Jordanian Kindergarten and 1st-Grade Teachers’ Beliefs About Child-Based Dimensions of School Readiness

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To cite this article: Merfat Fayez, Jamal Fathi Ahmad & Enass Oliemat (2016) Jordanian Kindergarten and 1st-Grade Teachers’ Beliefs About Child-Based Dimensions of School Readiness, Journal of Research in Childhood Education, 30:3, 293-305

To link to this article: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/02568543.2016.1178195

Published online: 24 Jun 2016.

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ABSTRACT
The purpose of this study was to explore the beliefs of Jordanian kindergarten and 1st-grade teachers regarding six child-based dimensions of school readiness: academic knowledge, basic thinking skills, socioemotional maturity, physical well-being and motor development, self-discipline, and communication skills. Questionnaires were used to collect data from 289 teachers; 155 kindergarten teachers and 134 1st-grade teachers were randomly selected from Zarqa, a highly populated city in Jordan. Results revealed that kindergarten and 1st-grade teachers considered all the six child-based dimensions as important to getting children ready for school. However, both groups of teachers rated the basic academic knowledge as the most important dimension and emphasized it over the other dimensions. In addition, results of the multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) indicated that there were statistically significant differences in the beliefs of kindergarten and 1st-grade teachers on four dimensions: academic knowledge, basic thinking skills, socioemotional development, and communication skills; meaning that kindergarten teachers rated these dimensions as more important than 1st-grade teachers did. Yet when teachers’ level of education was controlled for as a covariate, multivariate analysis of covariance results showed that significant statistical differences were only detected on the first dimension (i.e., academic knowledge). Suggestions for policymakers and for further research were offered based on the results of this study.

ARTICLE HISTORY
Received 3 March 2014
Accepted 11 April 2015

KEYWORDS
Early childhood educators; readiness; school entry skills; teachers’ views

Children’s readiness for school is a central topic in the discussion among early childhood teachers, parents, policymakers, and researchers. This could be attributed to the well-documented research evidence that links the general skills children exhibit in their early lives to their school success and to sustainable and lifelong learning (e.g., Kurdek & Sinclair, 2001; McWayne, Fantuzzo, & McDermott, 2004). From a different angle, children’s readiness had become a key component of many early childhood programs that consider their effectiveness in promoting children’s early competencies as a basis for their professional success (Tzuriel, Kaniel, Kanner, & Haywood, 1999; Winsler et al., 2008).

Although there is a growing consensus that future academic success is strongly associated with children’s readiness to learn during the first years of life, there is still little congruence about a clear definition of school readiness (Carlton & Winsler, 1999; Crnic & Lamberty, 1994). According to Graue (2006), readiness can be seen as a cultural and intentional-laden construct that fluctuates in definition from population to another based on its characteristics and based on the readiness developmental dimensions under focus. In that sense, readiness might be defined through a varied set of meanings that parents, teachers, and communities construct locally.

Discussion about children’s readiness has long been centered on two child factors. The first factor relates to the child’s readiness for learning and refers to the level of development at which an individual is ready to undertake the learning of specific materials (Carlton & Winsler, 1999). School
personnel commonly use age as a criterion by which to determine if the child has reached the appropriate level of development that is considered a precursor for school success. Countries differ on defining the appropriate age cutoff. For example, most U.S. states choose age 5 as the appropriate age for children to start formal schooling (Elder & Lubotsky, 2009), whereas Jordan chooses age 6.

The second factor relates to some child-based dimensions of readiness based on the assumption that there is a set of predetermined skills or indicators that mark the child’s ability to be successful in a typical school context (Lewit & Baker, 1995; National Association for the Education of Young Children [NAEYC], 1990).

In recent years, however, the concept of school readiness has been debated, which led to its evolvement (Bracey, 2005; Carlton & Winsler, 1999; NAEYC, 2009; United Nations Childrens Fund [UNICEF], 2012). According to Kagan and Rigby (2003), the new conceptualization of readiness “acknowledges that the sources of readiness are not only the child’s emotional, cognitive, linguistic, and social abilities, but also the contexts in which children live and interact with adults, teachers, and other community members” (p. 3).

In Jordan, the concern over children’s readiness is relatively new. Recently, Jordan has witnessed several education reforms that transformed into the Jordanian National Action Plan for children in 2004, which identified school readiness as a national priority. In addition, the government of Jordan launched a 5-year Education Reform for the Knowledge Economy Project (ERfKE I) in July 2003 (Kaga, 2007) that was extended into ERfKE II in 2009. The project was funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and other international agencies and emphasized, through its fourth component, the importance of providing increased and improved early childhood education for Jordanian children to boost their school readiness. From a different angle, Jordan has taken the initiative to develop early childhood standards as an action toward achieving the school readiness component of the ERfKE project (UNICEF, 2008). These standards are child-based outcomes that define the skills and characteristics expected from Jordanian children before they enter school.

At this point, it becomes important to outline the education system in Jordan. The formal compulsory schooling in Jordan begins as children reach age 6 (1st grade). Parents may choose to enroll their children younger than age 6 in kindergarten, which is widely provided by the private sector. Unlike many countries, kindergarten in Jordan is considered a prior-to-school stage and the concept of readiness is, therefore, a shared responsibility among kindergarten (i.e., prior-to-school stage) and 1st-grade teachers.

In spite of these governmental efforts, the views of teachers who are required to help children achieve these standards have not been solicited. As a consequence, there is limited information about teachers’ views of the skills they think are most important for Jordanian children. Therefore, this study was an attempt to examine how Jordanian kindergarten and 1st-grade teachers view school readiness. For the purposes of this study, school readiness was defined as “the personal readiness resources (human capital) a child may bring to school to help him or her adapt to the challenges of kindergarten” (Piotrkowski, Botsko, & Matthews, 2000, p. 540). This definition was adopted because it is in congruence with the national standards set for Jordanian children to meet.

In general, understanding how teachers view the child-based dimensions of school readiness may have important implications for understanding their instructional practices (Lin, Lawrence, & Gorrell, 2003). It could also provide insight into certain distinctive features across educators, including quality and learning outcomes (Lara-Cinisomo, Fuligni, Ritchie, Howes, & Karoly, 2008). Literature, however, indicates that some substantial inconsistencies might exist across educators in their beliefs about the concept of school readiness (Lara-Cinisomo et al., 2008; Piotrkowski et al., 2000; Wright, Diener, & Kay, 2000). Hence, there is a need for more research to examine the beliefs of different educators about children’s readiness.

Moreover, exploring Jordanian kindergarten and 1st-grade teachers’ views about school readiness and their ratings for the different dimensions of readiness is considered timely in light of the current national reforms in Jordan. Information gained from this study will inform policy decision making about whether teachers’ views are consistent with national standards. This would in turn help
policymakers devise research-based plans for preparing and training teachers on these standards and the readiness skills and knowledge that are considered prerequisite for children’s success at school. The study further examines whether the beliefs of kindergarten and 1st-grade teachers vary with regard to their ratings on the dimensions of school readiness. Understanding similar and differential ratings of child-based readiness dimensions among kindergarten (i.e., prior-to-school stage) and 1st-grade teachers may also shed light on whether these groups—who hold joint responsibility for getting children ready for the school—have a shared vision for the children they teach.

This study was intended to answer the following research questions:

1. What are current Jordanian kindergarten and 1st-grade teachers’ beliefs about the child-based dimensions of school readiness?
2. Are there statistical differences between kindergarten and 1st-grade teachers’ ratings of child-based dimensions of school readiness?
3. Are there statistical differences among kindergarten teachers and 1st-grade teachers in their beliefs about readiness due to years of teaching experience and level of education?

Beliefs about child-based dimensions of school readiness

Many research studies have examined teachers’ beliefs about the concept of school readiness. Among these studies is the study conducted by Lara-Cinisomo et al. (2008), who interviewed early childhood teachers to examine their beliefs about what is important for school readiness. They found that educators believed that a stimulating home environment and teacher-parent relationships are important to prepare children for the school. In addition, the study identified four domains of child-based characteristics that were important for children to attain to be ready for school: personal characteristics, such as health or physical fitness, motivation, confidence, and security; social skills, such as impulse control and being able to share with others; basic skills, such as knowing colors, shapes, and letters; and reasoning skills, such as understanding consequences and reflecting on actions. In a similar vein of research, Serry et al. (2014) examined the beliefs of 153 teachers in Australia regarding the factors that they thought were most needed to help children transition into the first year of primary school. Teachers in their study identified various child-based factors that they considered important for school readiness, such as cognitive, social, self-care, emotional, and language domains.

In general, the relative lack of emphasis on skills and knowledge as important factors in school readiness has characterized teachers’ beliefs. Lin et al. (2003), for example, have investigated the perceptions of 3,305 kindergarten teachers toward the construct of school readiness in America. The study results showed that teachers emphasized the social aspects of schooling more than the academic. Teachers gave high ratings for social skills, such as being able to tell needs and thoughts, not being disruptive, following directions, taking turns, and sharing. In an earlier study conducted through the National Center for Education Statistics, West (1993) found that kindergarten teachers tended to assign importance to items such as being physically healthy, rested, and well nourished; communicates needs, wants, and thoughts verbally; enthusiastic and curious in approaching new activities; and can follow directions. Similar results were reported by Perry, Dockett, and Howard (2000), who found that educators considered children’s social adjustment as the area that was most significant for successful transition to school in Australia. Moreover, Wesley and Buyssse (2003) explored the perceptions of professionals and parents regarding school readiness and found that participants placed emphasis on social-emotional and language development and communication, while they deemphasized such academic skills as knowing letters. According to the researchers, participants in their study felt that the social-emotional and language development could form a base for academic skills that kindergarten teachers are required to teach. Several other studies (e.g., Dockett & Perry, 2004) have found evidence that teachers place greater emphasis on how well children adjust to school, whereas others have shown that teachers assign priority to being physically healthy, rested, and well nourished as important prerequisites for school readiness (Lewit & Baker, 1995; West, 1993).
Earlier studies have also shown that consistencies and differences exist in the school readiness beliefs of teachers who teach at prior-to-school settings and teachers of the first stage of schooling. For example, Zhang, Sun, and Gai (2008) examined perceptions of kindergarten and elementary schoolteachers about some child-based dimensions of school readiness: physical well-being and motor development, social and emotional development, approaches to learning, language use, cognition, general knowledge, and family. Results of their study indicated that both groups of teachers emphasized health, attention, parental rearing patterns, confidence, and learning interest. Yet elementary schoolteachers placed greater emphasis on areas such as compliance with teacher’s authority, parents’ educational level, manners, self-centralization, and the ability to express needs. Similar findings were reported by a study conducted decades ago by Hains, Fowler, Schwartz, Kottwitz, and Rosenkoetter (1987), who found that preschool teachers (teachers at prior to school setting in their study) emphasized social interaction and communication whereas kindergarten teachers emphasized conduct and instruction-following.

Likewise, Piotrkowski et al. (2000) compared the beliefs of preschool teachers, kindergarten teachers, and parents regarding the importance of 12 school readiness “resources.” They found that teachers agreed that children must be healthy and socially competent, and be able to comply with a teacher’s authority. However, they found that preschool teachers also believed that basic knowledge was more important than kindergarten teachers did. Furthermore, preschool teachers also believed that advanced knowledge (such as knowing one’s address and phone number) was more important than the kindergarten teachers did.

Although the effect of grade level (teachers at prior-to-school settings versus teachers of the first year of school) on beliefs about school readiness has been examined in earlier literature (e.g., Piotrkowski et al., 2000), other factors, such as level of education and years of teaching experience, were less explored. Therefore, this study aimed to explore the effect of these two variables on kindergarten and 1st-grade teachers’ beliefs.

In recent years, the Jordanian government has commissioned a number of studies related to the assessment of learning readiness (e.g., Abu-Taleb, 2004). Yet studies that explore the beliefs of educators toward school readiness are still sparse in the Jordanian context. This study examines and compares the beliefs of kindergarten and 1st-grade teachers about school readiness and the skills they think are most important for Jordanian children to attain.

Method

Sample

Participants for this study were drawn randomly from Zarqa—a big and highly populated city in Jordan. A list of kindergartens and primary schools in Zarqa directorate was obtained from the Ministry of Education. A computer-assisted random sample of schools was generated from the list. Questionnaires were distributed to kindergarten or 1st-grade teachers in each randomly selected school. Two hundred questionnaires were distributed to the kindergarten teachers and 155 questionnaires were returned, constituting a 77% return. Two hundred questionnaires were also distributed to 1st-grade teachers, but only 134 questionnaires were returned, constituting a 67% return. A total of 289 questionnaires from both groups were analyzed.

Instrument of data collection

To achieve the study purposes, a questionnaire was developed by the researchers to measure kindergarten and 1st-grade teachers’ beliefs about school readiness and entry skills. The items of the questionnaire were developed after reviewing an extensive related literature and instruments. Among the documents and instruments reviewed were: the National Jordanian Standards,
Community Attitudes on Readiness for Entering School (CARES) (Piotrkowski et al., 2000), and the Arabic validated Early Years Evaluation Tool (EYE) (Abu-Taleb, 2004).

As an initial step toward establishing validity in the questionnaire, interviews were conducted with five kindergarten teachers and three 1st-grade teachers. The goal was to test for the clarity of the items and account for teachers’ suggestions. At this stage, four items were deleted, two were added (the items related to the academic knowledge dimension), and some were reworded and clarified. As an example, the item “classifies objects based on a single dimension” was not clear for teachers; therefore, it was further clarified by adding examples.

After that, the instrument was given to a panel of judges who were experts in the field, including PhD holders in the Jordanian universities and the Ministry of Education. Experts were asked to give their comments regarding the appropriateness of the questionnaire items to the questions of the study and to provide suggestions for additions to the questionnaire. Before being given to the judges, the initial version of the questionnaire contained 52 items. Many items were deleted based on the judges’ suggestions, and some were clarified further either by adding examples or through Arabic rewording.

The completed questionnaire was pilot tested with 30 early childhood teachers and 39 1st-grade teachers who were selected randomly from the study population. The lowest calculated reliability index for the kindergarten teachers’ survey was for the communication skills subscale ($\alpha = .558$). The reliability indices for the other subscales of the kindergarten teachers’ survey were self-discipline ($\alpha = .950$), basic thinking skills ($\alpha = .939$), academic knowledge ($\alpha = .905$), physical well-being and motor development ($\alpha = .894$), and socioemotional maturity ($\alpha = .890$).

The lowest calculated reliability index for the 1st-grade teachers’ survey was for the socioemotional maturity subscale ($\alpha = .579$). The reliability indices for the other subscales of the 1st-grade teachers’ survey were: self-discipline ($\alpha = .881$), basic thinking skills ($\alpha = .854$), communication skills ($\alpha = .849$), academic knowledge ($\alpha = .827$), and physical well-being and motor development ($\alpha = .790$). All indices indicate a satisfactory level of reliability.

The final version of the instrument comprised two parts. The first part asked about teachers’ demographics (their level of education, major, and years of experience). The second part included 42 items distributed evenly on the child-based dimensions of school readiness mentioned above. A 5-point Likert-type scale was used in the design of the questionnaire, ranging from essential to not important at all with scores ranging from (5 – 1), respectively.

As mentioned earlier, the sample of this study included kindergarten and 1st-grade teachers. With regard to the kindergarten teachers, 26.8% of them had an intermediate diploma, 66.7% had a bachelor’s degree, and 6.5% had a graduate degree. As to the number of years of experience, 42.6% of the teachers had 1 to 3 years, 27.1% had 4 to 10 years, and 30.3% of them had more than 10 years of teaching experience. As to their gender, all of them were females.

Regarding 1st-grade teachers, 12.7% of the teachers had an intermediate diploma, 76.9% had a bachelor’s degree, 9.7% had a graduate degree, and .7% had high diploma. In terms of 1st-grade teachers’ gender, 17.2% of them were males and 82.8% were females. Furthermore, 30.8% of them had 1 to 3 years of teaching experience, 40.6% had 4 to 10 years, and 28.6% had more than 10 years of teaching experience.

**Statistical analysis**

To answer the first research question, data were analyzed using descriptive statistics (calculating means and standard deviations). For the second research question, MANOVA was used to examine any statistically significant differences among kindergarten and 1st-grade teachers’ beliefs on the six child-based dimensions of school readiness. A multivariate analysis of covariance (MANCOVA) was conducted to examine if there were statistical significant differences among kindergarten and 1st-grade teachers’ beliefs due to their teaching experience and level of education. The intention was to control for the effect of teaching experience and level of education through considering them as covariates.
Results

Kindergarten and 1st-grade teachers’ beliefs about school readiness

To answer the first research question, descriptive statistics for teachers’ responses on the items of the six dimensions of readiness were calculated. These indicated that both groups of teachers (kindergarten and 1st-grade teachers) rated all dimensions of school readiness as important in preparing children for school. There was a high consistency between the ratings of both groups of teachers on three dimensions. Academic knowledge was considered the most important dimension by both groups of teachers ($M_{KG} = 4.10, SD = .68; M_{G1} = 3.80, SD = .62$). Physical well-being and motor development was the second highest based on the ratings of both groups ($M_{KG} = 3.91, SD = .68; M_{G1} = 3.82, SD = .58$). Both groups of teachers rated the basic thinking skills dimension as the least important of all the other dimensions ($M_{KG} = 3.73, SD = .79; M_{G1} = 3.42, SD = .66$).

Yet there were variations between kindergarten and 1st-grade teachers in terms of their ratings on the other dimensions. For example, socioemotional maturity was rated the third highest dimension by kindergarten teachers and as the fourth highest by 1st-grade teachers ($M_{KG} = 3.85, SD = .65; M_{G1} = 3.63, SD = .68$). In addition, the communication skills dimension was rated fourth by kindergarten teachers and fifth by 1st-grade teachers ($M_{KG} = 3.80, SD = .92; M_{G1} = 3.58, SD = .58$). Finally, self-discipline was rated as the fifth highest dimension by kindergarten teachers and the third by 1st-grade teachers ($M_{KG} = 3.76; M_{G1} = 3.76$).

To provide a clear depiction of kindergarten and 1st-grade teachers’ beliefs regarding children’s readiness, the results of the items within each dimension are presented in the following. The descriptive statistics for the items of the questionnaire are shown in Table 1.

Academic knowledge

Within the dimension of academic knowledge, the item that was considered most important by both groups of teachers was states address ($M_{KG} = 4.26, SD = .790; M_{G1} = 4.17, SD = .744$). Further consistency was found as both groups of teachers rated the item recognizes the basic geometric shapes, such as triangle, square, circle, as the least important item ($M_{KG} = 3.88, SD = .926; M_{G1} = 3.54, SD = .947$).

Physical well-being and motor development

There was a high level of consistency between the ratings of kindergarten and 1st-grade teachers on the items of this dimension, being healthy and well nourished ($M_{KG} = 4.32, SD = .76; M_{G1} = 4.34, SD = .68$) was the item that held the highest ratings by both groups. On the other hand, uses scissors without hurting self ($M_{KG} = 3.58, SD = .94; M_{G1} = 3.07, SD = 1.06$) was considered the least important item in this subscale by kindergarten and 1st-grade teachers.

Socioemotional maturity

Investigating the results of the third dimension, socioemotional maturity, indicated that the most important items identified by kindergarten teachers were joins the activities with other children ($M = 4.14, SD = .71$) and shares toys and things with others ($M = 4.08, SD = .74$). Other items, such as can do homework independently or with little help ($M = 3.63, SD = .83$) and shows acceptable social behavior in a particular situation ($M = 3.67, SD = .87$), were considered less important. As to the 1st-grade teachers, the item does not show an aggressive behavior (does not bite, beat, kick, or hurt other children) ($M = 4.08, SD = 2.6$) was considered the most important one in the social dimension. On the other hand, 1st-grade teachers considered the items controls own emotions when depressed, angry, or frustrated ($M = 3.37, SD = .95$) and shows acceptable social behavior in a particular situation ($M = 3.47, SD = .92$) as relatively less important.
Table 1. Descriptive statistics for the items of the six dimensions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Item</th>
<th>KG M</th>
<th>KG SD</th>
<th>G1 M</th>
<th>G1 SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Can count to 10 or more</td>
<td>4.23</td>
<td>.769</td>
<td>4.03</td>
<td>.794</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Knows Arabic alphabet</td>
<td>4.19</td>
<td>.771</td>
<td>3.84</td>
<td>.866</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Knows English alphabet</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>.893</td>
<td>3.65</td>
<td>.944</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>States address</td>
<td>4.26</td>
<td>.790</td>
<td>4.17</td>
<td>.744</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Names and distinguishes colors</td>
<td>4.17</td>
<td>.867</td>
<td>3.94</td>
<td>.894</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Recognizes basic geometric shapes (triangle, square)</td>
<td>3.88</td>
<td>.926</td>
<td>3.54</td>
<td>.947</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Knows his or her five senses and body parts</td>
<td>3.92</td>
<td>.911</td>
<td>3.69</td>
<td>.992</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Classifies objects based on single dimension (e.g., color, shape, size ...)</td>
<td>3.83</td>
<td>.930</td>
<td>3.58</td>
<td>.887</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Retells a story of 4–5 sentences with the help of pictures</td>
<td>3.54</td>
<td>.899</td>
<td>3.19</td>
<td>1.007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Understands and explains a series of events</td>
<td>3.51</td>
<td>.978</td>
<td>3.02</td>
<td>.969</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Distinguishes the different shape from many</td>
<td>3.93</td>
<td>.891</td>
<td>3.74</td>
<td>.831</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Recognizes the picture that does not belong to a group</td>
<td>3.98</td>
<td>.833</td>
<td>3.73</td>
<td>.836</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Realizes relationships such as: in front of, behind, first, last, left, right, more, less ...</td>
<td>3.79</td>
<td>.972</td>
<td>3.64</td>
<td>.921</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Solves a simple number problem using pictures or the abacus</td>
<td>3.61</td>
<td>.943</td>
<td>3.30</td>
<td>.966</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Controls own emotions when depressed, angry, or frustrated</td>
<td>3.70</td>
<td>.920</td>
<td>3.37</td>
<td>.946</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Does not show aggressive behavior (does not bite, beat, kick, or hurt other children)</td>
<td>3.93</td>
<td>.941</td>
<td>4.08</td>
<td>2.678</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Joins the activities with other children</td>
<td>4.14</td>
<td>.712</td>
<td>3.87</td>
<td>.740</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Shares toys and tools with others</td>
<td>4.08</td>
<td>.743</td>
<td>3.82</td>
<td>.821</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Understands the feelings of other children and responds with passion</td>
<td>3.86</td>
<td>.748</td>
<td>3.58</td>
<td>.825</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Can do homework by himself or herself or with little help</td>
<td>3.63</td>
<td>.830</td>
<td>3.40</td>
<td>.832</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Shows acceptable social behaviors in a particular situation</td>
<td>3.67</td>
<td>.869</td>
<td>3.47</td>
<td>.923</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Holds a pencil correctly</td>
<td>4.02</td>
<td>.896</td>
<td>4.03</td>
<td>.875</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>Catches a soccer-size soft ball with both hands</td>
<td>3.69</td>
<td>.904</td>
<td>3.40</td>
<td>1.034</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>Uses scissors without hurting self</td>
<td>3.58</td>
<td>.941</td>
<td>3.07</td>
<td>1.063</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>Dresses/undresses self independently</td>
<td>3.84</td>
<td>.894</td>
<td>3.67</td>
<td>.830</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>Can use the bathroom independently</td>
<td>4.29</td>
<td>.711</td>
<td>4.32</td>
<td>.713</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>Ties shoes independently</td>
<td>3.80</td>
<td>.956</td>
<td>3.84</td>
<td>.809</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>Healthy and well nourished</td>
<td>4.32</td>
<td>.762</td>
<td>4.34</td>
<td>.684</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>Sits still and calm in the classroom</td>
<td>3.77</td>
<td>.971</td>
<td>3.82</td>
<td>.911</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>Does not interrupt classroom activities</td>
<td>3.80</td>
<td>.986</td>
<td>3.95</td>
<td>.845</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31</td>
<td>Pays attention to teachers’ direction</td>
<td>3.91</td>
<td>.885</td>
<td>4.04</td>
<td>.760</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32</td>
<td>Takes care of classroom belongings</td>
<td>3.88</td>
<td>.969</td>
<td>4.01</td>
<td>.933</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33</td>
<td>Finishes assigned seat work within the determined time</td>
<td>3.61</td>
<td>.003</td>
<td>3.45</td>
<td>.981</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34</td>
<td>Cleans after self and brings objects to where they belong</td>
<td>3.77</td>
<td>1.031</td>
<td>3.77</td>
<td>.965</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35</td>
<td>Moves from one activity to another with ease</td>
<td>3.54</td>
<td>.941</td>
<td>3.40</td>
<td>.859</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36</td>
<td>Understands and follows direction of two steps or more</td>
<td>3.92</td>
<td>4.14</td>
<td>3.84</td>
<td>.827</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37</td>
<td>Verbalizes feelings using appropriate language</td>
<td>3.88</td>
<td>.759</td>
<td>3.62</td>
<td>.658</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38</td>
<td>Makes eye-to-eye contact</td>
<td>3.92</td>
<td>.805</td>
<td>3.77</td>
<td>.794</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39</td>
<td>Uses social courtesies, such as saying thank you and reciprocating a greeting appropriately</td>
<td>3.80</td>
<td>.793</td>
<td>3.72</td>
<td>.828</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40</td>
<td>Takes turn in conversation</td>
<td>3.56</td>
<td>.873</td>
<td>3.35</td>
<td>.834</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41</td>
<td>Forms simple and correct sentences that others can understand easily</td>
<td>3.80</td>
<td>.776</td>
<td>3.67</td>
<td>.793</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>42</td>
<td>Engages in conversation (complete sentences, listens and responds to others)</td>
<td>3.66</td>
<td>.864</td>
<td>3.44</td>
<td>.854</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. KG = Kindergarten teachers; G1 = 1st-grade teachers.

**Self-discipline**

There was a high consistency between kindergarten and 1st-grade teachers in their ratings on the items of dimension 5: self-discipline. Pays attention to teachers’ direction ($M_{KG} = 3.91$, $SD = .88$;
M_{G1} = 4.04, SD = .76) was considered the most important item by both groups. Kindergarten and 1st-grade teachers considered moves from one activity to another with ease (M_{KG} = 3.54, SD = .94; M_{G1} = 3.40, SD = .86) the least important item.

**Communication skills**

The descriptive statistics indicated that, on average, kindergarten teachers considered the communication skills more important than 1st-grade teachers. However, both groups of teachers considered makes eye to eye contact as the most important communication skill (M_{KG} = 3.92, SD = .81; M_{G1} = 3.77, SD = .79), whereas both groups considered takes turn in conversation as the least important skill (M_{KG} = 3.56, SD = .87; M_{G1} = 3.35, SD = .83).

**Basic thinking skills**

Kindergarten teachers and 1st-grade teachers considered this dimension as the least important one among all the other dimensions. For example, understands and explains a series of events was not considered important by either kindergarten teachers (M = 3.51, SD = .98) or 1st-grade teachers (M = 3.02, SD = .97). However, other thinking skills, such as distinguishes a shape from many (M_{KG} = 3.93, SD = .89; M_{G1} = 3.74, SD = .83) and classifies objects based on a single dimension (M_{KG} = 3.83, SD = .93; M_{G1} = 3.58, SD = .89), appeared more important than the other items within this dimension. In other words, though the dimension of basic thinking skill was considered the least important dimension, some items were still considered very important.

**Differences between kindergarten and 1st-grade teachers’ ratings**

We utilized MANOVA to compare the ratings of kindergarten and 1st-grade teachers on the six dimensions of readiness. First, we ran correlation analysis among the six dimensions of readiness. Table 2 presents the correlation coefficients between the dimensions.

The correlation matrix shows that the correlations among the dimensions are moderate and statistically significant at α = .01; therefore, MANOVA was conducted.

MANOVA results showed that there were statistically significant differences (α = .05), indicating that kindergarten and 1st-grade teachers differentiated among the dimensions of readiness (Wilks’s lambda = .017, F = 2521.3, p = .000). Statistically significant differences were detected on the dimensions of: academic knowledge (F = 12.98, p = .000, eta squared = .05), basic thinking skills (F = 11.56, p = .001, eta squared = .04), socioemotional (F = 7.57, p = .006, eta squared = .03), and communication skills (F = 4.82, p = .029, eta squared = .02). Based on the descriptive statistics of the two groups, it was found that kindergarten teachers rated these dimensions as more important than 1st-grade teachers. There were no statistically significant differences (α = .05) for the dimensions of physical well-being and motor development (F = 1.36, p = .245) and self-discipline (F = .032, p = .857).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Table 2. Correlation between the dimensions.</strong></th>
<th>Basic thinking</th>
<th>Socioemotional</th>
<th>Motor development</th>
<th>Self-discipline</th>
<th>Communication</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Academic knowledge</td>
<td>.74**</td>
<td>.616**</td>
<td>.37**</td>
<td>.51**</td>
<td>.41**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basic thinking</td>
<td></td>
<td>.677**</td>
<td>.37**</td>
<td>.54**</td>
<td>.46**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socioemotional</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.445**</td>
<td>.64**</td>
<td>.51**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motor development</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.43**</td>
<td>.5**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-discipline</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.53**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
Differences among kindergarten and 1st-grade teachers in their beliefs due to level of education and number of years of experience

Spearman correlation analysis between the expected covariates (level of education and number of years of experience) and the six dimensions of readiness was used to identify the correlation coefficients (Table 3).

Experience had no significant relationship with the six dimensions of readiness. It was removed from the equation and a MANCOVA was conducted using only one covariate (i.e., level of education).

Before controlling for the level of education, there were significant differences between the kindergarten and 1st-grade teachers on four dimensions (academic knowledge, basic thinking skills, socioemotional maturity, and communication skills). MANCOVA results (Table 4) indicate that when level of education was controlled for, statistical significant differences were only detected on one dimension—academic knowledge ($F = 5.84$, $p = .016$, eta squared = .02).

Discussion of results

Teachers’ beliefs about children’s readiness affect their general view and expectations of children and their curricula choice (Hatcher, Nuner, & Paulsel, 2012). This study provides information about how Jordanian kindergarten and 1st-grade teachers rate the child-based dimensions of school readiness. The results of this study show notable consistencies between kindergarten and 1st-grade teachers in their beliefs about school readiness. For example, both groups of teachers rated all six dimensions as very important to essential indicating a limited variability in their report.

In addition, both groups of teachers agreed on the importance of children being healthy and well nourished as a precursor to success at school. This particular finding is consistent with those of earlier studies on teachers’ beliefs about school readiness that indicate teachers prioritize children’s physical well-being and health over all other readiness-related components (Lewit & Baker, 1995; Piotrkowski et al., 2000; West, 1993). Other components of school readiness that also appeared important for both groups of teachers were children’s ability to state their address, count to 10 or more, and hold the pencil correctly. For Jordanian teachers, these preacademic skills might be considered the minimum standard for what children should know and be able to do to succeed in a structured learning setting. Similarly, teachers in other studies reported emphasis on these preacademic skills (Lewit & Baker, 1995).
Moreover, both groups of teachers were similar in the order of priority they assigned to three of the six readiness dimensions: academic knowledge (rated first by both groups), physical well-being and motor development (rated second by both groups), and basic thinking skills (rated the last by both groups). Although the alignment between the beliefs of kindergarten and 1st-grade teachers regarding school readiness is expected and often noted in literature (Zhang et al., 2008), a striking finding is that both groups of teachers ranked the dimension of academic skills as more important than the other dimensions. This finding is in dissonance with the findings of many earlier studies conducted in different cultural contexts, indicating that teachers deemphasize the academically oriented skills (Lin et al., 2003; Piotrkowski et al., 2000; Wesley & Buysse, 2003; West, 1993). Culture, context, and the public policy in a given country are recognized as factors influencing how readiness is conceptualized (UNICEF, 2012). A possible explanation is that these inconsistencies arise because of the different philosophies that teachers of different cultures espouse and the histories of the different pedagogies they adopt. It becomes important at this point to reexamine developmentally appropriate practice and traditional beliefs about child development. Developmentally appropriate practice (DAP) (Bredekamp, 1987) has characterized and guided the general philosophy in the field of early childhood education in the United States and the West for many years. According to Cohen (2008), the DAP document has been adopted to “counter a trend toward more academic curriculum” (p. 9). In response to this document, many teachers’ practices and beliefs moved away from the teacher-directed classroom beliefs and practices that focus on the academic skills toward more child-centered and social-emotional-oriented ones (File & Gullo, 2002). Yet early childhood education in Jordan, which is dominated by the private sector, has been characterized by its dissonance with the tenets of DAP (Abu-Talib, 2013). This also may indicate that Jordanian teachers’ beliefs might be influenced by the traditional beliefs about child development and education that emphasize academic skills and knowledge over the other dimensions of development. Even in countries like the United States, the potential of narrowing down the education in the early childhood education field to a limited range of academic domains continues to be a concern. This might be due to many factors embedded in the sociocultural context that affect teachers’ views and practices, such as state-mandated policies, standards, and licensure requirements. Within a recent discourse about implementing Common Core standards, for example, NAEYC (2012) points out the concern posed by educators about the downward pressure to increase academic focus and the overlooking of social and emotional development.

Jordanian teachers in this study did not consider socioemotional maturity and self-discipline as important for school readiness as the academic skills. Literature points to the importance of self-regulation and children’s ability to manage emotions, attention, and behaviors for children’s success at school (Liew & McTigue, 2010). It is equally important to turn our attention toward a dialogue about children’s readiness that focuses on the whole child through promoting socioemotional development. This is particularly true in contexts where there is strong emphasis on academic skills and high-stakes testing (Wesley & Buysse, 2003). The holistic perspective recognizes that children develop in a variety of domains—physical, cognitive, emotional, social, and moral. These domains are inter-related and develop in the context of each other. This, in turn, requires teachers of young children to pay equal attention to all aspects and domains of development (Noddings, 2005). Hence, more efforts should be geared to increase Jordanian teachers’ awareness of the importance of these readiness components. This would, in turn, help teachers adjust their belief systems and probably their instructional decisions and practices.

Results of this study showed statistically significant differences in the beliefs of kindergarten and 1st-grade teachers. The statistically significant differences were found on the dimensions of academic knowledge, basic thinking skills, socioemotional development, and communication skills for the benefit of kindergarten teachers. Piotrkowski et al. (2000) have found that teachers at prior-to-school settings believed that knowledge was more important for children entering kindergarten than the kindergarten teachers did. Yet because differences were detected on four dimensions in the current study, we would expect general higher expectations among teachers at prior-to-school settings for the children’s
readiness skills and components than among 1st-grade teachers. It might be possible that teachers at prior-to-school settings feel more pressure to get children ready for school than 1st-grade teachers do and hence set higher expectations for school readiness skills and components. Hains et al. (1987) found that teachers at prior-to-school settings had higher expectations for school readiness than kindergarten teachers did, which lends support to the finding of the current study. As mentioned earlier, the detected statistical differences had a low practical significance, indicating low actual impact.

Only a few studies have investigated the effects of different factors on teachers’ perceptions about readiness. Lin et al. (2003) studied—among many other factors—the effect of teachers’ educational levels and found no statistical significant effect for education level on teachers’ views of readiness. In the current study, a particularly noteworthy finding is that when level of education was controlled for, statistical differences were only detected on the dimension of academic knowledge. Yet, even with the existence of statistically significant differences on the academic knowledge dimension, the estimated squared eta was low. This finding points to the importance of level of education in explaining the variations that exist between kindergarten and 1st-grade teachers’ ratings on the readiness dimensions. Creating a consistent teacher preparation program plan among 1st-grade and kindergarten teachers in the different educational degree levels is important for enhancing the alignment between teachers’ beliefs.

**Research implications**

Many implications might be drawn from the findings of this study. First, this study points to the importance of examining Jordanian teachers’ beliefs and their impact on understanding and perceiving school readiness. It might be necessary for policymakers and teacher education programs to introduce teachers to theory-based and research-supported knowledge about how children develop while preparing them for the profession. Furthermore, efforts should be devoted to increase Jordanian teachers’ awareness and introduce them to recent trends that consider the holistic approach in child development—specifically, children’s socioemotional development, self-discipline, communication skills, and, most important, thinking skills.

Clear and concise expectations and beliefs about school readiness among kindergarten and 1st-grade teachers would help in developing continuity of children’s experiences between kindergarten and 1st grade. Therefore, it is important to encourage kindergarten and 1st-grade teachers to regularly meet. These meetings are expected to encourage discourses and constructive discussions among teachers that would help them adopt shared and common views about school readiness. Planning joint in-service training and workshops for teachers at prior-to-school settings and 1st-grade teachers is also expected to help promote continuity in services and ensure easy adjustment and grade transition among young children (Kayre-Sayre & Pianta, 2000).

As indicated from the results of this study, teachers’ level of education was decisive in enhancing the alignment between kindergarten and 1st-grade teachers. Hence, well-prepared and organized teacher preparation programs may provide opportunities to elevate teachers’ understanding of the concept of children’s readiness and help teachers set a shared vision for the skills and knowledge needed from children before school entry.

Further research studies that examine parents’ views and beliefs about the concept might also be illuminating. Knowledge about parents’ school readiness beliefs may shed light on the type of activities that parents place emphasis on at home. In addition, because the relation between beliefs and practices is complex, studies that investigate the relationship between beliefs about school readiness and the teacher-child relationship in the classroom would be very informative.

**References**


