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Kindergarten Teachers' Perspectives on School Readiness in Children Who Attended Military Installation Childcare Centers

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MA, Concordia University, 2007

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Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

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Abstract

Limited literature exists on the effectiveness of prekindergarten programs located on military installations in the United States. The children who attend these programs may not receive school readiness preparation equivalent to that received by their peers who attend community-based prekindergarten programs, which follow different guidelines. The purpose of this study was to gain insight into the kindergarten readiness of children who attended preschool on military installations as described by teachers in community-based kindergarten classrooms. Pianta's work on school readiness formed the conceptual framework of this basic qualitative study. The research question addressed how kindergarten teachers describe school readiness in children who attended prekindergarten at military installation childcare centers. Data were collected by interviewing 10 kindergarten teachers who worked in public school settings where military dependent children are represented in the school population. Open coding was used to analyze data and determine emergent themes. Results indicate that military dependent children are similar to children who attend community prekindergarten programs in their preparation for kindergarten academic tasks, attentiveness to teachers' authority, and adherence to classroom procedures. However, these children struggle to make and keep friends. This inquiry contributes to the existing school readiness literature on educating military dependent children. It may effect positive social change by fostering teacher support for interpersonal skill development in both military and community children, which may improve preschool experiences for children attending both military-installation and community childcare centers and for their teachers.

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Dedication

This work is dedicated to my parents, Janie and Emmanuel Edwin, who provided all the foundational learning for this successful journey. My sons, Winston S. Wilson Jr, Kevon Corey Wilson, and Cedric Julian Wilson, who consistently challenged me to be better as a mother, mentor, and coach. My husband, Winston S. Wilson, who allows me to be me and affords me the freedom to pursue all my dreams and aspirations. My brothers, Renick, Calixte, Joseph, and Augustin; sisters, Margarite, Bibiana, Colletta, Veronique, and my twin sister Julie Clarke, my strength; nieces, especially Lizette; and nephews, who provided the inspiration and motivation to keep going. My granddaughters, Gianna Rae Wilson and Georgia Mae Wilson; daughter in-law, LaTeisha Wilson; and the future granddaughters and grandsons who make this level of accomplishment worthwhile.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

The topic of this study was the perspectives of kindergarten teachers concerning school readiness of children who attended prekindergarten in childcare centers located on U.S. military installations. This study was needed because limited research exists on military children and school readiness (Ghandour et al., 2019; Stites, 2016). This study provides a new lens through which school readiness program leaders and early childhood educators might assess the level of school readiness offered by childcare programs housed on military installations. This chapter includes the scholarly background for this research, the study problem and purpose, the conceptual framework, and the research question. Specific terms used in this research are defined, and the assumptions, scope and delimitations, limitations, and significance of the inquiry are discussed.

Background

The aim of kindergarten and preschool programs is to prepare children with the specific knowledge and skills needed to successfully perform assigned tasks in kindergarten classrooms and at other grade levels (Altun, 2017; Ansari & Pianta, 2018; Ansari et al., 2019; Ansari et al., 2020; Arthur & Johanson, 2016). A child who is ready for school stays focused, completes assigned tasks, self-regulates, manages stress, and collaborates with peers (Wenz-Gross et al., 2018). According to Wenz-Gross et al. (2018), children entering kindergarten for the first time must be able to develop and maintain positive relationships with their peers and teachers. Efforts to promote school readiness in early childhood education programs should prioritize program leaders, educators, and parents (Wenz-Gross et al., 2018). Military dependent children typically

attend kindergarten in schools located in the community outside the military installation. They attend kindergarten in all states (McIlvaine, 2020). Therefore, children who attend preschool in centers located on military installations must meet or exceed the readiness expectations of the community-based kindergartens they will attend (McIlvaine, 2020)

Kindergarten readiness predicts children's future academic success (Ferretti & Bub, 2017; Williams & Lerner, 2019). For example, the department of education in the state that was the focus of this study reported in 2019 that children who scored at the approaching level on the state's Kindergarten Readiness Assessment (KRA) were more likely than children who scored at the emerging level to continue to achieve grade-level success on standardized assessments in first grade. In addition, the South Carolina Education Oversight Committee (2020) found that children who failed to score at the emerging level on the KRA were likelier than those who achieved the approaching level to be retained in kindergarten. The ability of preschool children to be kindergarten ready suggests they will continue to achieve academic success in school. However, kindergarten teachers' perspectives on the readiness of individual children were shown by Smith and Glass (2019) to be a critical factor in children's kindergarten success. Children who teachers believed to be kindergarten ready performed better on the KRA than those who were not prepared for school at kindergarten entrance.

Limited research exists about the school readiness of kindergarten children who attended childcare programs located on military installations (Stites, 2018). KRA data in the target state do not indicate the childcare center children attended before entering kindergarten, so a comparison of readiness based on attendance in childcare centers

located on military installations cannot be made. Therefore, to understand the school readiness competencies of military dependent children attending kindergarten in community-based schools outside of military installations, I explored kindergarten teachers' perspectives on the school readiness of these children.

Problem Statement

The research problem was a lack of literature about prekindergarten programs located on military installations in the United States. These programs operate under U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) guidelines that may or may not meet prekindergarten standards adopted by state-supported or community-based programs (U.S. Department of the Army, 2017; Coley & Kull, 2019). Because preschools on military installations follow different guidelines than do preschools in the community, children who attended prekindergarten at preschools located on military installations in the United States may not receive school readiness preparation equivalent to that received by their peers who attended prekindergarten at community-based preschools that strictly adhere to state department of education guidelines for early education. Risberg et al. (2014) found that even experienced teachers have had difficulty providing academic support to military-connected students. Teachers have expressed difficulty in closing the academic achievement gap they believe exists between military dependent children and their non-military-affiliated peers. In a review of its 5-year strategic plan, the DoD Education Activity (DoDEA, (2018) reported that much more process is needed to align DoDEA school learning standards with state standards.

DoDEA (2014) reported that providing high-quality education to military dependent children positively affects soldiers' commitment to defending the United States. The entity added that the U.S. government is dedicated to dispensing the funds and supplies that the military dependent children need to ensure children's academic success. Stites (2016) reported that limited research had been done on the education of military dependent children, especially children in early childhood, suggesting a gap in the literature.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to gain insight into the kindergarten readiness of children who attended preschool on military installations in childcare centers run by DoD as described by teachers in community-based kindergarten classrooms. The participating teachers provided information describing the readiness skills of children who attended military installation prekindergarten programs and were currently attending kindergarten in community elementary schools outside the installation. I used a basic qualitative research paradigm (see Ravitch & Carl, 2019) to guide data collection and describe participants' perspectives on the school readiness of military dependent children entering kindergarten.

Research Question

I sought to answer the following research question in this study: How do kindergarten teachers describe school readiness in children who attended prekindergarten at military installation childcare centers?

Conceptual Framework

The work of Pianta (2002) on school readiness formed the conceptual framework of this study. Pianta suggested that a child's school readiness is determined by the mastery of five developmental goals: gross and fine motor skills, social and emotional competencies, language acquisition, literacy, and cognitive skills. Pianta indicated school readiness programs must address three core issues: (a) what knowledge and skills children possess when entering school, (b) how teachers in early learning classrooms plan to assist children in developing and mastering what they need to know for school, and (c) how teachers in kindergarten and first grade help children extend and improve their school readiness skills.

According to Pianta (2002), the quality of early learning environments, what children are learning and how, child and teacher interactions, and peer-to-peer interactions are critical in determining the quality of the school readiness program. I used Pianta's five developmental goals and three key issues as the framework for this study. The framework provided a lens for collecting and analyzing the data and determining school readiness among children who attended prekindergarten programs on a military installation.

Nature of the Study

I used a basic qualitative design with interviews for this study, as suggested by Ravitch and Carl (2019). This design was appropriate for this study because it permits exploration and discoveries about a particular group, as indicated by Ravitch and Carl, which aligned with the purpose of this study. It would have been less effective to use a

survey design because a survey does not provide the opportunity to capture participants' feelings and personal experiences. I also rejected a case study design because of the need to collect detailed information using several data sources, such as observations, documents, work samples, and interviews (see Ravitch & Carl, 2019), which did not match the study purpose of exploring kindergarten teachers' perspectives. My choice of a basic qualitative design with interviews allowed me to focus on the participants' beliefs and definitions of the problem (see Creswell & Baez, 2020).

The key concept explored in this study was kindergarten readiness. I used kindergarten teachers' perspectives to understand kindergarten readiness in children who attended prekindergarten programs on military installations. I collected data by conducting interviews with 10 participants who taught kindergarten in public school settings where military dependent children were represented in the school population. I auto-recorded interviews and transcribed them to create text files for analysis. I analyzed the transcribed data for emergent themes, following the protocol described by Ravitch and Carl (2019).

Definitions

School readiness: A term that encompasses what children can do when they start kindergarten (Pianta, 2002). Five development areas undergird school readiness: gross and fine motor skills, psychological maturation, appropriate social competencies, verbal competency, and cognitive skills (Pianta, 2002).

Strong Beginnings: A DoD prekindergarten program meant to refine 4- to 5-year-old children's skills, abilities, and knowledge for kindergarten-level education (McIlvaine, 2020).

Assumptions

I assumed that participants would be honest and complete in their answers to interview questions. This assumption was necessary to support the credibility of results and is typical of assumptions made in qualitative studies that rely on informants to provide data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Scope and Delimitations

The scope of this study was kindergarten teachers' perspectives regarding the school readiness of military dependent children who had attended childcare programs on military installations. This study was delimited to include 10 kindergarten teachers working in community schools outside of military installations in the northeastern United States. I excluded kindergarten teachers who worked far from military installations, teachers of other grade levels, and teachers who worked outside the target region. Other individuals who were excluded from this study were teachers who worked in therapeutic settings or classrooms specifically enrolling students with special needs, teachers who taught only special topics such as music or physical education, and teacher aides or other adjunct or paraprofessional teaching personnel. These delimitations affect the potential transferability of the study results in that the findings may not be applicable to other contexts; however, careful delimitation of the current study context aids in the transferability of study results to similar situations (see Daniel, 2019).

Limitations

One limitation of this study was that it was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic. Face-to-face interviews were not an option to maintain social distancing and adherence to other COVID-19 protocols. Therefore, I conducted interviews by Zoom and audio recorded participants' responses. Farooq and Devilliers (2017) stated that conducting telephone interviews rather than face-to-face interviews may promote power sharing between the interviewer and interviewee because participants have the freedom to provide their perspectives on the topic and have more control over the information they want to share. I did not have the opportunity to record my observations of participants' body language or facial expressions. However, because participants could engage in interviews from their location and did not need to meet me at an interview site, they may have been encouraged to participate more than they otherwise might.

A second limitation was the possibility of researcher bias. Bergen and Labonté (2020) encouraged the researcher to confirm at the beginning of each interview that the participant meets the research criteria to reduce the possibility of researcher bias. Likewise, I ensured that I clearly explained the study details and answered all questions participants had before, during, and after the data collection process (see Bergen & Labonte, 2020). Because I conducted telephone interviews and not face-to-face interviews, I did not have the opportunity to record body language and facial expressions, which may assist in reducing assumptions and biases in the study (Farooq & De Villiers, 2017). To address this limitation, I used a reflexive approach during the study to reduce the opportunities for me to inject bias and prejudice and resist the temptation to use my

experiences and interpretation of language to assume a participant's meaning; instead, I asked participants to explain information I did not understand (see Holmes, 2020).

Significance

The results of this study may contribute to reducing the gap in research about military dependent children's school readiness. The study may provide insight into how kindergarten teachers view military dependent children and their readiness for kindergarten. This inquiry contributes to existing school readiness literature and adds to the literature about educating military dependent children. A better understanding of military dependent children in the classroom may enable teachers to develop appropriate teaching strategies to promote higher learning and positive social change among this group of students.

Summary

In this chapter, I introduced this study of kindergarten teachers' perspectives on the school readiness of dependent military children who attended prekindergarten programs at childcare centers located on U.S. military installations. I included the study's background, problem and purpose statements, and research question. I also discussed the conceptual framework that informed the research process and the nature of the study and defined key terms. I described the study's assumptions, scope and delimitation, limitations, and significance. The following chapter includes a review of the scholarly literature that supported this research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Limited literature exists about prekindergarten programs located on military installations in the United States. The guidelines established by DoD for these programs differ from those for nonmilitary early childhood education programs. The preschool program needs of military dependent children may differ from those of their non-military-affiliated peers in ways that could affect their school readiness. For example, according to Coley and Kull (2019), the frequent moves of military families impact children's health, social skills, and academic and mental functioning. Frequent moves may increase the likelihood of these children having behavioral problems in childcare and school programs (Coley & Kull, 2019). The frequent moves of military dependent families suggest that programmatic emphases, specific to military installation preschool education, may be needed to ensure that children are ready for kindergarten (Stites, 2016). The purpose of this study was to gain insight into the kindergarten readiness of children who attended preschool on military installations in childcare centers run by DoD as described by teachers in community-based kindergarten classrooms. This study was needed because limited research exists on military children and school readiness (Stites, 2016). Stites (2016) indicated the need for additional research about military children's school readiness educational needs.

Literature Search Strategy

To find peer-reviewed studies about this topic that were published within five years of the conduct of my study, I used the following databases: Academic Search Complete, ERIC, Education Source, Thoreau Multi-Database Search, Military and

Government Collection, Primary Search, Sage, ProQuest Central, and Education Source Combined. I used the following key search terms to find literature pertinent to the research problem: *kindergarten readiness programs on military installations*, *school readiness*, *skills needed for kindergarten success*, *Department of Defense school readiness programs*, *Strong Beginnings*, *Kindergarten Readiness Assessment*, *early childhood education curriculum*, *assessment tools*, *parent-teacher partnership in school readiness*, *quality prekindergarten classrooms,* and *best practices in prekindergarten programs.* I conducted an iterative search by reading articles about school readiness and identifying new terms to apply to fresh literature searches. The additional terms I searched following this iterative process included *school readiness assessment tools*, *the importance of school readiness*, *how school readiness skills are assessed*, and *state and national assessments of school readiness scores*. Additionally, I used manuals and guidelines published by the department of education in the target state and by DoD entities that describe the qualities and conduct of preschool and kindergarten programs. These sources are not peer-reviewed works but are credible because of their authorship by government agencies.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study was Pianta's (2002) school readiness theory. Pianta focused on the role of the child, family, community, and school in preparing children for formal education. Pianta's work grounded this research because it focuses on the whole child, including the child's language, social, emotional, intellectual,

and motor skills. Pianta wrote that school readiness is a combination of skills, knowledge, and abilities that enable a child to accomplish learning tasks in kindergarten classrooms.

Pianta (2002) described five developmental areas to consider in assessing a child's readiness for kindergarten: physical well-being, emotional maturity, social confidence, language richness, and general knowledge. To gain an understanding of children's school readiness, Pianta recommended the assessment of all five developmental areas in addition to addressing three essential elements: (a) what knowledge and skills children have mastered that are useful when entering school, (b) how teachers in early learning classrooms assist children in developing and mastering what they need to know for school, and (c) how teachers in kindergarten and first-grade classrooms help children extend and improve their skills when entering school. When family, community, and school focus on children's five developmental areas and provide evidence of the three elements, the joint effort promotes children's learning in preparation for school success (Pianta, 2002).

Understanding the competencies necessary for children to succeed in kindergarten classrooms is paramount to determining school readiness (Pianta, 2002). According to Pianta (2002), there are two ways to determine children's competencies when they enter kindergarten. One is through ongoing observations during the preschool years, and the second is through KRA tools (Pianta et al., 2019). Pianta noted that children who are school ready possess the skills and knowledge to have continuous positive interactions with their peers and teachers. Children who are school ready demonstrate executive function behaviors of sustained attention and persistence, frustration tolerance,

appropriate help-seeking and direction following, emotional regulation, and interpersonal skills (Pianta, 2002). Pianta (2002) wrote that the quality and climate present in the home and childcare center are critical in providing the child with experiences that promote preacademic, social, and behavioral skills. Positive adult and child interactions at home and in childcare promote social and emotional competencies that benefit children's readiness for kindergarten instruction and learning (Goble & Pianta, 2017; Goble et al., 2019).

Pianta's (2002) school readiness perspective emphasizes the importance of focusing on the whole child and the key factors that play a significant role in the child's successful transition to formal education. Pianta's school readiness theory informed the development of this study's research question regarding kindergarten teachers' perspectives of school readiness in children who attended prekindergarten at military installation childcare centers. I also used the theory to guide the selection of articles for the literature review.

Literature Related to Key Concepts and Variables

In this review of current literature, I describe research relevant to the school readiness of military dependent children attending childcare in on-installation programs. I include a synthesis of current literature that examines the uniqueness of military dependent children and how their experiences may affect their school readiness. In the following sections of the literature review, I focus on the knowledge and skills expected of children when entering kindergarten, the levels of school readiness of children entering kindergarten nationwide and in the target state, the factors that affect readiness, and the

unique experience of military dependent children that may affect their readiness for school.

Knowledge and Skills Expected of Children When Entering Kindergarten

Ansari et al. (2020) wrote that children entering kindergarten who are ready to learn must possess specific levels of knowledge and skills. Some required skills are cognitive skills of executive functioning, academic skills of reading and numeracy, life skills needed for independent functioning throughout the day, and social-emotional skills. Pekdogan and Advul (2017) stated that children's executive functioning; language; literacy; and social, emotional, and physical learning experiences in the years before formal education are critical because they set a positive demeanor towards learning in the kindergarten classroom and beyond. Furthermore, a child's school readiness is a blend of essential and relevant social and emotional behaviors and cognitive skills that encourages the child to discover, study, and complete class assignments (Aslan & Çikar, 2019). In this section, I present literature on these areas of executive function, academic, social, and life skills.

Executive Function Skills

A child ready for school demonstrates high mental functioning (Mann et al., 2017), including the capacity to retrieve mental information, love learning, and exercise attention and self-regulation (Wenz-Gross et al., 2018). Willoughby et al. (2019) proposed that executive functions are a collection of flexible cognitive functions/abilities that assist a child in successfully performing tasks that involve planning, identifying and solving problems, and managing behaviors. According to Willoughby et al., executive

functioning relates to three areas of reasoning: working memory (having the ability to recall prior learning and increase and modify prior learning with new information), inhibitory control (having the ability to delay expected emotions and remain focus on the task), and cognitive flexibility (having the ability to multitask between similar activities with success). Well-developed executive functions support school children in reasoning, paying attention, memorizing and recalling information, and managing themselves (Keown et al., 2020). These executive functions are critical in assisting children in understanding and completing academic assignments and promoting positive interactions with others (Keown et al., 2020). Children who are mentally ready for school can ask questions that will help them solve problems by figuring out the directions to accomplish a task, following the directions, and completing the task using the directions (Aslan & Çikar, 2019). According to Aslan and Cikar (2019), cognitive skills correlate with the child's level of brain development. A child who is intellectually ready for school has the disposition and understanding for continued learning success and the reasoning skills needed to learn new information speedily.

According to Devl (2019), children create an understanding of almost all information about their world through the application of executive functioning abilities. Children who enter kindergarten with ordinary cognitive skills can resolve complex tasks and understand given information (Devl, 2019). According to Keown et al. (2020), a child's brain functions determine the child's cognitive and social abilities, two critical components of school readiness. Devl proposed that a student, who is ready for school, has mental abilities that support and encourage a positive approach to learning.

Academic Skills

Academic skills, such as math, language, and literacy knowledge, are essential in determining children's ongoing success throughout kindergarten and in future education grades and their later professional and social standing (Bassok & Latham, 2017). Prekindergarten is the best time in a child's life to build the foundation for ongoing academic success and an individual's professional and personal future outcomes (Bassok & Latham, 2017). Pekdoğan and Advül (2021) suggested that prekindergarten success is based on mastery of specific knowledge skills and abilities. For example, Piasta et al. (2021) identified reading and writing skills as crucial academic requirements for school readiness. Reading and writing skills include letter forms, names, and corresponding sounds. Alphabet knowledge is one of the best predictors of children's later reading and spelling abilities and early literacy (Piasta et al., 2021). Harris et al. (2017) discussed the importance of children's understanding of the alphabet for emergent literacy and recommended alphabet knowledge in early literacy development when preparing children for kindergarten. Ghandour et al. (2019) focused on children's recognition of sounds associated with letters of the alphabet, identification of letters, ability to rhyme words, competent storytelling, and the ability to write their first names as critical skills for kindergarten success.

McClelland et al. (2019) also listed three early reading and writing elements that should be assessed in prekindergarten: verbal language, phonological awareness, and print knowledge. Children must have verbal language comprehension, know the meaning of words, and make the connection between language and the correct grammatical and

phonological rules before beginning to read (Guarnera et al., 2017). Cadime et al. (2017) reported that children, who can identify words and understand what they hear, are more likely to become competent readers. When entering kindergarten, Bassok and Latham (2017) suggested that children should be able to use and understand complex sentences during communications, comprehend and clarify stories they hear, recite all capital and lowercase letters of the alphabet, make a good guess of story outcomes, read simple books without help, show emergent writing skills, and comprehend the use of print.

Korucu et al. (2020) reported that the number of words a child can use indicates his understanding and ability to communicate needs and wants, sight read, learn the meaning of words, and understand how to use them in the right context. Jarrett and Coba-Rodriguez (2019) stated that a child's intellectual, linguistic, reading, and writing skills determine the child's ability to keep up with the learning expectations of kindergarten. Children with inadequate reading skills at the kindergarten entrance risk of failing (Smart et al., 2017). Additionally, children who enter kindergarten with limited language and literacy skills experience later reading difficulties and underperform in later grades (Hojnoski & Missall, 2020). Furthermore, Gibson et al. (2020) reported that a child's inability to communicate effectively with peers and teachers in the kindergarten classroom strongly predicts ongoing difficulties throughout their academic endeavors.

The readiness assessment used in the state that is the focus of this study lists several languages and literacy requirements for children entering kindergarten; these include children understanding books and having the ability to ask relevant questions, provide answers, to understand what a specific book is about, and to forecast what will

come next in the story. According to the readiness assessment tool used in the target state, the entering kindergartener can retell stories in correct sequences and remember the information presented in individual books. Additionally, five-year-old children entering kindergarten are familiar with books as purposeful objects and can identify the starting point, middle, and end of books. According to the readiness assessment in the target state, children, as they begin kindergarten, should be familiar with phonics and can identify the sounds of the letters and the syllables in words. Beginning kindergarteners are expected to know the letters of the alphabet, the meaning of words and that words are made up of letters, why print is used, and some of the many uses of print. Common Core State Standards Initiative (2021) requires children entering school for the first time to be competent at expressing their feelings, ideas, desires, and discontentment to peers and adults. The readiness assessment in the target state indicates kindergarten students should know alphabet letter names, use developmentally appropriate English grammar in ongoing speech, and understand the singular and plural forms of words.

Mathematical knowledge is another academic requirement for kindergarten children (Hendrix et al., 2020). Traff et al. (2020) found that foundational mathematical concepts are a prerequisite for children entering kindergarten. Children entering kindergarten with foundational mathematical concepts are more able to learn higher level concepts. Future success in math requires children to build on the foundation as tasks become more challenging (Traff et al., 2020). Ghandour et al. (2019) suggested that counting ability, and the ability to identify basic geometric shapes such as triangles, squares, and circles, are key mathematics skills for entering kindergarten students.

Children who have developed their visual and spatial skills during the prekindergarten years have a better chance than other children of developing advanced mathematical skills in kindergarten to manipulate numbers and dimensions successfully and to make mathematical associations to complete numerical tasks (Guarnera et al., 2017). Butamante et al. (2017) agreed that a child's cognition and general knowledge, counting, and shape identification are essential skills for formal education. Bassok and Latham (2017) suggested that basic mathematical skills include solving problems that involve numbers and various rules and concepts, such as placing items in groups based on length, shade, and other categories and having knowledge of amounts and how to compare them. Additionally, Bassok and Latham (2017) suggested that the student should be familiar with graphing activities, know how to use measuring tools appropriately, and apply several strategies to solve mathematic problems. Susperreguy et al. (2020) noted that regardless of a family's economic status, research has shown a positive coalition between parents' involvement in numerical games and children's mathematical achievements and growth in non-representational and representational number comparison at the end of the first year of formal education. Furthermore, Susperreguy et al. (2020) suggested that parents' knowledge of number□related games can predict children's arithmetic skills and growth in non-symbolic number comparison. Satsangi and Bofferding (2017) stated that without mathematical knowledge, typical and especially atypical children entering kindergarten would fail.

The KRA used in the target state requires children entering kindergarten to identify and understand connections between number names up to 20 and the quantitative

values they represent. Likewise, the 5-year-old child is expected to be able to sequence number cards based on number value and use mental knowledge in identifying quantities of items in groups of 1 to 3. Students arriving in the kindergarten classroom for the first time must be familiar with solving simple math problems that involve subtraction, addition, sorting, and grouping (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2021).

Social Skills

Pekdogan and Advul (2017) showed that it is essential for children 5 to 6 years old and entering school to be socially and emotionally prepared for school. Kindergarteners must be ready and willing to develop positive relationships with their peers and teachers and have the social tools for collaboration and stress management (Wenz-Gross et al., 2018). However, children entering kindergarten must make many social and emotional adjustments. According to William et al. (2020), kindergarteners who are not ready for the life changes that occur in the transition from a preschool or home environment to formal schooling, where expectations are different, the adults are unfamiliar. The learning requirements are more stringent than what they experienced previously (William et al., 2020). Prekindergarten teachers agree with kindergarten teachers that social and emotional skills are critical for continued academic success (Aquino et al., 2019).

Kindergarten teachers believe that children entering school should possess solid social and emotional skills before they can succeed in their academic endeavors (Humphries et al., 2018). Le and Gottfried (2019) noted that children entering school with important social and emotional skills could negotiate conflict, compromise, and

develop friendships. They are effective at maintaining their focus and enjoying the kindergarten classroom learning challenges affords. Domitrovich et al. (2017) proposed that children entering school must be able to successfully implement their social and emotional skills required to proficiently identify and handle social interactions, accomplish their goals, be compassionate to others, and make positive decisions. Hunter et al. (2018) added that a child who is socially and emotionally competent for kindergarten could create and maintain positive relationships, is empathic, is proficient at cooperating, can take other's viewpoints, and can handle their emotions and behaviors, including being able to calm themselves promptly when upset.

Resilience is an additional social, and emotional skill that children entering kindergarten should possess for self-motivation and competency in accomplishing kindergarten academic tasks (Ramakrishnan & Masten, 2020). Sattler and Gershoff (2019) found that resilient children from low-income families can perform at the same levels as children from higher income households in kindergarten. In contrast, children from low-income families who have not developed resiliency before starting school tend to fall below grade level in all their academic areas and risk repeating grades. Puccioni (2018) reported African American and Hispanic parents believe that self and behavior management are crucial for school success. In contrast, white parents believe social standing is essential to their children's academic success.

A lack of fundamental social and emotional skills can impede a child's learning ability (Panayiotou et al., 2019). Ghandour et al., 2021, agreed that children entering kindergarten with required cognitive and social-emotional skills have a better chance of

maintaining academic success in kindergarten and other education grade levels, promoting good health and economic success. The kindergartener should not be easily sidetracked but possess the determination to complete a task using the teacher's instructions and the tenacity level that encourages the child to keep working at something until it is complete (Perrin et al., 2019). The child needs to exercise control over his emotions, for example, gauging the appropriate time to maintain excitement and display discontentment when things are not going their way (Ghandour et al., 2019). Children lacking social and emotional skills may find it difficult to delay gratification, control their thinking, manage their conduct, listen, and follow instructions (Mann et al., 2017). The kindergartener needs to possess the ability to make and retain friends (Ghandour et al., 2019). Happy children who can develop positive relationships with adults and peers are more apt to be ready for school (Alzahrani et al., 2019).

Self-Care Skills

Self-care abilities play a vital role in a child's functional level in the kindergarten classroom (Bay & Bay 2020). Caring for oneself, including such abilities as feeding oneself, meeting hygienic needs, and dressing and undressing without help, are critical in kindergarten (Pekdogan & Advul, 2017). Sezici and Akkaya (2020) defined self-care proficiencies as the capability to independently feed self, put clothing on and off, and perform toileting tasks without assistance. Current research has identified several self-care skills teachers believe are needed when children enter formal education: hand washing, feeding, and successfully dressing (Pekdogan & Advul, 2017).

Hustedt et al. (2018) reported that 86% of kindergarten teachers agreed that a child's competency to use a fork during mealtime is a critical requirement for kindergarten readiness. When children are competent at feeding themselves, they can complete the task promptly and move on to another activity (Gatumu & Kathuri, 2018). On the other hand, Gatumu and Kathuri (2018) found that the children who could not feed themselves demanded extra time from the teachers, which included supervising children during mealtime and dealing with spills and food droppings on children's clothing. Additional time is needed to assist those children in changing their clothing, which inhibits children's positive sense of self (Gatumu & Kathuri, 2018). Competent children exhibit good manners during mealtime, with such behavior directly correlating with self-regulation (Barrios-Fernández et al., 2020).

In a study conducted by Barrios-Fernández et al. (2020) about the daily activities of Spanish school children, researchers reported that a student's ability to feed themselves successfully is greatly influenced by the child's ability to dress and undress without assistance. School-age children who have developed the appropriate motor skills should also be able to successfully practice basic self-care, including hygiene and grooming, without help. Mastering the ability to dress and undress oneself is essential in being about to complete toilet training (Sezici & Akkaya, 2020). The child's physical well-being and motor development are essential for self-help skill accomplishment and are markers of school readiness (Becker et al., 2018).

Along with feeding, dressing oneself, and health care practices, Gatumu and Kathuri (2018) reported that most kindergarten teachers expect the children in their

classrooms to know how to keep themselves safe when they encounter strangers and when exploring their indoor and outdoor environments. The target state readiness guidelines suggest an expectation that school-age children show they can apply the appropriate preventative knowledge, aptitudes, and procedures to encourage safe and healthy living, in school, at home, and anywhere they go. Children must consistently follow safety boundaries indoors and outdoors to reduce teachers' time handling incidents and accidents resulting from a child's inability to observe and adhere to the danger warnings while in school (Gatumu & Kathuri, 2018). According to the target state children's readiness guidelines, entering school with appropriate life skills can contribute to the safety of others while on school premises.

The target state's Department of Education Common Core standards require kindergarteners to practice, follow, and complete self-care tasks, such as washing their hands before eating, after using the toilet, and following other health protocols, like covering the mouth when coughing and containing sneezes in napkins, sleeves, or tissue. Success in those areas demonstrates that the student is knowledgeable and practices safe ways to protect themselves and others from contagious illnesses. Mastery of self-care skills is an expectation for kindergarten readiness.

Factors That Affect Readiness

Inappropriate or insufficient life experiences can adversely affect the speed and quality of the development of neuron connections that can affect a child's growth, development, and learning abilities (Britto et al., 2017). As mentioned previously, children need to possess a collection of skills, abilities, and knowledge in several areas,

including social, emotional, cognitive, physical, language, literacy, approach to learning, and life skills (Aslan & Çikar, 2019). Children must be able to self-manage, regulate behaviors, and have foundational academic skills at the end of prekindergarten (Britto et al., 2017).

Nevertheless, several risk factors inhibit children from entering kindergarten prepared (Pekdogan et al., 2017). The timeliness of maturity may depend on nature and nurture and affect children's ability to succeed in school (McKnight et al., 2019). Research findings by Dhuey et al. (2018) revealed that children who entered the school before their fifth birthday eventually improved their test scores as they grew older and moved on to higher grade levels. However, entering kindergarten before age five may have lifetime implications academically.

McFarland et al. (2017) claimed that 6% of children entering kindergarten in 2010-2011 had two primary risk factors, poverty and at least one parent without a high school diploma (p. xxxiii). Additionally, 2% had one of the two risk factors, whereas 18% lived in poverty (McFarland et al., 2017). Duncan et al. (2018) focused on inadequate levels of social, emotional, and academic skills as risk factors for achievements in kindergarten. Wenz-Gross et al. (2018) reported that children across the United States, especially those from low-income families and those with no or limited experience in quality preschool programs, lacked the necessary skills and eagerness to be successful in kindergarten.

Pianta et al. (2017) noted that despite the enormous amount of money made available to programs preparing children for school, a significant number of children at

and below the poverty line would enter the kindergarten classroom without the necessary academic, social-emotional, language, and literacy knowledge, skills, and abilities they need to succeed in school. An explanation for this discrepancy comes from Dorman et al. (2017). They stated that an evaluation of 676 prekindergarten programs from 11 states showed that 19% (p. 92) of those learning environments lacked emotional and developmental scaffolding compared to 15% (p. 92) of environments with high levels of emotional and developmental scaffolding. Minority children living in poverty were found in those low-quality classrooms (Dorman et al., 2017). According to Dorman et al. (2017), less than 50% of children living under 100% of the American poverty line are ready for kindergarten compared to 75% of their peers living 185% above the American poverty line (p. 92). Nationally, the kindergarten readiness gap continues to expand for underprivileged children at the start of kindergarten (Kenne et al., 2018). Research has shown that providing at-risk children with high-quality prekindergarten programming can give those children a greater chance for academic success (Kenne et al., 2018).

Gullo (2018) suggested the reasons for the gap in readiness at kindergarten entrance include children having limited access to health care, including emotional and mental health, family factors including parents' emotional and mental wellness, family financial security, the strength of positive social and emotional networks, and parents' support of children's education. According to Culler et al. (2018), for military children, there may be additional factors that impede a child's school readiness, including the frequent deployment of a parent, the stress associated with the risk of the parent suffering

grave harm, and strained parent and child relationships resulting from these circumstances.

Poor preschool quality is another factor that negatively affects a child's school readiness. Quality indicators often found lacking in some preschool settings include the following: a high child-to-teacher ratio and lack of a research-based curriculum (Jenkins et al., 2020), teacher qualifications, center accreditation, and instructional alignment with kindergarten expectations (Davies et al., 2020). Early childhood educators without formal knowledge of child development and readiness skills can adversely affect children's success in school (Purtell & Ansari, 2018). Purtell and Ansari found that teachers' inadequate early childhood education preparation and inability to plan activities that meet the development needs of children in a mixed-age group make it challenging to prepare children for kindergarten.

Standard (2017) advocated for implementing a research-based curriculum because it is extremely important for the children's school readiness academically and socially. This curriculum must provide opportunities for children to develop their gross and fine motor skills because failure to develop them can negatively impact school readiness (Bustamante & Hindman, 2019). Rechtik (2018) recommended daily vigorous movement for preschoolers to increase their interest in physical activities in preparation for kindergarten's physical and fine motor activities.

The amount of time children participate in preschool on a daily basis is important to their kindergarten readiness. Atteberry et al. (2019) compared the benefits of part day prekindergarten programs to those of full day prekindergarten programs. They found that

the children attending full day prekindergarten demonstrated more excellent receptive vocabulary at completion than those attending part day prekindergarten. Ehrlich et al. (2018) found that children who are habitually absent during enrollment in pre-kindergarten demonstrated lower skills, knowledge, and abilities when they entered kindergarten and continued the same attendance record in kindergarten. Full day prekindergarten students' skills were significantly more excellent than part day prekindergarten students' physical, cognitive, social-emotional, and literary skills (Atteberry et al., 2019). Atteberry et al. reported that several reviews and evaluations of the effects of the average prekindergarten programs showed that half day programs do not provide the learning experiences for disadvantaged children that promote school readiness. Pianta et al. (2020) reported that the knowledge, skills, and abilities of children who attended half day preschool programs at entry into kindergarten are insufficient to close the education gap between low-income and middle-income children.

Prekindergartners with chronic school absenteeism also may need additional assistance to perform educational grade level tasks. For example, Fuhs et al. (2018) reported that persistent absenteeism could have a negative impact on a child's successful transition from prekindergarten to kindergarten. Fuhs et al. reported that poor preschool attendance might also affect intellectual performance. Hutt (2018) stated that children with ongoing absenteeism in preschool programs are more likely to enter kindergarten with language delays. Furthermore, children entering kindergarten with language delays are unprepared to follow teacher verbal instructions and may experience delays in all learning domains (Hutt, 2018). Garcia et al. (2017) found a direct link between a child's

frequent relocation and subsequent disruption in school attendance and their difficulty in achieving academic success.

Another area that impedes school readiness is teachers' biases and misconceptions about race-based children's abilities (Smith et al., 2019). Providing early childhood educators with ongoing professional development training that assists them in developing positive teacher-child relationships can diminish their inappropriate practices, improve teachers' perceptions, and better prepare all children for school (Pianta et al., 2017). Additionally, kindergarten teachers can be misled in their assessment of children's school readiness based on preconceived ideas of which children are more likely to succeed in school (Smith et al., 2019). Teachers may fail to assess children promptly, resulting in delayed assessment, planning, and the failure to capture authentic observations. This reduces the teacher's ability to capitalize on teaching opportunities that provide instant learning experiences (Yeigh et al., 2019). Prekindergarten teachers may neglect to regularly assess the quality of their practices in the classroom (Jenkins et al., 2018). Failure to self-reflect reduces the opportunities to make the necessary professional changes to promote all children's learning experiences to succeed in school (Jenkins et al., 2018). Understanding the factors that negatively impact kindergarten readiness and taking the appropriate steps to minimize the impact through best practices and high-quality prekindergarten programming can somehow give disadvantaged children a chance at academic success at kindergarten doors across our nation.

Assessed Levels of School Readiness

In the ten years before the conduct of this study, several states mandated KRAs for kindergarten students (Curran et al., 2020). According to Curran et al. (2020), many school principals across the United States use readiness assessments to determine the classroom a child will be attending during the kindergarten and later grades. Little (2017) reported that African American and Hispanic children typically enter kindergarten with weaker readiness skills than white children, which may affect their kindergarten placement and future academic careers. According to Little (2017), assessed levels of school readiness can have great importance for a child, so examining how readiness is assessed and the typical levels of school readiness is a valuable aspect of this exploration of preschool efforts to develop readiness.

Means of Assessing Readiness Skills

Russso et al. (2019) reported that prekindergarten programs use several approaches when assessing children's school readiness. These approaches include performance-based assessments, observational measures, rating scales, and direct assessments. Performance based assessments gauge a child's achievement of specific benchmarks in accomplishing educational tasks. Observational measures include teacher reports of what they see are children's everyday abilities and challenges. Rating scales are typified by checklists of discrete skills, in which the level of accomplishment is designated by numerical hierarchies or labels like "meets expectations." Direct assessments are standardized measures, administered individually or in groups, using norm referenced test items (Russo et al., 2019).

Performance-based assessments and observational measures are the two most used assessment tools in preschool and prekindergarten programs because they encourage the educators to observe the children's learning experiences in all the developmental domains (Russo et al., 2019). Both performance based and observational assessment tools encourage teachers to use authentic daily observations to identify children's skill levels in all learning domains and guide them in planning developmentally appropriate learning experiences that promote school readiness (Russo et al., 2019). Such assessments can include the development of physical skills (Kybartas et al., 2021) and social-emotional and behavioral skills (Welchons & McIntyre, 2017), which rating scales and direct assessments may miss. District administrators have many commercially prepared assessments from which to choose.

The Preschool Social Emotional Inventory focuses on social, emotional, and self-regulation skills, including children's self-awareness, social awareness, self-management, relationship management, level of attachment, communication skills, responsible decision making, and pro-social skills (Welchons & McIntyre, 2017). This assessment takes the form of a questionnaire completed by parents and teachers at three separate times during the period leading up to kindergarten. Welchons and McIntyre (2017) found that parents and teachers agree on children's mastery of the inventory's target skills and that a child's level of mastery is indicative of their behaviors in kindergarten.

A tool described by Ísfeld Víðisdóttir and Sveinbjörnsdóttir (2021) as one used to assess children's basic cognitive skills in readiness for formal education is the Preschool Life Skills assessment. This tool measures children's ability to follow a teacher's

instructions, to use and understand language, and to apply social skills. According to Ísfeld Víðisdóttir and Sveinbjörnsdóttir (2021), the Preschool Life Skills assessment tool is beneficial in measuring basic life skills that children need to be successful in school. Similarly, the Health and Ready to Learn survey measures individual children's skills, knowledge, and abilities through a lens of developmental wellness (Paschall et al., 2020). Parents of 3- to 5-year-old children completed the survey based on items derived from the National Survey of Children's Health. One assessment tool that targets academic skills is the KRA. The KRA can identify each child's kindergarten readiness and predicts students' third-grade literacy abilities (Justice et al., 2019). The KRA is widely used as a school readiness evaluation tool. According to Justice et al. (2019), the results from the KRA linguistic, reading, writing, and calculations sub-goals can determine later reading abilities.

Finally, Teaching Strategies Gold (TSG) is a researched-based assessment tool that measures children's learning in four domains: social, emotional, approach to learning, cognitive, physical, and language (Vitiello & Williford, 2021). TSG encourages teachers to reframe children's play and group activities to emphasize specific learning goals (Kim, 2016). Observation and assessment are done throughout the day in TSG classrooms, during child play, a child's interactions with peers, and children's interactions with adults (Lambert, 2020). TSG is the official assessment tool used in prekindergarten programs on military installations. Teachers can use the results of these readiness assessments to change the learning environment and plan meaningful,

challenging activities that promote new learning and increased understanding in critical domains (Vitiello & Williford, 2021).

National and Local Statistics on Kindergarten Readiness

According to Latham (2018), children who entered kindergarten in 2010 had a greater mastery of mathematics and literacy skills than did students in 1998. However, Latham reported that entering kindergarteners in 2010 showed lower levels of self-control and less positive approaches to learning than did children in 1998. Justice et al. (2017) found nearly half of children entering kindergarten in rural Appalachian communities in 2016-2017 were academically ready, and 71% were socially and emotionally prepared (p. 6).

In 2017 the state school readiness report of children entering kindergarten in the state in the 2016-2017 school year showed that 43% of those children had basic skills for the grade level, including 50% of girls and 36% of boys. Half of the kindergarteners entering attended either state prekindergarten or private preschool programs, and 64% of those children attended prekindergarten or preschool for at least one year before kindergarten. The target state reported that in the 2017-2018 school year, the results from the KRA showed a nonsignificant increase from the school year 2016-2017. A more detailed report of 2018-2019 KRA results in the target state indicated that 33% of children entering kindergarten scored as not yet ready, 22% had some pre-reading skills, and 45% were thoroughly prepared, including 54% of girls and 41% of boys. These figures indicate that about half of the children who entered kindergarten in the target state each year scored as ready, compared to the national reporting of children with inadequate

social, emotional, cognitive, and physical skills (Williams & Lerner, 2019). Seven thousand nationwide kindergarten teachers reported that only 35% (p.6) of students entering their classrooms were successfully ready for kindergarten (Ackerman & Barnett, 2005).

Importance of Kindergarten Readiness for Future School Success

Kindergarten readiness is important to a child's future school success because kindergarteners who lack the necessary knowledge and skills abilities are beginning formal education behind and may have trouble catching up with their school-ready peers (Pianta et al., 2020). Pianta et al. (2020) stated that language skills are necessary kindergarten readiness skills required for understanding and accomplishing teacher's instructions and maintaining positive interactions with peers and teachers. In addition, a child who enters kindergarten with an eagerness to learn will keep a desire and inquisitiveness in new learning experiences, is likely to be persistent in completing given tasks, will be attentive to teachers' instructions, and will follow instructions with success (Ghandour et al., 2019). Children who enter kindergarten without a positive approach to learning may not be able to manage their desires and feelings and may be less successful in kindergarten (Panlilio et al., 2018). Children who are ready for school have tended to have better teacher-child interactions and experience higher success in problem-solving situations than children who are not yet prepared (Pianta et al., 2020).

School readiness depends on the quality and quantity of learning experiences a child is exposed to during preschool as the child interacts with others and their environment (Keown et al., 2020). The difference in governance over preschool programs

conducted on military installations compared to programs conducted in the civilian community may result in differences in children's learning experiences and kindergarten readiness.

Readiness and the Unique Experience of Military Dependent Children

According to Bloir (2020) in 2018 the active duty and reserve members of the military numbered 2,101,134 (p.vi) with 2,627,805 (p.vi) dependents, including 966,604 spouses (p. iv), and 1,650,464 children (p.vi). Of those children, 623,875 (p.vi) were aged birth through 5 years (Bloir, 2020). Children whose parents are on active duty in the U. S. military may be subject to unique experiences that could affect their readiness for kindergarten.

According to Bloir (2020), military dependent children may be affected by experiences that other children do not share widely, including frequent moves, parental absence, financial hardship, child and parent anxiety, harsh parenting, and feelings of insecurity. In addition, because preschool children attend childcare in facilities located on military installations that follow military regulations, the quality of their childcare experience may differ from that encountered in community-based childcare centers. In this section, I will describe some of the unique experiences of military dependent children that may affect their readiness for kindergarten in areas of family disruption, emotional disruption, and childcare quality.

Family Disruption

Family disruption, frequent relocations, and parental deployment affect the well-being of young children (Walsh & Rosenblum, 2018). Military life often contributes to

challenges in family members' physical health, mental health, and financial stability, negatively affecting children and adults (Owen & Combs, 2017). According to Cramm et al. (2019), military families experience unrelenting stress for various causes that families not affiliated with the military do not experience.

Some stressors include constant relocation from installation to installation nationwide and internationally (Cramm et al., 2019). Dependent children are not part of the decision-making process concerning when and where they relocate or the frequency or length of relocations; the DoD makes these decisions without consideration for family impacts (Cramm et al., 2019).

Schmitt et al. (2017) noted that change of residence more than three times a year significantly increased children's level of school misconduct during preschool and later school years. In addition, there are times when military parents are deployed unaccompanied by family, leaving their spouse and children behind and, in most cases, without the knowledge of whether the parent will return and in what condition (Cramm et al., 2019). Deployment increases the stress level of children and the spouse, who must manage independently.

Families that experienced more deployments were less functional than other families, and relationships between husband and wife were strained (Lester et al., 2016). The many relocations and deployments that make up the normal life of the military family can contribute to poor handling of finances and staying within a budget, which can create anxiety, marital discord, and mental stress (Ross et al., 2017).

The relationship between military dependent children's academic scores and their family's financial soundness and frequent relocation have been examined in several studies. Findings showed a direct relationship between students' academic success and family-related issues (Garcia et al., 2017). Family disruption can impact children's physical health. Toomey et al. (2021) reported that young children who experience parent deployment were more likely to be overweight and have poor teeth, leading to other health issues. Lleras and McKillip (2017) showed that family instability could disrupt kindergarten readiness.

All these family disruptions are compounded when both parents of young children are military, and both have a dual active-duty status (Huffman et al., 2018). However, some military dependent children have grandparents and family friends who, in the absence of the parents, can temporarily take on the parenting role when both parents are deployed (Huffman et al., 2018). Moves from installation to installation that are part of military life disrupt these extended family connections, too, so young children may not have family-like support when needed. Lleras and McKillip (2017) argued that ongoing traumatic conditions, environmental dangers, and poor childhood experiences, extending from birth through kindergarten, negatively impact children's intellectual and social emotional growth.

Emotional Disruption

Although nearly all children at some time in their young lives experience emotional disruption, children of military parents are more likely than other children to feel anxious and insecure and to be confronted with parent anxiety, harsh parenting, and

parents' feelings of insecurity (Rooks et al., 2020). The issues that affect the young military dependent child can vary based on which parent is on active duty (Strane et al., 2017). According to Strane et al. (2017), the stress levels soldiers feel differ depending on gender, as do their reactions to the emotions those stress triggers. Regardless of how the parent deals with stress and anxiety in their lives, military dependent children are affected (Rooks et al., 2020).

Karre and Perkins (2022) emphasized that the high mobility that military dependent children experience from place to place and school to school make their initial day in school very difficult. Those children are reported to experience loneliness, struggle with peer relations, have heightened fear of rejection and low self-esteem. According to Rauhut (2020), military dependent students indicated the most widespread pressure they experienced as they moved from school to school was forming and maintaining close relationships. Military-affiliated children described deliberately avoiding making close relationships with their classmates at school, opting instead to cultivate superficial friendships. In contrast, Karre and Perkins (2022) found the high mobility military dependent children experience exposes them to multiple cultures and provides them with a high level of resiliency. These children handle change well and are more accepting of differences in others than children who have resided in one community their whole life (Karre & Perkins, 2022).

Active-duty military parents may return home from deployment with posttraumatic stress disorder. This disorder affects the soldier and the soldier's spouse and can create a stressful home environment for the soldier's children (Hisle-Gorman et

al., 2019). Pahwa et al. (2019) reported that 41.8% of mothers in the military who were directly responsible for the care of their children were diagnosed with a mental health issue. One quarter of those were diagnosed with anxiety, 23.9% with depression, 16.4% with posttraumatic stress disorder, and 7.4 % with traumatic brain injury; many were diagnosed with more than one of these issues (Pahwa et al., 2019). Pahwa et al. reported that some participants reported not pursuing help for their issues because they feared that seeking help for mental issues would jeopardize their promotion in the military. Mailey et al. (2018) reported that parents who serve in the military face several challenges when seeking care for stress, although parents who do describe themselves as being tired, exasperated, and quick to anger,

Military parents who lack stress coping skills and resilience and who cannot or dare not seek support for mental health issues may engage in harsh parenting, which creates a difficult problem in the military community (Kaye et al., 2021). According to McCarthy et al. (2018), parent maltreatment of children identified by the military's Family Advocacy Program includes bodily harm resulting from physical force; mental maltreatment, such as criticizing or intimidating the child, being overly controlling, engaging their spouse in explosive arguments within earshot of the child; and child sexual abuse or exploitation. Using a Family Advocacy Program database from 1997 to 2013, McCarthy et al. (2018) identified 11,055 cases of a parent's failure to meet a child's physical, mental, and social, emotional needs (p. 70), 5495 cases of a child mental abuse (p. 70), 5,183 cases of child physical maltreatment (p. 70), 164 cases of child

sexual maltreatment (p. 70), and 2,102 cases that were reported as a combination of maltreatment. Seventy-three cases caused a child's death (McCarthy et al., 2018).

According to Hisle-Gorman (2019), results from several studies on military dependent children found that because of ongoing stressors in the lives of these children, they are more prone to lash out, have poor self-control and poor behavior management skills, and are likely to experience physical and mental health issues and are more frequently than other children to be under the care of a specialist. In contrast, Sharma and Nagle (2018) asserted that, despite the stressful life of military children, they are resilient and therefore do not exhibit a higher level of challenging behaviors than their civilian counterparts. Cramm et al. (2019) agreed with Hisle-Gorman (2019) that military dependent children receive more psychological care than their non-military-affiliated peers. Lester et al. (2016) suggested that, although parents' mental issues contribute to children's anxiety and other social and emotional problems in school, the children thrived in school when the parents met the children's emotional needs. Because of the unique conditions that military dependent children likely face, childcare programs must ensure that they provide a learning environment that supports the family and the child (Hisle-Gorman et al., 2019).

Comparison of Installation and Targeted State Prekindergarten Programs

Fine (2020) wrote that the DoD serves over 633,957 children under six years old at over 300 locations worldwide. The experience of the military dependent preschoolers is different from that of their civilian counterparts because they attend child development centers organized and run by the DoD (Bessette, 2020). Unlike community-based

childcare centers, military installation centers are not regulated by licensing agencies in states in which military installations are located. To ensure military dependents receive the highest quality of care while their parents are at work, Congress enacted the Military Child Care Act in 1989 (Bessette, 2020). The new mandates required numerous improvements to military childcare programs, including accreditation by an outside organization, such as the National Association for the Education of Young Children, highly trained child development program associates, competitive salaries, and accountability (Bessette, 2020). Several areas of military childcare programs differ from the targeted state's prekindergarten programs, including governance, funding structure, program types, the proportion of eligible children enrolled, teacher qualifications, and quality standards. I will compare these areas because differences between the two types of programs may affect military dependent children's readiness for kindergarten.

Governance

The DoD is responsible for the operations of all early childhood education programs on military installations (Kamack, 2020). The prekindergarten programs on the installation are governed by key personnel on and off the installation (AR608-10, 11 May 2017), including the assistant chief of staff for installation management, who has the accountability and responsibility to ensure all child and youth service program mandates listed in the DoD instructions and Army Regulations are followed (AR608-10, 11 May 2017). The mandates include standardized menus and recipes, guidelines on nutrition, hiring process and practices, pay bands, operating program hours, square footage per child in the learning environment and outdoor playground, parents' share of tuition, and

all materials, tools, and props available to children, and behaviors of employees and disciplines (AR 608-10, 11 May 2017: AR 215-3 29 August 2019). The installation commander maintains direct oversight of all child and youth service programs and ensures the mandates established for these programs are followed (AR 608-10, 11 May 2017). The commander approves the members on the annual mandated fire, Safety, health, and comprehensive center inspections and maintains ongoing communication with the child and youth programs leadership team to ensure the smooth operation of the programs. Each installation childcare program is led by an on-site management team, including a facility director, assistant director, program coordinator, program operation specialist, nutritionist, program administrator, school liaison, special needs director, and lead trainers (AR 608-10, 11 May 2017). The management team's role is to ensure all existing policies and guidelines remain in the programs and that all new policies are immediately implemented (AR 608-10, 11 May 2017). The role of the facility directors and assistant directors is to monitor the compliance of all policies and standard operating procedures in accordance with Army regulations (AR608-10, 11 May 2017).

In the target state, the department of education's early childhood division maintains oversight of all federal and state-funded early childhood education programs in the community (that is, those not on military installations). The office of childcare's licensing branch governs all early childhood education programs in the target state and provides each program with initial licensing and re-licensing. The licensing branch tracks all early childhood education activities to ensure state policies and guidelines are followed, scrutinizes reports of unlicensed and other childcare infractions, and prosecutes

activities with major incompliances. Additionally, the licensing branch assists early childhood education programs in meeting the established childcare guidelines and assists the state, state officials, and communities by serving as early childhood education key proponents to safeguard children's wellness and protect them from harm.

All prekindergarten programs in the target state that are not operated on military installations are governed by the state's education department. A distinction is made between center-based programs housed in a commercial building or similar setting and family childcare (FCC) homes housed in residence. A registered provider manages the operation of their FCC home, and a center director is responsible for running a childcare center and conforming to state licensing guidelines.

Two entities govern Head Start programs, in addition to state licensing agencies. One of these is the delegate agency, which comprises a board, executive director, Head Start policy committee, and Head Start director (Roles, 2018). The delegated agency is responsible for the program's legal and financial affairs and the day-to-day operation of the Head Start program (Roles, 2018). The grantee agency also contributes to the governance of Head Start programs through oversight of an individual center or group of centers. It includes the agency governing board, a Head Start policy committee, the local Head Start council, and a director at each center (Roles, 2018). The grantee agency must be contacted and notified ahead of time for any request requiring approval from Head Start (Roles, 2018).

Funding Structures

Funding for childcare on military installations is allotted from two sources: non-appropriated funds from tuition payments assessed to parents and appropriated funds received from Congress (DoD, 2014). Funding for military child and youth programs in fiscal year (FY) 2019 was approximately $943M (Kamarch, 2020). In FY 20, $1.1B (Kamarch, 2020), and in FY 21, $1.2B (Kamarch, 2020,). Military installation prekindergarten programs provide low-cost tuition for service members and civilian employees based on total household income, with the other funding subsidized by the federal government (Leskin et al., 2018). Funding for childcare on military installations is allotted from two sources, non-appropriated funds from parents' tuition payments and appropriated funds from Congress (DoD, 2014).

According to 2015 research conducted in the target state, the state provides free prekindergarten programs for all eligible children for four years. The 2002 Bridge to Excellence in Public Schools Act in the targeted state mandated that all 4-year-old children, especially children from underprivileged families, attend prekindergarten programs. The 2002 Public School Act provides funding for the prekindergarten programs approved by the state and nationally accredited (Workman et al., 2016). In 2014, the Prekindergarten Expansion Act provided prekindergarten programs in the target state with $15 million to improve preschools and prekindergarten programs and provide funding for additional 4-year old's that were not currently attending the programs. In 2015-2016, federal funding in the target state provided 1,210 new prekindergarten spaces and enhanced 1,601 existing prekindergarten programs.

In 2017, the target state launched a new prekindergarten grant to fund full-day prekindergarten programs for children meeting specific criteria (Parker et al., 2019). This funding included two children learning English as a second language, children with special needs, prekindergarten children living in areas where transportation was needed to attend the programs, and children from families 200% below the government poverty criteria (Parker et al., 2019, p. 4). According to local reports, the target state received prekindergarten funding for $115.6M in 2016-2017 and $117.7M in 2017-2018. In 2017-2018 Head Start, the state's target, received $1.8M; the same year's funding for prekindergarten expansion efforts was $8M. According to internal reports, Preschool for All received $606K from the federal government in 2016-2017, but only $91K in 2017-2018, and expanded funding in 2017-2018 for state full-day kindergarten was $11M. Parents of children who attend prekindergarten in the target state typically pay between 0% and 100% of the cost of childcare, depending on eligibility for subsidized programs. Tuition for state funded programs is based on a family's income identified by the government as being between 100% to 200% percent of the poverty level. The monthly tuition ranges from $55.00 to $205.00, depending on family income, according to the 2021 fee scale published by the target state.

Programs to Support Kindergarten Readiness

Strong Beginnings is the curriculum that promotes readiness in military installation prekindergarten programs. Children who experience Strong Beginnings are provided with learning experiences in math, social studies, reading, writing, and social skills. Strong Beginnings classrooms are part of each child development center's National

Association for the Education of Young Children accreditation program (AR 608-10. 2017 May 11), which means that Strong Beginnings outcomes are not evaluated separately as a prekindergarten program with school readiness standards but as part of a child development center with preschool standards. On military installations, TSG, an online assessment tool to assess children's learning accomplishments at different points throughout the prekindergarten school year, is used to assess children's prekindergarten accomplishments. TSG uses a collection of authentic observations and assessments along with the individual child's work samples and portfolios to validate learning in 10 domains, including social-emotional, cognitive, physical, and language development, and familiarity with academic areas of literacy, math, science, and technology, social studies, and the arts (AR 608-10. 2017 May 11).

Additionally, the Strong Beginnings program does not use the targeted state's KRA tool to assess children's readiness abilities during the prekindergarten year, so it is impossible to determine if children taught with Strong Beginnings are kindergarten ready by the state's standards. Having an official curriculum minimizes the impact of a move from installation to installation on prekindergartners and maintains continuity of learning experiences. TSG records are accessible to all child development centers as children move from installation to installation in America and worldwide (Lambert et al., 2014).

In the target state, the federal government's Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge initiative, in collaboration with the state department of health initiatives 2011, provided $1B to encourage state funded prekindergarten programs to maintain quality programs (Merrill et al., 2020). For a state to qualify for funding from the joint initiative,

the early childhood education programs must meet three specific guidelines: adherence to early learning standards that detail children's learning milestones; assessment of the skills and knowledge children have upon entry into kindergarten classrooms determined through kindergarten entry assessment; and implementation of tiered quality rating and improvement systems to assess the quality of individual programs (Merrill et al., 2020). Although funded guidelines suggest curriculum elements for prekindergarten in the target state, the actual curriculum chosen by each center is not specified in state rules.

According to Nguyen et al. (2018), most states surveyed on the type of curriculum used in their prekindergarten programs reported using either a whole-child curriculum or a curriculum that is content specific. The whole child curriculum aligns with constructivist learning, which encourages learning through child-teacher interactions (Nguyen et al., 2018). In a national survey of early childhood education programs, 41% used a whole child curriculum, with 75% of those using a Creative Curriculum™ (Nguyen et al., 2018, p. 4). Twenty percent of Head Start programs and 25% of independently funded prekindergarten programs used a skill specific curriculum (math, reading, and writing) or whole-child curriculum (Nguyen et al., 2018, p. 4).

According to the target state education department, a KRA tool is used at different points in the prekindergarten year to assess children in state-funded and non-funded programs. The KRA is also used to identify learning delays among children in the prekindergarten learning environment (Regenstein et al., 2017). Then, upon entry into kindergarten, the target state uses a Kindergarten Entry Assessment to evaluate each child's school readiness skills (Weisenfeld et al., 2020), including the readiness of those

students who attended prekindergarten in installation programs and so were assessed for kindergarten readiness using TSG instead of KRA. Kindergarten Entry Assessment measures four developmental areas, including Language and Literacy (reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills); Mathematics (counting, comparison, and sorting skills); Physical Well-Being and Motor Development (dexterity, muscular coordination, and balance); and Social Foundations (following rules, asking for help, task persistence, and other relevant skills be successful in kindergarten). Kindergarten entry readiness in each domain is categorized as Demonstrating Readiness (a child showing emergent abilities and practices that guide the child is ready to perform kindergarten level skills). It is also categorized as approaching Readiness (a kindergartener showing certain emergent abilities and performances that demonstrate that the child is prepared to perform specific tasks in kindergarten successfully) or Emerging Readiness (a student with a limited number of foundational abilities and skills that can be used in kindergarten).

Teachers' Qualifications

According to U.S. Department of the Army (2017) regulations, lead teachers in the prekindergarten programs on military installations are required to have, at a minimum, a high school diploma and 18 months of working experience in the child development centers on the installation as an assistant teacher. Because a bachelor's degree is the preferred level of education for a lead teacher in the Strong Beginnings program, the percentage of lead teachers with at least a bachelor's degree is approximately 25%. All Strong Beginnings teachers are required to complete 24 hours of professional development annually. Prekindergarten leads teachers working in the Strong

Beginnings program on military installations are only required to seek recertification if they hold a Child Development Associate credential because the organization that certifies the credential, the Council for Professional Recognition, requires that all credential holders must recertify after 3 years (Council for Professional Recognition, 2021).

In the target state, instruction for children in the year before kindergarten can be obtained by parents through three avenues, each with its teacher qualification requirements. According to the early education website in the target state, teachers who work in publicly funded prekindergarten programs serving poor or homeless families must have completed a bachelor's degree, and a teaching certificate is preferred. Teachers who work in independently funded childcare centers, preschools, and nursery schools that serve tuition-paying families must, at minimum, be at least 19 years old and have completed high school or its equivalent and have completed at least six semester hours of early childhood training or its equivalent, according to the target state website. Providers who run an FCC home must be at least 18 years old and have completed an introductory training program for FCC providers. Teachers in an FCC home must meet the exact minimum requirements that qualify teachers in independently funded childcare centers. The target state website indicates that all teachers working in independently funded centers and FCC homes must complete 12 hours of professional development training annually.

Quality Regulation

All child and youth service programs operating on military installations are subject to 12 unannounced inspections annually (AR 608-10. 2017,11 May). The program areas included in the annual inspections include program quality, childcare providers' annual training reports, quality of program leadership, the monthly inspections, the utilization of spaces, and U.S. Department of Agriculture food service compliance (AR 608-10. 2017,11 May). The installation's safety, health, and fire regulators monitor monthly compliance with regulations and report findings to leadership and the installation commander. The facility director promptly provides corrective actions for all non-compliant findings (AR 608-10. 2017,11 May). State licensing authorities have no jurisdiction over the installation of child and youth service programs.

At military installation childcare centers, a training and curriculum specialist with a bachelor’s degree or higher degree in early childhood education is on staff to train and coach the Strong Beginnings teachers and assistants (DeVita et al., 2003). The training specialist approves weekly planned activities for the Strong Beginnings classrooms and is required to spend most of their time in the classrooms, training, observing, and mentoring the teachers and assistance (U.S. Department of the Army, 2017). In a study conducted by Harding et al. (2019), nine types of overall support were available to Head Start early childhood education teachers as professional development. However, there was no guarantee that the teachers would receive any of professional development. The offered professional development included seminars or trainings, mentoring, and coaching offered by the program. Eight different types of curricular help were provided, which

included help in knowing and understanding the core curriculum. The teachers also received a variety of support from their supervisor, mentor, or coach, to include feedback on classroom observations conducted by the mentor. Unlike the on-installation prekindergarten programs, the community programs did not have a full-time, on-site trainer hired to fully support the prekindergarten programs. The ratio in a Strong Beginnings classroom is 20 students to 1 teacher and one teacher assistant (U.S. Department of the Army, 2017). The assistant teacher can help implement planned activities and assist with observation, planning, assessment, and parent/teacher conferences. Still, the responsibility for the classroom and students' well-being and success lies with the teacher.

The target state requires annual inspections and evaluation of all state-funded center-based and FCC home programs and privately funded early childhood education programs to ensure all policies and guidelines are followed. Only programs that meet required state standards retain their license and ongoing funding. The areas examined include children's knowledge, teachers' qualifications, and professional practices in a program (Merrill et al., 2020). In 2013, the target state implemented a Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System (TQRIS) that concentrates on the learning environment, the tools, materials, and props available to the students, teacher qualification, and parent participation in the programs. All State-funded and licensed early childhood education programs participating in the TQRIS are evaluated in five areas: licensing and compliance; staff qualifications and professional development; accreditation and rating scales; developmentally appropriate learning and practice; and administrative policies

and procedures (Merrill et al., 2020). In addition, the state also encourages programs to acquire and maintain National Association for the Education of Young Children and National Association for Family Child Care accreditation and become a member of the Excellence Counts in Early Learning and School-age Child Care program, which also provides accreditation for its members (Workman et al., 2016). Most early childhood education programs, childcare centers, and FCC homes are licensed or certified by the state licensing agency. The federal Child Care and Development Block Grant mandates the state to validate the licensing of privately owned or state funded programs, serving children from birth through five (Backes et al., 2018). Qualified programs receive added state funding and maintain high quality programming for children and their families (Lee, 2021). In the target state, all early childhood programs that serve 4-year-old children maintain the licensing requirement of a maximum of 20 children in each classroom at a ratio of 1 teacher to 10 children (Parker et al., 2019, p. 5).

Comparison Summary

Several differences exist between the target state prekindergarten programs and the installation prekindergarten programs. One of the differences is an oversight. The DoD is responsible for the operations of the programs on the installations. It uses the guidelines and mandates from the Army Regulations and the DoD instructions. The target state department oversees all early childhood education programs in the state. Teacher qualifications in independently funded centers and FCC homes in the target state are like the qualifications required of teachers in military installation preschools. Still, teachers in state-funded prekindergarten have more rigorous requirements of a bachelor's degree and

teacher certification. Teacher-child ratios of 1 adult to 10 children are the same for military installation classrooms and classrooms in community-based center programs and state-funded prekindergarten but vary in FCC homes, depending on the multi-age character of the class. Funding for childcare on military installations is allotted from two sources, tuition payments assessed to parents and appropriated funds, which are received from Congress. The target state programs in the community receive funding from state and federal funding, or parent tuition, depending on the facility type, family income, child readiness needs, or a mix of the two. Military installation prekindergarten and state-funded programs follow established curricula determined by governing authorities. Still, independently funded community-based centers and FCC homes are free to choose their curriculum. In sum, prekindergarten programs housed on military installations are like those offered in the surrounding community, with minor variations by community program type. This means that my exploration in this study of kindergarten teachers' perspectives on school readiness in children who attended prekindergarten programs in military installation childcare centers before kindergarten is grounded in program qualities like program qualities experienced by children who attended community-based programs in the year before kindergarten.

Summary and Conclusions

In this chapter, I presented my literature search strategies, a detailed description of the conceptual framework that grounded the research process, and a review of relevant current literature. I included in the current literature review information on the knowledge and skills expected of children when entering kindergarten, the levels of school readiness

of children entering kindergarten seen nationwide and in the target state, and factors that may affect readiness. Additionally, I extensively compared programs offered to prekindergarten children on military installations and in the targeted state. In addition, my literature search provided evidence of the limited research about military dependent children and their school readiness, creating a gap in the literature. In Chapter 3, I present the study's research design and rationale, my role as the researcher, and the research methodology, and I will address issues of trustworthiness and ethical conduct.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this study was to gain insight into the kindergarten readiness of children who attended preschool on military installations in childcare centers run by DoD as described by teachers in community-based kindergarten classrooms. In this chapter, I describe the research design and rationale and my role as the researcher. I also discuss the methodology, including participant selection, instrumentation, and data analysis, and address issues of trustworthiness and ethical procedures.

Research Design and Rationale

I sought to answer the following research question: How do kindergarten teachers describe school readiness in children who attended prekindergarten at military installation childcare centers? This study's central phenomenon of interest was kindergarten teachers' perspectives on the school readiness of children who attended military installation preschools in the year before kindergarten entrance. I followed the narrative research tradition. According to Ntinda (2019), narrative researchers describe people's experiences in their own words. In employing this research tradition, I used a basic qualitative design with interviews. This design was appropriate for this study because it permits exploration and discoveries about a particular group, as indicated by Ravitch and Carl (2019). By interviewing kindergarten teachers, I was able to elicit research findings that provide insights and understanding into the study phenomenon (see Creswell, 2008; Ravitch & Carl., 2019). Additionally, this inquiry contributes to existing literature regarding school readiness among children who attend prekindergarten programs on military installations.

Role of the Researcher

My current professional role is facility director at the child development center on the military installation that prompted this study. The center has Strong Beginnings classrooms. I have worked for several military agencies, including the Department of Homeland Security, the United States Coast Guard, the United States Air Force, and the United States Army Child and Youth Services. For the past 30 years, I have worked with military dependent children and held several positions in programs in the United States, Germany, and Japan. I have previously held roles as child and youth program associate, lead teacher in an infant classroom, supervisory lead specialist, training and curriculum specialist, assistant facility director, and child and youth program administrator.

Because of my extensive experience in early childhood education, particularly on military installations, there is a likelihood that the research process may have been affected by my own biases and inferences. The intrusion of researcher bias is inherent in a qualitative study (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). I kept a reflective journal to manage my own opinions and biases and followed the process suggested by Annink (2017). In the reflective journal, I took notes on data not included in verbatim interviews, my reflections on what participants said or did, and any ideas I wished to apply to data analysis or recommendations for future research or practice. Using a reflective journal as a repository of my thoughts helped maintain research credibility throughout the research process. My role as a researcher did not include any individuals I had supervised or exerted any power relationships over. All prospective participants I had supervised and

had a relationship with were excluded from this study; this included any teacher with whom I have any current professional relationship.

Methodology

Participant Selection Logic

The population under study included kindergarten teachers working in general education classrooms in public schools near a U.S. military installation that provides childcare to military dependent children. I began recruiting participants by first identifying the military dependent children's schools. The schools were identified by looking online and discovering the community elementary schools that the children utilizing the before- and after-school program on the installation attended. Using this strategy to identify target schools increased the likelihood that prospective participants worked directly with military dependent kindergarteners from the installation. Participants in this study were kindergarten teachers working in general education classrooms in four public school districts in one Middle Atlantic state in the United States. The excluded teachers were special subject teachers (music, art, and physical education) and teachers representing special populations (teachers of gifted students and students with behavioral issues or other special needs).

Additionally, I identified community elementary schools with a high population of military dependent children who attended prekindergarten programs on the installation and lived outside the installation in the four-district school in the communities. Kindergarten email addresses of the target school districts are publicly available on the

internet. I used this resource to find kindergarten teachers at the identified schools and those teachers' contact information.

I sent emails to the teachers inviting them to participate in the study. When prospective participants contacted me, stating their interest in being part of the study, I provided them with the consent form. The consent form instructed volunteers to reply to me via email with the words, "I consent." Each teacher who consented to be part of the study was asked to suggest a date and time for their interview.

I interviewed a small sample of 10 kindergarten teachers. Blaikie (2018) reported that a small sample size may reduce confidence in the sufficiency of the collected data but also noted that determining the sample size ahead of the data collection can be difficult. Blaikie and Sim et al. (2018) suggested that the determination of data saturation comes not from the sample size but the apparent completeness of the data as they are collected. Alase (2017) and Creswell (2013) both suggested that a sample size as small as two participants can be appropriate in an interview-based study and that large numbers of participants can be unworkable. Similarly, Fountouki and Theofanidis (2018) suggested that participants' perspectives from a small geographical area may not provide a complete view of the larger population. However, because the expectations for children entering kindergarten may vary from state to state, kindergarten teachers working with military dependent children may have different perspectives about kindergarten readiness depending on their state kindergarten guidelines. Therefore, the limitation posed by the limited geographic area appropriately delimits the data. Collecting data from one school

district was also fueled the need to limit confounding variables that would be introduced by using a wider geographic area.

Instrumentation

The data collection instrument used to answer the research question included a series of seven open-ended interview questions. I based the questions on Pianta's three key ideas about readiness, including (a) what knowledge and skills children possess when entering school, (b) how teachers in early learning classrooms plan to assist children in developing and mastering what they need to know for school, and (c) how teachers in kindergarten and first grade help children extend and improve their school readiness skills. Three interview questions provide a sample of inquiry into each of the three key ideas:

- "When children start kindergarten in your classroom, how do you know who is ready for kindergarten and who might be less ready?";
- "What do you know or guess about how preschool teachers assist children in developing the skills they will need in kindergarten?"; and
- "What sorts of things do you do to support kindergarten readiness skills in children who might not be fully ready for kindergarten at the start?"

The data collected from the participating teachers' responses assisted me in answering the research question on how kindergarten teachers describe school readiness in children who attended prekindergarten at military installation childcare centers. I asked a doctoral-level practitioner with experience in education research to review the interview questions and assess their sufficiency in answering the research question. This practitioner changed the

wording of some of the questions to encourage the participants to continue talking about their experiences with military dependent children from the installation prekindergarten programs. The interview questions are presented in the appendix.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

I began recruiting participants by first identifying the military dependent children's schools. The schools were identified by looking online and discovering where children who attend the before- and after-school program on the installation attend community elementary schools. Staff email addresses of the target school districts are publicly available on the internet, and I used this resource to find kindergarten teachers at the identified schools and those teachers' contact information

Additionally, I identified community elementary schools with a high population of military dependent children who attend prekindergarten programs on the installation and live outside. Staff work email addresses of the target school districts are publicly available on the internet. I used this resource to find kindergarten teachers at the identified schools and those teachers' contact information. I emailed my invitation to the teachers and asked them to participate in the study. When prospective participants contacted me, stating their interest in being part of the study, I provided them with the consent form. The consent form instructed volunteers to reply to me via email with the words, "I consent." Each teacher who consented to be part of the study was asked to suggest a date and time for their interview.

I used Zoom to conduct the interviews, which I recorded using an audio recorder with a USB port. Each participant's interview was uploaded as an MP3 file and labeled

using codes instead of names to maintain confidentiality. Otter.ai was used to transcribe the audio recordings. In a study comparing automatic speech recognition system for interpreters, Gaber and Corpas-Pastor (2021) found that Otter.ai was time efficient and effective as a transcription tool for audio recordings. I reviewed each transcript while listening to the audio recording, to catch any errors of transcription and ensure clarity of the written file. I kept field notes in my research journal during the interviews to record my thoughts and questions and to help me remember information from the participants that required further probing for clarification. Phillippi and Lauderdale (2018) suggested that researchers use field notes to record their thoughts, personal thoughts, concepts, and challenges about their discoveries during the data collection process. According to Pacheco-Vega (2019), field notes benefit the researcher because the notes can provide an understanding of the collected data during the writing process.

For new researchers taking the field, notes increase the individual's knowledge research, better understand different populations, and provide reliable information that encourages politicians in their decision-making process (Pacheco-Vega, 2019). Each participant's interview was uploaded as an mp3 file and labeled using codes instead of names to maintain confidentiality. I used Otter.ai to transcribe the audio recordings. I reviewed each transcript while listening to the audio recording to catch any transcription errors and ensure clarity of the written file. I emailed each participant the interview transcript and asked them to review it for accuracy. At the end of the interview process I emailed the participants and thanked them for their participation in the study and informed them that their part in the research process was ended.

Data Analysis Plan

I examined the transcripts for precision by listening to the audio recording while reading through each transcript to identify discrepancies and make necessary corrections. After participants reviewed the transcript and made changes, I added the changes to the individual transcripts. I ensured that all my inferences, pleasantries, questions, and information were excluded from the audio transcripts. In addition, I removed all names used by the participants during the interview and used descriptive words in brackets as needed to clarify a participant's statements.

I analyzed the transcribed data by separating each transcription into individual ideas. Each idea consisted of one or more sentences. Each of these ideas was entered verbatim into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet in a single column, with each idea in a separate row. Each row constituted a code derived from the data, and an adjacent column to the right of the codes contains the identifier for each participant. When I isolated each code this way, I moved rows, so similar ideas followed one another. In this way, I created categories of data, with each category representing an emergent idea offered by multiple participants. I moved all the rows in various categories to align similar categories of data, one after the other, to create themes. I anticipated locating about 20 categories and grouping these into four or five themes. Discrepant cases did not arise in the process of coding the data. Following Rose and Johnson (2020), I identified codes that did not align with the developed themes or the established analysis. I considered how the discrepant data might represent a unique perspective not shared or understood by the remaining

participants. I also determined how these discrepant cases might contribute to understanding the study problem and purpose.

Issues of Trustworthiness

Credibility

Credibility is the researcher's ability to consider a study's complexities and deal with not quickly explained patterns (Guba, 1981). Pelzang and Hutchinson (2017) suggested several strategies that can be used to maintain credibility during a research process, and I incorporated several of those strategies while conducting my research. For example, I maintained an appropriate length of time with each participant during the interview segments. When necessary, I remained open to providing additional time for each participant to answer additional questions that would encourage them to provide examples and more thorough explanations relating to individual statements. As Rose and Johnson (2020) suggested, I conducted the interviews on days and times convenient to participants. Because I conducted interviews by telephone or teleconferencing, and participants were able to choose the location that suits them, interview venues are expected to be comfortable for the participants. I engaged in member checking by asking participants to confirm the accuracy of their interview transcripts. To achieve data saturation, I followed the advice of Weller et al. (2018), who indicated about 12 to 16 interviews are sufficient to reach saturation in qualitative research.

Transferability

Transferability describes how the results of a study are relevant to other settings. The researcher uses descriptive statements regarding the study parameters (Guba, 1981).

I established transferability by providing detailed descriptions of my participant selection criteria, the setting of the study, and my process of conducting the study. I endeavored to provide the reader with sufficient information about my study so that they could decide how the results might transfer to their context.

Dependability

According to Burkholder and Cox (2016), dependability means that there is evidence of consistency in data collection, analysis, and reporting. As advised by Mekonnen et al. (2018), I created dependability in this research by developing a sense of trust and mutual respect throughout my interactions with the participants. I also sent each participant's interview transcript to the participant for corrections and used the corrected transcripts in the data set. I maintained notes regarding my decisions, self-reflections, sampling strategies, research ideas implemented, development of the research findings, and notes about data storage and management. Throughout the research process, I made critical self-reflection and ensured my conceptual views, evident and hidden beliefs, biases, and experiences with the topic being explored, did not influence my behaviors and decisions during the research. A PhD peer reviewed my interview questions and provide feedback concerning the interview questions' alignment with the research topic and methodology. Finally, I adhered to Pelzand and Hutchinson's (2017) guidelines on cultural respect in research. I created cultural trust with my participants by understanding what participants were saying and translating their words accurately and in the proper context.

Confirmability

Confirmability demonstrates how the data supports the research findings and establishes whether the researcher is biased during the study (Guba, 1981). I used reflexivity to establish confirmability by recording my spontaneous thoughts during each interview session and isolating these from the actual data. Dodges (2019) noted the importance of reflexivity with new researchers when reporting qualitative research. I followed the points made by Reid et al. (2018). I reported any ethical dilemmas I encountered in the research process as someone with knowledge about and concern for military dependent children who must remain open and neutral about each participant's perspective about the students.

Ethical Procedures

Before conducting my research, I received approval from Walden University's Institutional Review Board (approval no. 03-23-22-0592182). I protected participants' privacy by being careful not to name them or their school in any study files or the capstone itself. Participants were provided with a consent form that described the study and detailed their right to withdraw at any time and have any data already shared by them deleted from the study.

The collected data were stored as digital files in folders on my computer with password protection, and all paper files were stored in a locked cabinet in my office. Data did not include participants' names but only a number indicating the order in which they volunteered. A master list linking participants' names, contact information, and study numbers was kept separate from all other files and shared with no one. I will keep all

study materials for five years, after which I will wipe digital files using a tool like Eraser™, and I will shred any paper files.

Summary

In this chapter, I restated my research purpose to explore kindergarten teachers' perspectives on school readiness in children who attended prekindergarten programs in military installation childcare centers before kindergarten. I described and previewed major sections of the chapter and restated the research question about how kindergarten teachers describe school readiness in children who attended prekindergarten at military installation childcare centers. I identified the research tradition of qualitative inquiry and provided a rationale for the chosen tradition. I defined and explained my role as the observer, the data analysis, and how I plan to address trustworthiness issues and ethical procedures. In Chapter 4, I present the results of this study.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore kindergarten teachers' perspectives on school readiness in children who attended prekindergarten in military installation childcare centers. In this chapter, I describe the research setting, provide participant demographics, discuss data collection and analysis, and offer evidence of trustworthiness. The results of the data using thematic analysis are also presented. There was one research question for this study: How do kindergarten teachers describe school readiness in children who attended prekindergarten at military installation childcare centers?

Setting

This study occurred in four public school districts in one of the most populous cities in the Mid-Atlantic part of the United States. This school districts are in the 25th largest school environment in the United States, with about 200 schools, programs, and centers, and enrolling about 114,000 students at the time of the study. The target school districts were in an area in which there were nine military installations nearby. Military dependent children who live with their families on or outside an installation are enrolled in the public elementary schools in the four targeted school districts.

To conduct the interviews with participants, I used the Zoom videoconferencing platform. As a new user of the Zoom platform, I found it challenging to conduct the first three interviews. At the end of the first interview, I realized that the interview was not recorded on Zoom and, therefore, I could not retrieve a copy of the interview transcript. In addition, the voice recorder failed. I made several attempts to contact the participant,

and eventually she emailed back and agreed to participate in another interview. Other challenges were difficulties logging into the same meeting as the participant and having to set up another meeting while the participant waited. Fortunately, after I sorted out these issues, the interviews themselves went smoothly with no interruptions.

I conducted this study amid the COVID-19 pandemic at the end of the first year back to school for teachers and student. When referring to impact of COVID-19 and kindergarten entry, P1 said kindergarten teachers were finding

> children less prepared than [prior to COVID -19] with their fine motor skills or finding the kids' hand strength wasn't what it would normally be, the kids had weak hands, and we're trying to figure out why. We were thinking kids have been at home and they have not been cutting and coloring and not developed that hand strength that they would normally come in with.

P9 agreed, saying that every year except for the COVID years, children were coming in with a higher level of kindergarten readiness: "This year in particular, with the COVID environment and everything, we were finding children were definitely less prepared than in the past."

Demographics

I conducted interviews with 10 participants from four school districts in this public school community. All participants were kindergarten teachers working in general education classrooms. Of the 10 participants, six were previous kindergarten teachers and were currently teaching other grades in the community elementary schools, and four were current kindergarten teachers with one of the teachers now teaching military children on a

military base overseas. All 10 currently worked with or had prior experience teaching military dependent children in at least one the four school districts. In addition. at least four of the kindergarten teachers had prior experience teaching in a military installation prekindergarten program. Two of the participants had children who attended a military prekindergarten program because of their military affiliation. One participant had a niece who attended the program. All the candidates were female. The sample included three African Americans, two Hispanic Americans, and five European Americans.

Data Collection

I identified kindergarten teachers who could be potential participants through the districts' websites. Using publicly available addresses, I emailed 50 teachers and received responses from 10. Data collection began in the last week of May 2022 and was completed within 6 weeks. Although the time allotted for each interview was 30 to 45 minutes, the actual time for the interviews ranged from 16 minutes to 35 minutes, due to lack of time teachers had available at the end of the school year. Nonetheless, all interviews seemed complete and thorough to me. All participants provided one interview, except the first participant whose interview I failed to record; this participant graciously agreed to be interviewed a second time.

Data Analysis

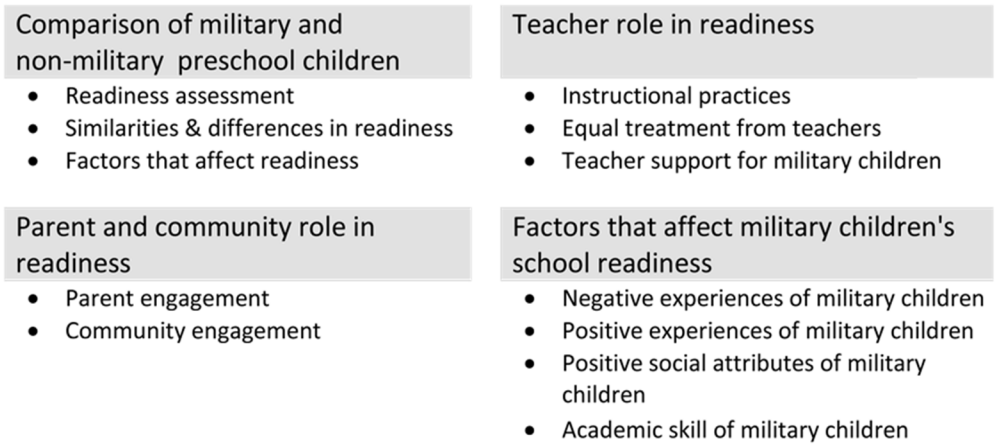
To analyze the data, I followed the process described in Chapter 3, beginning with transcription of interviews using Otter.ai, and with organization of interview data in a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet following member checking for transcript accuracy. Data were separated into sentences or passages that represented individual thought units. These

data were inserted in the spreadsheet in a single continuous column. I derived 216 thought units from the data, representing 216 codes.

After deriving the codes, I labeled them with a phrase that represented the sense or meaning of the code. These labels constituted categories of data. Twelve categories emerged in this process, including academic skill of military children, community engagement, equal treatment from teachers, factors that affect readiness, instructional practices, negative experiences of military children, parent engagement, positive social attributes of military children, positive experiences of military children, readiness assessment, similarities and differences in readiness, and teacher support for military children. These 12 categories were then grouped by similarity into four themes. These themes were comparison of military and nonmilitary preschool children, factors that affect military children's school readiness, parent and community role in readiness, and teacher role in readiness. Figure 1 illustrates the organization of categories into themes.

Figure 1

Themes With Associated Categories



These themes apply to this study's research question, How do kindergarten teachers describe school readiness in children who attended prekindergarten at military installation childcare centers?

Evidence of Trustworthiness

To establish credibility, I developed the interview questions based on the literature review and tested them in a trial run with subject matter experts, colleagues, family, and friends. I used interview probes and member checking to ensure accuracy of the data and to establish credibility. Reflexivity was used to support credibility as I documented in a journal any self-critical analyses of my biases and made adjustments as necessary to eliminate bias.

Transferability was supported by providing detailed descriptions of my participant selection criteria, the study's setting, and the study process. I provide the reader with information about my study so that they can decide how the results might transfer to their context. Using my research journal notes, I provide thick descriptions to understand and build a clear picture of the participant in the context of their setting, describing the circumstances, meanings, intentions, strategies, and motivations that characterize the participant's role during the interview sessions.

I supported dependability in this research by developing a sense of trust and mutual respect throughout my interactions with the participants. I also sent each participant's interview transcript to the participant for corrections and used the corrected transcripts in the data set. I maintained notes regarding my decisions, self-reflections, sampling strategies, research ideas implemented, development of the research findings,

and notes about data storage and management. I created an audit trail to ensure the dependability of study processes and the results.

Reflexivity was used to support confirmability by recording my spontaneous thoughts during each interview session and isolating these from the actual data. I followed the points made by Reid et al. (2018) in recording any ethical dilemmas I encountered in the research process. Throughout the research process, I made critical self-reflection and ensured my conceptual views, evident and hidden beliefs, biases, and experiences with the topic being explored, did not influence my behaviors and decisions during the research.

Results

Four themes emerged from the data analysis. I will present results associated with each theme and the categories included in them.

Theme 1: Comparison of Military and Nonmilitary Preschool Children

This theme included data from categories of readiness assessment, equal readiness, differences in readiness, and factors that affect readiness. I will offer results for each of those categories in turn.

Readiness Assessment

The participants presented several perspectives on school readiness that can be attributed to their experiences teaching military dependent kindergarteners who attended preschool in programs on the military installation and kindergarteners who attended preschool in community programs. Understanding the level of readiness in all children entering the kindergarten doors is important in determining what each child needs to be

successful. In general, kindergarten teachers in this study described readiness in terms of self-care and behavioral regulation, not academic skills. For example, P4 said readiness is "a lot of things that we that we look at in their physical abilities, you know, walking or running without falling and able to hop on one foot." P3 agreed, saying, "It's interesting, the kinds of things that are asked: Can the kindergartener go up and down steps without assistance alternating feet? Can the student successfully hold items and open packages or sealed items?" P3 added,

> a lot of it is just what I observed how they interact with their peers, how they interact with adults, do they have, like, those basic needs and a lot of this stuff they should know before they even come into the classroom - tying their shoes, health issues, some kids can't go to the bathroom by themselves, and feeding, just eating.

According to P8,

> we should perform this baseline test, like at the beginning of kindergarten, we do a test to assess all children where they are developmentally across the board for math skills, reading skills, and then have an open conversation with the parents and say, Okay, we tested, we did this test and little Johnny shows that he may need more additional help.

P5 noted that "assessments are good because it lets us know where they are academically. But I don't think they're the most important thing." P5 suggested, "a child may know [only] a single letter in the alphabet but …. he's good at organizing the kids so that their play can be successful. He's good at ignoring when someone's mean to him." P9

stated that, “all those things really help us to start with actual academics, if students can come in knowing how to use the bathroom by themselves, because as kindergarten teachers, we do not help students use the bathroom.” For kindergarten teachers in this study, readiness meant mastery of life skills and ability to interact successfully with teachers and classmates. According to these teachers, when children have these skills, academic instruction can begin in kindergarten. Teachers did not differentiate between readiness in military and non-military preschool children, as demonstrated previously by their comments in the category of equal readiness.

Similarities and Differences in Readiness

According to the kindergarten teachers in this study, children from the military installation prekindergarten programs and those from the community kindergarten programs seem to enter kindergarten with the same skill levels in all learning areas with a few exceptions. P1 stated:

> every preschool program is going to have a different viewpoint have an appropriate level of academics for a preschooler. And there's lots of different programs, especially in early childhood, and approaches. So, in regard to academics, I would say that, you know, there's no difference between a civilian and military c you never, you know, specifically from that viewpoint, kind of just never know, what you're gonna get depends on the school.

P3 noted

> I do feel they're ready mostly, at this point, to go on to first grade. But, if they're not, we're moving slowly. There was a lot of deficits in children this year, more so than normal, and it took a lot of time to kind of work on that initially.

P1 said

> I've worked at schools that were on a military base, but they we're staffed by the local public school district, so they weren't DoD schools. So even though all of the students because it was a closed base, were military children, the instruction was no different. You know, in preschool and kindergarten, the instruction was no different than the schools off base.

According to P10, "I don't know if there's much difference, honestly it depends on the center. Some centers do focus on the kindergarten, Common Core standards, they really are pushing them so that they come to kindergarten ready." P7 indicated that when the children enter the classroom for the first time, "the skills matchup between children from military preschools and children from community preschools." According to P4, the two groups are "pretty much at the same starting place." P1 noticed that there was no difference in the two groups of children's academic skills and said, "regarding academics, I would say that, you know, there's no difference between a civilian and military child. P10 said, "I don't know if I'd be able to differentiate who came from the military program versus not, unless I knew."

Although in some areas the level of readiness can seem equal, according to several of the participants there are distinct differences between the military dependent

children coming from the military installation prekindergarten programs and the prekindergartners coming from the community prekindergarten programs. P9 noted

> Recently, students coming from the military installation prekindergarten programs have been the ones that do know some of their letters, not all of them. They appeared to be more social than some of the other students who don't come from the military families.

P2 added,

> Some children are more skilled in letters, numbers, and stuff like that. Some are more skilled in other aspects. I mean, you take that into consideration, this one came from a military installation, this one came from a nonmilitary prekindergarten program, but you should take them and assess them all equally, and then know that each child may need different things, the child coming from the military installation may need a little bit more social emotional help.

P1 suggested this variation actually helps with planning for instruction, saying:

> all children coming from the military and community prekindergarten programs are at different skills, abilities, and knowledge levels, and that these differences aid instruction. Having the students at various academic levels in the kindergarten classroom makes working with the whole class less complicated. The students are more comfortable to work at their level when everyone in the room is at different skill knowledge and abilities levels. It's easier for each student to work on his/her level when the students around them are all also on different levels at the same time.

In summary, participants in this study indicated that children who attended preschool on a military installation were prepared for kindergarten similarly to children who attended a community preschool. Any differences among readiness in a class of kindergarten students was attributed to natural variations in children's prior experiences and abilities, not to the type of preschool they attended. Participants suggested they cannot tell which children attended which type of preschool, based on children's kindergarten readiness.

Factors That Affect Readiness

The kindergarten teachers in this study mentioned two factors that affect children's school readiness including having had any sort of prekindergarten program experience and the social-emotional development needed to get along in the classroom and to make and retain friends. Participants were not concerned with academic readiness. P5 said, "In kindergarten we are not so much concerned about academics; we are more concerned about social and emotional [skills]."

Participants were more concerned that children attended a prekindergarten program of any sort. P1 stated that,

> students who come in who had the pre-K experience are usually ready for kindergarten, because they've been introduced to a lot of things that we assess the kids on, or that we work with the kids with throughout the year in kindergarten. Specifically, a lot of them know most of the letter names and sounds and they can count past 10. And they recognize their basic shapes, and all of that.

P4 noted that children who have attended prekindergarten understand how a classroom is structured, while children who have not attended prekindergarten may not:

> Right out the gate, you know, like, I can tell if they have problems with the structure, like sitting down and not just getting up and wandering off whenever you get ready. You know, respecting me and another adult as the authority figure, their interactions with their classmates, you know, so like, sharing and not sharing and that kind of stuff.

P10 expressed the view that, "students who have been in a center understand the expectations of school."

Another factor that affects school readiness, according to participants, is a child's level of social-emotional development. For example, P5 stated, "In kindergarten we are not so much concerned about academics; we are more concerned about social and emotional skills." P8 agreed, saying that,

> [children's] social emotional skill is just as important as their academics. I have a couple of kids in my class currently, that cry every day. They're not emotionally ready. They're not ready, they're not ready to focus. They are in kindergarten, there's a lot of independent activities, and they're not good with that yet.

P5 explained that children from military families may lack stability needed for social-emotional readiness for kindergarten and for getting along with peers. P5 said:

> Friendships at that age, I think, are very important. You can become a good friend, you can become a bully, depending on the children around you. And when you post change, your whole environment changes, they come in scared, because

> they don't know anybody. You know, they just left their stability, they left their comfort zone. [Non-military children as they grow up] still have their friends from kindergarten; military children don't have that. They're making new friends every 2, 3 years. So, I think it's harder emotionally [to be a military child.]

P1 noted "there might be a lot more social and emotional regulation that needs to happen for a military child." Participants mentioned that children entering kindergarten are usually ready academically for school and that kindergarten teachers are more concerned about social and emotional skills.

Summary of Results for Theme 1

Kindergarten teachers in this study did not distinguish between readiness in military and non-military preschool children and suggested they could not identify children who attended military installation preschool without being told that information. At the same time, teachers described military dependent children's social emotional skills sometimes below school readiness level because of lack of family stability and experience with making and retaining ongoing friendships. Success in the kindergarten classroom is dependent on each child's social emotional skills and behaviors.

Theme 2: Teachers' Role in Readiness

Participants were asked to describe ways they believed that preschool teachers support acquisition of readiness skills in military dependent children. Participants' suggestions indicated three categories that help explain the participants' perspectives on the preschool teacher's role in readiness: instructional practices, equal treatment from teachers, and teachers' support for military children. I will describe each of these in turn.

Instructional Practices

Participants in this study named several instructional practices they believe preschool teachers use in preparing children for kindergarten and in helping them succeed when in kindergarten. Many of these practices teachers said they use also in the kindergarten classrooms. These practices included adherence to an effective curriculum, instruction guided by assessment, instruction individualized for each student, and use of professional and volunteer assistants.

For example, when asked about preschool teachers' role in readiness, P2 responded, "based on my Strong Beginnings Pre-K teacher experiences, I know that the curriculum I followed was a very strong curriculum." P10 mentioned:

> through the CDC [military child development center] programming, whatever curriculum they use, I know it's a rigorous program that the teachers are asked to follow. I know that teachers had to write lesson plans every week and submit them to whoever the director was at the centers. So, the lessons were well planned out, for sure.

P7 suggested that administrative oversight of teachers' use of curriculum in military installation preschools might exceed the curriculum adherence found in the community. P7 said:

> military installation prekindergarten programs have trainers overseeing to make sure they're not just throwing a lesson plan together; they're touching all of those content areas to make sure the children are given those lessons. The same curriculum oversight may not be present in a community-based preschool.

> On the other hand, sometimes in a community setting, they may not have a trainer, it may just be the teacher writing the lesson plan. And who's overseeing that? Who's looking at it? Is it the director? Is she really looking at it? Or is he really looking at it? Or is he just saying, check the box. And they don't have like a scope and sequence to say, hey, we have to follow this.

P8 distinguished the adherence to a curriculum in military installation preschools from what she suggested was a more teacher-determined approach followed in community preschools. P8 stated

> In the community, sometimes they may focus on the interest of the children. And even though their studies have themes, the themes may seem like, oh, are they getting anything from it, but it's also bringing the number of children in. [In contrast] even though the military preschool programs want to focus on the interest of the children in pre-K, they have studies where they want to make sure that these studies are followed each week, and the staff is not just like making up things or not following a sequence. But themes are bringing the military dependent children in a way that they don't even realize how much they're learning.

In addition to adherence to an effective curriculum, participants described the importance of assessment and how it is used to guide instruction. P6 described how assessment is used by saying:

> My understanding is that the military installation programs work with Teaching Strategies and try to look into the alignment with the county that their children are

> going to go to. I think that I want to say that I think they try to prep them as best as they can, by taking a peek into what they're going to be tested on.

P4 indicated kindergarten teachers also use assessment at the start of kindergarten, saying,

> So, after I do the kindergarten assessment, the KRA kindergarten readiness assessment. I find out I get a general idea of where the kids are, then we group them according to their abilities. So, we got to continue to move them forward, but we give them more individualized instruction.

P7 added, "[Teachers] observe, and they use the data to tell them or to help them to see where the children are. But not only that, where they need to go next."

Another of the instructional strategies that the participants of the study assumed the prekindergarten teachers on the installation use is grouping for instruction. P2 mentioned that "teachers are involved in small and large group teaching to assist children develop social and emotional skills, recognizing and writing vowels using sounds at an early stage."

P7's opinion was:

> They look at the skills, they look at lessons, they build in skills, but they don't just build in the skills. As they work with the children in large and small group settings, they see where each child is and then they scaffold lessons. They make their lessons culturally relevant, so that the children want to invest in learning.

Several teachers described their own experience with grouping for instruction in the kindergarten classroom. For example, P4 said, "We will eventually put into place like

small intervention groups. Once the more advanced kids get to a point where they can continue independently, can then pull that smaller group back to the teacher's table for additional help." P3 said grouping for instruction makes the task of teaching every child more manageable:

> In the beginning of the year, we start really slow. And a lot of that is pulling kids in small groups. And you know, sometimes I can't take a reading group because we really need to work on some skill. And I might grab a couple of kids together. And we'll work at the reading table instead of a reading group. I try to use small group time whenever I can, especially to support but, you know, it's me myself versus 25 of them.

P2 described using individualized instruction for reteaching, saying, "if a kid was struggling at any given point, the child would be pulled back to the table and work one-on-one or in a smaller group with a teacher while the other teacher continued to move forward with everybody else." P8 agreed, saying she might use "individualizing the lesson plan, so I may have to modify it, I can't do much if the child is not ready to elevate, so the child is not there, I may have to modify it down." P7 noted that learning takes time and teachers' instruction must reflect that: "And then they give them time, and they give them practice."

Another strategy that that teachers use in preparing children for kindergarten is engaging helpers, including volunteers, professional assistants and experts, and peer mentors. For example, P5 said:

> I pretty much use the concept from No Child Left Behind. I will pair up a child from the bluebird group, with a child from the red bird group, and that child can mentor because a lot of times a child who's not ready to read may show a better interest in reading, if it's one of their peers doing it, rather than the teacher. So that's what she does in her in her room.

P1 also described using peer mentors:

> I love to find a peer that is confident that maybe has skills or that is more open and outgoing and so whether to just engage a child and play at you know, a more hesitant or, or a child that that is not quite ready. So, a more ready peer will just engage them in play, or even help model any of the skills that I'm looking for, you know, work together, like partner up. stated If I am trying to build skills, kinesthetic movements are the way to go. you sing a song, you move to a dance, you move your body, and it helps attach a muscle memory to a concept.

P9 described using teaching assistants, including in the small group reteaching process. P9 said:

> we have teaching assistants that help the students, they'll pull students and work with them one on one, or in a small group to help with some of the skills, you know, cutting, writing their name. And throughout the school year, it gets to, you know, whatever skills were really focusing on that time. So, they are a huge resource to us as they can meet with the students on their level.

P1 reported that often such teaching assistants are shared by several classrooms:

> We did utilize an aide shared among multiple classrooms as kind of an interventionist. So, for students that might need a little extra practice with any academic skill, or extra practice with fine motor skills, you know, she would be the one to kind of sit with the student and then say nope, fix your pencil grip, or say here's, how we do, you know, zip up your jacket, step one, step two. So, definitely a benefit, but I do recognize that I also, you know, did not have her all day when I wanted her.

P4 described the value of non-professional volunteers, including even her husband. P4 said:

> My husband volunteers with me, two days a week. So, every Thursday and Friday, he comes, and I tell you, on those two days, in particular, I'm excited about going to work, because I know that I'm going to get that extra support that my children need. So, I'm teaching and those kids who are struggling, you know, I'll see him go over and then you see them, they're just excited. And that because they're not left behind.

Teachers in this study emphasized the need to help children feel successful, and that using small groups and various helpers' aids in that. Teachers' own attitudes matter in this regard too, as suggested by P10:

> I do a lot of modeling, a lot of examples, a lot of practice, a lot of review, going over the rules going over the expectations. For example, if we're doing math, you know, we'll work through the problems together so that students can be supported

> and feel successful. I like to give students [support to] build up their self-confidence, so they try things on their own.

In summary, teachers described instructional practices they use and that they believe preschool teachers use that provide students with individualized support and that help students feel successful and capable. Their descriptions did not differentiate between military and non-military children.

Equal Treatment From Teachers

Participants in this study expressed their intention to treat all children in the class equally. P2 indicated that

> every child coming into kindergarten should be put on a blank slate. And you shouldn't look at that, okay, this one came from a military installation, this one came from a non-military, but you should take them and assess them all equally, and then know that each child may need different things. The child coming from the military installation may need a little bit more social emotional help. Whereas a child coming from my off-post pre-K program may need more developmental help. Every child develops differently, and every child has a different need.

P9 said she

> would treat the military dependent student very similarly to a non-military dependent, you know, a lot of contacting the parents sending home resources. For military families, I would get our guidance counselor involved, because there are specific places that military has the option of going to, that non-military members don't have the option to.

The collected data showed that although the kindergarten teachers were able to tell the difference between the military dependent children from the installation and the children from the community prekindergarten programs, the participants intended to treat all the children equally. The teachers identified the readiness needs and each child and provided the families with the school and community resources appropriate for the child's learning needs.

Teacher Support for Military Children

Although teachers indicated an intention to support all the children equally by giving each child what they need to succeed, they described providing differences in support due to the challenges the military dependent children face. Participants indicated they must help military children adjust to disruptions caused by frequent family moves. P5 explained one of her challenges was,

> trying to explain why a child had to leave her friends, when the child is coming to the classroom from another installation. I have a little girl that's leaving in mid-July. And she's asked a couple times, "why do I have to leave?" And it's very hard to explain to them, you know, the adult world.

P1 added, "for military dependent children that have recently relocated and for those who are about to relocate, the kindergarten teacher will have to prepare the student about what will happen next."

P3 stated, "a lot of the emotional assistance that military dependent children need comes from a loving home and a school setting where children feel supported by the teacher and the parent." Teachers' support for military children requires coordination

with parents. P8 said, “the teacher just has to know family dynamics is very important. So, teachers parent relationship is very important. They have to know because those parents have to share that with us.”

Summary of Results for Theme 2

In summary, teachers described multiple methods they use and that they believe preschool teachers use to support children. In the words of P4:

> people who don't work in the classroom full time, they don't know the half of it. I have to assess them, figure out where they are behind, or what skills they don't have, that they actually need before they leave my classroom. I have to teach the ones that are lagging behind at a pace where it's comfortable for them, but still bringing them up to the ones that are already ahead of them, all by myself. But if you're not inside of the classroom, you don't you don't see that, you don't know that. We have the parents, we have volunteers, we have math and reading facilitators, we have ESOL. So, it's a lot of things in place. But you know, we just got to, we just got to do what we can.

Results from the collected data showed that the prekindergarten programs on the installation follow a curriculum based on studies that meet the learning needs of the children but that community programs may not have all the in-house resources to assist in the implementation of a curriculum. Additionally, installation programs have trainers that ensure the curriculum is fully implemented which the community programs maybe lacking. The community program kindergarteners have an advantage over the military dependent student in that they stay in one place while the military children experience

high mobility. The high mobility may cause a deficit in social emotional skills to include making and maintaining friendship.

Theme 3: Parent and Community Role in Readiness

During the data collection process, the participants were asked about the Parent and community role in children's school readiness. Two categories that emerged from the theme were parents' engagement and community engagement.

Parent Engagement

Some of the participants shared perspectives on what they perceived as parents' lack of engagement with preparing their children for kindergarten. For example, P4 said, "A lot of parents do not understand the importance of their role in school readiness, and therefore they are unaware of what their children needs are in relation to school readiness." P9 agreed, saying:

> It's typically very easy to identify the skills the students are working on at home versus students that aren't working on those skills at home. Oftentimes when students come in after a few weeks and are suddenly able to do things that the kindergarteners haven't been able to do before. In addition, it is easy to tell when parents have been working on different skills with their children because they will start to grasp those concepts, if they're only working on it at school, they kind of lose it and they often have trouble connecting home life with school life.

P1 explained,

> If a child comes in, and they're not counting to 10, or, you know, naming letters, or recognizing letters, or feeding themselves, they're not doing those things, those

> are kind of a red flag to me, because that tells me that their parents are not as engaged with them as, as I think they should be.

P4 suggested that children's lack of school readiness is directly related to parent engagement:

> I can't teach the children if they're not in my class. So even though a child was out, I could tell that her parents did a lot working with her and making sure that she was ready and stayed ready throughout kindergarten.

P1 explained that when children in her classroom need help because they were not ready for kindergarten in some of their developmental areas, "it is because of lack of parent engagement."

Two participants described a difference in parent engagement among military parents compared to non-military parents. For example, P2 mentioned:

> military parents are more involved in their children's education than community kindergarten parents because the military parents are overcompensating for exposing their children to the military lifestyle. The military parents know that their children are moving around a lot they tend to get involved more and try to make sure that the children are meeting their academic milestones and they are prepared for that next change.

P4 noted that

> there have been times when the military dependent kindergartener's school attendance is poor because the military parent is traveling and the whole family is going along. When the child returns to school it is evident that the parents were

> working with the child because the child comes back on track with her schoolwork.

Participants described being proactive in encouraging parents to be engaged in their children's education and well-being. P1 said that communication with parents is important and described her process in this way:

> I'm checking in with parents about routines, both for what their living situation is, like, who's home? Who's not? Are the children getting sleep? What time is bedtime? Are the children eating the right kinds of things? But also, what are you doing with your child to help promote early literacy or early math skills. So, it's very important that parents know, I'm not here to judge, I just need to know those things so that I can help support your child and make your life easier.

P3 stated:

> it is necessary for parents to be engaged in their children's education because. Parents need to know and understand their children and what they are experiencing. A lot falls back on families and talking to your child and understanding what they're going through. I communicate a lot with families, I gave out a lot of handouts and flyers and like, there are things you can do here, at home. So, I'm very big on communication.

P7 proposed

> putting the family first and providing the parents with resources that are available to them inside and outside of installation. When they [teachers] build a rapport with parents, teachers are ready to become students themselves. Teachers

> informally continue to link the learning between home and school. That does give children a heads-up, it gives them a greater head start. And once again, they're [teachers] sharing with their parents to informally let that continue with minutes they might have at home.

P9 added "Sometimes the parents are able to give us resources that they have found that we can use in the school, which is really helpful." P8 noted that "The parent teacher relationship is so important. Keeping the parent abreast of where their child is how they're doing in school, maybe giving resources that they can work with at home, to help their child."

Participants discussed parent school partnership as a vehicle for sharing necessary information about the children. Teachers share what children know and what they are working on at school along with what parents need to work on at home. Parents in turn share information about their children with teacher that will assist the teacher to better meet the learning needs of the children.

Community Engagement

Participants in this study mentioned the engagement of the community, including program administrators, policy makers, specialists, and volunteers, as important in providing support to the students and families. Participants supported the need for a strong rapport between family, classroom, and community resources, and indicated those connections lay the foundation for school success. P7 said:

> teachers in military preschools invest in a strong rapport between family, classroom, community resources, connecting with the director, the trainers and

> special needs resources in the community that are readily available for them to be able to take advantage of. Specialist with parents' approval to work with the children in prekindergarten to help prepare the children for the kindergarten experience. Additional resources are available to children when the children start school.

P2 noted:

> the children's parents, their teachers, their community, and where they grow up is a big foundation for how their skills develop. I think it takes a village to raise a child. I think the teachers that are involved in the military children's lives, I think the parents, the grandparents, and anyone else who is in this so-called village is a big founding factor in developing these skills.

P4 viewed community engagement as a strong component for school readiness:

> I am a strong believer in the saying, I don't know if it's the African proverb - it takes a village. It takes all of us, you know, working together to help our children to be successful. It takes us all working together and believing, that the children can do it and that we can make a difference.

Participants endorsed actions by community members to support children and teachers. They welcomed input from multiple sources in their efforts to develop children's readiness for kindergarten and later schooling.

Summary of Results for Theme 3

The participants noted that the military dependent kindergarten parents may be more involved in their children's education than community kindergarten parents because

the military dependent parents understand the challenges their children encounter with frequent moves and other disruptions. In contrast, some parents are unaware of what their children need to know before and during kindergarten and fail to provide at-home readiness support without encouragement from teachers. Nevertheless, the participants agreed that building a parentship among parents, teachers, and the community can provide necessary resources that all children need for kindergarten readiness and success.

Theme 4: Factors That Affect Military Children's School Readiness

The fourth and final theme that emerged from the collected data describes factors that affect readiness among military dependent children. Four categories in this theme included negative experiences of military children, positive social attributes of military children, positive experiences of military children, and academic skill of military children.

Negative Experiences of Military Children

When asked about military dependent children negative experiences that may affect school readiness, participants described the effects of military deployment, which is often a part of military life. P5 stated that the military dependent children are different because of their constant relocation:

> when a child post-changes their whole world is upside down. It's very hard to teach social emotional because they can't touch it, they can't see it. And it's if it's not tangible, it's hard for a child that age (1) to have an interest in it and (2) understand it.

P1 provided an example of the military dependent children's mobility:

> using my niece as a as an example, she's been in and out of three different preschools in a year; she's four years old. So, in one calendar year, one school year, she spent time in three preschools, and she did not start the school year at the beginning. I think, for the military child that upheaval, and you know, and obviously COVID was also a factor. So, you know, staying at home in Germany, they would be like, Okay, well, we want to get as much Europe as we can before we leave. So, the priority is not school. For a military child who is in the middle of a move, adapting to change is constant. This is also similar to civilian parents, they're like, yeah, it's just preschool, we can go on a family vacation.

P6 noted that there is a difference between military dependent students and non-military children:

> the difference between our military children and let's say a regular student, is that there's so many factors that come in and affect our military families, and it trickles down to their children. When one military parent is deployed or reassigned to another installation where children are left behind with the other parent, the children are plagued with several emotional issues. Some of the emotional issues, like anxiety, a preoccupation for their mom, their dad deployments, separation, financial difficulties. And I'm not saying that other students do not have those challenges as well on a civilian level, but I think that our military children have more stressful situations.

P8 stated that

> Kindergarten classrooms with military dependent children are not like a typical classroom where the children start in September and end in June. Children filter in and out of the classroom throughout the school year. As a direct result of the high mobility military dependent children experience, they may have a friend today, and the following week is different because of their PCS [Permanent Change of Station.

P6 went on to say:

> the teachers working with military dependent children must be socially-emotionally ready to work with those children. They must be ready to face whatever is going on with the children which may be a direct response to family issues. Sometimes, they're always a new kid at school, because the parents are preoccupied, there are certain developmental issues that aren't addressed, the mom is overwhelmed, I could go on and on and on with a list of factors that do affect our military children more.

P4 stated

> The students from the community prekindergarten programs stay in one place with their parents that work in the community where the children attend preschool and kindergarten, there is the possibility that the all the children attend the same schools and the teachers in the community schools are familiar with the family. On the other hand, the military child may move to more than five different addresses within the first five years of the child's life with unstable education

> experiences. The constant relocation can negatively impact a child's school readiness.

P1 acknowledged that, "a military child needs to constantly adapt to changes because their ongoing relocations and as a result they sometimes struggle with adapting to change."

The military dependent children coming from the installation bring to kindergarten more social emotional issues. They come from a military culture where family members are gone for different parts of their life. Therefore, they bring social emotional needs to kindergarten with them. Military dependent children experience high mobility and may follow the trend of moving in and out of a variety of prekindergarten when they enter kindergarten as a result some of them may struggle with learning tasks in kindergarten.

Positive Experiences of Military Children

Children coming from military instillations experience school life in a different way than non-military children, due to their frequent relocations. This can be a positive experience, because a relocation somewhere around the world will allow for meeting new people and adapting to a new environment. P1 put it this way:

> They are already used to moving and changes and having new adults to have to answer to, other than just their parents. Children have caretaking experiences from multiple sources, so they are more open to [authority] once they start kindergarten. Children are respectful not just to their own parents, but respectful

to the surroundings, property, and other people. This is a part of the adult military life that children experience.

Military children bring skill in socialization and resilience as observed by several participants. P8 said:

> children from installation pre-Ks, bring a strong skill of socialization and resiliency. A strong socialization because children are meeting other children from all walks of life. These meetings are unusual because they are not like a typical classroom situation where the children start in September and end in June. These children have children filter in and out of the classroom. So, they know how to bounce back when their friends disappear from the classroom because they are prepared for such situations.

P8 added:

> military families, a lot of times they may start the program, and they may have to move. So that takes a lot from a little person just maybe five years old. They have to get used to making friends, trusting the teachers, and still getting that academic part. So, they have that strong tenacity to be able to balance out their lives at such a young age.

P5 noted the lifelong positive effect that might come from frequent relocations:

> They're learning to adapt to new environments, so when they do get into the job market or even in their educational careers, they are not going to be afraid of changes. Even though they may not understand it now, they are going to realize that it's prepared them to not fear this change as they get older.

In contrast to other participants, who noted frequent relocations may impair military children's emotional well-being, P7 suggested children from a military installation develop strong skills in the area of social emotional development that are important to their kindergarten readiness:

> these children are a part of a very diverse peer classroom structure. Children are exposed to multiple languages and family backgrounds, and they really get a chance to zero in on diversity without them even knowing. They're always asking "who" or "why." Or "where did you get that from?" Or "how did you get it to look this way?" Or "I'd like to say this word another way." [Military] children build a sense of independence and confidence.

Although the high mobility of military dependent children can have a negative impact in the children's school live, it can also have a positive outcome. The children can adapt easily to new environments and cultures that are part of the kindergarten experiences.

Positive Social Attributes of Military Children

Since military children are exposed to diverse environments, they have a deep respect for culture and are ready and open for change. P1 stated "just the whole culture, you know, top down comes down to the kindergarteners and preschoolers they kind of have that awareness and that gives them that openness and that resilience." P2 said that because

> military families tend to travel more than non-military families, military children have to learn how to survive in a new environment, they have to learn how to

> adapt to changes faster just because of their post changes and some of them post change three times before kindergarten. This allows children to learn and adapt to change better than non-military children."

P10 noted, "But most of the time, the children who have that background from a military preschool, they did come with some sort of discipline. They understand the rules and the expectations."

"Military children are different in their vocabulary content," said P3. "They can share and talk to you and explain things. They're asking more questions, be able to see more things, rather than just like staying in that one community and you know, always being in the same place." P3 also said that military children come in with worldly experiences and are more comfortable than other children with uncertainty. P3 stated that is because:

> a lot of the children have moved multiple times and in an international setting. Therefore, children have different skills because they are exposed to different environments and tends to understand the bigger picture than some of the kids who come in from other pre-K experiences.

P1 mentioned:

> on a military base, the whole base life is very family oriented and program oriented. So, I think those students when they are on a base, and amongst only military children in a preschool or kindergarten setting, they're there with peers that have had like experiences and more open to engaging. When you are in a class of all similarly, experienced peers, on base, you bond with similar

> experiences. “Oh, you've been here, oh, you travel on airplanes all the time. Oh, me too.” And so. I think children on a military base are much more eager or quick to make friends and socialize. Whereas off base, depending on the communities, if it's a smaller community or a more rural community or an urban community where there's not a lot of opportunity for outside play, children aren't engaging as much.

P9 found that those students from military installation prekindergarten are more social and able to make friends more quickly and are academically similar to non-military children as long as they've attended preschool. P9, “I haven’t noticed any big ups or downs either way.”

In summary, some of the participants stated that military dependent children from the installation prekindergarten programs enter kindergarten with higher social skills than the children coming from the community prekindergarten programs. They attributed this difference to military children’s wide experience with a variety of settings and situations. Other participants did not notice a difference in academic and social skills between the two groups of students.

Academic Skills of Military Children

Most participants said that children from the military installation are prepared with the necessary academic skills for school. P7, said:

> I am convinced that [military] children have a rich background of preparation in reading pre reading skills for sure. And enjoyment of literacy, numbers sense and,

> and the world around them and appreciation for print, environmental print, a richness of language skills,

P8 said, “When military children pretty much leave [prekindergarten] and go into schools, they are very equipped, because they have mastered things that's not just for that area, but for the area that they're coming into. And they're ready to learn.”

According to some participants, children from military families seem stronger in mathematics than they are in reading. P3 said:

> Generally, the kids [from military families] become more math ready. They are stronger in math than they do in reading. I think numbers are worldly, they can translate anywhere in the world. But some of the reading can be difficult. Military children from families with dual language come into kindergarten with a difference in their language and literacy comprehension compared to someone coming from the community center, whose both parents are English speaking parents

P3 said, “If you have military children from families with dual language coming into kindergarten, there would be a difference in their language and literacy compared to someone coming from the community center with both parents, English speakers.”

As part of an active-duty military family, P10 described firsthand experience of the value of the child development center program administered on base. P10 said,

> I thought it was spectacular. I think that teachers do a fabulous job. I love that they do lesson plans. I love that they require discipline, I find that to be effective.

> Neither one of my children had any behavior problems, but I know other children did. I know that they were handled. So, I really enjoy the program.

In summary, military dependent students coming from the military installations prekindergarten programs may have been raised in bilingual contexts and as a result may have trouble in English language tasks. Military dependent students may find it easier to perform mathematical tasks. Participants indicated military dependent students show equal and, in some cases, slightly advanced readiness skills. Most military dependent children enter kindergarten ready.

Summary of Results for Theme 4

The military dependent children coming from the installation bring to kindergarten more social emotional issues than their community counterpart. Based on the participants' perceptions, the high mobility the military dependent children experience contributes to both negative and positive outcomes that can be observed in the classroom and overall, in children's school lives. Some of the participants said that military dependent children from the installation prekindergarten programs are more accepting to differences in others than their community classmates. This positive behavior according to the participants was due to the difference military children's wide experiences with a variety of settings and situations. In contrast, these children can find it difficult to fit in with the community of peers in the classroom. According to participants, these children struggle to make and keep friends, due to their frequent relocations and changes of school.

Participants did not notice a difference in academic and social skills between the two groups of students. Almost all the participants agreed that military dependent students coming from the military installations prekindergarten programs may have been raised in bilingual contexts and as a result may have trouble in English language tasks. Military dependent students may find it easier to perform mathematical tasks. Participants indicated military dependent students show equal and, in some cases, slightly advanced readiness skills. Most military dependent children enter kindergarten academically ready for success.

Summary

In Chapter 4 I described four themes that emerged from the data analysis, including comparison between military and non-military preschool children, teacher role in readiness, parent and community role in readiness, and factors that affect military children's school readiness. Findings indicated that children who attended prekindergarten in a military installation center typically struggle to make and keep friends because of frequent relocation and changes of school. Participants indicated that children of military families enter kindergarten with academic skills similar to those of children in non-military families and that in general they conform well to classroom routines and teacher authority. Findings also revealed prekindergarten and kindergarten teachers use a variety of strategies to assist military dependent students in coping with the emotional aspect of school and deployments, such as giving individual attention, group activities, team teaching, and involving the family in the children's education. Participants suggested that assessments of all sorts are useful in assessing students'

abilities and needs and in giving children of military families a good education despite their unique situation. In Chapter 5 I will offer an interpretation of these research findings and their implications for positive social change.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to gain insight into the kindergarten readiness of children who attended preschool on military installations in childcare centers run by DoD as described by teachers in community-based kindergarten classrooms. I sought to answer one research question, which asked the following: How do kindergarten teachers describe school readiness in children who attended prekindergarten at military installation childcare centers? In this chapter, I interpret the research findings in relation to the literature reviewed in Chapter 2. This chapter also includes discussion of the study's limitations, recommendations for future research, and consideration of the study's implications for practice and positive social change.

Interpretation of the Findings

A key finding in this study was that military dependent children are prepared for kindergarten academic tasks similarly or to a greater extent compared to children who attended a community preschool. Participants attributed any differences in academic readiness among kindergarten students to natural variations in children's prior experiences and abilities, not whether they attended prekindergarten programs on the installation or community programs. This finding confirms statistics from the 2019-2020 KRA in South Carolina, which show that 47.5% of military dependent children in the state scored ready for kindergarten compared to 39.0% of all children tested (South Carolina Education Oversight Committee, 2021). This finding contrasts that of Garner et al. (2014) that mobility exposes military-affiliated children to various curriculum and teaching approaches that may cause a gap in military dependent students' academic

abilities, knowledge, and skills. Rauhut (2020) agreed with Garner et al. (2014) and reported that, on the whole, some military dependent children in public school settings seem to be faced with intellectual and learning disparities. Lleras and McKillip (2017) found that even one change of location that occurs during the school year can have disastrous consequences resulting in educational and social interruptions in the child's life. Additionally, Lleras and McKillip (2017) implied that the lack of stability during the school years may impact students' conduct and commitment in school. The findings in this study indicated that the military dependent children entering kindergarten in the community schools are just as ready academically as their non-military-affiliated peers. This finding is contrary to literature, which indicates that military children fall behind non-military-affiliated kindergarten children academically when they enter kindergarten.

A second key finding in this study was that children who attended prekindergarten at military installation childcare centers were attentive to teachers' authority and followed classroom procedures at least as well as children who attended community prekindergarten programs. Participants attributed this strength in children of military families to the prekindergarten programs on the installation, which provide children with experiences that promote school readiness, and to installation program trainers who ensure that the curriculum is fully implemented. Such supports may be lacking in community programs. This finding aligns with that of Karre and Perkins (2022), who reported that although military dependent kindergarteners experience high mobility before, during, and after the kindergarten years, the exposure to multiple cultures appears to help these children handle change and to be more accepting of differences than

children who have resided in one community their whole life. In contrast, Schmitt et al. (2017) stated that relocation of residence more than three times a year drastically heightened children's level of school misconduct during preschool and later school years.

The third key finding in this study was that children from military families struggle to make and keep friends. Participants mentioned that when a child moves from the installation to a community kindergarten program the child's sense of belonging may be disrupted because their friends from the installation may attend different schools in the community. This finding aligns with work of Karre and Perkins (2022), who found that moving from place to place and school to school make the first day of school very difficult for military dependent students. If the military dependent students' school environment is not responsive to these students' distinctive needs and if personnel are not aggressively working to assist those students, there is a greater possibility of these children being unsuccessful in school and not graduating on time (Karre & Perkins, 2022).

The findings in this study show that the military dependent children entering community classrooms from the installation possess skills, abilities, and knowledge across the five developmental areas of physical well-being, language skill, cognitive development, emotional maturity, and social development identified in the study's conceptual framework. The areas of social development, emotional maturity, and cognitive development varied due to the high mobility of those children and their experience with different classrooms, teachers, and instructional methods. The finding of strong cognitive development, described by academic readiness, was unexpected because

this is contrary to the literature reviewed in this study. The issue of social development, described as difficulty in making and keeping peer friendships, emerged as a problem to be addressed.

Limitations of the Study

One limitation that could affect the interpretation of the results was recruiting participants from only four school districts in a region served by over 50 school districts. Participants who responded to the invitation email were mainly from the same area; therefore, they had similar experiences when answering the interview questions.

Recommendations

Several recommendations for future research are evident from the results of this study. First, future researchers could include a larger population of representatives from each school in the district. This study's findings represent participants' views in four school districts, representing only a few schools, and may not be that of the entire region. An analysis of this nature could benefit schools as children's readiness is a prerequisite for entering school and is now becoming a recurring dilemma in classrooms as priorities are channeled in other directions. Similarly, another recommendation is to extend the study to accommodate all the DoD installations in the area. Expanding the research to include the different agencies governed by DoD may clarify whether the findings in this research can extend to other military dependents attending community kindergarten schools in other district within the same state.

I also recommend that researchers draw attention to differences between installation preschool curriculum and assessment protocols and those of community-

based preschools. Knowing and understanding children's skill levels is important to help teachers tailor their instruction to develop skills in children who make lack them at the time of kindergarten entrance. In addition, researchers might focus on preschool curriculum, particularly in community-based preschools, where curriculum, teacher training, and administrative oversight are less consistent than they are in military installation preschools. The finding that children who attend military installation preschools are well prepared for academic work in kindergarten, despite their frequent relocations and family disruptions, suggests that programmatic consistency similar to that in installation child development centers might benefit children who attend community preschools.

Finally, I recommend that research attention be drawn to the many deployments of military parents, and the effect of these disruptions on young children. Development of social skills and peer relationships in preschool can affect children’s mental health and success in later life. Increased understanding of how strong social-emotional development can be supported in children of military families may contribute to initiatives in DoD programs that promote positive teacher-student relationships, contribute to children’s academic success, enhance children’s feelings of self-worth, and improve children's readiness skills.

Implications

My goal was to explore kindergarten teacher perspectives on school readiness in children who attended prekindergarten in military installation childcare centers. As a result of the three key findings of this research, I recommend some ideas for others to

consider when applying this research. These ideas include implications for preschool programming, support for community-based teachers similar to the support provided to military installation teachers, and increased kindergarten focus on children's friendship skills in both frequently relocated military dependent children and their more stay-at-home community peers.

A key finding in this study was that military dependent children are academically ready for kindergarten; an implication of this finding is that installation prekindergarten programs continue to focus on children's academic skills. Literacy skill development may benefit from more attention, especially in military dependent children who may have grown up in cultures that speak a language other than English. Mathematics skills in military dependent children seem strong. At the same time, community-based preschools might look to military installation curriculum and assessment processes to support academic readiness in their students. Because academic readiness of military dependent children was indistinguishable from that of community children, despite the many educational interruptions experienced by military dependent children, an implication of this study is that military child development centers prepare children well for the academic requirements of kindergarten, and community programs might adopt some of the military child development center processes.

In addition, another implication of this study is the need for administrative, parental, and community support for children in preschool and kindergarten. Military-installation preschool programs enjoy the benefit of strong administrative support and provision of specialists to support teachers and children. Community schools should

establish policies that provide specific resources such as specialists and other trained personnel similar to those provided to teachers in military child development centers, to assist the children who enter kindergarten not quite ready for school. Participants in this study also pointed to the importance of parental involvement and community support for young children's education. Efforts to engage both military and civilian parents as volunteers could enhance readiness in all children, and this engagement could include participation by volunteer tutors and assistants. The value of an extra adult to work with small groups or individual children was cited many times by participants in this study.

Finally, results of this study imply that teachers should place greater emphasis on developing social skills in military dependent children. Although military dependent children tend to be accepting of others and of teachers' authority, they often lack the social skills to be successful in group settings. Prekindergarten and kindergarten teachers should create opportunities for children to learn from each other through collaboration and teambuilding activities. They should explicitly teach and model skills of inviting oneself into a group, negotiating conflict, and accepting a new friend into an existing circle of friends. Teaching military dependent prekindergarten and kindergarten children, and their community peers, the necessary skills to build and retain friendship and to be inclusive of new friends, may help all children adapt to new situations and be better prepared to fit in and focus on their learning.

These findings and implications may inspire positive social change by improving preschool experiences for children attending both military-installation and community childcare centers, and their teachers. Validation of the academic readiness component of

military-installation programs should reinvigorate teachers and administrators of these programs and lead to matching elements adopted by community programs. The finding in this study that military dependent children are significantly disadvantaged in interpersonal social skills suggests greater need to support these children on the installation and in kindergarten. Positive social change may result when addressing this need becomes a priority of the military and of community school districts, and not merely accepted as collateral damage incurred by family disruptions common in military life. This research study helped to fill the gap in existing school readiness literature and literature about educating military dependent children. This study brought awareness to the school readiness of military dependent children and to their social emotional development. This inquiry supports kindergarten readiness, which may improve the general level of education, which in turn may lead to positive social change.

Conclusion

In this study, I explored kindergarten teachers' perspectives on school readiness in children who attended prekindergarten in military installation childcare centers. The study's results depicted participants' responses as they described their perspectives on children's school readiness in military installations. Participants suggested that the academic readiness of military dependent children is indistinguishable from that of community-based peers, but that military dependent children need support for social and emotional skills. Although these children seem resilient and cooperative with authority, they struggle to make and keep friends due to their experiences with multiple relocations. Military dependent children are unique because of their parents' obligations to the

military; they are challenged by disruptions that affect their interpersonal relationships. Teachers and administrators of military-installation preschools and community kindergarten programs must help these children to be not only academically ready for kindergarten but socially confident and happy. Supportive school readiness experiences prepare children for successful academic achievements and enable development of positive social emotional skills essential to productive adult life.

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Appendix: Interview Protocol

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research. Be reminded that I will not use your personal information for any purposes outside of this research project. I will not include your name or anything else that could identify you in the study reports. At any time during this research process, you have the right to withdraw. I am going to audio record our conversation, so I can get what you say right and not need to write everything down. Is it okay to turn on the recorder now? Thanks. Let's get started.

1. What skills do you think children bring with them when they start kindergarten?
2. Tell me about the ways you think children acquire these skills before they begin kindergarten.
3. What do you know or guess about how preschool teachers assist children in developing the skills they will need in kindergarten?
4. Thinking of the children you've worked with, describe any differences in children's preschool experiences that you think might affect their readiness for kindergarten.
5. Some children in your class might have attended preschool on a military installation, right? Based on your experiences working with new kindergarteners, what differences in kindergarten readiness - if any - have you observed between children who attended preschool in a center located on a military installation and children who attended preschool in a center located in the community?

6. When children start kindergarten in your classroom, how do you know who is ready for kindergarten and who might be less ready?
7. What sorts of things do you do to support kindergarten readiness skills in children who might not be fully ready for kindergarten at the start?

This concludes the interview session. I will transcribe your recording and email it to you for your review for accuracy. If I've got anything wrong, I will make the changes you ask for. Thank you for choosing to participate in my research.