of that he knew all of the letters, he knew all of the sounds." She emphasized the importance of waiting until children are ready. She said, "It's just when they're ready, it's so much faster and easier once they're interested."

COVID

Five parents mentioned the impact of COVID and school closures on their kindergarten readiness process. All five experienced a disruption in their childcare or preschool plans. Four of these parents, Susan, Elizabeth, Annie, and Allison spent at least a year homeschooling their child as a result. Allison describes how "COVID just kind of pushed us into it and we've enjoyed it so much that we kept going." Annie also explains how she started "homeschooling out of necessity" but then enjoyed the process so much that she continued. Elizabeth did homeschool while her daughter was two and three before sending her back to preschool.

Julia described how the changes to the school environment during COVID-19 were concerning and were a major factor in her decision to homeschool. She described especially "the lack of physical contact, my kids need that physical reassurance, and I was really worried that if they weren't getting that then, that would really affect them emotionally." She pulled her children out of childcare, began homeschooling them, and has no plans to stop.

Research Question 2. What sources of information do parents consider when forming their beliefs about kindergarten readiness?

The second research question what sources of information do parents consider when forming their beliefs about kindergarten readiness? was analyzed using codes derived from Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Systems Theory and prior research on the kindergarten readiness process (see Appendix 5). Transcripts were coded for the sources of information each parent referenced and these sources were categorized using Bronfenbrenner's systems as a guide. For example, one participant stated, "Our teachers were really, really, accessible, we had lots of different meetings and checkpoints." This was coded as a preschool teacher source and was categorized with other sources of information from preschools.

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Sources of Information

The second research question explored what sources of information parents used to inform their kindergarten readiness process and was analyzed using Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory to identify themes. For each participant, sources of information were mapped onto Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Systems model (See Image 1).

Image 1 – Bioecological Systems Map
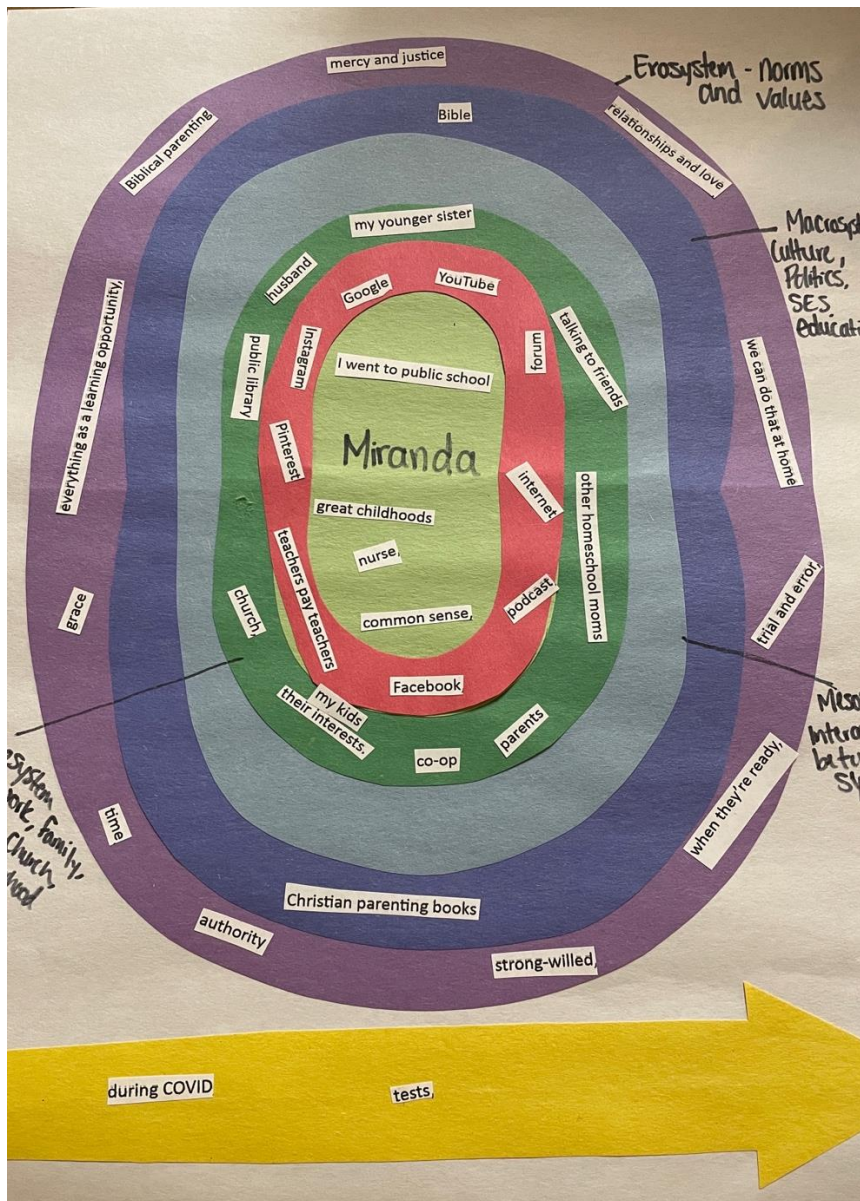
These maps were then used to identify themes in participant responses. A majority of the sources mentioned by parents appeared in the microsystem, or direct environments in which individuals interact. Media like books and other physical sources fall within the macrosystem which involves the indirect environments that impact an individual. Social media and other internet sources fall within the techno-subsystem surrounding the individual. Parents often mentioned trusting their gut or intuition when selecting activities or determining when their child was ready for school highlighting the center circle's importance. The exosystem involving the norms and values held by individuals varied considerably across participants. Still, it impacted how participants structured their at-home learning, made school choice decisions, and selected sources of information. The techno-subsystem played a significant role for several participants and will be addressed with the third research question.

The Microsystem

The microsystem includes the immediate environments and individuals that influence a person. Most of the sources considered by parents fell within the microsystem, which makes sense as it is the closest to the individual. Within this system, the most commonly mentioned sources were (a) family members, (b) friends, (c) their children, (d) preschool, and (e) community resources

Family Members

All participants mentioned their supportive spouses as a resource. Some participants referred to their partners as sounding boards, supports, and partners in parenting. Susan said, "I would say my husband's a good sounding board. We're on the same page as far as making sure our kids navigate the challenges that they're faced with." Three parents described a process where they researched activities and philosophies of child development and then shared them

with their partners to ensure they were both on the same page. Annie said, "I will usually tell [husband] like here's what I think we should do and then we kind of just stick together, stick to the same plan." Some parents also mentioned how their partner supported kindergarten readiness, particularly in math and science. Elizabeth talked about her husband playing chess and math games with her daughter. Julia described when her husband brought home a deer and allowed their children to observe the cleaning process. He proudly exclaimed "homeschool science!" when they returned inside.

Parents

Each participant also mentioned how their parents helped prepare their children for kindergarten. Some grandparents, especially grandmothers helped develop activities and provide emotional support to their children as they navigated the shift in their parenting role. Some served as examples as participants were influenced by memories of their parents' teachings from childhood. Susan's mother was a speech pathologist and provided speech support over Facetime for her son/daughter. Elizabeth described her mother as her best friend and discussed working with her mom to search social media for ideas. She said, "My mom and I both have a folder on Instagram and that's where we save all the ideas and stuff for [daughter]". She said they work together to find fun activities to try at home.

Drawing ideas from childhood experiences was also mentioned with some parents looking to recreate their childhood memories and others looking to improve upon what they had experienced. Miranda said, "Both my husband and I are really close to our parents and had great childhoods so we just kind of model it after what our parents did." She talked about how strongly she appreciated the Christian values that her parents modeled and taught her. She wants to pass them on to her children. Annie wanted to create an environment where expressing and talking

about emotions is commonplace. She said, "Neither of us saw that a lot when we were growing up, so that was a big deal for both of us." She and her husband wanted to provide their daughter with more emotional support than they had received during childhood.

Friends

Friends were mentioned by all participants as a significant source of support and advice. Julia talked about a great group of friends who had formed a neighborhood book club of moms. She talked about getting together weekly at the park to "shoot the breeze, maybe talk about what we're reading, but also like, oh my gosh, you would not believe what so and so did in my kitchen the other night." Her friends were there to commiserate with her and to provide advice and support when necessary. Adam talked about talking to his friends about what they were reading in terms of academic literature around kindergarten readiness. He also spoke to many parent friends when trying to make school choice decisions to get their perspectives. When she started that process, Annie turned to friends who had homeschooled their children. She described them as "a wealth of information around how they approached it, so I got some of their perspectives." Allison talked about having friends at church and the homeschool co-op who could offer perspective and advice. She said, "Most of us use different curriculums, there's all sorts of different ways and everybody does it a little different and I think that's really fun." She valued hearing everyone's different experiences and got a lot of ideas from her friends. Elizabeth talked about having two best friends she can call whenever anything happens. She also described the difficulty of making new mom friends. She said "I didn't have a lot of mom friends that I really trusted to talk about real issues. Cause making mom friends is hard." She said there is even an app for making mom friends and described it as "similar to dating."

Child

Most parents described their child as a resource during the kindergarten readiness process. They described using their child's interests to inform activities and trying to follow their child's lead. Katherine described trying to foster her child's interests. She said, "If she's into experiments, we let her do experiments. If she's into art, we let her do art at home. We just try to follow her interests where they lead us." Other parents described finding activities their child liked and doing them repeatedly with different concepts. Andrew talked about melding his academic concepts and his child's interests together. He described this process as "letting him decide what we are doing and then I just find ways to sort of integrate the counting, or the numbers, or the subitizing, or science and engineering stuff." A few parents described integrated play as a method of helping their child learn in a less structured way. Her child completely led Annie's approach to readiness and homeschooling. She said, "I would always have ideas of things I could go pull out and do but I would ask her where she wanted to focus today." She created a space full of academic material and let her children follow her curiosities wherever they led.

Preschool

The four parents who sent their children to preschool all mentioned using classroom observations and teachers as a resource. These parents often found classroom observations the most helpful way to get to know their child as a student. Susan helped with a math group at her son's preschool and used her time in the classroom to drive conversations about school at home. Katherine described "being in her preschool classroom, listening to the teachers, noticing the things that are working for her" as the most helpful way to understand what to work on and what

to expect in kindergarten. These parents seemed to prefer classroom observations to conversations with teachers, although all confirmed teachers were available as a resource.

Parents described how available teachers were, and how comfortable they felt reaching out but none of them could think of a time when they had asked a teacher for support. Andrew checked in with his son's teachers regularly to better understand what his child was working on in the classroom and to ensure everyone was working toward the same goals. He also noted that his son was "reticent to talk about his day and what I consider to be an unreliable narrator." He used the preschool teachers as a resource to engage his son in conversation about his day. All parents described valuing the checkpoints and feedback they were getting from teachers regarding progress and kindergarten readiness. They also described feeling comfortable reaching out to teachers when they had questions or concerns. Elizabeth said, "They gave us their personal phone numbers and texted us regularly, so if I had a question, it wasn't a big deal to just text them and ask." She then went on to say, "I don't know how much I really used it, but it was nice knowing it was there." This was a sentiment echoed by all the preschool parents. Katherine said, "I think I would feel comfortable if I had a concern but in general it's sort of like, a no news is good news type situation." Parents knew teachers as a resource were available, but typically looked elsewhere when they had questions or concerns.

Community Resources

All parents mentioned resources in the community that had been particularly helpful. The public library was brought up by all participants as a useful resource. Museums, camps, and a homeschool store were also mentioned often. Elizabeth discussed the library as a great source of enjoyment and a regular part of their readiness routine. She also noted that during COVID, the libraries put out a lot of online resources that she found helpful. She said, "I did a lot of stuff

through the libraries, the stuff they put out was nice, and they did story time videos which were excellent!" All the homeschooling parents talked about the value of the public library as a source of resources and social opportunities for their children. Allison said, "We're at the library all the time. Even the public library has lots of great homeschooling resources, whether it's the physical copies at the library or ones you can get digitally." She said she listened to several homeschooling curriculums on audiobooks through the library to decide which would best fit her family. All homeschooling families also mentioned a local homeschool store as a resource. Miranda said, "The moms in there are super, super helpful" and they helped her sort through the "overwhelming amount of curriculum and material" in the store. Julia also mentioned that the staff at the homeschool store helped her find a co-op group and other homeschool parents to befriend.

The Macrosystem

Indirect environments and culture including media reside in the macrosystem Some of the participants mentioned cultural norms that impacted their decision-making, specifically religion but most parents mentioned print materials and other sources of media. Books and newsletters were the most commonly mentioned print sources mentioned by parents.

Print Materials

Printed materials were mentioned by most parents when describing their kindergarten readiness process. The most frequently referenced resource was parenting books. Most participants mentioned parenting books as a helpful resource, especially when figuring out how to manage behavior and support children emotionally. Julia said she read physical books but that they were typically about parenting. She said they were "not so much on kindergarten readiness. Most of the books that I read are either on like the actual care of kids or behavior." Katherine

agreed and said, "Most of the books I've read have been on like how to tame tantrums and that type of stuff." Allison talked about how books gave her actionable steps and said, "Some books that I read helped spell that out for me" when discussing her approach to discipline. Some parents, like Adam, found parenting books to be a waste of time because of the "tremendous amount of variance" within schools and children. He said, "I think being in schools and talking to people has given me a much better idea than reading a book."

Religion

Christianity was specifically mentioned by three of the participants as a source of information during this process. Miranda discussed using her religious beliefs as the foundation of her parenting. She noted that "just reading the Bible" was a source of strength and information during the kindergarten readiness process. She used primarily Christian-led parenting books to help inform her discipline style and inform her homeschooling. Julia, Allision, and Miranda had all selected Christian homeschool curriculums for kindergarten and used them as a reference when deciding what activities to work on at home.

Desired Sources

When parents were asked about the sources of information, they felt would be the most helpful for their kindergarten readiness journey, several parents mentioned personal experiences with the school. Parents wanted more opportunities to visit the school with their children and more connections at the microsystem level. For all participants, kindergarten was not something they had direct experience within decades. Increasing the amount of direct contact with the school, teachers, or mentors who have been through the process would help to move kindergarten from the macrosystem into the microsystem and make it easier to navigate. Adam suggested "a series of orientation events where you can come in. He can go in and visit the

classroom, the school, get some tours around." He felt these events would help his son feel more comfortable in the school and might help to establish some friendships before the start of the year. He talked about wanting that experience as a parent as well. Annie wanted her daughter to be able to form her own perspective of school by touring and asking questions. She had taken her daughter on school tours and wanted her to participate in the whole process. She felt like time in the school building was the best way for the entire family to "understand how this whole thing works."

Susan mentioned the value of having a peer mentor. She felt that "pairing up with somebody who has already done the process would be so helpful." She was grateful for her neighbors who had provided that support for her but wanted that support for others who might not have the same level of support. Elizabeth mentioned the consultants who helped with the school application process and wished that service was more readily available. She said the application process was "Overwhelming and complex and difficult." She was grateful she liked her base so she didn't bother with the application process.

Research Question 3. How does social media influence parents' kindergarten readiness experience, if at all?

The third research question was analyzed using the same technique as the first question. Parent experiences were analyzed for units of meaning and thematic statements were identified. Commonalities across participant experiences were highlighted and two distinct perspectives were discovered. Social media was a polarizing resource. Half of the participants used it daily to help support their kindergarten readiness process, and half of the participants had personal aversions to social media as a source of information.

Using Social Media

The parents who used social media used several platforms including Pinterest, Instagram, YouTube, and Facebook. Some parents also accessed blogs and podcast forums for support. Elizabeth described a process of going to Pinterest weekly to pin activities and devise a plan for the week. Katherine talked about looking at Instagram accounts to gather ideas for activities to do at home. Miranda used Pinterest and listened to a podcast about fostering a love of reading in your children. She liked that it came with a forum for homeschooling parents. She said the forum is "my favorite because everybody on there is nice which you don't always get on social media." Allison discussed the local Facebook pages for homeschool parents and the mom's group. She also mentioned that her husband found educational app ideas on a "dad blog".

When asked why they accessed social media, most parents mentioned the ease of access, some mentioned enjoying online research and one parent mentioned an online community. All parents who used social media marveled at what parenting must have been like before online resources were readily available. Elizabeth said "We live in a time that everything is right at our fingertips. We're really lucky to have all that kind of stuff right here." Katherine agreed and said "It's easy, number one. It's at your fingertips. You know you can find a wealth of information, multiple different answers." She also expressed that using internet sources and social media was just a part of being a millennial. She said, "Well I also think we're like the internet generation, right? We grew up with the internet. We're used to looking up everything."

Miranda, who started homeschooling her toddler during COVID spoke about online forums:

{They} felt like more of a community and a place that I could ask questions. Now that I am at co-op and I talk to other homeschool moms at church, we can have face-to-face

conversations, I use more of my face-to-face interactions, but I do still have it when I

need it.

Allison commented on the flip side of the internet community. She described the Facebook

mom's group as a "minefield." She said "Sometimes it is really helpful. Sometimes you can

search, dig through all the drama, and find some really good nuggets." But also said she would

never feel comfortable posting on the site. Allison's thoughts aligned with what was found

during the content analysis phase in which only 75 of the 249 (30%) of the Facebook posts

analyzed were relevant to kindergarten readiness. This number is significantly lower than most

of the other sources reviewed.

A few parents described the process of weeding through resources to find the most

helpful ones. Allison said, "It's like going through and being like okay is this a reasonable thing

to do in your kitchen?" She said having to sift through ideas was "sometimes irritating, but I'm

like well I'm not going to do that, but I'll take that idea and move on from it." Miranda talked

about how finding good activities came with time and experience. She learned what steps of a

project to prep ahead of time and how to adjust activities for different ages. Katherine talked

about not always being able to tell what a good activity was and what wasn't but said, "I don't

know that any of it is necessarily a bad thing. You know, you're not really going to harm them

doing a ton of different things."

Avoiding Social Media

Four parents had a strong negative reaction when asked about social media. Susan said, "I

hate social media. It's just not really my MO." She described a desire to have "a little bit more

research or tried and true behind it versus I'm being paid a bunch of money to share my

insights." Andrew also expressed strong feelings stating, "I sort of detest social media as like a

route for making these sorts of decisions." He shared Susan's desire for more "rigorously vetted" resources. He did mention that his wife was a member of certain social media groups but that they did not impact her parenting decisions. Julia had no social media accounts and believed they were a waste of her time and energy. Annie did not have negative feelings about social media but shared "I don't do social media but we're older parents so that might be why." This sentiment was captured in this sample of parents as the parents under 40 sampled used social media and those above 40 did not.

Research Question 4. How does the information parents use to prepare their students for kindergarten align with North Carolina state readiness standards?

Sources of information mentioned by participants in initial or follow-up interviews were analyzed for content during the study's second phase. Physical sources were collected from participants during follow-up interviews or accessed from the original source mentioned by participants. Digital sources were accessed from the source and all content was captured using screen recording and saved in a secure file. Digital posts were collected dating back six months to ensure the content was current and to bind the amount of content collected. All content was numbered and named to reflect the source to provide accurate data analysis. The content was first screened to determine relevance to kindergarten readiness and sources that did not relate to readiness were excluded from the analysis (see Table 3).

Table 3 - *Summary of Content **Collected***

Source	Collected	Analyzed
Books	10	9 (90%)
Newsletters	4	4 (100%)
Brochures	3	3 (100%)

Instagram Posts	637	500 (78.5%)
Facebook Posts	249	75 (30%)
Pinterest Posts	150	147 (98%)
YouTube Videos	216	210 (97%)
Forum Posts	16	7 (43.8%)
Podcast Episodes	28	26 (93%)
Blog Posts	6	5 (83%)
Total	1319	986 (75%)

Sources of information were analyzed for theme and type of content provided. Sources that related to multiple themes were coded for all that applied. The content analyzed was from all physical and digital sources mentioned by parents during initial and follow-up interviews. Most of the content analyzed 49.2% came from Instagram posts by users identified by participants (see Figure 4). YouTube videos and Pinterest posts represented 23.5% and 16.5% of the content analyzed respectively. Facebook posts represented 5.4% of the content analyzed and all other sources represented less than 5 % of the content.

Figure 4 - *Source of Information*
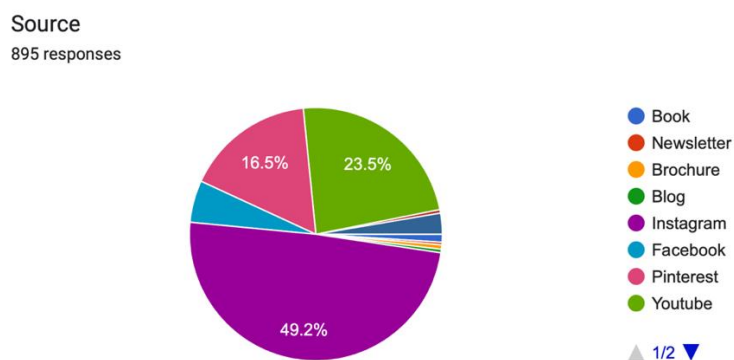
The initial content analysis compared the content of each source to the domains of kindergarten readiness identified by the state of North Carolina. 51.6% of the source information accessed focused on the health and physical domain (see Figure 5). The second highest readiness domain (49.8%) is related to cognitive development. The approaches to play domain appeared in 22.9% of all content analyzed. Language development and communication appeared in 15.6% of the content analyzed and the social and emotional domains had the least related content at 12.4% and 6.1% respectively.

Figure 5 - *Content Analysis Themes*

Theme
986 responses

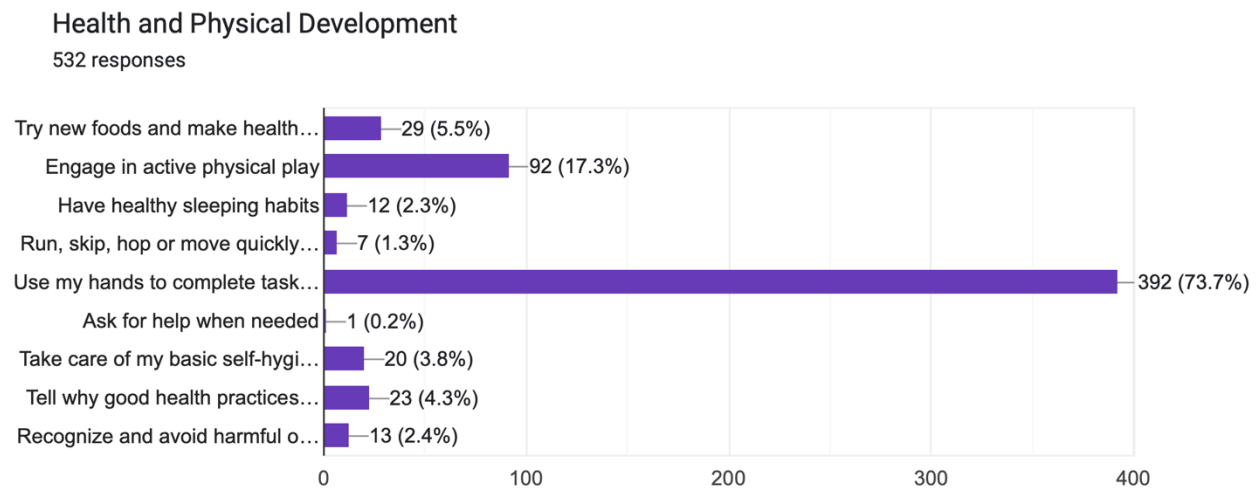| Theme	Count
Approaches to Play and Learning	226 (22.9%)
Emotional	60 (6.1%)
Social	122 (12.4%)
Health and Physical	509 (51.6%)
Language and Communication	156 (15.8%)
Cognitive	491 (49.8%)
Other	82 (8.3%)
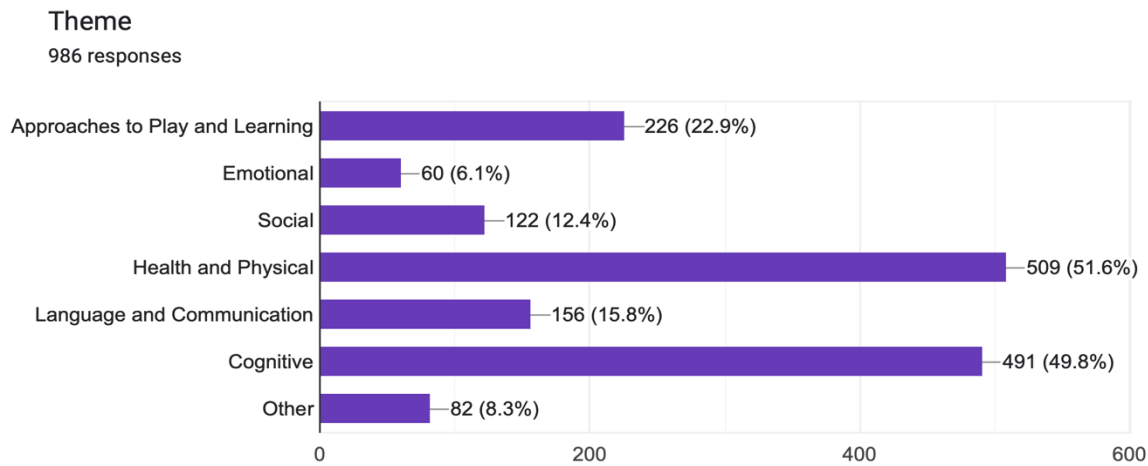
The domains of kindergarten readiness are broad and the initial analysis did not provide specific information on the content of each source. A second analysis was performed using the "I Can Statements" from each domain as the codebook. The results of the second analysis provide a closer look at what topics were covered and what was missed in the sources of information used by parents. Overall, most of the content analyzed aligned with North Carolina kindergarten readiness expectations although the source material did not represent several recommended skills.

The health and physical development domain of kindergarten readiness had the most related content. Upon further analysis, 73.7% of the content in this domain was related to using

hands to complete fine motor tasks (see Figure 6). Fine motor skills were referenced significantly

more than any other health and physical development skills and more than any other

kindergarten readiness skill. The only other tasks in this domain with more than 5% of related

content were related to trying new foods and engaging in active physical play. Notably absent

from the content in this domain was asking for help when needed, which was only seen in one
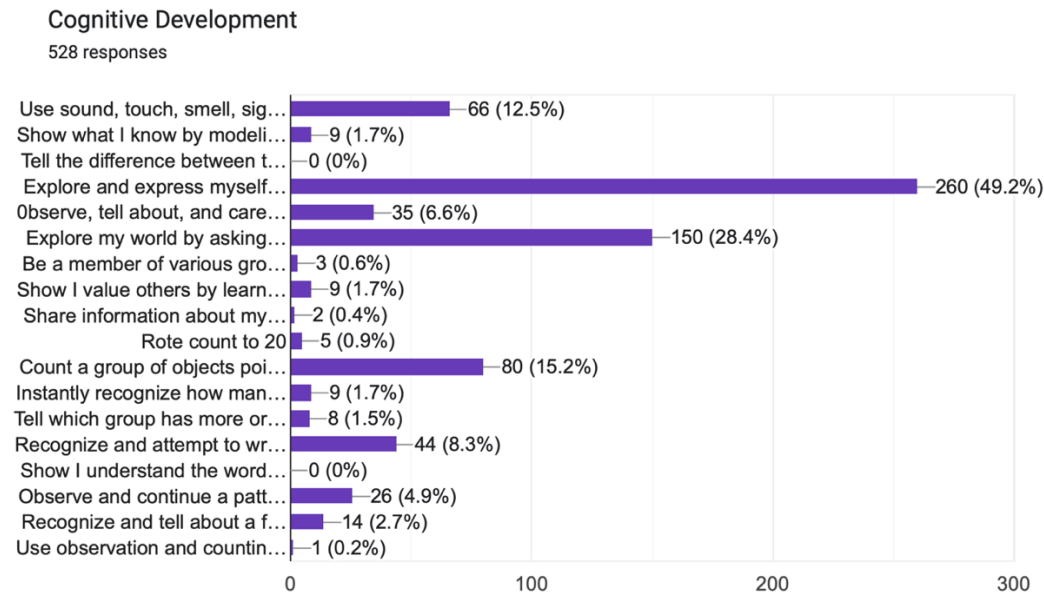
source.

Figure 6 - *Health and Physical Development Domain*

Health and Physical Development
532 responses

Try new foods and make health…	—29 (5.5%)
Engage in active physical play	—92 (17.3%)
Have healthy sleeping habits	—12 (2.3%)
Run, skip, hop or move quickly…	—7 (1.3%)
Use my hands to complete task…	—392 (73.7%)
Ask for help when needed	—1 (0.2%)
Take care of my basic self-hygi…	—20 (3.8%)
Tell why good health practices…	—23 (4.3%)
Recognize and avoid harmful o…	—13 (2.4%)

Cognitive development represented the next highest domain represented in the content

analyzed. Further analysis indicated that 42.9% of the content represented in this domain applied

to explore and express myself using a variety of art forms statement (see Figure 7). This category

was often seen in tandem with fine motor skills as they both represent many arts and crafts which

were overwhelmingly the topic of most of the content analyzed. The other statement of this

domain that was often represented was exploring my world by asking questions, comparing

things, and using various tools. This was reflected in 28.4% of the content analyzed. Most of the

content representing this statement involved asking scientific questions or comparing objects by

color or size. Using the five senses to explore the world, observing nature, counting a group of

objects, and recognizing numerals were the other statements in the cognitive domain that were

represented by more than 5% of the content. Several elements of the cognitive domain were

absent from the source material including telling the difference between what is real and what is

pretend, understanding the concepts of first, next, and last, and identifying how many of a set are

needed.

Figure 7 - *Cognitive Development*

Cognitive Development
528 responses

| Statement	Value
Use sound, touch, smell, sig…	66 (12.5%)
Show what I know by modeli…	9 (1.7%)
Tell the difference between t…	0 (0%)
Explore and express myself…	260 (49.2%)
Observe, tell about, and care…	35 (6.6%)
Explore my world by asking…	150 (28.4%)
Be a member of various gro…	3 (0.6%)
Show I value others by learn…	9 (1.7%)
Share information about my…	2 (0.4%)
Rote count to 20	5 (0.9%)
Count a group of objects poi…	80 (15.2%)
Instantly recognize how man…	9 (1.7%)
Tell which group has more or…	8 (1.5%)
Recognize and attempt to wr…	44 (8.3%)
Show I understand the word…	0 (0%)
Observe and continue a patt…	26 (4.9%)
Recognize and tell about a f…	14 (2.7%)
Use observation and countin…	1 (0.2%)

The statement represented most frequently in the approaches to play domain was the use

of toys and materials in creative and inventive ways with 69.3% of the content (see Figure 8).

The use of toys also represented most of the product marketing content (see Figure 11). Playing

alone was the next highest skill and was the topic of much of the philosophy and advice content.

Ignoring distractions and sharing interests were underrepresented in the approaches to play

domain.

Figure 8 - *Approaches to Play*


Approaches to Play
225 responses
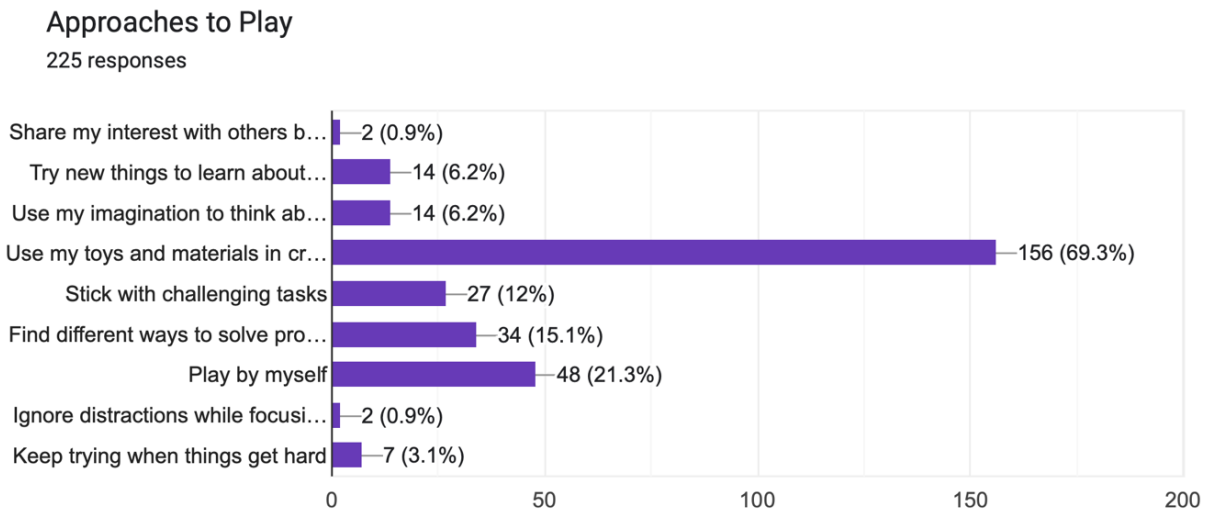
The language development and communication domain was more evenly represented than the above domains (see Figure 9). Identifying letters in the alphabet (54.1%) and listening to books read aloud (47.1%) were the most strongly represented elements. Asking others for help and sharing thoughts and feelings were seen in only 3 and 4 sources respectively.

Figure 9 - *Language Development and Communication*

Language Development and Communication
170 responses
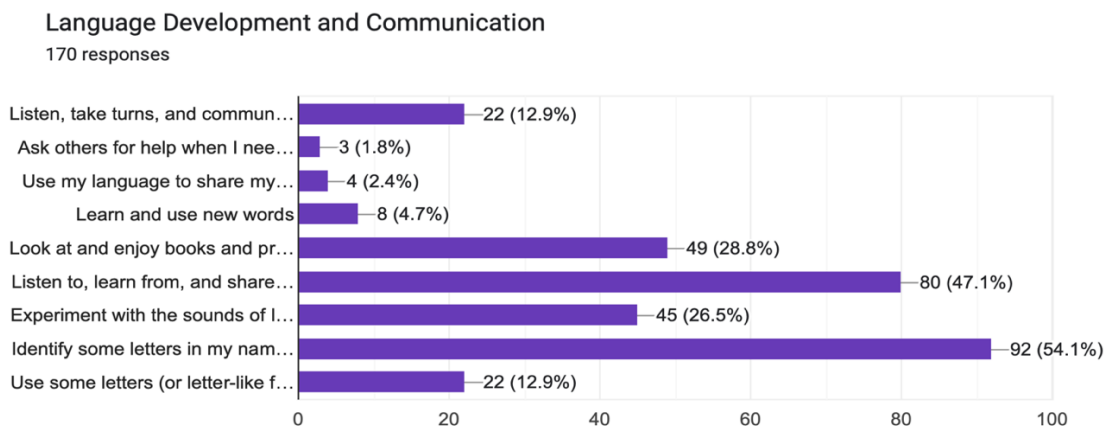
The emotional and social development domains appeared in the fewest sources. Engaging positively with peers (52.1%) and developing relationships with trusted adults (34%) were the most commonly featured elements (see Figure 10). Expressing positive feelings about myself only appeared in 4 sources and was the least represented in the domain.
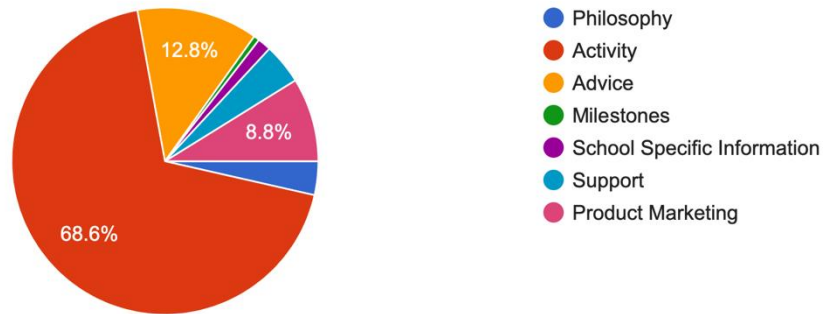
Figure 10 - *Emotional and Social Development*
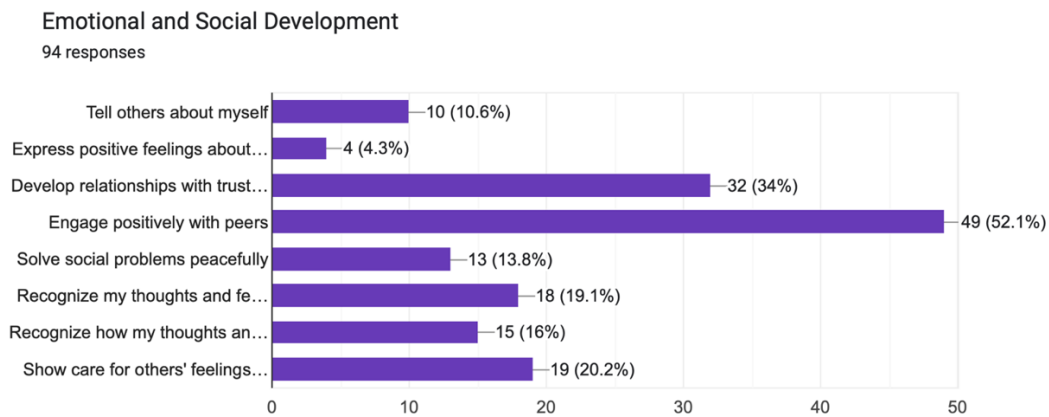
Most of the content accessed (68.6%) were home learning activities. This was especially true for the social media content accessed. Parenting or kindergarten readiness advice was the next highest content category with 12.8%. This was common with podcasts, forums, blogs, parenting groups, and parenting books. 8.8% of the content analyzed was product marketing. This occurred most frequently on social media although it did happen occasionally in podcast episodes. Support, philosophy, school-specific information, and milestones were found less than 5% of the time.

Figure 11 - *Content Analysis -Types*

Type of Content
986 responses

68.6% — Activity
12.8% — Advice
8.8% — Product Marketing

- Philosophy
- Activity
- Advice
- Milestones
- School Specific Information
- Support
- Product Marketing

Summary

This chapter described the data collection and analysis process used during this phenomenological study. Eight participants, who met the criterion of parents of rising kindergarten students, were recruited from local preschools and home school settings. Participants were interviewed and audio recordings were transcribed. Sources of information used by participants were collected and stored in a source database. Data analysis was conducted using van Manen's approach, a priori coding, and content analysis. The major themes found were, (a) emotions around kindergarten readiness (b) the importance of social-emotional skills, (c) learning at home, and (d) the impact of the current context. Sources of information most used by parents included (a) family, (b) friends, (c) their child, (d) print material, (e) community resources, and (f) social media. Most of the content parents accessed aligned with North Carolina readiness expectations although some skills were heavily emphasized and others were missing from the material. Fine motor and artistic expression activities were the most common content

accessed by parents. Information regarding social and emotional domains was the least prevalent

in the content analyzed.

Chapter 5: Conclusions and Recommendations

Introduction

This phenomenological study primarily focused on the lived experiences of parents as they prepare their first child for kindergarten. More broadly, this study sought to contribute to the knowledge of parent experiences with kindergarten readiness. Participants were engaged in interview sessions guided by open-ended questioning about the kindergarten readiness experience. Transcripts of these interviews were then analyzed for common themes. The main thematic elements in participants' experiences were related to the emotions involved in the transition process, the emphasis on social and emotional skills, home learning activities, and the impact of school choice and COVID-19 on schooling decisions. Additional analysis revealed that parents used a wide variety of sources when researching kindergarten readiness including, (a) family, (b) friends, (c) children, (d) printed materials, (e) community resources, and (f) social media. Social media impacted the kindergarten readiness process, but only for half of the participants. This chapter presents an extended discussion of the findings related to Bronfenbrenner's bioecological systems theory and current literature.

Discussion of Findings

Emotions about the Transition

The transition to kindergarten is an emotional time for many parents and families (Tobin et al., 2023). The participants in this study confirmed this idea and expressed a wide range of emotions about the forthcoming transition. They primarily expressed excitement, confidence, and anxiety. Parent excitement about the kindergarten transition is absent from much of the current literature, potentially because there is a lack of qualitative research about parent perspectives. Most of the parents expressed confidence in their child's ability to transition to kindergarten

successfully. Bettencourt et al. (2023) found that parents who were more educated about the transition to kindergarten felt more confident about how their child would perform at school. Parents from more affluent communities may have more access to specific school knowledge and social networks to support their kindergarten readiness experience (Tobin et al., 2023). The parents in this study fall within a middle-class demographic. They therefore may have more access to resources and knowledge about school systems than parents with less cultural or social capital. This might have an impact on their school readiness experiences and confidence.

Further research is needed with participants in other socioeconomic groups to determine how their experiences and access to information differ. Parental self-efficacy has been linked to the quality of the home learning environment (Amirazizi et al., 2023). When parents feel confident, they are more likely to provide their children with the support they need to transition successfully.

Despite confidence in their child's kindergarten readiness, most parents also mentioned anxiety about the upcoming transition. A study by Barnett et al., (2020) also found that parents feel anxious about how their child will transition, but more time spent in school settings can help alleviate some of that anxiety. Some parents indicated that their anxiety about the transition came from not knowing enough about what would come next. This desire to learn more about the transition to kindergarten reflects the findings of several recent qualitative studies on parent experiences (Jarrett & Coba-Rodriguez, 2018, Kang et al., 2017, Peterson et al., 2018). Parents in these studies, as well as the current study, were interested in more information about (a) registration information, (b) classroom expectations, (c) the teacher, and, (d) academic expectations (Peterson et al., 2018).

Emphasis on Social and Emotional Skills

The parents in this study emphasized the importance of teaching their children social and emotional skills. They talked about providing direct instruction on strategies to use and finding opportunities to practice often. Some recent studies on parent beliefs present this emphasis on social-emotional skills. A study by Jose et al., (2022) found that parents believed their children should have social-emotional and motor skills and basic numeracy and literacy skills. Another study found that parents often intentionally increase the amount of social and emotional support and practice for their children in the months leading up to the transition to kindergarten to better support these developmental areas (Korucu & Schmitt, 2020). This seems to be the case with the parents in the current study who intentionally selected preschools, camps, and other activities to provide their children with as many opportunities to practice their social and emotional skills as possible.

Other studies have shown that parents often prioritize academic knowledge over social-emotional skills (Brinkley et al., 2023; Dunaway et al., 2021). This does not seem true for the parents in the current study. A study by Jahromi et al. (2023) found that parents with higher education levels had greater awareness of the social skills their children might need at school. This may have had an impact on the participants in this study who all had at least a high school diploma.

Learning at Home

The parents in the current study all described engaging their children in at-home learning activities. This aligns with much of the current literature on parent participation in kindergarten readiness activities. Quantitative and qualitative studies have demonstrated that parents

participate in a wide range of activities at home including (a) shared reading, (b) letter practice, (c) writing activities, (d) counting games, (e) arts and crafts and (f) singing activities regularly (Peterson et al., 2018, Kang et al., 2017, Coba-Rodriguez & Jarrett, 2022). Parents in the current study mentioned all these activities and more when describing their home learning process. The parents emphasized three learning activities above the rest, shared reading, counting, and conversations with their child about kindergarten. These same activities were emphasized by parents in a study by Brinkley et al. (2023) as common transition activities for parents. Conversations with children about kindergarten readiness are less prevalent in the literature although two qualitative studies have found that it is an important part of the transition process for some families (Korucu & Schmitt, 2020; Cutler & Slicker, 2020). These studies found that answering questions and verbally preparing children for the transition helped to make the transition less stressful (Cutler & Slicker, 2020).

The parents in this study also used various approaches to learning at home. None of the parents exclusively used a skills-based or play-based approach as defined by Jarett et al. (2015). The parents described using a mixture of both methods and emphasized the importance of both. This reflects the findings of other qualitative studies on parent kindergarten readiness experiences that reflect the various techniques and tools parents use to support their child's kindergarten readiness (Coba-Rodriquez & Jarrett, 2022).

Source of Information

The sources of information utilized by parents in the current study aligned with Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Systems theory and current literature. Family members were a significant resource for parents as they were making kindergarten readiness decisions. Family members provided emotional support, and some helped with learning activities. Relationships

with family members fall in the microsystem in Bronfenbrenner's model and should therefore have a significant impact on the experiences of an individual. A study by Coba-Rodriguez & Jarrett (2022) also found that family members played an important role in supporting the kindergarten readiness process. Friends were mentioned by all parents as a significant resource despite the prevalence of social media. Some social media research theorized that parents accessed social media due to a lack of face-to-face interaction (Chee et al., 2023; Haslam et al., 2017). While one participant mentioned using social media for that purpose during the COVID-19 pandemic, all the parents who used social media also talked about having a wide network of friends whom they trusted during this process. One social media study found that the most frequently used source of information was friends and other parents (Baker et al., 2017).

Preschool teachers were not being accessed as much as anticipated considering their place in the microsystem. The parents in this study who sent their children to preschool reported that their child's teachers were accessible but that they did not reach out unless necessary. Korucu & Schmitt (2020) emphasized the importance of regular communication between preschool teachers and parents. This was present for just one of the parents in this study. The rest communicated with their child's teacher on an as-needed basis. Other studies have highlighted preschool teachers as an important source of information about child development and learning activities (Barnett et al. 2020; Puccioni et al., 2020). The parents in this study valued the time spent in the classroom and respected the teachers but got their kindergarten readiness information elsewhere.

Social Media

Social media was a significant resource for half of the participants in the current study. Participants who accessed social media talked about using it to research home learning activities

and to get social support. A study by Appleton (2014) also found that parents use social networks to seek help, parenting advice, and reassurance. There was an apparent age difference in views on social media. Participants indicated that the ease of social media contributed to its frequent use. This sentiment was found in several current studies regarding parent use of social media (Deuitch et al., 2021; Frey et al., 2021; Sutter et al., 2021; Haslam et al., 2017). The parents who used social media talked about having a wealth of information at their fingertips and appreciated that they could access different perspectives. Participants under 40 used social media and those over 40 did not. A study by Cook et al. (2022) identified maternal age under 30 as a factor in how parents used internet sources. Another study found that 82% of parents 40 or younger had social media accounts, although there was no number given for the percentage of users over 40 (Olszewski & Cullen-Conway, 2021). More research is needed to determine what role social media plays in the kindergarten readiness process and if age is a factor in social media use.

The parents interviewed were overwhelmingly looking up resources for fine motor skills and craft activities, yet few mentioned these in their interviews. Additionally, the social and emotional domains of development were heavily emphasized during interviews but were underrepresented in the source content. This could stem from the confidence parents expressed during their interviews, highlighting the readiness domains they are most comfortable with and avoiding the domains in which they require the most support. Further research is needed to determine how sources impact participant beliefs and behavior. Potentially parents are consuming a significant amount of information about kindergarten readiness that they are not using. Most of the information shared was accurate or in line with the North Carolina kindergarten readiness expectations however, content tended to focus on just a few aspects of certain domains and did not cover the broad range of skills expected. A few elements that were

not addressed by any of the content analyzed. These gaps in kindergarten readiness expectations should be communicated to parents to ensure that all aspects of kindergarten readiness are covered.

Limitations

This study has several limitations that impact the transferability of the results, which is consistent with many qualitative studies. The number of participants in the study was small, 8 parents, which limited the study's findings. Despite widespread recruitment efforts, the participants in the sample were almost homogeneous in socioeconomic status and race. This limits the perspectives represented and the transferability of the research. This study's participants include homeschooling parents who are significantly underrepresented in kindergarten readiness research. These participants provided a unique perspective on the kindergarten readiness process that has yet to be heard. This study also includes parents from a wide age range offering interesting insight into the role of social media, especially with younger parents.

The participants described their experiences with kindergarten readiness within a specific context which restricts the transferability to other populations and other periods in time (Creswell & Poth, 2017). The kindergarten readiness process takes place over several years but this study only reflects parents' experiences at one point in time. Interviewing parents at multiple times and closer to the transition to kindergarten would provide more information about what the process is like for families. Researcher bias based on prior experience with the research topic was also a limitation. Member checking, peer debriefing, and journaling were used to reduce bias throughout the study (Lincoln and Guba, 1985).

The sources of information analyzed for this study were limited to physical documents and digital sources. All participants strongly emphasized the impact of family members, friends, preschool environments, and community resources as valuable sources of information. These sources were not represented in this study which limits the conclusions that can be drawn from the content analysis. This study did not focus on how the sources of information were used to inform parent behavior this also limits how the data from the content analysis can be used to understand parent experiences.

Recommendations for Educators

Bioecological systems theory emphasizes the impact home learning can have on a child's development, as the home is one of the most important microsystems for an individual. A study by Foster et al. (2016) demonstrated that compared to the influences of childcare and early schooling, the home learning environment was the most significant contributor to math and preschool skills. Helping parents provide an effective home learning environment could help lessen the educational gap at kindergarten entry (Baker, 2018).

When asked about the support they would like to receive with the kindergarten readiness process, participants expressed an interest in (a) more opportunities to visit the elementary school, (b) a series of orientation events, (c) transition events for parents and children, (d) peer mentors to help with the process, and (e) more information about school choice options. These requests indicate that educators and county leaders could make the kindergarten readiness process easier for parents. A study by Tobin et al. (2023) emphasized the importance of providing children and their parents with transition activities before kindergarten. They also found that personal transition practices are more effective than generic newsletters and that transition practices are more effective when the whole family can participate. Providing parents and their

children with opportunities to come to the elementary school, meet the teachers, and become familiar with the expectations and routines is a shift that schools and teachers can make to ease some of the anxiety about the transition.

Parents want and need increased access to their child's elementary school. Currently, in Crest County, many orientation events happen in late spring before kindergarten entry and teachers are not assigned until the school year begins. This limits the opportunities for parents and children to gain comfort and familiarity with a place that will become a significant microsystem for both. Providing orientation events more frequently or earlier in the readiness process would help to create comfort and ease some of the anxiety described by the participants in this study. Assigning teachers before the first week of school would also allow families to start making connections with the teacher before the start of the school year. These connections can help alleviate anxiety and strengthen parent-teacher and student-teacher relationships. Administrators should be made aware of the importance of early and regular contact between incoming families and the school. New systems of assigning classroom teachers should be developed so that it can happen earlier in the year. Teachers should be encouraged to reach out to families as early as possible to begin developing relationships and supporting the kindergarten readiness process.

Another study introduced the idea of a neighborhood-level representative or office to help support parents with the kindergarten readiness process (Morgan, 2021). These representatives would act as a source of social capital for parents attempting to navigate the transition process, especially in counties like the one in the current study where the application and enrollment process is complex. A local representative who knows about available school options and readiness expectations could help all families understand more about what is needed.

Open communication between families and preschool teachers is also necessary. The parents in the current study only reached out when necessary and felt like not hearing from the teacher was a good sign. When parents and preschool teachers communicate regularly, home and school learning are more aligned and students succeed more (Korucu & Schmitt, 2020). Identifying ways to ensure preschool teachers, kindergarten teachers, and parents are in regular communication will help to ensure that more children successfully manage the transition to kindergarten. Preschool teachers could also play a pivotal role in distributing kindergarten readiness information. Providing preschool teachers with supports like the Let's Get Ready to Learn document to give to parents could help get those sources of information into the hands of parents earlier in the kindergarten readiness process.

Recommendations for Parents

The parents in this study emphasized the simplicity of preparing a child for kindergarten. They discussed not needing to buy or do anything extravagant with their child. None of the parents mentioned toys or materials that they had purchased that were helpful. Parents mentioned creating routines, reading, playing, and having conversations as the most important elements of their kindergarten readiness process. This is an important finding as it demonstrates how accessible readiness strategies can be for all parents. Literacy activities mentioned by participants that require little to no money include (a) trips to the public library, (b) singing alphabet songs, (c) Dolly Parton's Imagination Library, (d) having conversations about stories, (e) making up stories together and (f) writing practice. Parents also discussed the following math activities (a) skip counting routines, (b) playing with dice, (c) sorting and counting objects, (d) keeping score in games, and (e) looking for shapes. Most participants also mentioned conversations about emotional regulation, social skills, and expected behavior as critical for

readiness. Parents do not need to spend money on fancy toys or tools to help their children prepare for school. Supporting parents with creating routines and structures in their homes to promote kindergarten readiness is necessary.

The Let's Get Ready document produced by the Department of Education in North Carolina was used to compare content in the second phase of this study. This document describes the domains of kindergarten readiness and provides parents with milestones, helpful descriptions checklists, and activity ideas. None of the participants mentioned this document or indicated that they had heard of it when it was mentioned during the interviews. Two participants did refer to internet sites that provided a PDF copy of the document on the site but it is unclear if the participants accessed it. Public school kindergartens in the studied county typically distribute an abbreviated copy of this document to parents at kindergarten orientation, however, this event normally takes place in April or May and had not yet been attended by any participants at the time of the study. Increasing access to the Let's Get Ready document and other materials that provide information about kindergarten readiness earlier in the process would give parents more support and more time to work on readiness skills. All the parents in the study mentioned the public library as a resource they accessed. Providing copies of the Let's Get Ready document at the public library may increase access for some families. Community resources like preschools, daycares, churches, sports leagues, homeschool groups, and museums could also be used to distribute this information.

When looking at the content accessed by parents during their kindergarten readiness process, much of it relates to art projects and fine motor skill development. Several of the kindergarten readiness domains were underrepresented in the content parents recommended. Interestingly, despite the emphasis from participants during interviews, social and emotional skill

development was not common in the content. This could be because parents felt more confident in these areas and did not need outside support or ideas. Another possibility is a lack of content in these readiness domains. Parents should be able to access readily available and affordable ideas for supporting their child's development across all domains, not just physical development.

The Let's Get Ready document and the content accessed by parents had limited references to independence and self-reliance skills necessary for kindergarten. Much of the social media content promoted assisted or structured play and very little focused on developing independence. Students who come to kindergarten without the ability to perform tasks or follow directions independently will face difficulty adjusting to a larger classroom setting. Increasing the emphasis on developing independence and providing parents with ideas for promoting these skills at home would be beneficial.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study examined the lived experiences of parents who were preparing their first child for kindergarten and the factors that influenced their experience. First, additional research is needed to explore the experiences of a more diverse population of parents. This study looked at a small subset of the population; more information about the experiences of other populations is necessary to identify commonalities and differences. The current research also takes place in a particular context and factors such as school choice might not be as prevalent in other communities. Interviewing participants from a wide range of backgrounds and contexts would help to strengthen the current research.

School choice played a significant role in many participants' kindergarten readiness process. Additional research into school choice and how the process impacts families is

necessary. Research into how other counties and states handle the school choice process could also be beneficial to determine if there are ways to make the process easier for families.

Research into the other sources of information parents consider during the readiness process is necessary. Parents mentioned a wide variety of community resources and sources including school choices and homeschool store employees that could be accessed and analyzed to better understand the information and support parents receive. Further research into how to best distribute information to parents is also necessary.

Additional research is needed to determine how the sources of information parents access influence their kindergarten readiness decisions. This study looked at what sources parents accessed and the content of those sources but did not consider the impact of the sources. Future research should examine this gap to determine which sources have the most impact on parent beliefs and behaviors.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to examine the experience of parents as they prepare their first child for kindergarten. Chapter 5 discussed the implications of the findings and connected those results with previous studies on kindergarten readiness. The findings of this study indicate this subset of parents enjoy preparing their children for kindergarten but are anxious about the transition. These parents emphasized social and emotional skills at home and provided various home learning opportunities. Contextual factors like school choice and COVID have significantly impacted parent experiences. Parents accessed several sources when seeking advice and support during the kindergarten readiness process. Social media was a factor for half of the participants and was used to pursue activities and support. Most of the content accessed was

related to fine motor and art activities for home learning, yet these interviews did not emphasize these skills.

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Appendixes

Appendix 1 – Interview Protocol

- Good afternoon!

- Tell me a little about your family.

- Tell me about (child's name).

- What things are (child's name) interested in right now?

- What does a typical day at your house look like?

- Are they getting excited about kindergarten?

  - o What do they know about kindergarten so far?
  - o How are they getting this information?

- Do you talk with (child's name) about kindergarten?
  - o If yes, what are these conversations like?

- How are you feeling about the transition?

- How do you feel about working on academics at home? Is it something you are thinking about now, or not yet?
  - o If yes, can you give me some examples of some of the activities you have been doing at home?

- What do you do if (child's name) has strong feelings?

- What is your approach to discipline?

- Who does (child's name) like to play with?

- Who do you talk to if you need support?

  - o Have you turned to anyone to help you during this process?

  - o Has reaching out been helpful?

- Have you read or looked at anything that has helped you during this process?

  - o Can you give me some examples?

- How did you find those sources?

- Can you give me an example of a time you looked for information about the kindergarten readiness process?

  - Was it easy to find answers to your questions?

- Have you looked for support on social media at all?

- What has that process been like?

- Can you give me some examples of people or accounts you look at on social media?

- Are there other websites that you have looked at for information about kindergarten readiness?

- Can you give me some examples of these sites?

Provide time to collect physical and digital sources of information from parents. If parents are struggling to think of examples or answer questions, ask about social media content earlier in the interview. If parents are willing, look at some of the content with them and use content to elicit a response.
*If a participant indicates that they have not been working on kindergarten readiness skills with their child, conclude the interview. Another parent will be selected if possible.

Appendix 2 – Follow-Up Interview Protocol
- Good Afternoon! Thank you for meeting with me again!

- Source Collection

    o What sources of information did you bring to share with me?

    o How did you find these sources?

    o Are there any other sources that you can think of that you found particularly

      helpful?

    o Is there any information that you wish you had right now? Anything that you

      would find helpful?

- Clarifying Questions

    o Is there anything you would like to change in your transcript?

    o Is there anything else you would like to add?

    o You mentioned … can you give me more information about what that looks like?

ARE YOU HELPING YOUR FIRST CHILD GET READY FOR KINDERGARTEN?

We want to learn from you!

Participate in a research study designed to learn more about the experiences of parents who are preparing a child for kindergarten and the factors that influence the process.

To participate you must:

- Be a parent or primary care provider.
- Have your first child entering kindergarten in the 2024-2025 school year.

Participation involves:

- A 60-minute in-person interview
- Availability for follow-up questions by phone, email or in-person conversation

To learn more, please contact Grace Bache-Wiig at 612-718-0635 or gbachew@g.clemson.edu

Dr. Anna Hall, Principal Investigator
Clemson University
Ah2@clemson.edu

Is your oldest child going to kindergarten next year?

_____

Have you been helping them get ready for school?

_____

Would you be willing to talk about your experience?

_____

Participate in a research study today!

_____

IF INTERESTED CONTACT:
GRACE BACHE-WIIG

PHONE: 612-718-0635

EMAIL: GBACHEW@ G.CLEMSON.EDU

Appendix 4 – Consent Form

Information about Being in a Research Study
Clemson University

Preparing a Child for Kindergarten

KEY INFORMATION ABOUT THE RESEARCH STUDY
Grace Bache-Wiig is inviting you to volunteer for a research study. Grace Bache-Wiig is a
Doctoral Student at Clemson University. The study is being conducted under the guidance of Dr.
Anna Hall, a professor at Clemson University.

Study Purpose: The purpose of this research is to better understand the experience of preparing
a child for kindergarten and what factors inform the process for parents.

Voluntary Consent: Participation is voluntary, and the only alternative is to not participate. You
will not be punished in any way if you decide not to be in the study or to stop taking part in the
study.

Activities and Procedures: Your part of the study will be to participate in an interview about
your experience preparing a child for kindergarten.

Participation Time: Participation in this study will take approximately 1 hour.

Risks and Discomforts: We do not know of any risks or discomforts to you in this research
study.

Possible Benefits: You may not benefit directly from taking part in this study; however, this
research may benefit future parents who are preparing their children for kindergarten.

AUDIO/VIDEO RECORDING AND PHOTOGRAPHS:
Interview sessions will be audio-recorded to ensure accurate transcription of conversations.
Audio recordings will be stored in a password-protected file on a password-protected computer
for up to one year after the completion of the study. Personal identifiers will be stored separately
from audio recordings. Audio recordings will only be used by the researcher and will not be
shared publicly.

PROTECTION OF PRIVACY AND CONFIDENTIALITY
The results of this study may be published in scientific journals, professional publications, or
educational presentations.

The de-identified information could be used for future research studies or distributed to another
investigator for future research studies without additional informed consent from the participants
or legally authorized representatives.

CONTACT INFORMATION
If you have any questions or concerns about your rights in this research study, please contact the Clemson University Office of Research Compliance (ORC) at 864-656-0636 or irb@clemson.edu. If you are outside of the Upstate South Carolina area, please use the ORC's toll-free number, 866-297-3071. The Clemson IRB will not be able to answer some study-specific questions. However, you may contact the Clemson IRB if the research staff cannot be reached or if you wish to speak with someone other than the research staff.

If you have any study-related questions or if any problems arise, please contact Grace Bache-Wiig at 612-718-0635 or gbachew@g.clemson.edu

CONSENT
By participating in the study, you indicate that you have read the information written above, been allowed to ask any questions, and you are voluntarily choosing to take part in this research. You do not give up any legal rights by taking part in this research study.

Participant's signature: _____ Date: _____

Print name: _____

Appendix 5 – Code Book

Code	Description	Example
Personal Experience	Participant mentions a strategy or activity they experienced in the past	"he remembers his dad when they were little, like counting stairs, like kind of building math into everyday life."
Family Members	Participant mentions speaking to a family member	"I talk to my sister about it…"
Friends	Participant mentions speaking to friends or their social network	"I mean like I talk to everybody about it. Um, especially like teacher friends, and things like that"
Child	Participant mentions their child as a source of information	"I mean anything that she really like seems to grasp on to or be interested in we try to like foster that."
Preschool	Participant mentions their child's preschool as a source of information	"Even just like being in her preschool classroom, like listening to the teachers trying to get the kids to ask them a question."
Print Materials	**Participant mentions printed material as a source of information

Follow up for exact source if possible | "Most of the books that I read are either on like the actual care of kids like or like a pediatrician manual on like how to take care of your kids or on behavior…" |
| Social Media | **Participant mentions social media as a source of information

Follow up for exact source if possible | "I feel like, the one account that is most geared towards um, kindergarten readiness is an account called the busy toddler.." |
| | | |

Appendix 6 – Code Book – Content Analysis

Code	Description	Example
Approaches to Play and Learning	Source addresses how children learn or child's interest in learning	"I can stick with challenging tasks." "I can use my imagination to think about new ways to play."
Emotional	Source addresses the way children feel about themselves or how they learn to manage and express emotions	"I can recognize my thoughts and feelings"
Social	Source addresses child relationships with others	"I can engage positively with peers"
Health and Physical	Source addresses physical growth, motor development, nutrition, hygiene, or health practices	"I can run, skip, hop, or move quickly without bumping into others." "I have healthy sleeping habits."
Language and Communication	Source addresses child language or literacy development	"I can ask others for help when I need something." "I can look at and enjoy books and print on my own"
Cognitive	Source addresses thinking and reasoning skills, creative expression, scientific knowledge and mathematical thinking	"I can use sound, touch, smell, sight, and taste to learn about my world." "I can observe and continue a pattern."

Code	Definition	Example
Philosophy	Source provides information about why a domain is important	"Adults who build nurturing relationships by paying close attention to what children are trying to communicate, and responding consistently to children's communication help children become good communicators."
Activity	Source provides examples of specific activities families can do to support development	"Hide coins, beads, or small toys in a ball of playdough to create a treasure hunt."
Advice	Source provides suggestions for parenting practices	"Avoid criticism when your child makes a mistake. Instead, help your child see their mistake as an

		opportunity to do something differently next time.
Milestones	Source provides information about skills or milestones relating to kindergarten readiness	"Child can rote count to 20"
School Specific Information	Source provides information specific to child's school	"Attendance policies" "Special events for rising kindergarten families such as tours or open house."