Prekindergarten and Kindergarten Teachers' Perceptions of Demographic Determinants and Academic Success

Melanie Ellen Boyle

University of Southern Mississippi

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PREKINDERGARTEN AND KINDERGARTEN TEACHERS’ PERCEPTIONS OF

CHILDHOOD DEMOGRAPHIC DETERMINANTS AND

ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT

by

Melanie Ellen Boyle

Abstract of a Dissertation
Submitted to the Graduate School
of the University of Southern Mississippi
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

August 2013
ABSTRACT

PREKINDERGARTEN AND KINDERGARTEN TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF
CHILDHOOD DEMOGRAPHIC DETERMINANTS AND
ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT

by Melanie Ellen Boyle

August 2013

The purpose of this study was to examine kindergarten and prekindergarten teachers’ perceptions of academic success for children based on the type of care children received prior to beginning kindergarten, as well as other demographics, which could cause variations in academic success. The researcher used a seven section multi-method survey instrument, which included teacher demographic questions, Likert-scale perception questions, and one open-ended question. Sections of inquiry included: Common Core, general academic risk factors for students, barriers to overall academic success, student demographics, and promotion of academic success for students. The survey instrument was distributed to prekindergarten and kindergarten teachers in south Mississippi.

Overall analysis of data suggested that teachers believed preschool education did have an effect on the future academic success of children, while contrary to previous literature teachers did not believe that demographics were a true predictor of academic success. Specifically, quantitative analysis revealed significant differences in preschool teachers’ perceptions for the best facilities in which to educate their preschool students, and ideas of preparedness of children upon entrance to kindergarten. Descriptive analysis also suggested that both preschool and kindergarten teachers believed kindergarten
entrance should be based not only on age alone, but also social, emotional, and intellectual preparedness. Individual scrutiny of each section offered additional data to support prior research and newly published literature.

Qualitative analysis supported quantitative results. With regard to academic teachers overall perceptions of early childhood education, teachers noted there were gaps in children’s knowledge upon entrance into kindergarten. Teachers’ also believed kindergarten should be mandatory, along with funding for preschool, which correlated with recent literature. Falling in line with federal and state officials, south Mississippi teachers believed teacher education and certification is a must. Teachers’ perceptions of demographic identifiers contradicted much of prior literature because teachers believed identifiers such as parental marital status, race/ethnicity, and gender were suggestive based on individual households. However, teachers’ qualitative responses agreed with literature with regard to teachers needing to be more involved in their children’s educational endeavors, and more educated. Also similar to quantitative data, teachers noted that children’s education succession should be based on the whole child and not just age.
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Melanie Ellen Boyle

A Dissertation
Submitted to the Graduate School
of the University of Southern Mississippi
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for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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August 2013
DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to God and my family. You are the reason for everything I do each and every day. Without you this would mean nothing.

To my husband, Greg, who without your love, support, and extra help this would have never been completed. You pushed me through each event and struggle. Thank you for believing in me no matter what.

To my little ones and my inspiration, Maya (4) and Malerie (3), your preschool experiences were my guiding light and your love and smiles made everything better. You were just babies when this journey began. Thank you both for understanding when mommy had to go to school and sitting quietly through my online classes, so you could be with me. My little Geneva, though you’ve not made your appearance in this world, you were the best little motivator for finishing this project.

Last, but not least, blessed are those with a few true friends who become our extended family. Thank you for being there, cheering, and stepping in wherever was needed. Your support made the days better and guided this project, your cheers pushed me through some rough spots, and a special thank you to Angie for watching a sick baby on the day of my defense, so I didn’t have to worry.

May God bless each step we take because there are little ones following right behind.
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Thank you is never enough when it comes to completing a project and life-goal such as the one before you. However, it is with the greatest gratitude that I extend this simple phrase to my professors, department chair, and committee members. Without you this project would just be an idea. Each of you imparted a piece of wisdom that will travel with me throughout my career, and that I hope to share with my students and children one day. The encouraging words, critiques, and stories you have told have made me a better person and teacher.

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Dr. J.T. Johnson, thank you, and I hope I did make you happy. When I began this program, I was told that I must have you on my committee. With that recommendation so early, I needed to see, so I took all of my statistics classes first. You are truly the best, and thank you for making this all make sense!

Dr. Rose McNeese and Dr. Daniel Eadens, thank you for your assistance and counsels. I appreciate your time and suggestions along the way. For that, I am grateful.

Dr. Leslie Locke not only are you vital to the university, but you are to me, too. Your support, focus, and directions were invaluable. Thank you for being there through each step, starting with your phenomenal boot camp! I hope I am lucky enough to work with you for many years to come.
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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

When President Barack Obama reauthorized the Elementary and Secondary Education Act in September 2011, he called for a means to close the education gaps that have caused other nations to out compete the United States workforce in the global market. Through federal funding and community support, President Obama stated he wanted higher-quality schools, higher-quality teachers, and higher-quality principals, specifically starting with early education (U.S. Department of Education, 2012).

Originally, in 2002, as mandated by No Child Left Behind (NCLB, 2002), school districts were required to work toward having all children performing on grade level by 2014 (Rouse, Brooks-Gunn, & McLanahan, 2005). However, numerous states applied for waivers because they were unable to meet this goal. Per NCLB (2002), student achievement is measured through annual standardized testing, which begins in the third grade. Scores from these standardized tests were used as a means to measure academic achievement, and for school ratings and rankings, which may, in turn, have factored into the dissemination of federal and local funding. The establishment of charter schools and school availability could also be determined by the school’s ranking, which was ultimately decided by the academic achievement of the school’s students.

There were significant achievement gaps between advantaged and disadvantaged students, and some policy makers believed early intervention could be most beneficial for closing academic gaps. A study by Stipek (2006) said children from low socioeconomic settings start school more than a year behind their peers, and with what Hart and Risley (2003) defined as a “30 million word gap” because children in low socioeconomic homes are exposed to fewer positive language opportunities (p. 3). This word gap between
children of varying socioeconomic standing can be seen as early as three years old. It was known that cognitive development was sequential and without proper learning opportunities, students would not only have had a smaller vocabulary, but their abilities to comprehend and achieve academically later may be stifled (Hart & Risley, 2003).

Describing an earlier call for academic success, Magnuson, Meyers, Ruhm, and Waldfogel (2004) said, “By the year 2000, all children should enter school ready to learn” (p. 116). This was not achieved because to do so, upon entering kindergarten, students must be able to behave in a socially acceptable manner with a new and diverse population than in most homes (Magnuson et al., 2004). Furthermore, Magnuson et al. (2004) said students must be able to comprehend various materials from many different subject areas in a shorter time than they are typically used to doing. Many states had fallen short of this goal (Magnuson et al., 2004). The point is that children use newly acquired knowledge in these highly influential years to continually build on throughout their educational career.

In a later study, Magnuson and Waldfogel (2005) discussed how early experiences and exposures impact future educational opportunities and advantages. Without these early opportunities, children may be held back if their educational exposures and experiences are not of high quality.

As a means to assist with closing this achievement gap, Head Start, a federal preschool educational program, was established in 1965, this program strove to assist children living in poverty and children with disabilities by increasing their exposure to early educational programing (Reynolds, Temple, & Ou, 2010). Families of low socioeconomic standing and those with impaired children were able to enroll their children free of charge, beginning at age three, in this accredited and federally funded educational program. However, since enrollment in Head Start is income-based, those
above the poverty threshold do not qualify and must find alternate means of early education, if desired.

Many proponents agreed that Head Start was beneficial for children and families. However, criticism arose when Head Start did not make adequate progress for all children as required by NCLB (2002). Some states, such as Georgia, Oklahoma, and Florida, showed gains in math and reading through the introduction of a universal prekindergarten program (Fitzpatrick, 2008). Fitzpatrick (2008) explained that a universal prekindergarten in these states, unlike Head Start, is available to all children ages three and four and is not income, but aged based. According to Stipek (2006), early education and intervention of academic skills and behaviors, such as those gained in a quality prekindergarten program, will significantly impact a child’s academic career throughout the child’s life. Also considering that students of the lowest socioeconomic levels began school significantly behind their peers, and taking into account the number of children in childcare, and those age-eligible for childcare in the United States, some researchers such as Barnett (2008) and Stipek (2006) believed early childhood would have been the ideal opportunity to push positive cognitive gains.

As a means to support quality early education, President Obama announced in 2009 his Race to the Top (RTT) initiatives. With these initiatives, states could apply for a grant and selected states would receive funds to support their own initiatives for early childhood and general school improvement. U.S. Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan, was quoted as saying preschools’ work with young children “will help lead the way in ensuring excellent early learning and support for every child” (Middle Class Task Force, 2012, p. 1).
Statement of the Problem

As was reported in 2012, there were approximately “1.3 million children in 40 U.S. states” (Epstein & Barnett, 2012, p. 4) who were enrolled in some type of public prekindergarten program, but this did not account for all children who were age-eligible for care and education. In 2011, the National Association for Child Care Resource and Referral Agency (NACCRRA) reported that in the United States, there were almost 21 million children ages 0-4 years old, and approximately 4.5 million of these children were living below the poverty level. Furthermore, and important to note, 14.8 million of these children had working parents and needed childcare (NACCRRA, 2011). In Mississippi, the numbers were concurrent with the national average with 215,000 children 0-4 years old, 72,000 children living below poverty level, and 160,000 children under the age of six who need childcare due to working parents (NACCRRA, 2011).

Epstein and Barnett (2012) explained how all states have early childhood programs, but these programs mainly targeted those families who are at least 100% below the poverty level and children with a special need ruling. The programs strove to equip disadvantaged children with skills in math, reading, and writing (Epstein & Barnett, 2012). However, if a family did not fall into either the disabled or impoverished category, they had to look for another program in which to participate, such as private preschools or Christian daycares.

Hustedt, Friedman, and Barnett (2012) found many early educational programs and government financial investments in early education unacceptable because the breakdown per student was considered very small. They estimated in 2010, federal spending with regard to early childhood education was about $19.6 billion with state contributions at approximately $17 billion. Even so, many states were not meeting all
early childhood standards, and sufficient money was not available for funding high-quality preschools (Hustedt et al., 2012).

As of 2013, Mississippi did not have a universal prekindergarten system. Moreover, Mississippi’s Head Start program only served about 34% of the population, which left 66% of the age-eligible families having to research and pay for programs on their own. Also, this left Mississippi families with the daunting task of inspecting programs to make sure benchmarks recommended by the Department of Education were being met (Epstein & Barnett, 2012). However, Burnham, House, and Green (2012) of the Mississippi Department of Education published literature supporting early education and Mississippi’s goal of providing quality early education. Specifically, they stated “the early childhood classroom does not limit its focus on cognitive development but provides children with learning opportunities that address a wide variety of developmental domains” (Burnham et al., p. 5). These authors offered four positive areas for focus with early childhood: active engagement, social interactions, emotional support, and physical development, with a main goal of learning math and English skills to promote future academic success (Burnham et al. 2012).

In 2011, the Huffington Post ranked Mississippi’s schools the worst nationally for student performance in math and science (“State Education Rankings”, 2011). This ranking left much room for improvement, and with Mississippi’s Head Start serving only 34% of age eligible children (Epstein & Barnett, 2012), there was believed to be a large, underserved population in the state. The key for researchers was to determine the cause of the low educational ranking in Mississippi and how to best educate those affected students. It was also important to determine if these low rankings could be attributed to the type of early education received by students, the students’ demographics, or
something more. Due to many of the previous large-scale studies being conducted in other states, this study examined Mississippi kindergarten and prekindergarten teachers’ perceptions as to where issues or barriers for academic success were located. This study suggested where necessary interventions might best have served the greatest number of children.

Research Questions

Before children began their elementary school career, they were exposed to various types and levels of childcare. Whether that childcare is center-based, home care, relative care, federal facilities like Head Start, or private preschool each type could potentially affect the children’s future academic successes. The purpose of this study was to address the following research questions with regard to kindergarten and prekindergarten teachers’ perceptions of academic success for children. Academic success will be assessed on the type of care the children received prior to beginning school, as well as other demographics, which could cause variations. The following research questions were addressed throughout this study.

1. What were the perceived effects of preschool/pre-primary attendance on academic success?
2. What was the relationship between demographic identifiers and preschool/pre-primary attendance on perceived academic success?

Hypotheses

H1: There is not a difference in preschool and kindergarten teachers’ preferences for federal programs such as Head Start, private preschool, center-based care, or parental care and perceived academic achievement.
H₂: There is not a difference in preschool and kindergarten teachers’ beliefs that all children are prepared for kindergarten academics.

H₃: There is not a difference in preschool and kindergarten teachers’ beliefs as to who is most at risk academically when transitioning to kindergarten.

H₄: There is not a difference in preschool and kindergarten teachers’ beliefs of the barriers faced by children and academic success.

H₅: There is not a difference in preschool and kindergarten teachers’ beliefs with regard to demographic identifiers and academic success.

H₆: There is not a difference between preschool and kindergarten teachers’ beliefs of what is needed for early academic success.

Delimitations

The study was conducted in early education centers south Mississippi and kindergarten programs including private, public, and federal institutions. Obtaining the study results was contingent on kindergarten and early education professionals returning the survey, which included questions of demographics and perceptions with regard to the early education and elementary educational systems in Mississippi.

Assumptions

It was assumed that all teachers, educators, and caregivers would respond quickly and honestly to the survey questions. The respondents would understand the questions being asked by the researcher. It was also assumed that the educators answered the questions without concern for private information being released and fear of reparation.
Definition of Terms

The following operational terminology was employed throughout this paper.

At-risk: Children who are endanger of failing, dropping out or having a difficult time in school with the following characteristics: family income being below the poverty level, being an English language learner, race/ethnicity and others (“Current Efforts”, 2012)


Average Yearly Progress (AYP): A school meeting all benchmarks laid out by the state’s department of education in a given year (Linn, 2003).

Cognitive development: Defined as how the brain processes information based on age and influence (Piaget, 1983).

Disadvantaged students: Children with one or more of the following characteristics: low socioeconomic status, single parent family, or non-White (Tucker-Drob, 2012)

Early intervention: The steps taken to correct inappropriate training or behavior before children start kindergarten (Mississippi Department of Education, 2012).


National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP): One of the primary agencies that collect nationally representative data across the United States (Mississippi Department of Education, 2012).
No Child Left Behind (NCLB): A policy enacted by President George W. Bush, in 2002, that mandated that all school districts must have all children performing on or above grade level by 2014 (Rouse et al, 2005)

Prekindergarten students: A child who is either three or four years of age (Mississippi Department of Education, 2012).

Primary students: A child who has begun school and is located in grades kindergarten, first, second, third, fourth, or fifth (Mississippi Department of Education, 2012).

Self-efficacy theory: Bandura’s (1994) theory of how a person’s belief in himself or herself affects the world around them, and directs their personal beliefs.

Socioeconomic status (SES): A ranking of family income (Mississippi Department of Education, 2012).

Title I funding: The federal money allotted for the education and support of children who have been deemed at-risk for failure (“Federal Efforts”, 2012).

Justification of the Study

National surveys on such websites as Education Week and the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD) indicated many children were unprepared for the educational tasks that were laid before them when they began kindergarten. In many cases, these surveys included students of low socioeconomic status, those students considered at-risk or who many times are labeled as disadvantaged (Magnuson & Waldfogel, 2005). This coupled with the release of the Common Core standards (CCS) in 2010 (Common Core, 2012) increasing the classroom requirements, has been seen as a challenge. “Mississippi has the highest poverty and the lowest income” (p. 1), according to U.S. Census Bureau statistics, which were released
September of 2012 (Luhby, 2012). More than 22.6% of Mississippians could have been classified as living in poverty (Luhby, 2012); which could have potentially affected school readiness (Magnuson & Waldfogel, 2005). According to Magnuson and Waldfogel (2005), these poverty stricken “children attain less education and are more likely to be unemployed in adulthood” (p. 6). To combat the lack of education and later unemployment, Magnuson and Waldfogel (2005) suggested that it would be more cost effective to invest in early childhood education, instead of being reactive and providing such interventions as career training, remediation, tutoring, and other such programs.

With 2012 having been a presidential election year, candidates weighed in on these early educational agendas.

In May 2012, the Republican presidential nominee, Mitt Romney, released a press release where he offered his own educational vision, which said that he wanted an educational system where “every student [has] the opportunity to succeed” (Mitt Romney Press, 2012, NP). Then, in September 2012 at the Democratic National Convention, President Obama asked those in attendance for assistance in education through funding and policy when he said he wanted to “improve early childhood education” (Strauss, 2012, NP). The importance of preschool was not a new concept, but was another element of being proactive for academic success and also served a preemptive strike against long-term negative behaviors such as dropout, delinquency, or grade repetition (Barnett, Carolan, Fitzgerald & Squires, 2011; “Federal efforts,” 2012).

With 1.3 million preschool-age children in the United States having been served by public prekindergarten (Barnett et al., 2011), and an estimated 200,000 children who needed care in Mississippi (“Current efforts,” 2012), one might question why Mississippi does not have an established program in place. Furthermore, one may have wondered
about the lack of a universal early education program in light of Mississippi’s ability to have used Title I funding and the fact any state could have applied for Race to the Top funding. However, in the Mississippi Department of Education’s (MDE) 2013 budget request, MDE set forth three major goals, with the first two important to this study: “Goal 1: To mobilize resources and supports to help ensure that all students exit third grade reading on grade level by 2020”, “Goal 2: to reduce the dropout rate to 13% by 2013,” and “Goal 3: to reach the national average on national assessments by 2013” (Burnham, 2012, p. 4). Burnham and MDE hoped to implement strategies such as reformation of early education, ensuring higher quality teachers and administrators, and the preparation of the workforce through education for the workforce now and into the next century.

With detailed listing of MDE 2012 priorities, MDE’s 2013 budget request went on to read “the Mississippi Board of Education [MBE] is committed to ongoing collaboration with the appropriate stakeholders on the development and implementation of a coordinated initiative for early childhood education” (Burnham, 2012, p. 8).

In September 2012, interim Mississippi state superintendent of education Dr. Lynn House, explained how Mississippi needed to catch up with educational funding, even suggesting an eventual public prekindergarten program for Mississippi, but starting with a fully-funded pilot study. McDaniel (2013) suggested Lieutenant Governor Tate Reeves opposed the funding of a pilot program because he felt there should have been adjustments to the K-12 system that is already in place since Mississippi was not preforming well and has testing scores below most states.

This study provided evidence as to the importance of prekindergarten education on future educational success. However, since Mississippi did not have a public prekindergarten system in place, this study provided support of public prekindergarten
education through the literature, and the study examined perceptions of whether the childcare and private prekindergarten facilities or programs in place were providing the necessary educational resources the children needed for long-term academic success.

This study was important for policymakers, as mentioned above, because of the possibility of a public prekindergarten pilot program in Mississippi. This study also added to the research base for policymakers, educators and administrators, by giving them adequate knowledge of the early childhood care perceptions, identification of those perceived as needing the most assistance, and suggestions of ways to work with those students who were perceived as most challenged.

Summary

With the implementation of NCLB in 2002, states were required to have all students performing at or above their age-appropriate grade level by the 2013-2014 academic year. Thus, additional pressure was placed throughout the educational system to increase student achievement (Stipek, 2006). Barnett and Hustedt (2003) reported 75% of people in the United States were involved with a preschool in some fashion, which made preschool the most probable means for early intervention and potentially closing an ever-widening educational gap between student groups (Anderson et al., 2003). Even Senator Zell Miller, the former governor of Georgia, had called preschool “the most important grade” (Barnett & Hustedt, 2003, p. 3).

The importance of preschool was not a new concept, but was seen as an important element in closing educational gaps and preventing negative behaviors, such as dropout rates, delinquency, and crime. Based on a preliminary review of the literature and funding in the past decade, there has been a decline in overall funding however,
enrollment in early childhood programs has continued to increase (Barnett et al., 2011); therefore, a middle ground had to be found.

Many felt the influence of public education on early childhood education could have been highly beneficial for the students with regard to cognitive development, though there will never be a cure for all educational issues (Anderson et al., 2003). Researchers Holland and Soifer (2008) acknowledged a continued gap in educational availability to the disadvantaged middle class because those below poverty level have had access to federal programs and those largely above the middle could afford private sector programs.

Programs did persist for all socioeconomic status groups, but the quality and standards remained in question because of the lack of consistency and regulation of those programs. According to Magnuson and Waldfogel (2005) the addition of a public preschool to a school system allowed schools the ability to request Title I funding, disability funding, and other funding resources to meet the needs of the students and families. “Recognizing the importance of preparing children to enter school with the language, cognitive, and early reading skills that will help them meet challenging state academic achievement standards in elementary school and beyond” (Serving Preschool Children Under Title I, 2004, p. i) continued to be a goal not only for the nation as a whole, but individual states as well.

Lastly, in June 2010, the final draft of the Common Core Standards (CCS) was released to the public. The CCS aimed to align the public school curriculum with college and workforce development. States either had to adopt these standards or be at risk of being denied federal funding (Common Core, 2012). Many states, such as Mississippi, adopted and aligned these standards for K-12 schools, as well as preschool (Mississippi
Department of Education, 2012). The key was to make sure all children were ready to learn on their correct grade level, and what could have been the means of reaching that goal.
CHAPTER II
LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This chapter provided information regarding literature, research, and policies related to preschool attendance and children’s academic success. The research investigated various demographics that historically had an effect on children’s future achievement. The literature walked the reader through overviews of theorists who assisted in shaping early education and psychology specifically with regard to young children, such as Jean Piaget, Lev Vygotsky, and Albert Bandura. The literature then toured the reader through landmark early education projects such as Head Start, the High/Scope Perry Preschool Project, the Carolina Abecedarian Project, and the Child-Parent Center Preschool Program. The chapter also included a discussion of smaller studies that supported the results of the above mentioned landmark projects, contradicted those studies’ general findings, or have added additional layers of knowledge of early childhood development. Lastly, the researcher investigated the latest directions of early education and specific information with regard to Mississippi because Mississippi did not have a public prekindergarten program.

Theoretical Foundations

British statesman John Lubbock (1893) was quoted as saying “The important thing is not so much that every child should be taught, as that every child should be given the wish to learn” (p. 172). Knowledge is something that can never be taken from a child, and as educators, we must create opportunities for growth and learning.

Many theorists explained how knowledge is gained in stages and through various processes. Jean Piaget believed in four main sequential developmental stages for children
that each child, through their own experiences must complete on their own.

Contradicting Piaget, Lev Vygotsky’s social learning theory and zone of proximal development, which was defined in great detail in this chapter, explained how we as social creatures are able to learn from every aspect in life if given the opportunity, while Albert Bandura’s social cognitive theory opens our eyes to how we process emotions and learning.

As explained in Piaget and Inhelder’s 1969 book, *The Psychology of the Child*, Piaget was concerned with the way testing was deemed the most accurate way to measure a child’s intelligence. Piaget explored variables he hoped could explain children and testing, and what he believed to be major influential factors in this process. From his research, Piaget (1983) developed four stages of cognitive development: sensorimotor (birth to 18 months), preoperational (18 months to 6 years), concrete operational (6 to 12 years) and formal operational (12 years and up). The first, sensorimotor, explained how children use their senses to explain the world and if it is not in direct relation to their five senses, then it does not exist or matter to them. Most important to this study was the second phase, preoperational, which explained how children deal with one item at a time as a means to base their ideas and concepts of the world. It was believed that without proper guidance and directions some of these ideas and concepts will be incorrectly interpreted and will affect progression through the third and fourth stages. The third stage was called concrete operational. It was a very literal stage and is based on a child’s exposures through their current age. Children are unable to think abstractly. The fourth stage, called formal operational, usually begins around the age of 12 is when a child begins to apply learned concepts to have abstract thoughts and applications (Mooney, 2000).
However, Mooney’s (2000) book stated Piaget believed teachers should be more of a facilitator of learning because a child must be intrigued to learn through their surroundings and hands-on activities, but as stated in Ginsburg and Opper’s (1988) book, these activities could not be too difficult or too simple or the student would shut down and there would be no learning. Hergenhahn and Olson (2005) stated Piaget thought the best means of educating a child and preparing that child for the future was through developmental interactions. These developmental interactions first began with a child’s parents or guardians who in turn provided the child’s first schemas, or ideas, of the world. However, “Piaget believed that maturation provided only the framework, both physical and social experiences are indispensable for mental development” (Hergenhahn & Olson, 2005, p. 303).

Children take the schemas they have developed at an earlier time and use them to make assumptions of the world. Schemas occur when people come in contact with anything different or new. Hergenhahn and Olson (2005) explained how the interaction provided new information, which is either assimilated, or added, to the person’s basis for future acquisitions. If data did not agree with prior beliefs, the child would need to make accommodations, or adjustments, to their prior beliefs or original understandings (Hergenhahn & Olson, 2005). Assimilation or accommodation would allow one to reach what Piaget defined as “equilibration” (Hergenhahn & Olson, 2005, p. 298), or a satisfied mental state of understanding. If a child was not able to make these transitions, then they could lack the foundations for future learning. Authors Ginsburg and Opper (1998) explained the process of reaching equilibration as the difference between knowing and understanding a concept, which could be associated with future success in testing or in the classroom.
Piaget (1983) supported the idea that each child could progress through the various stages earlier or later than others, which would promote the idea of individualized learning in a child or future differentiated instruction. However, Hergenhahn, and Olson (2005) explained how they believe Piaget actually contradicted his own ideas when they found a publication where Piaget said he believed many “children of same age and from the same culture tend to have similar cognitive structures” (Hergenhahn & Olson, 2005, p. 306), and being so, could be educated in similar means, which could allow one to assume whole class instruction or classifying children by age and cultural background.

Combining Piaget’s thought processes of individualized learning experiences and the idea that with guided education a teacher could assist in making proper connections, it would make it possible for children to gain better understandings of course material both in the present and future (Ginsburg & Opper, 1998).

Like Piaget, Vygotsky believed children’s knowledge came from life experiences. However, unlike Piaget, Vygotsky did not believe the child’s knowledge gain was dependent on the individual’s experiences alone. Mooney (2000) explained that Vygotsky, more so, believed in the affects others such as teachers and peers could have in influencing a child’s views and knowledge. This would later be termed scaffolding, or assisting, one in getting to the next step through building off another’s experience either directly or vicariously (Mooney, 2000).

Vygotsky (1978) believed when a child is born, scaffolded learning begins; that is, children do not wait for school bells to ring to begin processing information or developing concepts, but instead begin learning at birth. A child’s first thoughts and concepts are usually gained from parents and caregivers through role modeling. In a study of Vygotskian perspectives, Dixon and Verenikina (2007) defined this role modeling as the
“zone of proximal development” (p. 1), which could be defined as the interaction between a veteran and a novice. The veteran or established party to any situation communicated proper cultural behaviors and intricacies to the novice or newcomer to the situation, much like a child watching their peers in a classroom. The authors explained as social creatures, people gain our cues, symbols, and behavior patterns from those around them.

According to Vygotsky (1978), those who did not gain proper use of socially acceptable cues, symbols, behaviors, and words at an appropriate time could potentially exhibit behaviors of developmental delay, problems with comprehension, and difficulty with problem solving. Mooney (2000) described how Vygotsky’s idea of an interactive learning environment where children are allowed to question, discover, build from others, and solve together by building on shared experience, would assist in the development of important language skills from peers and leaders. Chaiklin (2003) believed Vygotsky’s theories were developed more as a means of intervention. As an educator understands how children develop through this interaction then the educators know better how to work with the child (Chaiklin, 2003). Chaiklin explained the importance of understanding, so as a teacher one could meet the child’s individual needs and grouping, but also provide a means to assist children in reaching the next platform of educational development. With regard to Vygotsky’s theories, an educator would be led to believe children build a cognitive confidence very early. This confidence could be built upon or diminished throughout children’s educational career.

Another key factor researched in Vygotsky’s 1978 book is making sure lessons, social cues, and behaviors were developmentally appropriate for the child’s actual age and mental age, and potential developmental level. In preschool, knowing a child’s developmental stages could allow a researcher to ascertain a child’s future potential for
learning with regard to "performing under guidance, in groups, and in collaboration with one another, but which they have not mastered independently" (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 87). Imitation may be considered the highest form of flattery, but during the early years, the preschool child’s ability to mimic advanced developmental tasks of others makes them especially vulnerable to their surroundings, which could vary between harmful or positive influences (Vygotsky, 1978). Thus, one must be cautious with the exposures offered.

Lastly, Cahan and Cohen (1989) stated it is important to consider that each child develops at their own developmental pace and not necessarily at a chronological pace. In Chaiklin’s (2003) research, he explained, based on Vygotsky’s theory, overall intelligence was not as important as a child’s ability to process, mimic, or imitate information as described by the zone of proximal development. However, Chaiklin (2003) explained that a child’s individual zones could grow based on collaborative efforts. With that thought, and taking developmental stages into consideration, and the fact all children in the United States are mandated by a certain age to attend school, finding a means for school preparation is critical if everyone of a specific age was required to perform on the same educational level.

Mahn (2003) analyzed Vygotsky’s 1998 paper with regard to what happens during what Mahn calls critical periods, such as during the initial formation of words, during the beginning of school, during adolescence, and others. Vygotsky believed that some of the critical periods were natural and others were propagated by society, such as determining when a girl becomes a woman. Vygotsky offered three concessions to his theory explaining that first, there was no set timeframe, second, with time overall development slows, and third, the loss of what once was, or the replacement of one idea for another. For this study, the most important idea of Vygotsky was the influence of social relations
and school systems on the subject areas of math and reading. Vygotsky explained how math and reading could be hindered by the influence of critical periods such as when children start school due to adjustment periods. Mahn (2003) clarified by saying that this particular critical period most often occurs around the age of three when children are becoming more independent and self-centered. Furthermore, this was when they must enter school and begin learning to read and make meaning from various objects and concepts. However, once children have acquired the necessary skills for processing new information, they were much better able to comprehend the lessons taught (Mahn, 2003).

“The belief that humans learn by observing other humans goes back at least to such early Greeks as Plato and Aristotle” (Hergenhahn & Olson, 2005, p. 337). Researcher, Albert Bandura was considered the leader in the field of early childhood education during his time due to his breakthrough studies in observational learning (Hergenhahn & Olson, 2005), which showed some of the processes humans go through in order to learn. In their 2005 article, Hergenhahn and Olson discussed how prior research studies like those done by Thorndike and Watson in early 1900s did not consider the entire picture when investigating various behaviors, possibly because they only allowed the mentee to view and not to participate with the mentor on the assigned task. Years later as discussed by Hergenhahn and Olson (2005), Miller and Dollard’s 1941 book study added to Thorndike and Hergenhahn’s study by explaining how as long as a behavior is positively extrinsically or intrinsically reinforced, the behavior would be imitated whether it is an acceptable behavior or not. Hergenhahn and Olson (2005) continued by stating how imitation and observational learning are related, but are very different topics. Simply put, the authors said that with regard to Bandura’s theories, if one has no reason to learn something, they would not retain the information being presented.
Hergenhahn and Olson (2005) discussed the four main processes developed by Bandura. These included: mastery, vicarious, social persuasion and somatic and emotional state. These four processes encompassed what has now been termed self-efficacy.

Bandura’s (1994) concept of self-efficacy suggested that if one felt confident to learn and felt confident in their abilities, then they were able to set and achieve expansive goals. As noted previously, Bandura’s concept of self-efficacy came from four main sources. These are mastery experiences, where a person completes the task; vicarious experiences, where a person has role models; social persuasion, which is positive verbal dialogue with regard to a situation; and somatic and emotional states with regard to various arousals. This developmental process begins at birth when one has no self-efficacy. After birth, it is up to the guardians to expose to the child next stages and model how to respond to each stimulus.

Bandura (1994) explained there were four learning processes that operate simultaneously with one’s efficacy. According to Hergenhahn and Olson (2005), one must observe something for some reason, which is the Attentional process; then the information gained must be stored in some way, which is the Retentional process. Next, one must practice, which is called the Behavioral Production process. Finally, there was the need to actually use something, or the Motivational process. This four-step learning process was something that could occur in every aspect of life for both children and adults in a variety of situations. Each piece would influence the other. Parents and guardians would have the first opportunity to employ or influence a child’s Behavioral Production processes.

For this reason, parental training at the early stages of development could profoundly affect the child throughout life. Bandura (1994) explained that when a child
with low-efficacy or low self-confidence is faced with an adverse situation without the proper background knowledge and experiences, he or she tends to take a negative disposition or behavior response. On the other hand, a child with a strong self-efficacy, or strong self-confidence, could exhibit a more positive response to the adverse stimuli (Bandura, 1994). When parental influence could be lacking, the ability to promote a strong efficacy, the next main influences in a child’s life, are peers and educators.

For this reason, preschool could be an important part of developing children’s cognitive ability because of the availability of interventions, the children’s exposure to other children, and the teacher's direction. All three theorists would have agreed that important to this process of learning is peer pressure. Bandura (1994) identified peer pressure as one of the best tools for developing self-efficacy on all levels, and he believed that without experiencing peer pressure in a manner that promotes growth, a child’s intellectual self-efficacy would be hindered potentially through adulthood. Hergenhahn and Olson (2005) labeled this process Reciprocal Determinism, which is where the environment affected the behavior, and the behavior affected the person, and the person is affected by all in a continuous cycle.

The previously mentioned theorists and their studies offered support for the need to institute preschool and early childhood programs. These programs should be developmentally appropriate, along with the overall need for parental support or education in order to promote a successful academic future. One widely known program, which was designed to promote the success of disadvantaged children, is Head Start.

**Head Start**

Head Start began in 1965 as a federally mandated intervention for children and families living in poverty (Resnick, 2010). Head Start not only provided early education,
but other services such as classes for English language learners, some medical treatments and immunizations, and meals. The effectiveness of the Head Start program was questioned (Gormley, Phillips, Adelstein, & Shaw, 2010; Resnick, 2010). Resnick (2010) described how in 1998, before the funding for Head Start could be renewed, an accountability program, or a way in which to measure the success or failure of the program, had to be put into place. Between 2002 and 2006, data was collected and the results from this study were released in 2010. Through individual student testing and surveying of parents, teachers, and administrators, conclusions were drawn by comparing scores of similar programs with similar demographics. Head Start was shown to be most effective in pre-writing and pre-reading, as well as showing slightly higher scores in math and vocabulary. Though results were positive, the overall scores were still below national norms. According to Joo (2010) and Resnick (2010), parents' educational background, along with socioeconomic status were the biggest predictors of academic success.

In a 2010 study titled *Long-term effects of Head Start on academic and school outcomes of children in persistent poverty: Girls vs. boys*, researcher Myungkook Joo (2010) used descriptive analyses and ordinary least squares (OLS) regression to determine if there were any differences in the success rate of children who had attended Head Start, and who had not attended preschool or private preschool. Joo specifically analyzed children and family's demographics, along with their environment both in and out of school through the reexamination of participants from a study conducted in 1997 with data collected from the Panel Study of Income Dynamics (PSID) at the University of Michigan. Results from the study concluded that females who attended Head Start had more positive outcomes than males in academic testing, and White children who had attended Head Start were better-behaved through high school, resulting in fewer
disciplinary actions (Joo, 2010). Mother’s marital status and educational level at the child’s birth were also determined to be significant factors in the child’s overall academic success (Joo, 2010; Resnick, 2010). Similar results were also found in Magnuson et al.’s, (2004) study, along with an international study from Berlinski, Galini, and Manacorda in 2008. Finally, Joo’s (2010) study theorized that children with no preschool experience scored lower on the tested material than those who attended Head Start or private childcare.

An earlier study by Kreisman in (2003) showed similar results when using the general growth mixture modeling (GGMM). Using data from the United States Department of Education, Kreisman (2003) was able to examine how much, if any, affect Head Start had with regard to academic outcomes for children at the poverty level compared to children who received no preschool education. It was concluded that there was a gender and socioeconomic difference for children who attended Head Start and those who did not attend (Kreisman, 2003). Kreisman explained that there were also significant differences in a child’s academic scores in reading and math with regard to their preschool attendance, specifically future academic scores increased with early education attainment (Kreisman, 2003). Kreisman (2003) believed Head Start could assist in closing the academic achievement gap between the various socioeconomic labels because of the increased academic scores of those who did attend Head Start. Interestingly, females received the higher scores in both areas, but males, in general, significantly closed the academic gap in math by third grade (Kreisman, 2003; Loeb, Bridges, Bassok, Fuller, & Runberger, 2007). Kreisman’s (2003) study suggested the benefits of early education as a means to equalize the achievement differences between males and females, along with the addition of higher educated teachers. In what Head
Start policymakers believed to be a proactive measure to combat the educational gap between the various socioeconomic levels, Head Start administrators was increased the educational requirement for its teachers. Head Start mandated that at least half of their teachers possess a bachelor's degree in early childhood education or a closely related field by the 2014 school year (Barnett & Frede, 2010; Resnick, 2010).

Gormley and colleagues', (2010) article compared the curriculum and the academic outcomes of Head Start to their state-funded public prekindergarten to see which one was more advantageous for the children who attended (Gormley et al., 2010). Children were tested before school began and parents were given a survey to complete. This process was repeated at the end of the year. Through ordinary least squares (OLS) Regression analysis, the study concluded that the public prekindergarten of Tulsa, Oklahoma, was the most beneficial for students in the short and long-term, except in mathematics, where the Head Start and prekindergarten programs were equal (Gormley et al., 2010). Once again, like Joo (2010) and Resnick (2010), Gormley et al. (2010) attributed this success to the more academic focus public prekindergarten stereotypically has versus that of Head Start. Gromley et al. (2010) believed this was because Head Start completed a more holistic, or whole-child approach, and to the potential adjustment period a child must experience going from one curriculum structure to the next can cause education and emotional setbacks.

Landmark Studies

In addition to the studies conducted with Head Start, there were three landmark studies which examined the effects of public preschool education on future academic success: the High/Scope Perry Preschool Project, the Child-Parent Center Preschool Program, and the Carolina Abecedarian Project (Barnett, 2008; Campbell & Ramey,
Schweinhart's (2010) article described how the High/Scope Perry Preschool project used an experimental design to study the effects of preschool attendance. The study focused on African American children living in poverty in Michigan through the age of 40 with a very low attrition rate, with half of the children's parents lacking a high school diploma. Between 1962 and 1967, 123 participants were identified as being at-risk for school failure based on academic performance, socioeconomic status, and community referrals. All participants were randomly assigned to a group with some receiving no preschool program. The research followed the beliefs of Piaget, who, as I have mentioned earlier, said children were "intentional learners, who learn best from activities that they themselves plan, carry out, and review afterward" (Schweinhart, 2010, p. 160), and focused on working with the whole child (Barnett, 2008).

Results from the study allowed researchers to conclude that the group who received the interventions of preschool, along with weekly home visits and low primary and secondary classroom ratios, tested higher in academics through the age of 27 (Schweinhart, 2010). According to Schweinhart (2010), 20% more of the program group graduated from high school, and had higher annual earnings through the age of 40. Moreover, their overall lifetime delinquent behavior was lower based on public records. Additionally, participants' literacy scores were higher throughout their educational career. These findings are also highlighted in the work of Temple and Reynolds (2007), who added to these results by saying there were additional benefits, which were not measurable through statistical calculations, such as social development both with peers and adults. Furthermore, participants who received the preschool interventions were
more likely to become homeowners by the age of 40 (Schweinhart, 2010). To put the benefits into a different perspective, based on the value of a dollar in 2000, Schweinhart (2010) reported a cost/benefit return of $16.14 per dollar spent on providing preschool education. Barnett (2008) said this 16 to 1 cost/benefit ratio was the same for the 2002 dollar.

Research on the benefit of public preschool education was the highlight of the Carolina Abecedarian Project. The Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities Branch of the National Institutes of Health initially sponsored research on curbing what they called “developmental retardation” (Campbell & Ramey, 2010, p. 76). The objective of the project was to attempt to intervene and offer training in areas that could be considered risk factors, such as teen motherhood, low socioeconomic levels, and single parenthood (Temple & Reynolds, 2007). The researchers of the Carolina Abecedarian Project believed a child’s environment could deprive them of the proper stimulation necessary for success (Campbell & Ramey, 2010), which followed the beliefs of Bandura (1994) who touted how one learns best from others. For research purposes, between 1972 and 1977, four cohorts of 28 at-risk children were randomly assigned to an experimental program group or a non-treatment daycare group, which would be tested and followed throughout the future, as funding allowed. The demographics of the participating families in all groups mainly included single, African American females who were classified as being in the lower socioeconomic category (Campbell & Ramey, 2010). Selected children could attend the program from six weeks of age until beginning kindergarten (Barnett, 2008).

The treatment group not only received a designated educational program, but family training and family home visits as well. Campbell and Ramey (2010) believed
early childhood development could counteract potentially negative stimuli, such as low socioeconomic level and low maternal education. These authors found that early childhood education was shown to increase IQ by at least 20 points for each participant in the Carolina Abecedarian Project. Using multivariate statistical analysis, Campbell and Ramey (2010) explained how even at the early ages of 12 and 15, the treatment group was advantageous. The results allowed Campbell and Ramey (2010) to conclude that participants' language and math scores were significantly higher and participants experienced less grade retention in middle and high school than the control group. The participant group was tracked through adulthood, and it was discovered that participants who received the early childhood intervention were more likely to obtain higher education, were older when they had their first child, and had less delinquent behaviors per court records than the non-treatment group (Campbell & Ramey, 2010). The above reported results allowed authors, Barnett and Masse (2007) to draw the conclusion of a 2.5:1 ratio of savings per dollar spent with regard to the implementation of a preschool education program.

One of the oldest state run preschool programs in the United States was located in Chicago. Research data collected from this program was invaluable to early education research. The Chicago Child-Parent Center Preschool Program (CPC) allowed for a distinct longitudinal study of children who attended during various years. It examined a study of participants who were born between the years of 1979 and 1980 (Reynolds et al., 2010).

After Head Start, the CPC, which began in 1967, is the second oldest federally funded preschool program in the United States (Reynolds et al., 2010). Reynolds et al. (2010) explained how the CPC was and continued to be funded through Title I funding,
which was provided per the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965. Magnuson et al. (2004) discussed how being funded through Title I afforded CPC and any school system or educational entity to have the ability offer additional resources to at-risk or disadvantaged students. For example, Title I funds could help fund certification for teachers, a parent resource teacher, a school representative, a community representative, and other such support staff (Magnuson et al., 2004; Reynolds et al., 2010). With Title I funding a school may have been required to offer a summer program and the Act required schools to continue all necessary interventions throughout the primary grades (Reynolds et al., 2010).

Using a confirmatory program evaluation method, or comparative study for children in similar situations (Barnett, 2008), researchers for the CPC program reported that participants at age 24 had more positive outcomes than those who did not participate in the program. Participants, at the age of 24, were more likely to have finished high school, to have attended a university, and to have had a semi-skilled or higher career (Reynolds et al., 2010). The participants also reported fewer charges of crime and mental health issues (Reynolds et al., 2010, p. 175). Showing statewide benefits, Reynolds et al. (2010) and Temple and Reynolds (2007) explained how the cost-benefit for the CPC program averages a benefit of $10.15 per dollar spent. Temple and Reynolds (2007) offered one explanation of the higher cost-benefit amount, which they attributed to the school’s use of higher classroom ratios, thus a more inexpensive program.

In 2008, Steve Barnett, the director for the National Institute for Early Education Research, noted the scholarship mentioned above as key studies in his article, *Why governments should invest in early education*. In this article, Barnett (2008) evaluated the three landmark programs, their benefits, and why such programs were cost effective for
implementation. Barnett (2008) focused on the long-term increase in IQ that was boasted in the results of the Carolina Abecedarian Program (ABC). Barnett also discussed the short-term IQ gains of the ABC program and the High/Scope Perry Preschool program. Additionally, Barnett explained the savings provided less crime as a result of participation in the CPC and the High/Scope Perry Preschool Programs.

Barnett quoted English economist Alfred Marshall from his 1890 article, *Principles of economics*, stating that teachers must teach more than academics. Teachers must also teach character. Marshall believed that with proper and early education, when children became adults, the students could raise smarter children of their own, no matter the disadvantage experienced. Another key point Marshal made was how high-quality interventions were needed as early as possible for the most positive, long-term gains (Barnett, 2008). Moreover, authors Temple and Reynolds (2007) said preschool is much more cost effective than the reactive interventions that traditionally occur, such as remediation, class ration reductions, and alternative programs.

**Early Childhood Longitudinal Studies**

The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) (2012) hoped to create an all-encompassing database pertaining to early childhood development. The database would focus on understanding development processes and to offer statistical information for informing and making educational policy. Specifically, the National Center for Education Statistics (2012) provided information on two concluded studies and one in progress under their Early Childhood Longitudinal Program (ECLS) (National Center for Education Statistics, 2012). As of 2013, the overall study comprised three cohorts. The first cohort, titled Early Childhood Longitudinal Study-Birth cohort (ECLS-B), followed children from birth through kindergarten, beginning with children born in 2001. The
second, titled Early Childhood Longitudinal Study-Kindergarten cohort (ECLS-K), worked with students who were enrolled in kindergarten beginning in 1998 and followed them through the eighth grade. The final study followed children from kindergarten through the fifth grade, beginning with the 2010 school year (NCES, 2012). Throughout all the studies, educational researchers have had access to the resulting data in order to assist conducting their own in-depth studies.

Magnuson et al., (2004) conducted one such analysis of the data from the ECLS-K group, focused on the potential effects of various demographic variables, along with preschool attendance and type, such as Head Start, private, public, or personal care on student achievement in math and reading. Using OLS regressions, Magnuson et al. (2004) concluded that any center-based educational program was better than no educational program for early learning. However, children who attended a public prekindergarten scored higher on math and reading assessments, with a .20 increase for center-based care to .30 increase for public prekindergarten, while Head Start participants actually showed negative scoring results (Magnuson et al., 2004). These statistically significant results continued to be visible with a documented 50% decrease by the spring semester of first grade. The greatest positive affects with regard to preschool attendance was for disadvantaged children whose mothers had the lowest levels of education, who lived in single parent homes, who were English language learners, or who were considered to be living in poverty, according to Magnuson et al. (2004) these findings were also supported in the work of Berlinski et al., (2008), Joo (2010), and Resnick (2010).

The study by Magnuson et al. (2004) offered support for prior claims by Barnett (2008), Reynolds et al. (2010), and Temple and Reynolds (2007), who boasted impressive
cost-benefit ratios. Using a study from 2003 by Krueger, authors Magnuson et al. (2004) stated that without factoring in delinquency, retention, or interventions, there was a 1:1 ratio in students' lifetime earnings for every dollar spent in preschool education. They discussed the financial feasibility of having public prekindergarten through the utilization of Title I funding and the fact thirty-nine states already had public preschool programs in place. The benefits of early education, in general, were well documented (Magnuson et al., 2004).

In another similar study using the ECLS-K data, Hair, Halle, Terry-Humen, Lavelle, and Calkins (2006) attributed academic increases to what they deem an ideal developmental profile for children, which included a child having two parents who are preferably married, the family being Caucasian, the parents being educated, and the family being classified in the upper socioeconomic status index. They based their profile descriptors on the National Education Goals Panel (NEGP). The NEGP was developed in 1990 to formulate consistent national goals by the year 2000 in hopes of ensuring all children started kindergarten ready to learn (Hair et al., 2006). The panel consisted of a bipartisan representative group of policymakers such as governors, congress members, state representatives, and presidential appointees (National Education Goals Panel, 2012). With this, the panel offered three objectives for reform on the preschool level.

The first objective was to increase child and family nutrition. The second objective was to hold parents accountable for a child's education, by insisting the children learned at home and as well as school. With the third objective, the NEGP wanted to insure that "all children will have access to high quality and developmentally appropriate preschool programs that help prepare children for school" (National Education Goals Panel, 2012, p. 1).
Researchers took the large components of the NEGP goals and used two dichotomous coding schemes to create indices (Hair et al., 2006). Hair et al. (2006) then used a cluster analysis look for positive and negative profiles of students. In phase two of this, they used bivariate analyses with chi-square, and then used multivariate logistic regression analyses to examine the demographics that could potentially predict the negative and positive profiles (Hair et al., 2006). Hair et al.'s (2006) research resulted in an ideal student profile that included White, female students with two older, educated parents who spoke English as a first language, with small household demographic size, which was similar to the findings of Radasill, Gallagher, and White's (2010) study. Those students deemed at-risk for a negative academic profile were those with the lowest socioeconomic descriptors, as mentioned in the landmark studies CPC, High/Scope Perry Preschool, and Carolina Abecedarian Preschool projects by Barnett (2008), Campbell and Ramey (2010), and Schweinhart (2010), respectively.

In the end Hair et al. (2006) concluded that 35%-45% of kindergarten-age children, in general, were not fully prepared for academic success in the primary grades. Therefore, early childhood education was a must in improving school readiness. These authors did not give specific instructions, nor did they follow students past the first grade, where one could have examined the idea of various combinations of factors in a child’s profile and the longevity of the consequences of risk factor effects, leaving additional questions.

Furthermore, Magnuson, Ruhm and Waldfogel’s (2007a) study also used the ECLS-K data expounded on the research of Hair et al., (2006) with specific increases of .18 and .17 for math and reading, respectively, scores for children who attended a school-based prekindergarten, and an overall increase of .10 to .12 math and literacy scores for
any kind of center-based care. However, Magnuson, Ruhm, and Waldfogel (2007b) stated that though the grades increased, behavioral incidents also increased from .07 to .11. Conversely, the researchers explained that the students in public prekindergarten programs reported positive academic increases and had no reported behavioral issues. On the other hand, their research also included a 70% to 80% fade-out of the potential increase in academic achievement by the spring of first grade, but not in the pronounced behavioral issues. Magnuson and colleague’s (2007b) study could have led one to believe preschoools should be placed in public systems or be provided strictly for the disadvantaged who showed a .24 gain in math and reading with behavioral issues remaining constant, such as location.

In a subsequent study by Magnuson et al. (2007a) with the same ECLS-K data, the authors explained how they discovered what they called a “sleeper” effect (p. 33) in preschool attendance and academic achievement. They suggested that the quality of elementary and kindergarten education could have been the major attributing factor to an academic gap between various demographic groups. The authors stood by their prior results that stated that children who attended a center-based program have higher entrance scores, but in addition to this finding, they stated those who attended preschool also have higher standardized scores, specifically in the third grade, than those who did not attend a public preschool (Magnuson et al., 2007a). Through regression analysis of test scores and other demographic information through the spring of third grade, Magnuson et al. (2007a) noted that public preschool education showed the most significant gains. Parental care also showed gains, but less than public preschool. Then, ranked 50% below the gains in parental care is that of center-based care, but as the research stated, interventions such as smaller classroom ratios and an intense reading program could combat the parental care
deficiency, but not necessarily the center-based care. Once again, research suggested a public prekindergarten program in order to reduce the academic achievement gap (Magnuson et al., 2007a).

Building on Magnuson and colleague’s (2007a) study, Loeb et al. (2007) again used OLS and instrumental variable estimates to examine the effects of the specific types of childcare arrangements, the time, both hours and ages of attendance spent in child care, and future academic success. The results were consistent with previously mentioned studies which said the results from Head Start attendance are mixed, but, agreeably, on the lower end (Loeb et al., 2007). Different from Magnuson et al. (2007a), Loeb et al. (2007) listed parental care as the second best practice, as long as the children attended kindergarten. Center-based care programs needed set guidelines and also, the costs of full-time daycare could have been very high (Loeb et al., 2007). “The greatest academic benefit is found for those children who start preschool at ages 2-3 rather than at younger or older ages; negative behavioral effects are greater the younger the start age” (Loeb et al., 2007, p. 52).

One could have surmised that the more hours and the earlier age children attended center-based care did lead to a potential increase academically, such as the reported .11 gain in reading and .12 gain in math, but as concluded in this study, more than 30 hours per week of attendance could lead to more negative behaviors (Loeb et al., 2007, p. 52). Consequently, these effects may not have been generalizable due to the various rates of access among the socioeconomic classes (Loeb et al., 2007). For example, those rated in the lower socioeconomic area have had access to Head Start and those considered affluent were more able to afford center-based care, but those in the middle may or may not have been able to afford area preschool programs, which was mentioned by Joo (2010) and
Resnick (2010). Loeb et al. (2007) published a description of what they believed to be an ideal student for academia. Like previously mentioned studies, this student would have been White, from a two parent household and be classified in the upper socioeconomic standings of society.

Supporting these prior studies was research from Tucker-Drob (2012), who explained how those who they believe were in most need of preschool could not always afford to attend. These were children who were displaying disadvantaged risk factors such as coming from low socioeconomic households, coming from single families, and coming from non-White households (Tucker-Drob, 2012). Using “full-information-maximum likelihood estimation in Mplus statistical software to fit structural equation models” (p. 3) Tucker-Drob (2012) was able to analyze ECLS-B data for 600 sets of twins at ages 2, 4, and 5 for math and reading skills. The author discovered a correlation of family dynamics and academic outcomes. Important for the current study, Tucker-Drob (2012) found no single risk factor was more significant than the other. Finally, he found a positive 1.5 standard deviation in math and reading between participants and nonparticipants. The results of the study could allow one to conclude the importance of prekindergarten interventions (Tucker-Drob, 2012).

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The importance of prekindergarten and the advantages and interventions it allowed for was becoming increasingly more important according to Downer and Pianta’s (2006) study. These authors believed that once a child reached third grade there was little opportunity to change educational achievement paths. For this reason, Downer and Pianta (2006) used data collected in 1991 by the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD). NICHD researchers chose 10 states and recruited
mothers who had recently given birth. The researchers followed the mothers and their children throughout the children's early educational career. Downer and Pianta (2006) used interviews, tested materials, and observation data collected from 832 participants to look at family structures, maternal education, home environments, and demographics such as gender, race, and socioeconomic status, with the initial thought that academic experience and home environment were the largest predictors of future academic success.

Using a Hierarchical Regression Analysis and looking for bivariate correlations, Downer and Pianta concluded that quality early educational experience was the best predictor of future academic success. Similar to other studies mentioned and examples to come (Berlinski et al., 2008; Magnuson et al., 2004), race/ethnicity, gender, and maternal education were the key predictors, along with preschool education in future academic success (Downer & Pianta, 2006; Greenburg, 2011). The results supported the importance of early educational opportunities to assist in closing achievement gaps before students enter kindergarten.

As it had been established previously, quality early experiences could be linked to closing achievement gaps (Downer & Pianta, 2006). Researchers Rudasill et al. (2010) took a different approach because they felt activity and student attention added to the academic success equation. Again, using the longitudinal data from the NICHD study of children born in 1991 from 10 states across the country, Rudasill et al. (2010) used regression analysis to examine teacher ratings of the classroom and students, parental ratings of the children, and validated tests to measure reading and math skills both at the preschool level and then in third grade, which was also seen in Downer and Pianta's (2006) study. The ideal scenario for continued academic success through the third grade would have been a student who scored well on the initial tests, had what was deemed a
high attention span, high activity levels, and high level of emotional support. However, the researchers of this study knew this was ideal and also note that if a child did not receive what they called enough emotional support, a high attention level could compensate (Rudasill et al., 2010). Rudasill et al. (2010) offered the following numbers in support of their conclusions: one standard deviation in attention level can be attributed to .32 point gain in reading and math in third grade. In summation of the findings of this study, children who can stay focused would learn throughout their educational career; therefore, a supportive early education could give the students the tools with which to achieve.

Sektnan, McClelland, Acock, and Morrison (2010) supported the idea of early intervention, especially in preschool and kindergarten, when children could be more easily influenced. These authors used the NICHD data to examine other risk factors that might influence academic achievement, precisely in first grade, such as race/ethnicity classification, maternal education, income levels, and maternal depression. Using structural equation modeling to classify the various risk factors, researchers reported a negative correlation to race/ethnicity classification, maternal education, and income levels in math, reading, and vocabulary, along with behavioral regulation. Specifically, they found that English-speaking Hispanics scored higher than African American children, but both were well below the general population in math, vocabulary, and reading with any of the risk factors presented (Sektnan et al., 2010).

The disadvantages among the African American and Hispanic populations were present as early as three years old, according to Burchinal et al. (2011). “The substantial gap in educational achievement between Black and White children is one of the most pernicious problems facing American society” (Burchinal et al., 2011, p. 1,404). Again,
like the studies mentioned previously, researchers examined the data from the NICHD study of selected children born in 1991 with a focus on race/ethnicity risk factors compared to White children of the same socioeconomic standards from birth to fifth grade (Burchinal et al., 2011).

Using t-test and chi square tests to compare the various groups, Burchinal et al. (2011) explained how maternal education, family income, parenting attitudes, parenting practices, and school risk levels would affect academic outcomes in children. When employing the hierarchical linear model they were able to visualize the academic gaps. Burchinal et al. noted that overall, the White children had better scores on math and reading standardized tests. Interestingly, the most overall gains were made with African American males, specifically in the area of math. Looking at individual classroom structures, Burchinal et al. concluded that schools implementing lower student teacher classroom ratios did show effective gains in math, but still earlier intervention would be the most beneficial, along with parenting classes.

Influential State Program Studies

The previously mentioned benefits gained from early childhood education pushed educators and parents to ask why all states were not making early education programs a standard investment. As of 2012, 40 states had public preschool programs in place (NCES, 2012). Mississippi was not included in these 40 states, according to the Mississippi Department of Education (2012). However, with demographics in 2012 that could rank the state at the bottom of the academic achievement scales, this ranking could lend itself to further research and comparisons to other state programs.

Again, there were “1.3 million children in 40 U.S. states” (Epstein & Barnett, 2012, p. 4) who are enrolled in some type of public prekindergarten program. Epstein
and Barnett (2012) explained how all states had some type of early childhood program[s], but, for the most part, the programs were established to target children and families at least 100% below the poverty level and for children who had special-need rulings with the premise of preparing them for school, specifically reading, math, and writing.

According to Epstein and Barnett’s (2012) article titled Early education in the United States and access, limiting access to those 100% below the poverty level was disconcerting because all children could benefit from being prepared for kindergarten, not just the those living in poverty. Barnett and Frede’s (2010) report demonstrated how the academic achievement gap was just as significant between middle- and upper-class students as it is between the disadvantaged and middle class. Some states, such as Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Iowa, New York, Oklahoma, and West Virginia, provided a prekindergarten program open to all children meeting the four-year-old age requirement (Barnett & Frede, 2010; Epstein & Barnett, 2012).

Co-directors for the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER), Barnett and Frede (2010) said Oklahoma was the closest to providing a true universal prekindergarten for all children meeting the four-year-old age requirement. Oklahoma was able to provide these educational outlets through working agreements with area Head Start and private preschool programs (Barnett & Frede, 2010). One account said there were more than 1,546,510 prekindergarten children being served in Oklahoma (Gormly, 2010). In the article, The Promise of preschool: Why we need education for all, Barnett and Frede boasted an 87% increase in academic scores for the upper income classes of students and a 74% increase in academic scores for anyone not classified as receiving free or reduced lunches in Tulsa, Oklahoma.
Barnett and Frede (2010) explained how Oklahoma’s universal prekindergarten program began in 1998 and how participation in the prekindergarten program was voluntary for preschool age children. Providing a preschool education opportunity was also voluntary for each public school system. Gormley (2010) added that more than 70% of qualified students participated in the various public preschools around the state in qualified Oklahoma schools. Potentially, Oklahoma could have had the largest preschool program in the United States (Gormley, 2010). Gormley explained that, through the utilization of Title I funding, the schools were able to maintain small student-teacher ratios of 10:1. The size and innovative practice of a public preschool have led many to study what was working, what was not, and how this data was applicable to other existing programs as well as potential programs.

For example, during a study of students in the prekindergarten class of 2002 and 2003, researchers were able to survey parents and test students before the year started for a baseline of achievement. Conclusions from the study included a 52% gain in letter-word recognition, 27% gain in spelling, and 21% gain in math (Gormley, 2010). Gormley’s study noted how all racial groups benefited from attendance, but the African American and Hispanic populations touted the most gains, along with those students who received free or reduced lunches (Burchinal et al., 2011; Gormley, 2010)

Due in part to hosting a large non-English speaking population of disadvantaged Hispanics, California looked for ways to meet the needs of this population. According to a report by Karoly, Gosh-Dastidar, Zellman, Perlman and Fernyhough (2008) those students considered most disadvantaged, such as English language learners or those of low socioeconomic status were not participating in early childhood programs. “About half of preschool-age children in California are children of immigrants and about 20
percent are linguistically isolated" (Cannon, Jacknowitz, & Karoly, 2012, p. 2).

Researchers, Karoly et al. (2008) believed these and other children were being missed in terms of educational opportunities because of the strict socioeconomic cut-offs levels for those who were eligible to participate in some state-funded preschool programs. Upper socioeconomic classes were able to better afford a preschool education, which could then leave the lower middle class or upper poverty-level families with few options (Karoly et al., 2008). Cannon et al. (2012) agreed that it was more than just the disadvantaged who needed preschool education because any child not prepared for school would have been at an academic disadvantage. These findings were similar to those Epstein and Barnett (2012) found in their study.

In California, 22% of children used public preschool programs, while 28% were in private facilities, and 9% were in general daycare/center-based programs. This left almost 47% of children in home or relative care based on the RAND California Preschool Study Household Survey data (Karoly et al., 2008). Results from this study also found correlations between maternal education level and socioeconomic status of the family (Karoly et al., 2008), which was consistent with the findings in Greenberg’s (2011) study. Interesting to note in the findings was the non-standardized distribution of teacher education (Greenberg, 2011). Karoly et al. (2008) reported how 47% of teachers in federally and state-funded facilities had four-year degrees, whereas there were only 11% with four-year degrees in many private sector programs. Even with these discrepancies between the socioeconomic groups, the authors found preschool to be an overall benefit for all who could and would have attended as a means to close the academic gaps between the distinct demographic groups.
Cannon et al. (2012) attempted to compare California’s preschool data to the United States’ census preschool data as a whole, in hopes of gaining a better generalization of data and results. The RAND survey discussed previously covered California was compared the data from the ECLS-B survey, which included data from the United States (Cannon et al., 2012). Results showed that attendance to a center-based childcare program in any form would benefit the isolated groups, children from other backgrounds, particularly in kindergarten reading, but reports for math were not consistent with prior studies (Gramley, 2010). According to Cannon et al. (2012), a longitudinal study for long-term effects was needed to answer whether or not the effect of preschool can be seen throughout elementary, that is, to understand if all groups eventually equalize. Lastly, the need for parental communication was needed because as in Oklahoma and New Jersey, where preschool education was offered to all, only 80% of the eligible were enrolled (Cannon et al., 2012).

Beginning in 1995, Georgia began offering its version of a universal prekindergarten program to all children four years of age (Barnett & Hustedt, 2003). Then, in Georgia, school was compulsory for all children ages six and up (Grant, 2007). This was after Governor Joe Frank Harris’ Quality Basic Education Act (QBE) was established in 1985 when he realized that districts were not being funded equally through local tax monies and academic achievement was suffering (Grant, 2007). As of 2013, the prekindergarten program had been funded by the Georgia Lottery since 1993 and had made early education available to more children and families each year. Specifically, the first year the preschool program was opened to families with the lowest socioeconomic status only. The second year the Georgia school system was able to offer preschool services to other disadvantage children above the 100% poverty level. Finally, because of
the money made through the lottery, the state was able to offer prekindergarten to all children school-age four within the two years of its initial conception (Fitzpatrick, 2008).

According to an article on *The New Georgia Encyclopedia* website, the Quality Basic Education (QBE) Act also established standard salaries for teachers, lowered classroom ratios, provided merit pay for teachers, added additional funding for kindergarten and preschool programs, and required further accountability for all areas (Grant, 2007; Fitzpatrick, 2008). Specific to the current study, Georgia required all children in kindergarten pass the Georgia Kindergarten Assessment Program (GKAP) test before advancement to the first grade. The GKAP has not been validated as of 2000, but it did offer pertinent information for this study (Taylor, Gibbs, & Slate, 2000).

Taylor et al. (2000) used data from the 1996 school year to examine the effect of the GKAP on the academic achievement. The data gathered was from 171 children (91 boys and 80 girls). Taylor et al. (2000) measured student achievement in numerous areas ranging from communication to the physical abilities. First, using analysis of variance, the researchers found preschool attendance to significantly increase kindergarten achievement and, then using multivariate analysis, they were able to draw conclusions with regard to the various types of prekindergarten education received. Overall, Taylor et al. (2000) believed preschool helped all children socially and emotionally. Unlike Downer and Pianta (2006), Sektnan et al. (2010), or Tucker-Drob (2012), Taylor et al. (2000) did not find academic benefit to preschool attendance. Taylor et al. (2000) suggested this is because of the study location and the lack of socioeconomic variations. This also called into question the generalizability of the study because of the rural setting the study took place in, which was not consistent with the rest of the nation (Taylor et al., 2000).
Fitzpatrick’s (2008) study contradicted Taylor et al.’s (2000) findings. Using differences-in-differences framework and individual level data from NAEP, Fitzpatrick (2008) examined test scores pre- and post-implementation of Georgia’s universal prekindergarten in math and reading, along with the standard survey data that was collected during this time from teachers, students, and administrators. Her results showed an increase in test scores for math and reading, but the overall scores were below the national averages (Fitzpatrick, 2008). However, those tested after the implementation of a universal prekindergarten were more likely on grade-level than students counterparts who did not attend (Fitzpatrick, 2008). Fitzpatrick (2008) attributed the lower overall scores nationwide to the idea that 40 states have a prekindergarten system, so the scores were not comparable. Fitzpatrick also noted an overall White score increase in math, but all areas increased an average of 2%. Furthermore, gender was not a factor in academic achievement when a statewide prekindergarten was in place. Last, Fitzpatrick suggested an estimated benefit of $.11 minimum increase in hourly wages for those who attended the prekindergarten, which would in turn offer the state $56 million increased tax revenue. Fitzpatrick stressed that this was an estimate, but for policy decisions, the results would show the cost effectiveness of the implementation of such a program.

Supporting Studies

One could not discount the smaller studies, which like the larger studies, showed the potential influence of preschool education in the short-term. For the most part, these smaller studies occurred during and after the timeframes of the previously discussed longitudinal studies. Some of the studies discussed below supported the previous research and others questioned the reason for what could be deemed a hasty investment in early childhood education programs.
As a result of *Abbott v Burke* (1985) an influential study was conducted in New Jersey (as cited in Barnett & Frede, 2010). *Abbott v Burke* was a school equality case that made preschool education compulsory in New Jersey. The ruling required New Jersey to offer quality education to all three- and four-year-old disadvantaged students (Barnett & Frede, 2010; Frede, Barnett, Jung, Lamy, & Figueras, 2010). In doing so, the case mandated all preschool teachers have an early childhood education certification, a four-year-degree, and classrooms with a maximum 15 to 1 student-teacher ratio. New Jersey was allowed to partner with Head Start and private facilities in order to meet the needs of the population (Barnett & Frede, 2010).

During the 1999-2000 school year, the New Jersey public school district used the Early Childhood Rating Scale Revised (ECERS-R), which evaluated the program on a 1-7 scale. A rating of 1, 2, or 3 is interpreted as poor, a rating of 4 is average, and a rating of 5, 6 or 7 is interpreted as highly satisfactory (Barnett & Frede, 2010). During the first year, New Jersey’s preschool programs received a score of 3.5 for the private sector and score of 4.4 for public sector prekindergarten (Barnett & Frede, 2010). In 2002, to measure their success, New Jersey’s program was evaluated by what researchers deemed to be the top faculty in the field of education. The evaluators boasted how the program served mainly African American and Hispanic students who showed immediately 11% gains in math, literacy, and writing at the conclusion of kindergarten (Barnett & Frede, 2010). Further, overall positive results were shown by the 2007-2008 school year. New Jersey’s scores rose to 5.2, and grade retention was half of what it was in previous years for all participants (Barnett & Frede, 2010).

In a university-based preschool in Mississippi, Moore, Yin, Weaver, Lydell, and Logan (2007) were able to support the larger studies discussed previously. They did so
through examination of gender differences in preschool literacy both in application and preschool teachers’ perceptions through interviews, observations, and work samples from the center-based preschool (Moore et al., 2007). Moore et al.’s (2007) study was conducted as a follow-up for previous two studies. The first by Thompson in 1987, and then by Lynch in 2002, both were based on No Child Left Behind’s (NCLB, 2002) stipulation that all students would be reading on grade level by the 2014 school year. This requirement was also true of the Mississippi Preschool Kindergarten curriculum standards (Mississippi Department of Education, 2012). Moore et al. (2007) believed that a child’s literacy achievement could be promoted or hindered by possible gender bias of the teachers and parents.

Moore et al.’s (2007) initial assumptions of gender differences were based on prior literature, which they quoted as saying that children could suffer from gender bias through the examples set for them at home, potentially causing boys to be left behind girls. Their qualitative research supported this idea, along with the importance of the quality interventions preschool could offer (Moore et al., 2007).

In a similar study, Bull, Espy, Wiebe, Sheffield, and Nelson (2011) concluded that possibly due to what they called biological maturation, girls matured faster than boys; therefore, girls generally were academically more inclined or more ready for school. For this reason, some states have even argued and changed the entrance dates for preschool and kindergarten, moving the December deadline to September in hopes of ensuring that all children are mature enough to learn (Stipek, 2006).

Using the structural equation model in the statistical program Mplus, and then the Statistical Analysis System (SAS) for descriptive statistics, Bull et al. (2011), studied 186 preschool children with a focus on mathematical skills and executive controls because
they believed preschool could be the foundation for future academic success. Consistent with much of the larger studies discussed, Bull et al. (2011) concurred that there was a gap between the various socioeconomic groups that needs to be addressed, that girls were generally ahead of boys in the initial maturity process, and the more resources a family had access to the better equipped children were for a successful academic career. Leaper (2011) agreed with Bull et al. (2011), and Moore et al. (2007) with regard to gender differences. Leaper (2011) felt gender development was generally effected by peers, leaders, and social media. Many researchers believed peers, leaders and social media could be biased with their opinions, which in turn supported the idea of increased interventions for boys. They also believed a quality early childhood education program could be instrumental in working with this idea of social education perception (Dale, Mills, Cole, & Jenkins, 2004; Leaper, 2011; Marcon, 2002). Howes et al. (2008) believed children would learn faster from and with their peers in high-quality childcare settings after observing various types of early childhood classrooms. Their study supported the positive effects a state-funded prekindergarten can have on math and reading performance both in the short-term and long term, possibly due to the experienced teachers, the access to materials, and as previously mentioned, peers as role models (Howes et al., 2008).

"A child’s ability to learn and to function as a contributing member of society rests heavily on the development of social competency and emotional health that begins at birth and is greatly influenced during the preschool years" (Boyd et al., 2011, p. 14). Rhoades, Warren, Domitrovich, and Greenberg (2011) supported the idea that children, particularly in preschool, learn to work within their peer groups, learning the emotional cues and processes needed for future academic success. Rhoades et al. (2011) felt the children would have increased positive experiences in a preschool setting and; therefore,
they would better focus on the academics, especially those who were in disadvantaged situations at home. Arnold, Kupersmidt, Voegler-Lee, and Marshall’s (2012) study supported the findings of Boyd et al. (2011) and Rhoades et al. (2011) explaining how, if one cannot focus, whether the source be medical or social, one cannot learn. Bandura (1994) also believed that peer pressure from teachers and students in classrooms were the best teachers. Along with the necessity of social skills, Arnold et al. (2012) also discovered a relationship with vocabulary, or emergent literacy, and gender. They concluded, as did previous studies (Bull et al., 2011; Moore et al., 2007) that boys needed additional focus and training, specifically in vocabulary (Arnold et al., 2012). For this reason, one study by Skibbe, Connor Morrison, and Jewkes (2011) suggested additional years, where possible, of early preschool intervention for the best overall academic success.

Similar results and conclusions were seen in research outside the United States. In 2008, Berlinski et al. (2008) published their study of 18,000 Uruguayan homes. Using data from the Uruguayan household survey (ECH), published by the Uruguay National Statistical Office, the authors focused on data collected from children ages 7-15 between 2001-2005. In Uruguay it was mandatory for children ages 6-15 to attend school, and at age 15 they may exit school to work. Berlinski et al. (2008) stated “as of 2001 about 25% of 25-29 year olds declared not having completed junior high school” (p. 1,417). However, with the implementation of early education students completing junior high school had increased.

Berlinski et al. (2008) concluded that by having preschool as an option, dropout rates decreased. Furthermore, the correlation of maternal education was neutralized and a 2.2 to 1 per dollar return was reported. Similar, the maternal correlations were also seen
in Joo (2010), Magnuson et al. (2004) and Resnick (2010). Berlinski, Galiani, and Manacorda, (2008) found the effects of preschool most beneficial for boys, but results were not significant, and investments into education were most effective at the beginning of one’s educational career. Adding to Berlinski et al.’s (2008) study, Berlinski, Galiani, and Gertler (2009) found statically significant increases in third grade test scores in a longitudinal study conducted between 1994 and 2000 in Argentina.

Using difference, difference estimator, and intent to treat, Berlinski et al. (2009) was able to establish an 8% point increase in math and Spanish (the official language in Uruguay) scores with their half-day, nine-month program. Again, as in the Berlinski et al. (2008) study, girls reported better scores than boys, except in math, which boys and girls tended to be equal. With a robustness test, Berlinski et al. (2009) attempted to estimate future effects on sixth and seventh-grade students, concluding that positive benefits continued through this time period. Thus, the continued positive effects of a preschool education can be seen across the globe.

“A child’s ability to learn and to function as a contributing member of society rests heavily on the development of social competency and emotional health that begins at birth and is greatly influenced during the preschool years,” (Boyd et al., 2011, p. 14) and the best time in which to do so would be early childhood (Reynolds, Rolnick, Englund, & Temple, 2010). In Barnett’s (2008) study, he explained that no matter the socioeconomic status or other differentiating qualities, all children could benefit from some sort of high-quality preschool education not only the small numbers of poverty-level families who qualify for programs such as Head Start. The research and statistics mentioned above show that those above poverty level, but below the advantaged group, were not left with many early childhood education options (Barnett, 2008). Barnett also
believes that “a half standard deviation is enough to reduce by half the school readiness gap between poverty and the national average” (p. 5).

In conjunction with previous studies, Lynch’s (2010) study argued for a universal prekindergarten via the projected facts, figures, and estimates extending to the year 2050. Using the value of a United States dollar in 2006, Lynch made estimations of the savings and potential gains of a universal prekindergarten for each state. Overall, he projected a $315 billion gain for the United States by 2050, and with regard to Mississippi, Lynch believed there would have been a 12.3 point gain for every dollar invested and potentially within 14 years the program could pay for itself. Thus, the benefits would outweigh any costs incurred. Some states and policymakers were starting to acknowledge the need and benefit of having such programs for early childhood.

Holland and Soifer (2008) acknowledged a continued gap in educational availability to the disadvantaged because those below the poverty level have access to federal programs and those largely above could afford private sector programs, but those in the middle were left with few options for prekindergarten education. As of 2008, democratic presidential nominees were calling for a universal prekindergarten to combat these shortcomings through early intervention. In 2012, President Barack Obama was documented by the Middle Class Task Force as saying early childhood education was one of the best means to giving children the advantage in school and life they need to become successful. Others still argued for interventions at the end, and not the beginning, of a child’s educational journey where there is less standardized testing and accountability (Holland & Soifer, 2008).

However, various candidates and United States Congressional personnel suggested acts and policies to assist with early education. For example, in 2007, Senator
Charles Schumer from New York presented information to the Joint Economic Committee to propagate increased funding for preschool education. He argued, like much of the prevalent information that preschool attendance assisted with both the short-term and long-term goals of the educational system. Schumer believed early education could close achievement gaps, curtail inappropriate behaviors, and “universal preschool would be a 3.5% increase in gross domestic product by 2080” (p. 3).

Others, such as, Hillary Rodham Clinton, were mentioned as making claims that the gaps between White and other students would be significantly closed with universal prekindergarten (Holland & Soifer, 2008) because “sizable racial and ethnic gaps already exist by the time children enter kindergarten” (Magnuson & Waldfogel, 2005, p. 5). Also, in support of closing this established academic gap, President Obama, who during his 2008 bid for the presidency, campaigned with what he called a “Zero to Five” educational strategy that promoted a universal preschool curriculum. This strategy focused on promoting the whole child (Holland & Soifer, 2008, p. 4). He boasted a 70% to 100% return on investment (Holland & Soifer, 2008). Important in Holland and Soifer’s (2008) article were the political and economic implications of investing in preschool, which did not go unnoticed by political figures, including John McCain, Mitt Romney, Mike Huckabee, and others.

Another important study was the work of Nobel Prize winning economist James Heckman, who studied the gains made by a universal prekindergarten for the disadvantaged. Heckman suggested that universal prekindergarten should also provided full-day care for working parents, therefore aiding in the economy (Holland & Soifer, 2008). As stated by Zhong (2012), households where it was cost effective for both
parents to work and to be able to afford childcare was most beneficial for the United States economy.

Holland and Soifer’s (2008) study ended with potential suggestions for meeting the funding needs and with examples of states where public prekindergarten had been successful. Their study also ended with a discussion of various proposed early education acts such as the Providing Resources Early for Kids (Pre-K) Act by Mazie K. Hirono, the Ready to Learn Act by Hillary Rodham Clinton, the Prepare All Kids Act (2007) by Robert Casey and Carolyn Maloney, and the Early Childhood Investment Act by Christopher Dodd and Rosa DeLauro. In 2009, President Obama introduced Race to the Top (RTT). RTT was an educational initiative where states apply and compete for monies to educate their youth. “Awards in the Race to the Top will go to states that are leading the way with ambitious yet achievable plans for implementing coherent, compelling and comprehensive early learning education reform” (RTT, 2012, p.1). The government website also explained the three main criteria that would be looked for in a state program. The three main components were, a specific focus on the disadvantaged, services for these groups, and conformity to best practices (RTT, 2012).

Thirty-five states, Washington, D.C., and Puerto Rico submitted packages for RTT grant money and nine were selected for funding (Weber, 2012). The aforementioned funding could have been utilized for “grantees’ work to build statewide systems of high-quality early learning and development programs” (Middle Class Task Force, 2012, p. 1). To the end, “what happens in early childhood sets the stage for everything that follows in life,” said Health and Human Services Secretary Kathleen Sebelius (Weber, 2012, p. 1).
Of the RTT submission packages, Mississippi was ranked 35th with 142 points, while the first place state of North Carolina received just over 269 points (RTT, 2012). All states’ packages and comments by reviewers could be downloaded for viewing. Mississippi’s 70-page comment packet was consistent with the information discussed in many of the studies and theories above (RTT, 2012). According to the comments section, Mississippi lacked universal preschool, lacked research-driven studies of early education and early education intervention, lacked universal standards and curriculum, and lacked consistency with educational practices and qualifications (RTT, 2012). In accordance with this RTT information, Mississippi Building Blocks, which was developed for “promoting the state plan for early care and education,” would offer directly linked information to federal programs available (“Current Efforts”, 2012, p. 1). Programs would include the Child Care and Development Fund, which was a voucher program for those needing temporary assistance and the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) program, which was a transition program for those receiving assistance as a means to help them improve economically. Along with these programs available to disadvantaged families were Head Start and Title I funding (“Federal Efforts”, 2012).

Along with implementation of various federal early childhood programs, Mississippi developed some specific programs and advisory groups. First established by Governor Barbour in 2008, the State Early Childhood Advisory Council (SECAC) worked with local, national, and home organizations to identify the education needs of children from birth up to the age of five (SECAC, 2010). In the SECAC Executive Summary (2010), recommendations for improvement were offered, goals established, and budgetary requests were proposed.
Most important for this study was the statement that the council should “develop a consistent state-wide skill-based progress report form for parents of children in grades prek-k through grade 3 by 2013” (SECAC, 2010, p. 4). Also mentioned was the Mississippi Child Care Resource & Referral Network, which provided various centers that supported the early childcare mission. It offered continuing education credits (CEUs), and other important contacts for the early childhood teacher or parent (Mississippi Child Care Resource and Referral Network, 2012).

Interested parties could also connect with the Mississippi State University Early Childhood Institute (ECI), which was established in the Education Department of Mississippi State University in 1999 to offer programs, advice, education, training, and community support for the youngest of learners (ECI Staff, 2011). According to the 2011 annual report of the ECI, the institute had 16 early childhood projects that ECI professionals are working with daily. Funding for these projects totaled more than $6 million, along with a more than $2 million research project sponsored by the United States Department of Education (ECI Staff, 2011).

Summary

Some believed making sure children have all they need for academic success was the responsibility of the schools. Maxwell and Clifford (2004) said, “It is the school's responsibility to educate all children who are old enough to legally attend school, regardless of their skills” (p. 43). Because some states did not have a public preschool system, it was believed that some children were not receiving the services they needed or desired. Literature showed how access to high-quality preschool interventions in other states assisted in easing the educational burden that many primary schools were faced with each year as children enrolled unprepared.
In this review of literature, the researcher discussed programs, grants, and other types of assistance which have been made available to academia for support of early childhood education. Top political figures voiced their concerns and expectations for children to be on or above their appropriate grade level. Even individual states, such as Mississippi, without a public preschool program had literature, websites, and data with regard to the positive effects a preschool education can provide to a child, to a family, and to a school. Furthermore, national organizations, such as the National Association for the Education of Young (NAEYC, 2012), extended their research, grants, and knowledge bases in order to discover new means to close achievement gaps. NAEYC offered certifications and accreditations for centers that were able to meet research based criteria in support of early education and development of children as a whole.

Additionally, Chapter II examined federally mandated programs, landmark early education studies, smaller argumentative studies, and early education initiatives in the state of Mississippi. In doing so, the literature review showed potentially positive implications of the establishment of a universal prekindergarten where students and families may receive the appropriate support and services based on the theories of Piaget (1983), Vygotsky, (1978), and Bandura (1977).

Chapter III provides a detailed description of the methodology used in investigating the long-term perceived effects of preschool, day care, Head Start, and no preschool attendance on academic achievement and educator perceptions on academic success in south Mississippi schools based on various demographic identifiers.
CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of kindergarten and preschool teachers' with regard to early childhood education achievement and practices. This chapter examined the perceived successfulness of the various types of early education programs in south Mississippi including center-based care, private or religious preschools, federal programs such as Head Start, and parental/relative care. Data was obtained through a questionnaire as a means to gain insight as to where teachers believed children were with preparation for common core standards, where children potentially faced academic disadvantage, and where leaders in the field of early education needed to narrow its efforts academically for preschool and kindergarten children. The survey was given to preschool and kindergarten teachers during the spring semester of the 2012-2013 school year.

For this reason, this chapter was organized in the following order: research design, participants, instrumentation, procedures, and data analysis. A copy of the survey instrument and other documents critical to this study were included in the Appendix section at the end.

Purpose and Research Questions

This purpose of this study was to examine kindergarten and prekindergarten teachers’ perceptions of academic success for children based on the type of care children received prior to beginning kindergarten, as well as other demographics, which could cause variations in academic success. The following research questions were addressed throughout this study.
1. What are the perceived effects of preschool/pre-primary attendance on academic success?

2. What is the relationship between demographic identifiers and preschool/pre-primary attendance on perceived academic success?

Hypotheses

H_1: There is not a difference in preschool and kindergarten teachers’ preferences for federal programs such as Head Start, private preschool, center-based care, or parental care and perceived academic achievement.

H_2: There is not a difference in preschool and kindergarten teachers’ beliefs that all children are prepared for kindergarten academics.

H_3: There is not a difference in preschool and kindergarten teachers’ beliefs as to who is most at risk academically when transitioning to kindergarten.

H_4: There is not a difference in preschool and kindergarten teachers’ beliefs of the barriers faced by children and academic success.

H_5: There is not a difference in preschool and kindergarten teachers’ beliefs with regard to demographic identifiers and academic success.

H_6: There is not a difference between preschool and kindergarten teachers’ beliefs of what is needed for early academic success.

Participants

The researcher enlisted the participation of school districts in south Mississippi. The researcher then contacted the superintendents from each district to gain consent (Appendix A) for contacting their principals. After obtaining Intuitional Review Board permission (Appendix B), elementary schools with kindergarten programs in each county were then contacted either by email from district websites or principal permission.
These school districts were also important to the study because of the student diversity afforded by each district lent itself to statewide generalizability because the overall demographics are representative of Mississippi as a whole in areas such as race/ethnicity and SES. All of the participating kindergarten teachers had attained at least a four-year degree and held a teaching certificate approved by the Mississippi Department of Education during the 2012-2013 school year.

Next, the researcher selected preschools and early education programs from these same counties due to the convenient location to the researcher via websites and commuting distance. Invitations to participate (Appendix D) were extended to preschools based on proximity to researcher and location to participating schools. Participating preschool teachers had a minimum of a general education or high school diploma. These preschool teachers worked in facilities which served preschool-age children who were ages 3 or 4 as defined by the Mississippi Department of Education (Mississippi Department of Education, 2012).

All participants received informed consent information (Appendix E), which explained the study, purpose of the study, confidentiality, and how their participation, though appreciated, was voluntary. The participants also received a cover letter (Appendix F) with explanation of the information being gathered and the purpose of the survey. Demographic data, such as years of experience, age, race/ethnicity, gender, and educational level of the participants was gathered. However, to ensure confidentiality, their name, place of employment, and other identifiers were not requested from the participants.
Instrumentation

The researcher used a multi-method survey instrument, which included teacher demographic questions, Likert-scale perception questions, and one open-ended question. This Academic Perception (AP) survey (Appendix G) incorporated researcher-developed questions along with survey selections developed by Dr. Mary O’Kane, of the Dublin Institute of Technology. Selected survey selections were taken from O’Kane’s Kindergarten Readiness Questionnaire with her permission to utilize (Appendix H). The AP survey was then developed because no other comprehensive survey focused on such specifics as student demographic components, types of early education, Common Core perceptions, and also allowed educators to share their opinions openly without fear of reprisal.

After gaining Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval, a validity panel was consulted, and a pilot study was conducted. Specifically, the AP survey was validated by an expert panel (Appendix I) including education professionals and administrators, who assisted the researcher in determining question clarity and content validity. Next, the pilot study was conducted with a group of 12 early education professionals. Results from the pilot study were placed in SPSS and a Cronbach alpha reliability coefficient test was used to examine reliability of the AP. The researcher stated she desired a minimum score of 0.70 on all questions of perception in order for the question to be included in the final AP survey. As denoted in Table 1, reliabilities of .75 or above were recorded for all sections except Barriers to Success. This total corrected itself in the final statistical analysis.
Table 1

*Cronbach alphas (Pilot Study)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Survey Section</th>
<th>Pilot Study Scores</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Common Core</td>
<td>.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Barriers</td>
<td>.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barriers to Success</td>
<td>.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child Demographics</td>
<td>.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategies for Success</td>
<td>.75</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The AP was divided into seven sections. The first section, titled Demographics, asked educators to mark answers to questions concerning their gender, age range, race/ethnicity, experience, and highest level of education obtained at the date of survey. These specific demographics allowed the researcher to divide and compare data obtained between the various demographic levels listed. This section assisted adding to the knowledge base for research question one, and in drawing conclusions about answering hypothesis one by asking educators to select the type of programs they felt were most appropriate for preparing children for kindergarten, and when the teachers believed students were most prepared to enter kindergarten.

The second section was developed by the researcher, titled Common Core, used Likert-scale questions to scrutinize educators’ beliefs with regard to the Common Core standards. This section assisted in answering questions about the perceived overall educational effects of early education attendance and curriculum standards, which were taken directly from the Mississippi Department of Education’s Early Learning Standards
for Common Core (Burnham, House, & Green, 2012). Teachers were asked to select from five percentage ranges describing their beliefs as to the number of children prepared for the various Common Core academic tasks. This section assisted in responding to the first research question with regard to the academic success and preschool attendance and hypothesis two which stated “there will not be difference in teachers’ beliefs that all children are prepared for kindergarten academics,” because all children, according to the standards should be able to accomplish the listed items upon entering kindergarten.

Section three was developed by Dr. Mary O’Kane and is titled General Beliefs on the Transition Process. It used five-point Likert-scale questions to discuss the different types of risk and demographic identifiers that could cause issue for children transitioning from preschool to kindergarten and who is more at risk and in turn affecting academic success as noted in research question two. Participants chose within a range of 1: strongly disagree to 5: strongly agree. Their answers were used to draw conclusions to support or reject hypothesis three in later chapters.

Section four, developed by Dr. Mary O’Kane, explored potential barriers to success children face stemming from the educational system itself through five point Likert-scale questions. As in previous sections, participants were asked to read a statement and choose strongly disagreeing, disagreeing, neither, agreeing and strongly agreeing about their feelings of other educational barriers that could be preventing the children’s academic success. These questions assisted in explaining other perceived barriers to early educational success as stated in hypothesis four. This data was then applied to research question one with regard to perceptions of academic success and preschool attendance.
The fifth section, titled *Childhood Demographics*, was developed by the researcher and based on the second research question to examine educators' belief of personal identifiers that could hold a child back academically. The researcher developed survey questions about teachers' perceived beliefs of demographic identifiers and children's potential academic success. The researcher was able to support or reject hypothesis five based on these five-point Likert scale questions ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree.

Then the sixth section, developed by Dr. Mary O'Kane, was used to gain teachers' perceptions as to what they believe would assist in promoting to overall success of the early education system as questioned in hypothesis six. Once again a five-point Likert scale format, ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree was used to gather the teachers' beliefs on each line of information. The data gained was applied to research question one to assist in making overall conclusions on the perceived effects of prekindergarten attendance on academic success.

Finally, in the last section, titled *Final Thoughts*, the researcher offered teachers an open-ended question to allow them to voice concerns or hopes for the field of early education. The information, though varied, was applied to both research question one and two and assisted the researcher in supporting and rejecting suggestions for policy makers, administrators, educators, and government officials.

**Procedures**

The researcher used the following processes for working with participants and understanding the data obtained from the school districts, and to make a determination of significance. As mentioned previously, after gaining superintendent and director consent, the researcher contacted principals and managers to gain numbers for teacher
participation. IRB permission was then granted. Participating school districts and preschools were then contacted for participating numbers. Once established, the researcher sent cover letters, informed consent forms, surveys, and self-addressed stamped envelopes to participating kindergarten teachers in south Mississippi school districts, along with preschools in the same counties.

The cover letter and informed consent explained that this survey was confidential, voluntary, and no harm would come if teachers choose not to participate. The letter also explained that by filling out the survey, the teachers were consenting to participate in the study. Most importantly, the letter explained how the data collected was confidential and would be kept in a locked file cabinet by the researcher for no more than three years and then would be properly destroyed at that point. Lastly, the letter explained how the only other persons who will see in the information will be the researcher’s dissertation advisors. However, school districts did have the opportunity to request a summary of the findings after the dissertation process was completed.

Data Analysis

Using descriptive statistics, demographic information such as race/ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status, and parental education, was be scrutinized as to its potential effect on the educators’ perceptions of academic success. As a means of rejecting or supporting the null hypothesis, the researcher tested the Likert response data to determine significance based on a level of .05. The researcher then used the results from an independent t-test to determine if there are any difference between kindergarten and prekindergarten teacher perceptions. The $p$ value was based on .05 and significance was determined after data is input into SPSS.
Summary

Preschool education programs in many states have been shown to be a cost effective and beneficial means of reaching out to disadvantaged children and narrowing the achievement gap between socioeconomic groups (Barnett, 2008; Temple & Reynolds, 2007). When children are linked to their elementary school through a public preschool, the transition was eased and students perform better academically, along with having fewer behavioral issues (Magnuson et al., 2007b). As of 2013, Mississippi did not have a public preschool. Therefore, the utilization of demographic perceptions along with educators’ perceptions of the benefits of specific types of preschools could be used to determine if general early childhood programs have a long-term effect on perceived academic outcomes.

This study explored which type of early childhood programs offered in these areas teachers believed were best for children, such as center-based, federal preschool programs such as Head Start, or private, versus no program at all. With federal programs, such as RTT offering incentives for early childhood initiatives, this study offered a collection of data that would allow policymakers to make informed decisions about which programs were believed to be the most effective by professionals and experts in the field, and which programs may be perceived as best for serving children and families in Mississippi.
CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

The purpose of this research study was to investigate prekindergarten and kindergarten teachers’ perceptions regarding the effect of preschool attendance and various demographic identifiers on a child’s future academic success. Specifically, 61 preschool teachers and 34 kindergarten teachers responded from seven school districts and 10 preschool programs where permission was granted by their superintendents and directors. These early educators were given surveys to examine the type of early education program they would recommend, whether children were prepared for kindergarten based on current curriculum guidelines, which type of child they believed could be most at-risk for academic failure, what kind of barriers children faced, the effect of demographic identifiers, such as race, gender, and socioeconomic status on academic success, and what teachers felt would be most beneficial in promoting children’s academic success. Both prekindergarten and kindergarten teachers were asked to respond to an open-ended question which asked what they would suggest, outside of the survey ideas, to best educate and prepare children for future early education success.

Descriptive statistics and independent t-tests were conducted to examine if there was a statistically significant difference between kindergarten and prekindergarten teachers perceptions with regard to children’s future academic success and also demographic identifiers. Descriptive means were also conducted on each section to explore teachers perceptions as to the value they would assign to each scenario to them based on a 5-point Likert-scale survey.

This chapter includes descriptive statistics of the teachers surveyed, along with a descriptive breakdown of individual question responses. Overall significance is included
based on each section of questioning, including which type of facility participants felt would most benefit children in early education. With regard to comparing kindergarten and preschool teachers’ overall perceptions t-test are discussed. Lastly, qualitative data provided by both preschool and kindergarten teachers is presented in terms of themes.

Results

A multiple-method research design was used to gain insight as to teachers’ perceptions of demographic identifiers, common core and other factors that may put a child at risk or would assist in future academic success. The survey instrument was divided into three sections. Section I yielded quantitative data related to demographic information and teacher beliefs. Section II explored curriculum, demographic and other ideas that factor into a child’s overall success on a 5-point Likert-scale. Section III contained one open ended question with regard to teacher beliefs, therefore it yielded qualitative data. An independent t-test was to respond to Research Questions 1 and 2 based on a $p$-value of .05

Descriptive Statistics

Two hundred and fifty surveys were distributed with a 38% return rate from kindergarten and preschool teachers across the southern region of Mississippi and the seven school districts and 10 preschool programs that agreed to participate. The perceptions of 95 south Mississippi preschool and kindergarten teachers were examined with regard to academic perceptions, demographics, and future academic achievement.

Demographic data of the teachers was collected and is presented in Table 2. Data from this selection was used to respond to Research Question 1. Table 2 shows a gender distribution of 3.2% male ($n=3$) and 96.8% female ($n=92$). The age differentiation among participating teachers was generally equal in the first three of the four categories, with the
most being in category 3, ages 41-50, which had 34.7% (n=33) of the teacher population and the least being 21.1% (n=20) of the teacher population, which included those teachers ages 51-65. Table 2 also offers the race/ethnicity of each participating teacher. Of the 95 reporting prekindergarten and kindergarten teachers the major concentrations were found to be African American with 35.8% (n=34) and 57.9% (n=55) were White.

Table 2

*Teacher Demographics*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>96.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18-30</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>21.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31-40</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>29.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41-50</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>34.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51-65</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>14.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race/Ethnicity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>35.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>57.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3 refers to the prekindergarten and kindergarten teachers' experience, education, and type of facility with which they worked and a breakdown of where each participant was employed. Teacher experience was found to be evenly distributed in the first three concentrations ranging from 0 to 15 years' experience. Teachers with more than 21 years' experience only accounted for 11.6% (n=11), which could due to the retirement opportunities for teachers with 20 or more years’ experience at some facilities. Education offered similar clusters among the participating teachers.

Prekindergarten and kindergarten teacher education was clustered in the bachelors' degree area with 44.2% (n=42) reporting this as having been their highest attained degree. Other levels of education were equally distributed, high school diploma to Master's degree, but only having a high school diploma or general education diploma (GED) was the lowest with 10.5% (n=10). Most of the teachers were working in either public programs with 42.1% (n=40) or federal programs 41.1% (n=39), which again would follow with generally accepted beliefs that largest kindergarten programs are public and the largest preschool programs are federal in south Mississippi. A total of 95 teachers returned completed surveys, which included 64.2% (n=61) preschool teachers and 35.8% (n=34) kindergarten teachers.
Table 3

*Teacher Program Demographics*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Experience Teaching</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0-5 Years</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>28.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-10 Years</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>23.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-15 Years</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>22.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16-20 Years</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>14.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21 plus Years</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>11.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Educational Attainment</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HS Diploma/GED</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CDA</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>11.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associate Degree</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>16.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor's Degree</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>44.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master’s Degree</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>16.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Facility Employed</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>42.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private/Christian</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>14.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Federal</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>41.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3 (continued).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Preschool</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>64.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kindergarten</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>35.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. HS = high school, GED = General Education Diploma, and CDA = Child Development Associates.

Teachers' preference for the best type of facility for preschool and what should be the deciding factor for allowing a child to enter preschool was captured and is presented in Table 4. Table 4 shows that early education professionals in south Mississippi prefer center-based care 40% (n=38) and federal facilities 37.9% (n=36) for educating children for kindergarten instead of homecare and private facilities. Based on Mississippi's standard age admission of 5 years-old before September first for kindergarten, 72.6% of teachers believed that age should not be the only deciding factor for a child’s admission, but also making sure a child is socially, emotionally and intellectually ready for the rigors ahead.
Table 4

*Descriptive Statistics of General Education*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Best Facility</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homecare</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Center Based</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private/Christian</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>17.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Federal</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>37.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kindergarten Admission</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age Alone</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>12.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social, Emotional, and</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>14.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intelligence</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both of the Above</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>72.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To assist with responding to Research Question 1 and 2, the quantitative aspect of the instrument was comprised of five additional sections past the previously mentioned demographic statistics. These sections offered insight into early educational professionals’ perceptions with regard to such educational issues as Common Core curriculum. They also delve into at-risk identifiers of children, items that could be barriers to a child’s future academic success, childhood demographics that have been viewed, by the literature to possibly affect children’s academic success, and items identified by the literature as promoting a child’s future academic success. The next five
The items discussed in Section 2 of the AP survey and Table 5 came directly from the Mississippi Department of Education Early Learning Standards for Common Core, in response to Research Question 1. Teachers were asked to choose between five 20-point percentage ranges with regard to their perceptions of how many children have the following skills that are necessary for kindergarten success with one being the lowest amount of knowledge and five being the most knowledge in a subject area. Teachers’ answers suggest that between 61%-80% of children going to kindergarten possess an understanding of being able to explore and experiment with scribbles, drawings, letters, and dictations to express opinions based on the common core requirement. However, the data showed children were coming to kindergarten lacking the proper ability to understand syllables in words through such means of clapping, stomping and finger tapping ($M = 2.93$), to use measurement terms such as “more than”, “less than,” and “equal to” ($M = 2.94$) and to understand charts and graphs ($M = 2.95$). Table 5 ranked the additional skills from greatest knowledge of a subject to least knowledge in a subject area.
Table 5

*Common Core Concepts*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concept</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Explore and Experiment</td>
<td>3.59</td>
<td>1.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>with scribbles, drawings, letters, and dictations to express and opinion.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Write first name with a capital letter.</td>
<td>3.51</td>
<td>1.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recognition of small, big, short, tall, empty, full, heavy, light.</td>
<td>3.40</td>
<td>1.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retelling stories with diverse media.</td>
<td>3.35</td>
<td>1.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duplicating and extending patterns.</td>
<td>3.29</td>
<td>1.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Applying meaning for familiar words</td>
<td>3.27</td>
<td>1.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding letters make words</td>
<td>3.17</td>
<td>1.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recite numbers to 30</td>
<td>3.17</td>
<td>1.20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 5 (continued).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concept</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Use of charts, graphs, maps, lists.</td>
<td>2.95</td>
<td>1.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of more than, less than, equal to, or same to compare.</td>
<td>2.94</td>
<td>1.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demonstrate understanding of syllables.</td>
<td>2.93</td>
<td>1.27</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Likert Scale 1=Strongly Disagree to 5=Strongly Agree

Table 6 offers descriptive means regarding teachers' agreement that each of the listed groups of children are at-risk in general terms with regard to kindergarten academic performance. The questions in Section 3 of the instrument were in response to Research Question 2. Participants were asked to rate each statement choosing from the following: 1 strongly disagrees to 5 strongly agree. Teachers felt strongly that children who face the most academic risk when going to kindergarten were those who had not attended preschool (M = 4.04). Teachers also felt strongly that children who were deemed as having behavior problems (M = 3.99), or those who have difficulty listening and sitting still (M = 3.95) would be at-risk for academic underachievement. Children with disadvantaged backgrounds (M = 3.65) and low self-esteem (M = 3.64) would also face difficulties in kindergarten without the right interventions according to the participating teachers. However, teachers did not feel birth order (M = 2.15) or having friends (M = 2.53) was a major factor in childhood academic success.
Table 6

**Barriers to Success**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concept</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not attending preschool</td>
<td>4.04</td>
<td>1.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having a behavior problem</td>
<td>3.99</td>
<td>1.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to listen and sit still</td>
<td>3.95</td>
<td>.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disadvantaged background</td>
<td>3.65</td>
<td>1.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having low self-esteem</td>
<td>3.64</td>
<td>1.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having special needs</td>
<td>3.35</td>
<td>1.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minority children</td>
<td>2.96</td>
<td>1.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youngest aged children</td>
<td>2.60</td>
<td>1.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not having friends in class</td>
<td>2.53</td>
<td>1.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being the first born child</td>
<td>2.15</td>
<td>1.09</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Likert Scale 1=Strongly Disagree to 5=Strongly Agree

It is commonly accepted that there are barriers to a child’s future academic success beginning with kindergarten, which is why Section 4 is applicable to Research Question 1 and detailed in Table 7. Participating teachers agreed that the largest barrier for children’s academic success was the lack of communication between preschool and kindergarten teachers ($M = 3.62$). Teachers also felt that starting children in kindergarten based strictly on age was a significant issue ($M = 3.58$). In contrast the teachers did not feel that the various types of preschool experience (or not) ($M = 3.11$), along with the cultural differences in preschools, were major issues for future kindergarten success ($M = 2.89$).
### Table 7

**General Perceptions of what could be holding children back**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concept</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lack of communication between preschools and kindergartens</td>
<td>3.62</td>
<td>1.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children should start kindergarten based on age</td>
<td>3.58</td>
<td>1.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Too many preschools</td>
<td>3.29</td>
<td>.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training of teachers in preschools and kindergartens</td>
<td>3.24</td>
<td>1.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Differences in curriculums in preschool and kindergarten</td>
<td>3.19</td>
<td>1.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children having a variety (or not) of preschool experiences</td>
<td>3.11</td>
<td>1.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural differences between preschools and kindergartens</td>
<td>2.89</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note:** Likert Scale 1=Strongly Disagree to 5=Strongly Agree
Whether a child’s demographic identifiers, such as race/ethnicity and gender could have an effect on their future academic success is the purpose of Table 8. Teachers were given general childhood demographic scenarios and asked to rate each of these from 1-Strongly Disagree to 5-Strongly Agree in response to Research Question 2. Results indicated that teachers believed that the more education a child’s parent has, the better chance of academic success the child would have ($M = 3.32$), and children from the lowest socioeconomic income homes would have the greatest disadvantage ($M = 3.09$) in academics. Teachers did not believe that African American children are at the greatest risk in academics ($M = 2.17$), nor did they feel that White children are at the least risk of failure ($M = 2.13$).

Table 8

*Demographics placing children at risk*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Increased parental education increased academic success</td>
<td>3.32</td>
<td>1.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low socioeconomic status puts a child at great disadvantage</td>
<td>3.09</td>
<td>1.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Girls are better in the literacy area</td>
<td>2.83</td>
<td>1.08</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 8 (continued).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Boys are better in math than girls</td>
<td>2.65</td>
<td>1.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Females are more academic than boys</td>
<td>2.63</td>
<td>1.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single parent children are at the greatest risk</td>
<td>2.52</td>
<td>1.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American children are at the greatest risk</td>
<td>2.17</td>
<td>1.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White children are at the least risk</td>
<td>2.13</td>
<td>1.07</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Likert Scale 1=Strongly Disagree to 5=Strongly Agree

Table 9 highlights teachers perceptions of what improvements would be most beneficial for preschools, kindergartens, administrators, and legislators to make to best serve the early education programs. Teachers were asked to rate each item from 1: Strongly Disagree to 5: Strongly Agree in response to Research Question 1. Most important to early educators was the idea of promoting the skills of social competence and resiliency before a child goes to kindergarten (M = 4.28), along with preschool teachers also promoting social competence and resiliency in the classroom before a child goes to kindergarten (M = 4.27). Early educators also thought there should be better communication between preschool teachers and parents (M = 4.27). Teachers did not believe there should be a greater focus on learning through play (M = 3.56), nor did they
feel that the school age should be raised for starting kindergarten in order to promote
greater academic success ($M = 2.81$).

Table 9

*Suggestions for Success*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Idea</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parents should promote competence and resilience before kindergarten</td>
<td>4.28</td>
<td>.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greater communication between preschool teachers and parents</td>
<td>4.27</td>
<td>.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preschool teachers should promote competence and resilience before kindergarten</td>
<td>4.27</td>
<td>.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greater communication between preschool and kindergarten teachers</td>
<td>4.25</td>
<td>.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kindergarten class sizes should be reduced</td>
<td>4.16</td>
<td>.96</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 9 (continued).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Idea</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Information and evaluations of children</td>
<td>4.05</td>
<td>.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>should transfer with children</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preschools class ratios</td>
<td>3.91</td>
<td>1.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>should be reduced</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preschools programs</td>
<td>3.82</td>
<td>1.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>should be located within the schools where</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>possible</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preschool curriculum</td>
<td>3.56</td>
<td>1.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>should be more focused on learning through play</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School entry age should be raised from the</td>
<td>2.81</td>
<td>1.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>traditional five years to six</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Likert Scale 1=Strongly Disagree to 5=Strongly Agree

Of the five areas of interest, including whether children are prepared for kindergarten, who is most at-risk, what barriers are faced, what demographic identifiers are of most concern, and what areas are best improved or supported, teachers were in
agreement with regard to what is most important, and in what order teachers, administrators, and policy makers should focus their attention. Both kindergarten and preschool teachers were in strong agreement with what should be done to promote children’s academic success ($M = 3.94$). They believed general risk factors ($M = 3.29$), barriers to success ($M = 3.28$), and common core ($M = 3.23$) were factors in future childhood academic success. Teachers were in least agreement with whether childhood demographics was a determinant for future academic success ($M = 2.67$).

Table 10

*Descriptive Statistics of Mean Sub-scores*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strategies for Success</td>
<td>3.94</td>
<td>.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Risk Factors</td>
<td>3.29</td>
<td>.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barriers to Success</td>
<td>3.28</td>
<td>.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Common-Core Preparation</td>
<td>3.23</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Childhood Demographics</td>
<td>2.67</td>
<td>.82</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Likert Scale 1=Strongly Disagree to 5=Strongly Agree

To test whether preschool and kindergarten teachers agreed on the best facility for educating preschool students a $\chi^2$ test of independence was used. According to the $\chi^2$ test of independence this difference was statistically significant $\chi^2 (N = 95, df = 3) = 36.234$, $p < .001$, so it can be inferred that preschool teachers prefer federal preschool programs and kindergarten teachers prefer center-based programs. This resulted in the researcher rejecting Hypothesis 1, which stated “There is not a difference in preschool and kindergarten teachers’ preferences for federal programs such as Head Start, private
preschool, center-based care, or parental care and perceived academic achievement.”

Specifically, out of 61 participating preschool teachers 57.4% (n = 35) believed that federal programs were the best for future academic success. Kindergarten teachers contradicted this belief with 58.8% (n = 20) believing center-based programs provided the best opportunities for future academic success.

Table 11

*Crosstabulation of Best Type of Facility*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Program</th>
<th>Details</th>
<th>Preschool</th>
<th>Kindergarten</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Homecare</td>
<td>Number Chosen</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% in Age Grp</td>
<td>6.6%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Center Based</td>
<td>Number Chosen</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% in Age Grp</td>
<td>29.5%</td>
<td>58.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private/Christian</td>
<td>Number Chosen</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% in Age Grp</td>
<td>6.6%</td>
<td>38.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Federal</td>
<td>Number Chosen</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% in Age Grp</td>
<td>57.4%</td>
<td>2.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Total Number</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Participating</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% in Age Grp</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Research Question 1 asked about the perceived effects of preschool/pre-primary attendance on academic success. Independent t-test results were analyzed to discover if there was a significant difference between each area in question, such as common core,
risk factors, barriers to success, childhood demographics, and promoting a better academic future. Based on the results included in Table 12, there was a significant difference, \( t(93) = 9.315, p < .001 \), between preschool and kindergarten teachers’ perceptions as to children being prepared for Common Core. Such significant results caused the researcher to reject Hypothesis 2, which stated “There is not a difference in preschool and kindergarten teachers’ beliefs that all children are prepared for kindergarten academics.” The mean of prekindergarten teachers (\( M = 3.74 \)) was more than a point higher than that of kindergarten teachers (\( M = 2.31 \)).

Hypothesis 3 said “There is not a difference in preschool and kindergarten teachers’ beliefs as to who is at most risk academically when transitioning to kindergarten.” Based on the results included in Table 12, there was not a significant difference, \( t(93) = -1.117, p = .267 \), which resulted in the failure to reject Hypothesis 3. Hypothesis 4, which stated “There is not a difference in preschool and kindergarten teachers’ beliefs of the barriers faced by children and academic success,” showed similar results. The researcher failed to reject this hypothesis based on the means below and an independent t-test result of \( t(93) = .140, p = .889 \).

Hypothesis 5 states “There is not a difference in preschool and kindergarten teachers’ beliefs with regard to demographic identifiers and academic progress.” In this area, there were slight, but non-significant differences in preschool and kindergarten teachers’ perceptions as to childhood demographics affecting future academic success. Kindergarten teachers (\( M = 2.82 \)) believed that childhood demographics had more of an impact than preschool teachers (\( M = 2.58 \)). However, with an independent t-test result of \( t(93) = -1.366, p = .175 \), the researcher still failed to reject these differences.

Furthermore, Hypothesis 6 said “There is not a difference in preschool and kindergarten
teachers' beliefs of what is needed for early academic success.” The researcher failed to reject this hypothesis based on the means in Table 12 and an independent t-test result of \( t (93) = -0.352, p = .725. \)

Table 12

*Kindergarten and Prekindergarten Teachers' Perceptions*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area of Concern</th>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Common Core</td>
<td>Preschool</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>3.74</td>
<td>.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Kindergarten</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>2.31</td>
<td>.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Risk Factors</td>
<td>Preschool</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>3.23</td>
<td>.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Kindergarten</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>3.39</td>
<td>.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barriers</td>
<td>Preschool</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>3.28</td>
<td>.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Kindergarten</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>3.26</td>
<td>.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demographics</td>
<td>Preschool</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>2.58</td>
<td>.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Kindergarten</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>2.82</td>
<td>.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Success</td>
<td>Preschool</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>3.92</td>
<td>.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Kindergarten</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>3.96</td>
<td>.64</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Qualitative Data Analysis

In the last section of the Academic Perceptions (AP) survey participants were asked to offer *Final Thoughts* with regard to the best way to prepare children for kindergarten either through preschool or other early educational means. Most participants' responses specifically addressed Research Question 1 regarding the
perceived effects of preschool attendance on academic success, while a few responses addressed Research Question 2 regarding demographic identifiers and their impact on future academic success. Overall, 48 of 95 of educators, who completed the survey instrument, responded to the qualitative question, which accounted for a 51% response rate to that question, or 19% response rate based on the 250 total surveys distributed. Specifically, total of 11 kindergarten teachers and 37 preschool teachers responded to the qualitative portion of the survey instrument.

Participants were asked to offer any additional thoughts with regard to preparing children for kindergarten through preschool or other early educational means. All responses were recorded and divided into preschool and kindergarten. Responses were then categorized based on general response themes. These themes are compared and reported in the following paragraphs.

Recall, Research Question 1 asked “What are the perceived effects of preschool/pre-primary attendance on academic success?” Many teachers stated they believed there should be more of a focus on early education. A kindergarten participant explained, “I think K4 should be mandated! There is too big of a gap in what kids know when they start kindergarten.” One preschool participant supported this thought saying, “Kindergarten should be mandatory in the state of Mississippi. Pre-school should also be funded.” While another kindergarten participant explained their feelings of children attending preschool by stating that “many children who have been to preschool seem to be more well-adjusted to being in school than others who stayed home until time to begin school. It is important for children to be ready for that transition.” A preschool participant supported this stating “Preschool Programs are a must! Giving children a Head Start is very beneficial for kindergarten.” Addressing specific programs, a preschool
participant added, “I think the new curriculum head start has implemented this school year will help our children succeed as he/she transitions into kindergarten. I also believe that more preschools in public schools would be a great asset to our children.” “I believe preschool should be based as part of schools to have a consistency and a better preparation,” reinforced a kindergarten participant.

**Communication.** The last idea of preschools being in public schools leads to the discussion of communication between preschool and kindergartens. A preschool participant said she believed “kindergarten and preschool teachers should be on the same page.” “There should be more communication between preschool and kindergarten teachers,” said two preschool teachers. Another preschool participant said, “I feel that kindergarten teachers should communicate more with the preschool teachers.” One preschool participant suggested a committee-type of setting for communication, “I think there should be designated teachers from kindergarten and Head Start on a committee so the Head Start teachers know what the kindergarten teachers are looking for & the kindergarten teachers will know what the Head Start teachers are teaching.”

“Preschool teachers need more help in the classroom and parents should be more involved in the classroom with the kids and teachers,” said a preschool participant. “I think the level of parental involvement for each child impacts that child’s success,” explained another preschool participant. “Their has to be communication between parents and teachers for any child to succeed regardless of financial status,” reinforced one preschool participant. Another preschool participant explained “the kindergarten teachers want to put most of the blame of not learning on the preschool teacher when in fact there is not enough parent involvement with the child’s education at preschool level.”
Common Core. A recurrent theme throughout teacher responses, both preschool and kindergarten, was the discussion of increased academic requirements with such curriculum programs as Common Core. “If Common Core is the curriculum there has to be something done to get them ready before they enter 5K at school. Some children are just not mature enough to sit still and do the Common Core,” as one kindergarten teacher said.

Another teacher offered the following.

“I believe the push to introduce more and more academic emphasis in preschool and kindergarten age children is greatly hurting our children. I believe this to be evident in the behavior problems we see escalating in our elementary and upper education schools. Much cognitive and developmental maturity is being skipped or rushed by “raising the bar” and requiring or aspiring for these children to read and acquire upper math skills at this early age. There are so many connections that need to occur and be solid before beginning first grade level learning (ex: the process from recognizing a letter-to knowing its sound-to copying in in print-to recognizing it in print-to using it to make words-to read then sing it to write and spell words.) Children are sponges but just because they are able to recite something back to you doesn’t mean they fully grasp the understanding of the material they get through touching it, moving it, looking for it.”

However, others agree that Common Core education is important. “Common Core should be taught in all federally funded and private facilities,” said one preschool teacher. “The Common Core is very important to preschool,” said another. “I said all that to say public school should take control of the program to make sure our students are learning according to the Common Core,” stated another preschool teacher.
Teacher Certification. One kindergarten teacher participant said, “Preschool teachers should all be certified! Common Core Curriculum is not a curriculum to throw at some, who do not know what to do with it or the real meaning of learning through play.” Another kindergarten teacher’s response expanded this idea stating, “While I have known many Preschool Teachers, who are not “professionally certified” to be effective teachers, I believe those who have a teaching certification are best. I have found, in my personal experience, that undergraduate and graduate educational courses have helped me develop a more focused, research-based curriculum.” This same teacher went on to say, “because the Common Core requires so much from students, I feel we need to place more emphasis on more highly qualified preschool teachers to meet these demands.”

A preschool participant supported this idea stating that, “I believe a better qualified staff will produce a better quality student.” This teacher also went on to say, “…so with an associates or bachelors being your foundation and in-house training with Head Start. We have teachers, high quality teachers, who have compassion as well as to serve our children and families.” “I truly feel that the school your child attends does matter but the teacher is the most important. Teachers must be educated in age appropriateness and early childhood,” said another preschool participant. One kindergarten participant said that, “educated teachers and assistants will promote educated children that will be the educated future.”

A kindergarten participant said, “The success of a student in school starts at home. K is not “play” it is academics and parents need to see the importance of working with their children at home.” This statement leads to responses concerning demographic identifiers and children’s future academic success including such ideas as race/ethnicity,
gender, race, parental education, and parental marital status, which were discussed in the Likert-scale questions.

 Parental Education. As one preschool teacher noted, “I strongly believe that preschool and/or having educated parents work with their child better prepares the child for kindergarten.” “The more educated the parents are the more they can teach their children. Some children don’t get that home care at home, because the parents don’t know what to teaching their children, because they are not educated themselves,” said another. A kindergarten teacher explained that, “we also need to encourage and foster the education at this level of parents on parenting skills—discipline, good diet, good exercise habits, keeping a routine for children. The children are often running the show in their homes. There is a huge gap from the parents themselves now [who] were not well parented.”

 Demographics. “I don’t think gender or race is a factor (for the most part) when dealing with intelligence. My smartest girl is an African American who goes to 1st grade for Reading. My smartest boy is white. In my low group I have mixed genders & races,” said one preschool teacher. “Some single parents put more effort into their children’s education than some 2 parent homes. Same applies for black vs white homes,” said another preschool participant.

 Lower ratios and curriculum adaptation were also themes throughout teachers’ statements. “The number of preschoolers to 2 teachers should be reduced to 14 or lower,” said one preschool teacher. Others were more concerned with the developmental appropriateness of the curriculum. “It kills me to see all those little ones sitting down doing seatwork (worksheets) instead of having fun while they learn,” said one kindergarten teacher. “Their attention spans are also suffering because of the increased
use of computers and technology—they are becoming addicted to stimulation. Quiet is
difficult for them,” said another kindergarten participant. Many teachers attribute issues
of attention span and behavior to the various entrance ages.

“I do not think that the age range should exceed 5 years old due to the children
having to spend 2 yrs in head start (if birthday is before Sept.)” said one preschool
teacher. However, another preschool participant said, “I think if a child is ready for
school after Sept. 1 need to go to kindergarten. One preschool teacher even
recommended “…children should be grouped according to academic progression.”
Another preschool teacher expanded this idea by saying, “Don’t hold those who are ready
to go on.” Parents are instrumental in making such decisions and pushing for change
where necessary.

General Curriculum. “A lot of parents do not know the requirements that are
needed before there children enter kindergarten and that would put a lot of children
behind in the beginning,” said one preschool participant. While one kindergarten teacher
added that, “Parents should be educated to know the importance of early childhood.”
Lastly, another preschool teacher suggested that there should be “a standard curriculum
between preschools and public schools would have a tremendous impact on school
readiness.” “All school districts should be on the same level just in case a child moves to
a different school district,” said another. One preschool teacher offered the following,
“Children do not learn the same way, do not learn at the same pace, and do not develop
the necessary skills for school readiness without proper curriculum and lesson plans that
develop the whole child, based on each child’s individual needs.”
Summary

Using a multi-method instrument to survey kindergarten and prekindergarten teachers, this study was designed to examine the teachers’ perceptions with regard to preschool attendance and demographic identifiers and future academic success. The researcher adapted and added to the Kindergarten Readiness survey originally developed by Dr. Mary O’Kane. The instrument included a new specific demographic area, a common core section, demographic-specific scenarios, and an opened ended question for teacher input. This allowed the survey instrument to yield both quantitative and qualitative data. Data was broken down into specific ratings of each scenario and then compiled for significance. Preschool and kindergarten teachers’ overall perceptions as to Common Core preparedness, along with the best types of facilities for academic achievement showed statistically significant differences. The data showed that there were not an overall statistically significant differences in preschool and kindergarten teachers’ perceptions of risk factors, barriers to early educational success, specific childhood demographic identifiers, and what would assist with making children more academically successful. Individual items in each area offered insight as to scenarios or identifiers most supported by both preschool and kindergarten teachers. A discussion of these results is in Chapter V.
CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of kindergarten and preschool teachers' with regard to early childhood education achievement, practices, and the potential effects of childhood demographics. This study examined early educators' beliefs as to the best type of early education program they would recommend, whether they believed children were prepared for kindergarten with current curriculum guidelines, which type of children they believed would be most at-risk, what kind of barriers children faced that could prevent future academic success, demographic identifiers and their effects, and what teachers felt would be most beneficial in promoting children's academic success. Preschool and kindergarten teachers from south Mississippi were asked to complete the Academic Perception (AP) survey, which yielded both quantitative and qualitative data. Chapter V includes a summary of procedures and findings, a discussion of results and, finally, a discussion of results and recommendations for future policy, administrative practice, and future research.

Summary of Procedures

Directors and superintendents from seven school districts and 10 preschool programs in south Mississippi agreed to participate. The seven-section AP survey was then developed from Dr. Mary O'Kane's Kindergarten Readiness Survey, so that the final survey would encompass common core curriculum, specific childhood demographic data, and a qualitative section. After being reviewed and validated by an expert panel of educators and administrators, the instrument was submitted for Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval at The University of Southern Mississippi. Once the IRB granted approval, an additional consent letter to conduct research was sent to the kindergarten
principals in each school district that had previously granted permission. The researcher then conducted a pilot study. As mentioned in Chapter III, results from the pilot study were entered into SPSS and a Cronbach alpha reliability coefficient test was used to examine the reliability of the AP. Reliabilities of .75 or above were recorded for all sections except *Barriers to Success*. However, this total corrected itself during the dissertation study, and no issues were found with reliability.

By preference of the participating preschool directors and kindergartens’ principals, the researcher either hand delivered and distributed, or mailed the instrument, an informed consent form, survey cover letter, and a self-addressed envelope where needed via the United States Postal Service. During the spring semester of the 2012-2013 school year, a total of 250 surveys were distributed and 95 preschool and kindergarten teachers from south Mississippi completed and returned the completed instrument. Once the researcher received a completed survey instrument, the instrument was labeled by input cell in an Excel worksheet, and whether it was preschool or kindergarten, and order of submission. Next, quantitative data was entered into an Excel spreadsheet, entered into SPSS, and analyzed with t-tests and descriptive statistics. Qualitative data was recorded by Excel number and classification of preschool and kindergarten level in a Microsoft Word document for further analysis.

**Major Findings**

The findings from this study are from south Mississippi teachers mainly comprised of early education professionals in the mid-age ranges and mainly African American or White. All kindergarten teachers were female, and most preschool teachers were female with a few male participants. The majority of teachers, both kindergarten and preschool held at least a bachelor’s degree. To the contrary, almost a quarter had no
formal degree at all, which is interesting to note given the impact of high stakes testing and the call for increased teacher education. These teacher demographics, such as education, could be of considerable importance based on the research questions presented.

Research Question 1, asked “What are the perceived effects of preschool/pre-primary attendance on future academic success?” In doing so it examined teachers’ preferences for federal programs such as Head Start, private preschool, center-based, or parental care and perceived academic achievement, stating there would not be a difference in teachers’ perceptions any type of facility, including common core curriculum, potential educational barriers, and what was needed for future academic success.

Descriptive statistics showed there was almost an equal split of teacher participants who marked their preferences for center-based programs and for federal programs as the best facilities for educating and promoting educational success of preschool students. This is interesting because the majority of the participating teachers were employed in either public or in federal facilities. Findings would suggest that early educational professionals prefer the type of educational facility with which they were employed to promote the greatest overall academic achievement. However, there were significant differences in teachers’ preferences for which type of facility that best promoted the academic success of students. These differences were also seen in the section titled Common Core, which asked participants to indicate the percentage of children who they believe will begin kindergarten with the a list of Common Core skills taken directly from the Mississippi Department of Education Early Learning Standards for Common Core (Burnham, House, & Green, 2012).
Through t-test data a significant difference in prekindergarten and kindergarten teachers’ preferences as to students’ preparedness for kindergarten was shown. Prekindergarten teachers believed children were prepared for kindergarten with the listed skills and most kindergarten teachers believe children are not prepared as needed for ideal academic success. The means for common core knowledge suggested a wide range of knowledge held by prekindergarten students. In general, teachers felt students were comfortable with expressing their opinions through scribbles, drawings, letters, and dictations. Whereas teachers believed students were unprepared for demonstrating an understanding of syllables, using comparison terms such as “more than” and “less than,” and lacking the knowledge to use charts, graphs, maps and lists. This finding could suggest that students are not getting the necessary preschool training or that assessments in preschool are not measuring what is desired by the board of education.

Significant differences were not seen for other hypothesis mentioned with regard to Research Question 1, such as teachers’ preferences for barriers faced by children, and what is needed for future academic success. As mentioned before, hypothesis 4 stated, “There will not be a difference between the barriers faced by children and perceived academic success,” and was addressed in Section 4 of the AP survey. Though there was not a significant difference in the prekindergarten and kindergarten teachers overall beliefs with regard to barriers faced by children, individual sections provide notable data for discussion. In general teachers felt there was a true lack of communication between prekindergarten and kindergarten teachers, age was an important factor in children beginning school, and there were too many different prekindergarten programs. On the other hand, they were ambivalent with regard to any possible cultural differences between prekindergarten and kindergarten programs affecting future academic success.
The section titled Suggestions for Success showed similar patterns in the findings. Overall, there was a not a significant difference in preschool and kindergarten teachers' beliefs as to what promoted the most positive academic environment. However, looking at individual scores, teachers believed parents should be promoting competence and resilience before a child attends kindergarten, and so should preschool teachers. Also responses suggested there should be greater communication between preschool teachers and parents, and between preschool and kindergarten teachers.

Research Question 1 asked “What are the perceived effects of preschool/pre-primary attendance on future academic success?” Findings suggested that preschool and kindergarten teachers felt children should be attending some sort of preschool program. Findings also suggested that students don't know or understand common core curriculum, and communication is lacking between teachers of the various age groups and between parents and teachers. Both preschool and kindergarten teachers felt there were too many and too varied types of preschools programs.

Research Question 2 asked “What is the relationship between demographic identifiers and preschool/pre-primary attendance on perceived academic success?” This was addressed by the researcher with sections titled General Beliefs and Childhood Demographics. General Beliefs of risk factors asked the participants to indicate their level of agreement with regard to each of the following groups of children and if these groups are perceived at-risk in general terms of transitioning to kindergarten. Data showed there was not a significant difference in preschool and kindergarten teachers' perceptions of how various risk factors would affect their transition to kindergarten. Preschool and kindergarten teachers were in agreement that not attending preschool caused the greatest disadvantage to students, while birth order, having a friend in class,
and a child’s age were not considered “risk” to a child’s success. This suggested that as long as children attend a preschool program, then anything that may be considered placing a child in a disadvantaged situation may be worked with to achieve greater academic success.

Hypothesis 5 stated that “There will not be a difference in teachers perceived beliefs of demographic identifiers and future academic success” with regard to Research Question 2. Again, there were not overall significant differences between preschool and kindergarten teachers’ beliefs. However, when examining each individual selection in the Childhood Demographics Section of the AP survey interesting results can be taken from the individual means, which could be important for future application. Results suggested teachers agreed that increased parental education increased academic success and being from a low socioeconomic background did put a child a disadvantage for future academic success. Results suggested that teachers did not feel race was factor in academic success, stating that African American children were not at the greatest risk and White children were not at the least risk.

As previously mentioned, Research Question 2 asked “What is the relationship between demographic identifiers and preschool/pre-primary attendance on perceived academic success in the future?” Though the researcher failed to reject the hypothesis related to this question, individual findings with regard to teachers’ perceptions of the effects of demographics emerged that contradicted prior research studies. One such contradictory factor is that of race/ethnicity not being a factor in academic success. Quantitative data supported parental education and socioeconomic status as having been large determinants of academic success, along with qualitative data.
The qualitative section of the AP survey provided thought-provoking information from participant teachers. Titled *Final Thoughts*, the qualitative section asked teachers to offer their thoughts with regard to the best way to prepare children, through early education, for future academic success, and if teachers had any suggestions for improvement. With almost half of the participants offering comments, suggestions, and thoughts, comments were concentrated with regard to Research Question 1.

Regarding early education in general, both preschool teachers and kindergarten teachers believed having a mandated preschool program would assist in closing educational gaps in kindergarten and throughout early education. Teachers felt Mississippi should make kindergarten compulsory in order to ensure academic success. Teachers felt Common Core required such early interventions because of its complexity, and some teachers felt children were not developmentally ready for this level of rigor at such a young age.

Teachers also felt communication between parents and teachers, along with preschool and kindergarten teachers should be increased. Furthermore, teachers believed parents’ education was an important factor in the success of students and the more educated the parents are, the better their children would do in school. Teachers from both age groups felt increasing the education of teachers would in fact increase the success of the students.

The last comment directly relates to Research Question 2 with regard to the effect of childhood demographics. Along with increasing parents education, some teachers did not feel race/ethnicity were a factor in early educational success, but age was a factor. Participants thought the age of a child could affect academic success due to the child’s maturity and the child’s prior experiences or exposures.
Overall significant findings were only noted in context to Common Core subject matter between preschool and kindergarten teachers. Statistical findings showed kindergarten teachers believed children were not prepared for the academic rigor ahead and preschool teachers believed children were. However, as discussed in Chapter IV and Chapter V, individual data components of the survey instrument offered additional insight as to the perceptions of the preschool and kindergarten participants with regard to academic success and the effects of demographic identifiers. Descriptive statistics suggested teachers prefer and support the type of program and facility with which they are employed as having the best ability to serve students academically. Furthermore, findings may suggest that as long a child attends a preschool program, many academic and behavioral descriptors could be addressed, supported, or corrected with educated teachers.

Discussion

Newly published and consistent with his prior speeches, President Obama’s 2013 State of the Union address called for preschool to be made available for more than just the “disadvantaged” four year-olds, but at least through middle class, along with a full-day kindergarten in all states in order to begin closing academic achievement gaps (Klein, 2013). Recently acquired data explained that, “Mississippi is the only state in the South that does not fund preschool” (Gilbertson, 2013).

Klein (2013) quotes Obama as saying that for “every dollar we invest in high-quality early education can save more than seven dollars later on by boosting graduation rates, reducing teen pregnancy, even reducing violent crimes” (para. 4). This was similar to Lynch’s (2010) publication which proffered a 12.3 point gain for every dollar invested in Mississippi’s early education program. As mentioned earlier, Lynch suggested an
early education program in Mississippi could pay for itself within 14 years. Findings from this study along with recent publications support prior research reported in Chapter II.

In general, both prekindergarten and kindergarten teachers agreed children needed prekindergarten to be successful. As one kindergarten teacher stated earlier, “I believe prekindergarten should be based as part of the schools to have a consistency and a better preparation.” A prekindergarten teacher said “preschool programs are a must! Giving children a head start is very beneficial for kindergarten.” Quantitative data concurred with teacher viewpoints. The scenario stated that not attending prekindergarten was one of the greatest barriers to academic success. Along with descriptive statistics showing a little preference by prekindergarten teachers, and no kindergarten teacher support for home care being the best program for overall academic success, this would suggest that children who are not enrolled in an early education program will not be as successful.

These ideas are consistent with researchers such as Magnusum et al. (2007a). They believed prekindergarten would truly assist in closing the academic achievement gap. Downer and Pianta (2006) believed the higher quality education the more future academic success stories children would have. More recently, President Obama’s Race to the Top initiative in 2012 noted that to receive additional federal funding Mississippi needed a preschool program to be successful. Furthermore, larger landmark studies and acts such as Abbott v. Burke (1985) suggested there should be quality education for all four year-old students and not to just the disadvantaged. Some studies explained that early education opportunities are most telling of future academic success (Downer & Pianta, 2006; Greenburg, 2011).
Some states, as mentioned in Chapter II, have proven results. One such program was located in Georgia, which offered a full-day program to all four year-old children, and then testing to make sure these children were ready for kindergarten (Fitzpatrick, 2008). Oklahoma boasted an 87% increase in academic scores for the upper-socioeconomic students who attended preschool (Barnett & Frede, 2010). Similar positive result were seen through the Carolina Abecedarian Project (Campbell & Ramey, 2010), High/Scope Perry Preschool program (Schweinhart, 2010), and the Chicago Child-Parent center preschool program (Reynolds et al., 2010). Each of these publications suggested that preschool boosted academic scores and throughout a child’s lifetime.

Descriptive statistics were able to break down which type of early education was believed to be the most positive for future academic success, especially for those meeting specific demographic criteria. Most prekindergarten teachers believed children would receive the best education if the programs were located in federal facilities, while most kindergarten teachers believed center-based programs would assist students with being successful. These findings can be correlated with the type of facility each participant was employed. However, kindergarten teachers’ perceptions were most consistent with prior literature such as Magnuson et al. (2007a) who reported that children attending a center-based preschool program would not only have higher kindergarten entrance scores, but overall academic achievement.

Hart and Risley (2006) stated a minimum of 35%-45% of kindergarten-age children were not ready for the academic rigors. Furthermore and recently noted, common core cannot be successful if children do not have the education necessary to progress and understand the increased requirements (Sparks, 2013). According to the data, the Common Core quantitative section showed the only overall statistically
significant results between the preschool and kindergarten teachers surveyed.
Kindergarten teachers did not believe children were prepared for the rigor of common core and preschool teachers believed children were. This adds to the educational controversy as to when to retain students, how to assess students, and the most successful educational tactics.

Overall, individual data selections of common core early childhood requirements showed very mixed results because preschool and kindergarten teachers were not in agreement on early childhood preparation. As mentioned in Chapter IV, students were able to communicate through drawings, letters, and scribbles, and even write their name, but they were unable to use charts, graphs, maps, and lists, along with understanding syllables. This is interesting to note because though Common Core has been adopted by the state of Mississippi since 2010, but not all schools have adopted these requirements. Qualitative responses from teachers supported these findings, explaining that “some children are not mature enough to sit still and do the Common Core,” as one kindergarten teacher noted. A preschool teacher contradicted this thought, suggesting that children are ready by saying that “Common Core should be taught in all federally funded and private facilities.”

According to a newly published article in Education Week, “all but four states are currently working on adapting K-12 instruction to align with the Common Core State Standards, an initiative led by the nation’s governors and the council” (Samuels, 2013). Interestingly, one kindergarten teacher seemed to see the importance of being proactive with regard to these mandates coming down the pipe. One kindergarten teacher said, “Preschool teachers should all be certified! Common Core Curriculum is not a curriculum to throw at some who does not know what to do with it or the real meaning of
learning through play.” A preschool teacher said that “a better qualified staff will produce a better quality student.” Other teachers agreed with this mindset based on common core requirements.

Kreisman (2003) believed that the more educated a teacher, the more successful the students. Chaiklin (2003) explained how teachers must be educated in how to best work with children to meet their developmental and academic needs (Vygotsky, 1978). These are interesting statements because descriptive statistics showed that just over half of participant teachers had bachelor’s degrees or higher, while the remaining teachers had general education diplomas, Child Development Association (CDA) certifications or Associates degrees, which raises the question as to the effectiveness of those teachers without formal education. As one preschool teacher said, “a teacher must be educated in age appropriateness and early childhood.” Quantitative data was consistent with prior research findings and new publications. In the Barriers to Success selection, teachers showed they were in agreement that teachers’ lack of training could be a barrier to child’s future success.

President Obama suggested that one way to increase academic achievement is to also increase the academic achievement of the teachers, such as requiring early childhood degrees and certifications (Sawchuk, 2013). In support of higher achievement, Mississippi Governor Phil Bryant has suggested legislation stating he would like to raise the educational requirements for those entering educational academia and completing it. However, proponents of his legislation stated that this would cause a severe teaching shortage (McDaniel, 2013) even suggesting that some teacher candidates would not qualify for the teacher program they are currently enrolled.
This is important because Vygotsky (1978) believed educators could make up for missed childhood experiences and provide essential new ones for children, making the children more academically successful (Mooney, 2000), which is consistent with his "zone of proximal development" theory (Dixon & Verenikina, 2007). Quantitative data agreed, Table 5 titled General Beliefs explained that not attending preschool was one of the major risk factors for a child not being successful in early education. However, the argument emerges on how to best combat this risk factor, what should be done to help these children, and when should children first be exposed to early education.

Children progress through developmental stages at their own pace, which propagates the idea of individualized learning, according to Piaget (1983). Chronological pace is not necessarily the way children become prepared for kindergarten or any stage, so each child must be seen individually (Cahan & Cohen, 1989). As one preschool teacher stated, “I think if a child is ready for school after Sept 1, they need to go to kindergarten,” suggesting an assessment of readiness. Quantitative results showed that both prekindergarten and kindergarten teachers were in agreement that school start time should be mandated based on age. However, in another section of the survey instrument, teachers responded that school entry age should not be raised from 5 to 6 in order to make sure children are mature enough for the academic and social demands. Based on early descriptive statistics that suggested most teachers believed admission to kindergarten should not be just age, but several proponents surveyed including: age, social, emotional and intellectual standings of the child.

As previously mentioned, to make sure children are mature enough to progress, some states and schools have chosen to adjust the entrance age for children to kindergarten (Stipek, 2006). However, as one preschool teacher explained, “I don’t think
that the age range should exceed 5 years old due to the children having to spend 2 yrs in
head start.” Furthermore, another kindergarten teacher explained that “much cognitive
and developmental maturity is being skipped or rushed by “raising the bar” and requiring
or aspiring for these children to read and acquire upper math skills at this early age.”
Consequently, to help prevent against children being passed on before they are ready,
Senate Bill 2347 was recently passed in Mississippi, which states that just because a child
is a certain age, then they should not be socially promoted (Hill et al., 2013).

Demographic results are varied throughout the quantitative and qualitative data,
which is very similar to prior research. Joo (2010) and Resnick (2010) believed parents’
education, specifically the mother’s, and socioeconomic status were the biggest predictors
of academic success. Similar reports of race, gender, and maternal education were also
predicted by Berlinski et al. (2008) and Magnuson et al. (2004). Furthermore, studies by
Burchinal et al., (2011), Campbell and Ramey (2010), Kreisman (2003), and Schweinhart
(2010), to name a few, believed that there is a significant educational gap between Black
and White students in the United States. Bull et al. (2011) agreed that there was a
significant academic gap between children of the various socioeconomic status groups,
also adding that girls were more mature than boys academically.

Though quantitative data results were not significant overall, individual results are
important for overall opinions. Teachers were not in agreement that just being from a
disadvantaged background was an automatic academic risk factor. Teachers were not in
agreement that gender was an identifier for academic success, nor was race/ethnicity.
This disagreement was also extended into the marital status of parents with many teachers
explaining how parental participation and support was case-by-case and not an automatic
determinant.
Qualitative responses were limited in this area, but teachers were adamant that basic demographics such as race, gender, and parent’s marital status were not exact identifiers. Specifically, one preschool teacher stated that her smartest girl is African American and her smartest boy is White. Another preschool teacher explained that “Some single parents put more effort into their children’s education than some 2 parent homes.” She also believed that the same was true for the various race/ethnic groups.

However, the one demographic identifier that teachers of all age groups can agree on is that of socioeconomic status. Landmark studies such as the High/Scope Perry Preschool study show socioeconomic status was a large predictor of academic status (Schweinhart, 2010). This was also true in the Carolina Abecedarian Project (Temple & Reynolds, 2007). Quantitative data supported these findings with teachers being in agreement that being from a disadvantaged home was a major risk factor for academic success, along with being children being from a low socioeconomic status income family.

Though teachers were not in full agreement, prior research states that the ideal student would be White, with two married, educated parents in the upper socioeconomic group (Calkins, 2003; Loeb et al., 2007; Rudasill et al., 2010). Burchinal et al. (2011) had very similar findings, along with noting the importance of parenting attitudes and parental education in general. Specifically, in this study the data showed teachers felt increased parental education would increase a child’s academic success.

As stated in Hergenhahn and Olson (2005) Piaget explained believed developmental interactions begin with the parents; therefore parents must know and understand their responsibilities. “The success of a student in school starts at home. “K [kindergarten] is not “play” it is academics and parents need to see the importance working with their children at home,” said a kindergarten teacher. Participating teachers
believed that educated parents make better students because, “some parents don’t know what to teach their children, because they are not educated themselves,” said one kindergarten teacher. Another kindergarten teacher explained that “Parents should be educated to know the importance of early childhood.”

The importance of education and a child’s enthusiasm for it may affect a child through adulthood. According to one recent news article, eleven Mississippi retired generals have called for funding for early childhood education because of the proven increases in achievement it can have throughout a person’s lifetime. They asked for this because they believe “nearly 90 percent of young Mississippians aged 17 to 24 can’t qualify for military service according to Mission Readiness, a non-partisan national security group made up of retired senior military officials” (Cheny, 2013).

As Barnett (2008) and Joo (2010) stated some preschool is always better than no preschool no matter the facility or situation because as Bandura (1994) said in and with his self-efficacy theory, as long as a child has the confidence to learn, they will be able to be successful. If education is to successfully intervene into matters that could potentially affect future academics the most influential time is preschool (Reynolds et al., 2010). As mentioned previously, the National Education Goals Panel (2012) hoped to provide “high quality and developmentally appropriate preschool programs that help prepare children for school” (p. 1).

Limitations

As with any study, there are limitations to consider when discussing the findings of this study. The reader should note that participating kindergarten and preschool teachers were from the southern Mississippi geographic area. Not all school districts participated in the survey, along with the non-participation of some individual schools.
There was also the inability to locate of many preschool programs, some of which are not registered. The reader should also note the large participation of federally funded preschool programs that participated, which might have affected some of the results.

Ninety-five participants having completed the survey instrument were enough to draw conclusions with regard to the research questions. However, there were almost twice as many preschool participants as there were kindergarten participants. This was sufficient, but the researcher desired a higher number of kindergarten teachers’ participation.

Raising additional concerns is the fact that only three males working in preschools participated in this study, and only female kindergarten teachers responded to the survey, which could possibly be a cause for skewed results. Also adding to possible limitations is that the majority of participants had a bachelor’s degree, while almost a quarter had only a certificate or high school diploma. Whether gender representation and educational skill level had an effect on the results cannot be determined, but a more representative sample may be desired for future studies.

Recommendations for Future Policies and Procedures

The adoption of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) (2002) mandating that all children are on grade-level by the 2013-2014 school year, and the Common Core standards outlining exactly what students should know across every state has made early intervention a necessity, so that every child’s needs are met (MDE, 2012). Race to the Top federal initiatives offering additional federal monies for increasing rigor and additions of preschool programs has set high standards for early education (Race to the Top, 2012). Specifically in the state of Mississippi, Senate Bill No. 2347 was “an act to establish the ‘Literacy-Based Promotion Act’ to improve kindergarten and first through
third grade public school students reading skills so that every student completing third grade reads at or above grade level…” (Hill et al., 2013, para. 1). As mentioned previously, the time for intervention is not third grade, but through early education programs. Contradicting NCLB, this act would not allow students who do not meet literacy standards to be promoted; therefore if children do not meet guidelines they will not continue (Hill et al., 2013).

As one preschool teacher noted, “…public school should take control of the program to make sure our students are learning according to the Common Core.” This study and prior research leads to the recommendation of some sort of evaluation system for preschools to make sure children are ready for kindergarten. Having such a program has increased the academic success for children in states such as Georgia with their Georgia Kindergarten Assessment Program (GKAP) (Taylor et al., 2000).

In accordance with President Obama’s State of the Union Address, both preschool and kindergarten teacher participants agree that teachers need to be qualified (Sawchuk, 2013). Quantitative data from this study supported teachers needing additional training in order to make children more successful, and qualitative data from teachers said much the same. Teacher comments ranged from all teachers needing additional credentials to additional training in developmentally appropriate tactics. Recent literature states that the degree should be a solid foundation, but that there is much more to making sure a teacher is prepared for early childhood education (Sawchuk, 2013). These ideas support some of the educational theorist, as mentioned in Chapter II, such as Piaget, Bandura, and Vygotsky who believed in the important role parents and educators play in providing the earliest experience for children in their educational journey. Studies by Magnuson et al.
(2004) and Reynolds et al. (2010) discuss how Title I funds may be used for the needed educational increase in teacher credentials and for additional teacher support.

As stated by one of the preschool participants, with all that is put into place with policies, law, and practice, “Children do not learn the same way, do not learn at the same pace, and do not develop the necessary skills for school readiness without proper curriculum and lesson plans that develop the whole child, based on the child’s individual needs.” Boyd et al. (2011) explained that the best time in which to make interventions is during the preschool years, which was also supported by Reynolds et al. (2010).

With that statement it is understood that current practices do not have preschool and kindergarten curriculums flowing in a conducive manner to best meet all children’s needs. School districts and preschools, including public, private, federal, and otherwise must work together to develop a system that is communicating and open. As noted by House Minority Leader Bobby Moak of Bouge Chitto, Mississippi with the possible implementation and legislation supporting charter schools not doing so could be detrimental to public education (Hess, 2013). With “1.3 million children in 40 U.S. states” (Epstein & Barnett, 2012, p. 4) enrolled in some sort of preschool program and many more that are not, policies in place should be driving more consistent programs for early childhood learning and educating parents as to the importance of early childhood learning.

Recommendation for Future Research

In future studies, the researcher recommends the following items for continued study and research with regard to the academic perceptions of preschool and kindergarten teacher and demographic identifiers of children:
1. Future studies should include a larger and more equivalent number of participants that would be more demographically representative of the early education population, along with equal participation from each type of facility.

2. Future studies should also consider academic grades in kindergarten and subsequent elementary grade levels, possibly through the third grade because that is the first year of standardized testing in Mississippi.

3. Future studies should explore the entire Common Core curriculum and students' knowledge, possibly through individualized testing as this survey only asks for the teachers perceptions of children being prepared.

4. Future studies should explore curriculum programs utilized in the various preschool programs and kindergarten centers how these affect the overall academic outcomes of students.

5. Future studies should obtain an associate the degree level of teachers and comparing these to student outcomes for comparing teacher academic obtainment to perceived academic success.

Summary

Data was collected from preschool and kindergarten teachers in south Mississippi to determine their perceptions as to early childhood achievement, educational practices, and how childhood demographics may factor into students' success. Specific areas of interest included what preschool and kindergarten teachers believed was the best type of early education program and what they believed best constituted a child beginning kindergarten. In addition, teachers were asked how they believed demographic risk factors, various educational barriers, demographic identifiers that could be a factor, and how best to promote student education.
The Academic Perception (AP) survey incorporates researcher-developed questions along with survey selections developed by Dr. Mary O’Kane, of the Dublin Institute of Technology and her Kindergarten Readiness Questionnaire. This survey was developed because no other comprehensive survey focused on specific items such as demographic identifiers, and Common Core and specific types of early education. Preschool and kindergarten teachers in south Mississippi were asked to complete the seven-section survey instrument.

The data from these areas of quantitative questioning showed that overall preschool teachers believed children were prepared for Common Core curriculum, but kindergarten teachers did not believe children came to kindergarten knowing the Common Core as readily as they should. Though there was no significant difference between the beliefs of preschool and kindergarten teachers in the other areas of questioning, the data revealed specific areas of focus under each section, such as the need for increased communication between preschools and kindergartens, and the need for increased parental education. Furthermore, the data also showed that most preschool and kindergarten teachers were employed in either public or federal institutions, which correlated with the idea that, in general, most teachers believed students received the best early education from either center-based or federal facilities. For the most part, teachers believed their institution was doing the best job educating children. Only a small number of teachers believed keeping a child at home until kindergarten was best.

The AP survey instrument also allowed educators to contribute without fear of reprisal due to its guarantee of anonymity with the multiple-choice questions, the Likert-scale scenarios, and qualitative question. The qualitative question on the survey instrument asked for additional thoughts or suggestions by the survey participants with
regard to early education and students’ success. The study exposed educators’ desires for all children to attend some sort of preschool program with additional communication between all educational levels, and also with parents. The study also revealed that both preschool and kindergarten teachers believed all teachers should be certified in their profession. Parents should also be educated in early education curriculum, so that parents understand what is needed for children.

Encompassing all of the quantitative data, along with the qualitative suggestions, the researcher was able to make recommendations for further research with regard to how teachers’ perceive children’s preparedness for future academic rigors lie, along with whether and what demographic variables may affect children’s success. Furthermore, the researcher was also able to expand the research data, and offer suggestions for the focus of future policies, research, and curriculum design, which was the researcher’s overall goal.
APPENDIX A
SUPERINTENDENT LETTER

Date:
Name of Superintendent
Name of School District
District Address:

Dear Superintendent _____.

My name is Melanie Boyle and I am a graduate student at the University of Southern Mississippi in the Educational Leadership doctoral program. I have recently completed the required coursework for my PhD and I will soon be conducting the research component required for my dissertation.

I have chosen the topic: Prekindergarten and kindergarten teachers' perceptions of childhood demographic determinants and academic achievement. This study will focus on teachers' perceptions of children’s general common core knowledge leaving preschool and entering kindergarten, perceptions of the transition process from early education to kindergarten, perception of potential barriers to children’s success, perceptions of childhood demographics that could cause a disadvantage for the student, and teachers’ perceptions of ideas that could promote a more successful student.

I am requesting permission to distribute questionnaires to your kindergarten and preschool teachers. With your permission, I would coordinate with the principals of each of your elementary schools to distribute the surveys at a regularly scheduled faculty meeting or online. As will be explained in the cover letter distributed with the survey, participation will be voluntary and any teacher or school identifying information will be kept confidential.

As a former classroom teacher, I understand the grueling demands of high-stakes testing and ensuring that all children are prepared for the next step in their educational careers. As a parent of two preschoolers, I also understand the importance of early education. This study will provide information as to what students need to be academically successful and teachers’ perceptions of barriers to this success. Once the study is complete, I will be very happy to share the results with you or other interested parties of your district.

If you choose to grant me permission to conduct this research with teachers in your district, please copy and paste the content of the enclosed consent form to your district letterhead, sign it, and return it in the self-addressed, stamped envelope, or if you would like, I can pick this up at your earliest convenience.
My email address is melanieboyle07@yahoo.com and my cell is 601-616-7110 if you have any questions or concerns. Dr. David Lee of the University of Southern Mississippi is my committee chair and his email address is david.c.lee@usm.edu.

Your thought and consideration is most appreciated.

Respectfully,

Melanie Boyle
Doctoral Candidate, University of Southern Mississippi

Enclosure

CC: Dr. David Lee, Committee Chair

SUPERINTENDENTS’ PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH:
CONSENT FORM

(Please place on school letterhead. I would be happy to email this to you if you will let me know at melanieboyle07@yahoo.com)

As superintendent of ________________ District, I give Melanie Boyle permission to conduct educational research in the district during the spring semester of the 2012-2013 academic school year.

The research conducted will measure teachers’ perceptions of student academic readiness and demographic determinants, along with the teachers’ perceptions of what is needed for the academic success of our youngest students.

Permission is granted to distribute the survey instruments to early education professionals. I understand that participation in the study is completely voluntary and all responses will be kept confidential. I also understand that none of the individuals or districts will be identified in the reports to follow, and that I may request a copy of the final report.

________________________________________  _________________________
Superintendent’s Signature                  Date
APPENDIX B

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL FOR STUDY

THE UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN MISSISSIPPI

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
118 College Drive #5147 / Hattiesburg, MS 39406-0001
Phone: 601.266.6820 | Fax: 601.266.4377 | www.usm.edu/irb

NOTICE OF COMMITTEE ACTION

The project has been reviewed by The University of Southern Mississippi Institutional Review Board in accordance with Federal Drug Administration regulations (21 CFR 26, 111), Department of Health and Human Services (45 CFR Part 46), and university guidelines to ensure adherence to the following criteria:

• The risks to subjects are minimized.
• The risks to subjects are reasonable in relation to the anticipated benefits.
• The selection of subjects is equitable.
• Informed consent is adequate and appropriately documented.
• Where appropriate, the research plan makes adequate provisions for monitoring the data collected to ensure the safety of the subjects.
• Where appropriate, there are adequate provisions to protect the privacy of subjects and to maintain the confidentiality of all data.
• Appropriate additional safeguards have been included to protect vulnerable subjects.
• Any unanticipated, serious, or continuing problems encountered regarding risks to subjects must be reported immediately, but not later than 10 days following the event. This should be reported to the IRB Office via the "Adverse Effect Report Form".
• If approved, the maximum period of approval is limited to twelve months. Projects that exceed this period must submit an application for renewal or continuation.

PROTOCOL NUMBER: 13022201
PROJECT TITLE: Prekindergarten and Kindergarten Teachers' Perceptions of Childhood Demographic Determinants and Academic Achievement
PROJECT TYPE: Dissertation
RESEARCHER(S): Melanie Ellen Boyle
COLLEGE/DIVISION: College of Education & Psychology
DEPARTMENT: Educational Leadership and School Counseling
FUNDING AGENCY/SPONSOR: N/A
IRB COMMITTEE ACTION: Expedited Review Approval
PERIOD OF APPROVAL: 02/26/2013 to 02/25/2014

Lawrence A. Hosman, Ph.D.
Institutional Review Board
APPENDIX C

PRINCIPAL PERMISSION FORM

Principal __________,

My name is Melanie Boyle and I am a graduate student at the University of Southern Mississippi in the Educational Leadership doctoral program. I am conducting the research component required for my dissertation.

Attached you will find the consent letter signed by your superintendent and now, I am requesting from you, as principal, permission to distribute questionnaires to your kindergarten and/or preschool teachers. If allowed, I would either send you a survey packet for each of those teachers, or I would be happy to come and speak to those teachers at a scheduled faculty meeting or a time most convenient for them in the next couple of weeks. Please just let me know how many you will need.

As will be explained in the cover letter distributed with the survey, participation will be voluntary and any teacher or school identifying information will be kept confidential, and it will only take about 15 minutes of their time. It will focus on teachers’ perceptions of children’s general common core knowledge leaving preschool and entering kindergarten, perceptions of the transition process from early education to kindergarten, perception of potential barriers to children’s success, perceptions of childhood demographics that could cause a disadvantage for the student, and teachers’ perceptions of ideas that could promote a more successful student.

As a former classroom teacher, I understand the grueling demands of high-stakes testing and ensuring that all children are prepared for the next step in their educational careers. As a parent of two preschoolers, I also understand the importance of early education. This survey will hopefully provide information as to what students need to be academically successful and teachers’ perceptions of barriers to this success. Once the study is complete, I will be very happy to share the results with you or other interested parties of your district.

My email address is melanieboyle07@yahoo.com and my cell is 601-616-7110 if you have any questions or concerns. Dr. David Lee of the University of Southern Mississippi is my committee chair and his email address is david.e.lee@usm.edu.

Your thought and consideration is most appreciated.

Respectfully,
Melanie Boyle
Doctoral Candidate, University of Southern Mississippi
APPENDIX D

PRESCHOOL/DIRECTOR FORM

Date

Director Name
School
School Address
School Phone Number

To Whom it May Concern:

My name is Melanie Boyle and I am a graduate student at the University of Southern Mississippi in the Educational Leadership doctoral program. I have recently completed the required coursework for my PhD and I will soon be conducting the research component required for my dissertation.

I have chosen the topic: Prekindergarten and kindergarten teachers' perceptions of childhood demographic determinants and academic achievement. This study will focus on teachers' perceptions of children's general common core knowledge leaving preschool and entering kindergarten, perceptions of the transition process from early education to kindergarten, perception of potential barriers to children's success, perceptions of childhood demographics that could cause a disadvantage for the student, and teachers' perceptions of ideas that could promote a more successful student.

I am requesting permission to distribute questionnaires to your preschool teachers. With your permission, I would coordinate with you to distribute the surveys at a regularly scheduled faculty meeting or online later this year. As will be explained in the cover letter distributed with the survey, participation will be voluntary and any teacher or school identifying information will be kept confidential.

As a former classroom teacher, I understand the grueling demands of high-stakes testing and ensuring that all children are prepared for the next step in their educational careers. As a parent of two young children, I also understand the importance of early education. This study will provide information as to what students need to be academically successful and teachers' perceptions of barriers to this success. Once the study is complete, I will be very happy to share the results with you.

If you choose to grant me permission to conduct this research, please copy and paste the content of the enclosed consent form to your school letterhead, sign it, and return it in the self-addressed, stamped envelope, or if you would like, I can pick this up at your earliest convenience.

My email address is melanieboyle07@yahoo.com and my cell is 601-616-7110 if you have any questions or concerns. Dr. David Lee of the University of Southern Mississippi is my committee chair and his email address is david.e.lee@usm.edu.
Your thought and consideration is most appreciated.

Respectfully,

Melanie Boyle  
Doctoral Candidate, University of Southern Mississippi  
Enclosure  
CC: Dr. David Lee, Committee Chair
APPENDIX E

ADULT CONSENT FOR RESEARCH FORM

University of Southern Mississippi
118 College Drive #5147
Hattiesburg, MS 39406-0001
(601) 266-6820

Consent to Participate in a Research Study
Date:
Title of Study: Prekindergarten and Kindergarten Teachers’ perceptions of Childhood Demographic Determinants and Academic Achievement

Researcher: Melanie E. Boyle (601) 616-7110
Email Address: melanieboyle07@yahoo.com
Faculty Advisor: Dr. David E. Lee

1. **What should you know about this study?** This is a doctoral research study that is completely voluntary and there is no penalty for declining participation at any time during this study. This study was designed to capture the perceptions of kindergarten and preschool teachers in regard to early education.

   Though this information may not be directly beneficial to you, the individual, it will be used to assist educators, administrators and policy makers in making future decisions in early education. Because your confidentiality will be maintained, along with that of your organization, the risks involved will be minimal.

   If you have any questions or concerns about the information below, please let the researcher listed above know. It is important that you are able to make an informed choice.

2. **What is the purpose of this study?** The purpose of this study is to examine prekindergarten and kindergarten teachers’ perceptions of childhood demographic determinants and academic achievement. There will be particular focus on common core knowledge, transitional processes, barriers to success, demographic advantages and disadvantages, and what supports the student the most.

3. **How many people will take part in this study and for how long?** You will be asked, along with 60 other preschool and kindergarten teachers, to answer a
15- to 20-minute-long survey.

4. *What is your roll in the study?* You will be asked to participate in a 15- to 20-minute-long survey along with 60 other preschool and kindergarten teachers. You will not be asked to complete a signed informed consent form because your researcher has requested that, instead, your completed and returned survey will serve as your permission and consent to participate. You will be provided a self-addressed, stamped envelope in which to return your survey. After being stored for one year in a locked cabinet, your survey will be shredded.

5. *What does my participation do to help?* The purpose of this study is to measure prekindergarten and kindergarten teachers’ perceptions of childhood demographic determinants and academic achievement. It will focus on teachers’ knowledge of common core, transitions processes, barriers to success, demographics that could affect students, and what makes a more successful early education student. The results could be used by other researchers, administrators, policy makers, teachers, and instructors in helping formulate a better curriculum for students to enhance early education policies and better teacher preparation.

6. *What are the benefits of my participation?* Though there are not any direct benefits to you, your participation could potentially benefit the overall educational system in Mississippi. As you know, Mississippi does not have a public prekindergarten and the present study will potentially provide evidence as to the possible importance of prekindergarten education on future educational success. This study could also add to the research knowledge base for educators and administrators, by giving them new information about early childhood care perceptions, identification of those students perceived as needing the most assistance and suggestions of ways to work with those students who are perceived as most challenged.

7. *Are there any risks involved with this study?* Risks of participation in this study appear to be minimal because there is no identifying information with regard to the participants’ facility, school, or identity. Questions involved are strictly related to the participants own perceptions; therefore, there will be no “incorrect” answers when completing the survey in question. At the end, participants will also have an open forum - without fear of reprisal - to discuss their suggestions, and only the researcher and her advisors will have access to the surveys. These surveys will be kept in a locked file cabinet at the researcher’s home for one year, and then destroyed.
8. *My privacy is important to me.* To ensure the privacy of the participant and his or her school, no identifiers are used, so that there is comfort answering any of the questions without fear of being identified. For this reason, you will not be asked to include any personal information and the researcher has requested a waiver of informed consent based on your completion of the survey. Your returned survey will be kept in a locked cabinet of the researcher's home and only the researcher and the researcher's committee members will have access.

9. *What if I have additional questions?* If you have any questions before, during, or after the survey, always feel free to contact the researcher at in the following ways: melanieboyle07@yahoo.com or 601-616-7110.

10. *What are my rights as a participant?* This project has been reviewed by the Human Subjects Protection Review Committee, which ensures that research projects involving human subjects follow federal regulations. Any questions or concerns about rights as a research subject should be directed to the chair of the Institutional Review Board, The University of Southern Mississippi, 118 College Drive #5147, Hattiesburg, MS 39406-001, (601) 266-6820.
Dear Participant,

I am working on the dissertation phase of my studies and as an early education professional, your help is needed and appreciated. The purpose of my research is to examine prekindergarten and kindergarten teachers' perceptions of what could be considered barriers, and what could be considered necessary to promote children's academic success.

It is important to know that Mississippi does not have a public prekindergarten and the present study could provide evidence as to the importance of prekindergarten education on future educational success. Though there are no direct benefits to you, the benefits from the information gained could be important for potential preschool pilot programs, Charter school legislation and early educational training programs. This study could also add to the research knowledge base for policy makers, educators and administrators, by giving them new information about early child care perceptions, identification of those students perceived as needing the most assistance and suggestions of ways to work with those students who are perceived as most challenged.

As a former classroom teacher, I know how valuable your time. For that reason, Academic Perceptions Questionnaire was designed to take no more than 20 minutes of your time to complete. Your completed survey will act as your consent to participate and should be placed in the self-addressed stamped envelope, which has been included in your packet, or turned into your assigned designee within one week.

There are seven short sections in this survey. The survey has six sections of Likert-scale questions and one section that contains an opened ended question for you to offer additional information you believe will be beneficial for the academic success of children. Section I covers your basic demographic information. Section II examines your perceptions of students' academic knowledge of Common Core. Your perceptions of things that could be risk factors for students' academic success are measured in Section III. Section IV focus on barriers one might perceive to be holding students back from academic success. Student demographics are explored in Section V, and Section VI looks at your perceptions of things that might promote the academic success of students.

Your participation is voluntary; therefore is no penalty for non-participation, and you may withdraw at any time, but I am grateful for your assistance. Risks of participation in this study appear to be minimal because there is no identifying
information with regard to your facility, school, or identity, so please do not write your name on the survey instrument. Also, I want guarantee you that as surveys are collected, they will be kept in a locked file cabinet at my home and destroyed within one year of completion of this study, and only seen by my dissertation advisors upon request.

Please know that this study and this consent form have been reviewed by the Human Subjects Protection Review Committee, which ensures that all research fits the federal guidelines for involving human subjects. Any questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant should be directed to the Chair of the Institutional Review Board, The University of Southern Mississippi, located at 118 College Drive #5147, Hattiesburg, MS 39406-0001, or by phone at 601-266-6820.

However, if there are any questions that I may assist with please email me at melanieboyle07@yahoo.com or call me at 601-616-7110. This research is being conducted under the supervision of Dr. David E. Lee with the University of Southern Mississippi, email: david.e.lee@usm.edu.

Your consideration, participation, and time are appreciated.

Respectfully,

Melanie Boyle

Doctoral Candidate, University of Southern Mississippi
DEMOGRAPHICS: Please mark the answer that best describes you.

1. What is your gender?
   - male
   - female

2. What is your age group?
   - 18-30
   - 31-40
   - 41-50
   - 51-65

3. How would you best characterize your race/ethnicity?
   - African-American
   - Asian
   - Caucasian
   - Hispanic
   - Other: ________________

4. How many years have you been a teacher?
   - 0-5
   - 6-10
   - 11-15
   - 16-20
   - 21 or more
5. What is your highest level of completed education?
   - HS/GED
   - Child Development Associates
   - Associates
   - Bachelors
   - Master's
   - Specialist
   - Doctorate

6. How would you best describe your facility?
   - Public
   - Private
   - Federal

7. Which age group do you mainly work?
   - Preschool (ages 3 or 4)
   - Kindergarten

8. What type of early childhood education do you believe best prepares children for the academic aspects of kindergarten?
   - Homecare or Parent only care
   - Center-based general childcare
   - Private or Christian schooling
   - Federal program (like Head Start)

9. Of the following, which do you feel entrance to kindergarten should be decided?
   - Age
   - Social, emotionally, and intellectually ready
   - Both

---

**COMMON CORE:** Please circle the number that indicates the percentage of children who you believe will begin kindergarten with the following skills, which have been taken directly from the Mississippi Department of Education Early Learning Standards for Common Core (Burnham, House & Green, 2012).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Common Core Key Idea (with prompting and support)</th>
<th>Percent with skills ready for kindergarten</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Retell familiar stories (from books, oral presentations, songs, plays)</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(1) 0%-20%  (2) 21%-40%  (3) 41-60%  (4) 61%-80%  (5) 81%-100%
using diverse media (conversation, drama, props throughout the classroom, creative movement, art, and creative writing).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Level of Agreement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ask and/or answer questions with details related to a variety of informational print materials (e.g., charts, graphs, maps, lists, and other reference materials).</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recognize words as a unit of print and understand that letters are grouped to form words.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explore and recognize rhyming words.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demonstrate an understanding of syllables in words (units of sound) by clapping, stomping, and finger tapping.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explore and experiment with a combination of written representations (e.g., scribbles, drawings, letters, and dictations) to express an opinion.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Write first name, capitalizing the first letter.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apply meaning for familiar words accurately (e.g., recognizing that a car is also a vehicle).</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recite numbers to 30 in the correct order.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use comparative language (e.g., more than, less than, equal to, or same) to compare objects, using developmentally appropriate preK materials.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duplicate and extend simple patterns using concrete objects</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recognize measurable attributes of everyday objects such as length, weight, and size using appropriate vocabulary (e.g., small, big, short, tall, empty, full, heavy, light).</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**GENERAL BELIEFS ON TRANSITION PROCESS:** Please circle the number which best indicates your level of agreement that each of the following groups of children are at risk in general terms of experiencing a difficult transition to kindergarten.

(1) Strongly Disagree  (2) Disagree  (3) Neither Agree or Disagree
(4) Agree  (5) Strongly Agree

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Level of Agreement with Statement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Children who have not been to preschool are at risk of experiencing a difficult transition to kindergarten.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children from disadvantaged backgrounds are at risk of experiencing a difficult transition to kindergarten.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children from minority groups are at risk of experiencing a difficult transition to kindergarten.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children with special needs are at risk of experiencing a difficult transition to kindergarten.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children with low self-esteem are at risk of experiencing a difficult transition to kindergarten.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children entering school without a &quot;friend&quot; in their class are at risk</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
of experiencing a difficult transition to kindergarten.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Level of Agreement with Statement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Children with behavior problems are at risk of experiencing a difficult transition to kindergarten.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children who find it difficult to listen and sit still are at risk of experiencing a difficult transition to kindergarten.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Firstborn children are at risk of experiencing a difficult transition to kindergarten.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The youngest children entering school are at risk of experiencing a difficult transition to kindergarten.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**BARRIERS TO SUCCESS:** Please circle the number which best indicates your level of agreement with each statement.

(1) Strongly Disagree  (2) Disagree  (3) Neither Agree or Disagree  (4) Agree  (5) Strongly Agree

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Level of Agreement with Statement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cultural differences between preschools and kindergartens are a barrier for the success of children.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Differences in curriculum of preschools and kindergartens are a barrier for the success of children.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difference in the training of preschool and kindergarten teachers is a barrier for the success of children.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of communication between preschool and primary school teachers causes a barrier for the success of children.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The number of “feeder” preschools and kindergartens makes preschool/school coordination difficult.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decision to start children in school based on age rather than individual preparedness for school causes barriers to success.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children arriving at formal schooling with a variety of preschool (or not) experiences causes barriers to success in kindergarten.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**CHILDHOOD DEMOGRAPHICS:** Please circle the number which best indicates your level of agreement with each statement.

(1) Strongly Disagree  (2) Disagree  (3) Neither Agree or Disagree  (4) Agree  (5) Strongly Agree

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Level of Agreement with Statement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>On average, African American children are at the greatest risk for academic failure in kindergarten.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On average, White children are at the least risk for academic failure in kindergarten.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female students are more academically successful that boys kindergarten.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
On average, boys do better than girls in mathematic activities.  

On average, girls do better than boys in literacy exercises.  

Children of single parents are at greater risk for academic failure in kindergarten.  

The more education a child's parent has, the better chance of academic success the child will have.  

Children coming from low socioeconomic homes are at a greater disadvantage academically than children from more advantaged homes.

SUGGESTIONS FOR SUCCESS: Please circle the number which best indicates your level of agreement that each statement is important for a child's overall school success.

(1) Strongly Disagree  (2) Disagree  (3) Neither Agree or Disagree  
(4) Agree  (5) Strongly Agree

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Level of Agreement with Statement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parents should promote the skills of social competence and resiliency, prior to a child attending kindergarten.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preschool teachers should promote the skills of social competence and resiliency prior to kindergarten.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information and evaluations on individual children should be transferred from preschool to kindergarten.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preschool programs should be located within schools where possible.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There should be greater communication between preschool and kindergarten teachers.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There should be greater communication between preschool teachers and parents.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School entry age should be raised from five years old so children are more mature when making the transition to kindergarten.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The curriculum in preschool classes should have a greater focus on learning through play.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class sizes in kindergarten should be reduced below the 1:22 teacher/student ratio or 1:27 teacher/student ratio with a full-time teacher's assistant.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class sizes in preschools should be reduced below the 1:16 teacher/student state mandated ratios.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

FINAL THOUGHTS: Please write any additional thoughts on this page that you may like to contribute with regard to the preparation of children for kindergarten through preschool or other early educational means.
Subject: Re: Requesting Permission
From: Mary O’Kane (maryok.oakleigh@gmail.com)
To: melanieboyle07@yahoo.com;
Date: Friday, October 26, 2012 1:35 PM

Hi Melanie,

That is no problem at all. Best wishes for the research. Would you mind sending me on a copy of your findings, I would be very interested to read them.

Best wishes,
Mary

On Fri, Oct 26, 2012 at 3:53 AM, Melanie Boyle <melanieboyle07@yahoo.com> wrote:

Dr. Mary O’Kane,

I am working on my dissertation with regard to early childhood educators’ perceptions of student readiness and achievement at The University of Southern Mississippi, Gulfport, Mississippi, USA. I would be appreciative and honored if you would grant me permission to utilize your questionnaire in my research. I am specifically asking for permission to incorporate the survey at this link: http://www.cedc.ie/english/pdf/Research%20Students/Mary%20O’Kane/O’Kane,%20App%203.pdf.

Thank you in advance for your consideration and if you have any questions for me, I would be happy answer either by email or cell at 601-616-7110.

Respectfully,
Melanie Boyle

Mary O’Kane, BSc, MPhil, PhD
Associate Lecturer in Psychology
and Early Childhood Education
APPENDIX I

EXPERT PANEL REVIEW FORM

Kindergarten/Prekindergarten Perception of Preparedness Survey

Thank you for your consideration in reviewing my doctoral dissertation survey instrument. I would ask that you review each demographic question and set of statements on the survey instrument. I would then ask you to offer your professional opinion on the lines that follow. Please feel free to offer any additional information or thoughts you feel will be important. Your participation in the development of my survey is greatly appreciated.

Reviewer's credentials (degree, position, or relevant experience): __________________________

1. Do you feel the survey language is appropriate for both prekindergarten and kindergarten teachers of various educational backgrounds? __________________________

2. Do you feel the survey statements address pertinent issues to perceptions of early childhood education preparedness? __________________________

3. Do you feel any of the survey statements or questions could be viewed as offensive or flagrant with regard to perceptions of early childhood education preparedness? __________________________

4. Based on your answer of question three (3), do believe there are any questions which should be omitted from the survey? __________________________

5. Do you feel there are questions that should be included in this survey that have not been included already in order to gain a true measurement of perceptions of the early childhood education preparedness? __________________________

6. Any additional comments or suggestions would be most appreciated. __________________________
REFERENCES


http://www.msbuildingblocks.com/mx/hm.asp?id=MississippiNumbers


