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# A comparison of parents and teachers' evaluations about school readiness among first-grade pupils of primary schools in Tehran

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**Abstract:** Children's school readiness has received much attention from professionals in the field of education. Nevertheless, scholars in Middle East countries have not investigated this topic in a major way. The purpose of the present study was to determine (i) the most common parent-child activities for first-grade pupils in Tehran primary schools as rated by parents; (ii) the skills and abilities of the children as rated by first-grade teachers; and (iii) the relationship between parents and teachers' ratings of children's readiness for school. Multi-stage cluster sampling was used to select samples, and the research instruments (questionnaires) were distributed among 36 teachers and 756 parents. The study found that the most common weekly activities with children among Tehran's families were reading to the child, watching television, helping the child do chores, and playing sports. Teachers' rating of children's skills and abilities indicated that the majority of children had previous experiences with other children. In contrast, teachers report that pupils lack abilities such as following directions and instructions, positive prior reading experiences, and listening and paying attention in the classroom. In addition, there was a significant

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Lida Kakia did her PhD at Sofia University, Bulgaria, and at present works at the Ministry of Education and Payam Noor University in Tehran with more than 20 years of experience. She has written 60 books and papers on different aspects of education. She has also presented some articles at international and national conferences and seminars.

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### PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

The purpose of the present paper is to explain to what extent first-grade pupils in Tehran primary schools are ready for a new educational stage in their life. First of all, we have tried to determine children's activities at home through parents' perspectives. In the second step, we examined first-grade teachers' opinions about children's skills, abilities, and experiences. Finally, the research compares parents' belief and teachers' rating about children's competencies. Findings of research reveal that although Iranian families prepare different activities for their children at home, the most common parent-child activities are reading with the child, watching television, helping the child do chores, and playing sports. Teachers also indicated that Iranian first-grade pupils have abilities like separate easily from their parents; toilet trained; and developmentally matured. In contrast, teachers report that Iranian first-grade pupils lack abilities such as following directions and instructions, positive prior reading experiences, and listening and paying attention in the classroom.



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relationship between parents' ratings of children's activities and teachers' reports of children's different skills and abilities.

**Subjects:** Childhood; Classroom Practice; Early Childhood; Early Years; Education Policy & Politics; International & Comparative Education

**Keywords:** children; parents; school readiness; teachers; Tehran

### 1. Introduction

The first years of life are critical to a child's lifelong development. Early experiences actually influence brain development, establishing the neural connections that provide the foundation for language, reasoning, problem-solving, social skills, and behavior and emotional health (Dockett & Perry, 2007; Dockett, Perry, & Kearney, 2010). These early experiences play critical roles in helping children get ready for school. School readiness is "a product of the interaction between the child and the range of environmental and cultural experiences that maximize the development outcomes for children" (Britto, 2012, p. 6). According to Dockett and Perry (2007), children who are socially and emotionally ready for school are better placed to be able to meet the cognitive challenges accompanying the transition to a new educational stage, the associated changes in their status as learners, and the demands of formal schooling. Contemporary views of school readiness take into account the processes that lead children to acquire these competencies or recognize children's dependence on opportunities within supportive settings that foster their development (Mashburn & Pianta, 2006). Infants and young children thrive when parents and families are able to surround them with love, support, and opportunities to learn and explore their world. Children will not enter school ready to learn unless families provide the environments and experiences that support the physical, social, emotional, language, literacy, and cognitive development.

Children entering primary schools vary in their early experiences, skills, knowledge, language, culture, and family background. There is overwhelming evidence that the care, support, and environment that children experience in their earliest years significantly influence their success in school and in life. Several studies indicated that parent/families support and involvement have positive effects on educational performance of learners throughout the K-12, and especially on primary school pupils (Carter, 2002; Desforges & Abouchar, 2003). Recently, Weiss, Boufford, Bridglall, and Gordon (2009) through review of research indicated that there are over 40 years of steadily accumulating evidence that family involvement is one of the strongest predictors of children's school success. In addition, many studies show that educational achievement gaps between poor and non-poor children already exist at the primary school entry (Klebanov, Brooks-Gunn, McCarton, & McCormick, 1998; Wright, Diener, & Kay, 2000). Children from low-income families are more likely to start school with limited language skills, health problems, and social and emotional problems, all of which interfere with learning. The larger the gap at school entry, the harder it is to close. Research confirms that children's readiness for school is multifaceted, encompassing the whole range of physical, social, emotional, and cognitive skills that children need to thrive (Ackerman & Barnet, 2005). Therefore, it is obvious that for children, what parents/families do in the home environment remains significantly more important to student outcomes than what they do in the school setting (Christenson & Sheridan, 2001).

If we want all children to be proficiently ready for school and to grow into healthy teens and productive adults, we must make a wise investment in the early years (Gonzalez, 2002). The first step is to investigate and recognize the present situation regarding children's school readiness and current status of research that addresses the conceptions of parents and teachers on this subject. Usually, these two groups are key figures in decisions about school readiness, often making the final determination of whether or not a child will enter primary schools in a given year. In fact, despite their obvious importance, little attention has been paid to how parents and teachers view school readiness. According to Karibayeva and Yurdagul (2014), most parents want to be involved more on school readiness process, but there are a lot of barriers for their involvement such as parents' education, lack of time, work commitments, not enough money, or lower social classes.

However, research has already found that early parenting practices are significant predictors of racial and socioeconomic achievement gaps (Belsky et al., 2007; Weiss et al., 2009). Cunha and Heckman (2006) and Foster, Lambert, Abbott-Shim, McCarty, and Franze (2005) reveal that the extent and form of parents involvements and participations at child-parents activities are strongly influenced by family social class, maternal level of education, material deprivation, parental psycho-social health, and, to less degree, family ethnicity. For example, research by Jacobs and Bleeker (2004) showed that when parents purchase math or science-related items for children or engage in math or science activities with them, those children participate more often in these activities and maintain an interest in math and science over time. Some researchers found that when families create regular routines, eat dinner with children, limit TV watching, monitor activities, and manage learning activities, children demonstrate better academic outcomes (Annunziata, Hogue, Faw, & Liddell, 2006; Spera, 2006; Taylor & Lopez, 2005). In addition, Cunha and Heckman (2006) found that one way parents could provide cognitive stimulation for children is through supplying and interacting with materials such as books and games. Weiss et al. (2009) reported that children whose parents read to them at home recognize letters of the alphabets and write their names sooner. Brouillette (2010) tried to understand how the arts help children to create healthy social scripts through exploring the perceptions of primary teachers of grades 1–4. He found that art experiences and activities help children to develop an enhanced understanding of the responses and emotional expressions. Edwards, Sheridan, and Knoche (2008) rightly mentioned that parents provide for their young child's general learning both at home and outside the home in many direct and indirect ways, and this is sometimes called the “curriculum of the home” (p. 12). They believe that parents have many opportunities throughout the day to engage in responsive language and learning interactions with their children and allow the child to learn through complex and constructive play, asking questions, shared book reading or involvement in household tasks, and open-ended explorations. Parents also support an early love of learning by introducing their children to the cultural events and activities (by providing drawing and listening materials or taking the child to a puppet show, library, public garden, swimming pool, and park). However, as Ramey and Ramey (1994, p. 194) rightly pointed out:

Across socioeconomic groups, parents face major challenges when it comes to providing education for their children. For many families in poverty, these challenges can be formidable. Sometimes, when basic necessities are lacking, parents must place top priority on housing, food, clothing and health care. Educational toys, games and books may appear to be luxuries and parents may not have the time, money, energy, or knowledge to find innovative and less expensive ways to fasten young children's development.

In reality, children's readiness for school is made up of multiple components and shaped by numerous factors. Efforts to improve school readiness must, therefore, address children's development of skills and behaviors, as well as the environments in which they spend their time. Fortunately, in recent years, we witness a progress trend on pre-primary education throughout the globe. Rao and Sun (2010) reported that in all sub-regions of the Asia-Pacific, the gross enrollment ratio in pre-primary education increased between 1999 and 2007. Children attend school-based, center-based, community-based or home-based programs, and gender does not seem to be an issue for pre-primary participation rates. Of course, there are variations among countries' Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) programs in different parts of the world. For example, while states in central Asia like Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan have a long common history of ECCE programs largely as a state responsibility, many other countries mostly see it as a family's task.

In Iran, family and pre-primary centers take care of and educate children from birth to age six. Yet, very little is known about either how Iranian parents prepare their children for school or what they think such preparation should entail. As Barbarin et al. (2008) have pointed out, certainly identifying parental effects on school readiness is a challenge: parents might have only vague conceptions of what school readiness is or how to promote it; and studies look mostly at parental behavior and so infer views about what parents consider school readiness to be. In addition, parents are not solely directed to optimize school readiness; they may care about other goals for their children. Therefore,

in the present research, we investigated what are parents' opinions about their children's experiences, abilities, and skills. In addition to the family's role on school readiness, there is a need to look at the preschool education in Iran.

Although pre-primary education in Iran is not yet part of the government's mandate, it dates back to the early years of the twentieth century (Mofidi, 1997). Christian missionaries in Iran set up the first preschools in 1919, which were mostly attended by children from rich families. In 1924, recognizing the growing importance of preschool education, the government prepared and ratified a bill to regulate their operations, and in 1931, conferred the first permit to operate a kindergarten in Tehran. From 1943–1953, the government set up centers for the training of preschool teachers (Salehi-Isfahani & Kamel, 2006). In 1961, the government started to operate its own kindergartens to allow children from middle- and lower income classes to attend preschool, but these were mostly set up within its own ministries to help women's employment. In 1974, the age for attending preschool was raised from three to five. There was a surge in the demand for in daycare and preschool education during the oil boom years of 1973–1978 and before the 1979 Revolution, which was met mostly by daycare centers attached to places of employment of women (Salehi-Isfahani, 2001). Consequently, as some women left the labor force or were encouraged to retire early after the Islamic Revolution, many of these centers were closed and enrollments fell by one-quarter (Salehi-Isfahani & Kamel, 2006). A further decline in pre-primary school enrollments occurred in the mid-1980s, following the huge increase in the primary school age population, which created a shortage of primary teachers and reduced the supply of preschool education. In 1984, enrollments reached their lowest level of about 78,000, less than one-third of their previous high of about 260,000 (Ministry of Education, 2005). With the end of the Iran–Iraq war in 1988, enrollments picked up, only to fall again in 1992. Since 1993, expansion of kindergarten education has increased uninterrupted and at a rapid pace. In 2004–2005, 47.8% of 5-year-olds attended kindergarten compared to only 7.6% in 1993–1994. The number of kindergartens increased from a few hundred in the 1970s to 17,291 in 2004–2005. According to the Iran Welfare Organization (2014), in the whole country, between 15 and 18 thousand kindergartens are active. These kindergartens cover about 10% of all children under age 5.

With respect to the organizational dimension, different institutions provide preschool education services. These include: the Ministry of Education, State Welfare Organization, Municipalities, NGOs, the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, as well as different governmental, non-governmental, private, and charity organizations. Based on the type and nature of the activity undertaken, the bureaus of the Ministry of Education are responsible for following up on issues related to the pre-primary stage as well as other educational levels and periods. In the provinces and their related areas, bureaus for education are active in the field of pre-primary education as well. This is also true for other related sectors. Taking care of affairs related to the management of kindergarten classes (those affiliated to both private and public primary schools) is the responsibility of the principal (UNESCO, 2006).

There are three types of daycare centers in Iran: those under the control of the State Welfare Organization, self-contained daycares, and private daycare centers. Daycare centers within the State Welfare Organization are few in number and open only to children of poor families whose parents work, children of working single parents, and children whose parents are divorced, deceased, or pensioners. They are not well equipped and often provide caretaking rather than educational services. Self-contained daycares are usually located within factories and industrial centers and offer services to children of employees. They are financially supported by the company and by fees paid by parents. The quality of services and programs differ from center to center, but are usually acceptable and augmented by professional assistance from psychologists and art teachers. Private daycare centers comprise the largest number of preschool education programs in Iran. They are established according to the principle of Iran's Constitution and approved by the Ministry of Health and Medical Education, the State Welfare Organization and, in some areas, the Ministry of Education. The mandate of these centers is to keep, care, and provide education for healthy children between the ages of three months and five years. By law, each daycare can register more than 100 children, and only women are given permission to open a center. Proprietors must be at least 22 years of age

and be both physically and mentally healthy. They must have a bachelor's degree in preschool education or in psychology, education, or sociology, and at least one year of practical practice (Sabbaghian, 1992). Teachers in private daycare centers are responsible for providing educational programs, supervising the religious and emotional growth of the children, and teaching social skills. They also care for the physical well-being of the child and keep evaluative records on their educational progress (Sorkhabi, 1992). The curriculum focuses on the religious, social, cognitive, affective, and physical development of the child and includes activities to enhance language skills, creativity, thinking, analyzing, problem-solving skills, and an understanding of the Islamic religion.

However, there is no evidence to show the extent to which these curricula are followed, or whether the quality of the programs provided is satisfactory and whether the programs make children ready for school. What is easily observable is that the quality of private daycare depends largely on parents' income. The cost of the program varies widely depending on the area, building, facilities, and services, and some of the centers require such a high fee that only families with very high incomes are able to pay it (Javaadi, 2013; Sorkhabi, 1992). As in many developing countries, the demand for preschool education for Iranian children comes largely from families in which both parents work. Although Iranian women were involved in economic activity outside the home prior to the revolution, since that time the rate of working women has increased as a result of changing social and economic factors. The Islamic Government has increased educational and professional opportunities for women (Zahedifar, 2012). Iranian women have also shown a growing interest in becoming more independent financially. Changes in the fiscal situation in Iran, especially during the last two decades, coupled with the influx of young families in urban areas following the revolution, have meant that the husband's income is frequently not sufficient for the family's living expenses, and these young couples may no longer have the assistance of their extended family (Nourani, 1998; Zahiri & Mahdavi, 2011). In addition, there is an increasing demand for part-time daycare from families in which the mother does not work, but who believes that their children will benefit from early educational experiences. As a result, Iranian children enter kindergarten or elementary schools with a variety of experiences and skills. Some have spent a number of years in a preschool environment, while others come directly from home with little experience in socializing with peers or pre-academic skills. Assessment of both groups in various domains can help educators plan educational programs and materials at the appropriate level in order to facilitate the transition to school.

A review of the literature reveals that only a few studies in the area of school readiness in Iran exist. This research have focused only on effects of pre-primary education on school readiness through comparing two participated and non-participated groups of children. Therefore, we were not able to find any research in Iran showing parents' report on child experiences, abilities, and skills at home. However, Tashakkori, Haghighat, and Yousefi (1988) compared two groups of primary school students with and without preschool experience and found significant differences between the two groups across all grades, with the students with preschool experience demonstrating higher intelligence and achievement scores. Mohammadi, Nazarian, and Sabzi (2008) found that preschool education had an effect on the motor skills of 5–6-year-old boys. They found that this training accelerated the motor development of children. Rohi and Behnam Hashjien (2011) compared the impact of preschool education on oral skills among Turk first-grade students in Ardabil Province, in the west of Iran. Findings indicated that there was a significant difference between two groups of children with and without preschool experiences and oral skills. Children who had attended preschool centers were better than those of the control group. Tatari et al.'s (2013) work on the effect of preschool education on the social maturity among 60 elementary students in the west of Iran revealed that the difference between preschoolers and non-preschoolers in terms of social maturity score was not so highly significant as to suggest mandatory preschool for all. The most recent research was that of Amiri et al. (2013), who conducted a national survey on the inequality of school readiness and autism among 6-year-old Iranian children. The study population consisted of 955,388 children (48.5% girls and 76.1% urban residents). Among the 6-year-old children, the following disorders were identified: impaired vision (3.1%); color blindness (1.2%); hearing impaired (1.8%); speech disorders (1.4%); autism (.08%); short height for age (10%); body mass index extremes (10.9%); decayed teeth (56.7%); spinal disorders (.8%); and hypertension

(.6%). These disorders were distributed unequally across provinces. Inadequate attention to preschool education in the national educational system, a shortage of financial resources, and a lack of appropriate psycho-educational devices for assessment is the most important constraint of research with preschool children in Iran. The present study will provide much-needed research documenting the activities that parents engage in with their children, and how that relates to teachers' reports of the skills, abilities, and experiences that the majority of the students demonstrate in their classrooms. It will further relate the parents' reports of activities and the teachers' reports' of children's actual skills, abilities, and experiences to teachers' perceptions of skills, abilities, and experiences believed necessary for developmental success in the city of Tehran, Iran.

## 2. Methodology

The first-grade teachers and parents of pupils in different primary schools in Tehran City were asked to participate in the study and to rate children's skills, abilities, and experiences. The Bureau of Education in Tehran has divided all schools into 19 different educational districts. In the first stage of the study, using multi-stage cluster sampling, the researchers divided Tehran into four clusters (north, south, west, and east). In the second stage, in 4 clusters of educational districts, the 4 districts of 1, 6, 7, and 15 were selected randomly. In the third stage, and again through simple random sampling, three primary schools were selected in each district (a total 12 primary schools). In the final stage, the research questionnaires were distributed among the first-grade teachers (36 teachers) and parents of their pupils in these schools (756 parents) randomly. In order to be selected for the study, a teacher had to be one recognized by the Ministry of Education and have taught in the primary school from the beginning of the academic year 2013–2014. For selection of parents, the criterion was that the mother or father should have a child in first-grade of the primary school at the time of the research. Prior to contacting the children's first-grade teachers and parents, the researchers explained the objectives of the study and the data collection procedure to the headmasters/mistresses of the schools, who then sent consent letters to the first-grade teachers and parents. In this letter, teachers and parents were informed of the nature of the study. For those parents and teachers who agreed to participate in the study, an appointment was made for a questionnaire to be completed at the school. The parents and teachers were also assured of the confidentiality of all information collected.

Among the first challenges for a researcher is securing or preparing appropriate instruments for collection of data. We took the School Readiness Questionnaire for Parents (SRQP) and the Student Readiness Questionnaire for Teachers (SRQT) designed by Moore (2002) and adapted it. The SRQP is a collection of items for the assessment of children's health and family, and children's activities, household information, and parenting programs. The SRQP employs parent-rating scales to sample the domains of family and children's activities only for school-age children. The questionnaire covers five general areas and items are rated on one dimension, which is Frequency. The frequency rating provides information on "how often," a perceived behavior occurs in the home. The SRQT form is relatively simple and self-explanatory. The SRQT provides details for scoring and identifying the children's strengths and weaknesses on different skills, abilities, and experiences by their teachers. Two authors of present paper translated the questionnaires into Farsi, and it was then back-translated into English by a colleague in the Department of English at Lorestan University to check if the meanings had remained constant. In addition, the questionnaires were then piloted in a Tehran primary school in which one of former students of the third author was the principal. With his help, five first-grade teachers and five parents completed the questionnaires. Finally, the SRQP and the SRQT were administered to parents and teachers. The SRQP form requires about 20 min to complete by parents, while the SRQT form can be completed by a teacher and each pupil within less than 10 min. Subsequent to the parent questionnaire, the children's teachers were asked to assess the child on the SRQT within a week. Concerning the reliability and validity of the instruments, the median internal consistency using Cronbach's alpha for the SRQP was .90, and for the SRQT, it was .84. The data were compiled and analyzed by the researchers using SPSS programs.

### 3. Results

The data revealed that the teacher participants were 22 females and 14 males aged between 27 and 60 years (Mean = 35.19) from 12 primary schools in Tehran City. Parent participants were 512 females and 244 males aged between 24 and 60 years (Mean = 32.16). A total of 36 teachers rated the subjects, with an average of about 21 children per teacher (a total of 756 children). The average teaching experience of the teachers was about 10 years (ranging from 1 to 23 years). Also, on average, there were about 21 parent participants from each class, and a total of 63 per school participated in the study. The demographic information about the parents shows that the majority of parents were young (ages 24–30), at an age when it is natural to have one or two children in primary school. Most of the parents who usually came to school were mothers. In addition, there was no difference in the percentage of boys and girls in schools. Regarding the educational level of the parents, the majority of parents had a college degree and above, although the level of fathers' education was higher than that of the mothers. Family demographic information of the research participants revealed that more than 80% of families had one or two children; the majority of their children were less than 15 years old, which is natural, given Iran's population structure; more than 80% of children lived with their parents; and most of the parents were married. Concerning the economic dimension and household yearly income, most of the parents participating in the present research had an average income and therefore belonged to the middle class. Data from the SRQT revealed personal information in this study. More than 65% of teachers were aged 30–50, which showed they were in the middle of their professional careers. The majority of teachers were female (60%). Most of the teachers in the study had at least a bachelor's degree, and 10% had a post-master's professional diploma.

After personal questions about parents, the first section of the SRQP questionnaire was allocated to information about child health. Parents answered “yes” or “no” to 14 questions soliciting detailed information about their children's health (Table 1). Table 2 shows parents' reports on the overall health of their children.

As already mentioned, all Iranian first-grade pupils at the time of school registration have to deliver their medical records to the school. In the medical records, there is all the information about health situation concerning a child's eyes, ears, teeth, and his/her overall health. In reality, most Iranian children do not have a regular monthly physician check up. The results in Table 1 shows that even in the capital city of the country, more than 65% of children did not have a regular monthly

**Table 1. Parents'\* report on child health from different dimensions**

No.	Child health items**	Yes (%)	No (%)
1	Regular physician	34	66
2	Dentist every six months	23	77
3	Health insurance	90	10
4	Child's immunization up to date	100	0
5	An annual eye check-ups	100	0
6	Child's hearing	100	0
7	Impaired hearing	3	97
8	Difficulty speaking or being understood	9	91
9	Physical activity regularly	97	3
10	Enough sleep at night	87	13
11	Child often tired	6	94
12	Nutritious breakfast	53	47
13	Nutritious dinner	79	21
14	Proper school supplies	92	8

\*N = 756.

\*\*Items are abbreviated.

**Table 2. Parents' report on overall child health**

Health status	Parent No. (%)
Very healthy	491 (65)
Healthy	197 (26)
Somewhat unhealthy	53 (7)
Very unhealthy	15 (2)

physician. Contact with a physician usually occurs when the child has a problem. In addition, the table reveals that parents reported at least four problems. First, more than 75% of their children did not go to the dentist at least every six months. Second, about half of them did not eat enough breakfast. Third, more than 20% of them did not eat a nutritious dinner. Fourth, more than 10% of children did not have enough sleep at night. The result of Table 2 reveals that 65% of parents believed their children were perfectly healthy, while 30% of parents' assessment of their children's health was less optimistic. Descriptive information about parents' reports of children's weekly activities can be seen in Tables 3 and 4.

As is obvious from Tables 3 and 4, the most common children's weekly activities among the Iranian families were: reading to the child (Mean = 2.75), watching television, videos, or DVD's with the child (Mean = 2.30), helping the child do chores (Mean = 1.87), and playing sports with the child (Mean = 1.68). Most parents who have children in first grade are young and have only one or two children. Therefore, they are usually very concerned about their children's educational progress and school performance and spend more time on educational activities such as helping their children read and learn Farsi words and sentences. In addition, because of the structure of life nowadays in huge cities like Tehran, most families live in apartments and spend time in front of the TV with their children. This is a common feature of civilian life in Iran. In contrast, a few Iranian parents have reported engaging in activities such as singing, art activities, or building things with their children because of a lack of parents' competency in these activities.

As already mentioned, 36 first-grade teachers participated in the present research. In the first step, teachers were asked to rate different skills, abilities, and experiences of pupils (Table 5). The results showed that 98% of teachers reported that the majority of children in their class had "previous experiences with other children." Other skills that a large percentage of teachers (90% and more) reported the majority of children possessing included: "separate easily from their parents or caregivers," "toilet trained," "physically healthy," and "developmentally mature." In contrast and

**Table 3. Means, standard deviations, and ranges for parents'\* ratings of child weekly activities**

Subject	Mean	±SD	Range**
Read to child	2.75	.79	1-4
Sing with child	1.10	.66	1-4
Do art activities with child	1.03	.53	1-4
Help child do chores	1.87	.77	1-4
Play board games or card games with child	1.50	.77	1-4
Talk about nature with child	1.23	.74	1-4
Build things with child	1.09	.75	1-4
Play sports with child	1.68	.69	1-4
Watch television, videos, or DVD's with child	2.30	.81	1-4

\*N = 756.

\*\*1 = never, 2 = 1-3 times/week, 3 = 4-6 times/week, and 4 = 7 and more times/week.

**Table 4. Frequencies for parents'\* ratings of frequency of weekly family and child activities**

Subject	Never n (%)	1–3 times n (%)	4–6 times n (%)	7 or more times n (%)
Read to child	23 (3)	384 (51)	295 (39)	54 (7)
Sing with child	303 (41)	317 (42)	77 (10)	59 (7)
Do art activities with child	394 (52)	311 (41)	31 (4)	20 (3)
Help child do chores	198 (26)	303 (40)	179 (24)	76 (10)
Play board games or card games with child	121 (16)	370 (49)	174 (23)	91 (12)
Talk about nature with child	78 (10)	390 (52)	201 (27)	87 (11)
Build things with child	280 (37)	313 (41)	119 (16)	44 (6)
Play sports with child	56 (7)	377 (50)	294 (39)	29 (4)
Watch television, videos, or DVD's with child	9 (1)	118 (16)	300 (40)	329 (43)

Notes: 1 = never, 2 = 1–3 times/week, 3 = 4–6 times/week, and 4 = 7 and more times/week.

\*N = 756.

**Table 5. Frequencies for teachers'\* ratings of children's skills, abilities, and experiences**

Subject	Yes (%)	No (%)
Good language and communication	69	31
Positive prior reading experiences	38	62
Toilet trained	92	8
Classroom listening and paying attention	33	57
Following directions and instructions	34	66
Good social skills	51	49
Sitting still	77	33
Possessing basic knowledge	45	55
Separate easily from their parents or caregivers	93	7
Exhibit fine motor skills	76	24
Curiosity and an interest in learning	61	39
Care for, or assist in caring for, themselves	88	12
Physically healthy	90	10
Developmentally mature	90	10
Signs of previous experiences with other children	98	2

\*N = 36.

according to the teachers' reports, the main problems of the Iranian first-grade pupils were: lack of skills, abilities, and experiences, such as "follow directions and instructions" (66%), "positive prior reading experiences" (62%), "listen and pay attention in the classroom" (57%), and "possess basic knowledge" (55%).

To determine the relationship between teachers' reports on child's skill, ability, and experience and the reports of parents on children's activities in the present study, two phases were implemented: factor analysis and logistic regression analysis. In order to determine whether the 14 items

representing parent-child activities reported by parents could be reduced to a smaller number of activities, a principal axis factor analysis with varimax rotation was performed. Factors with an eigenvalue greater than or equal to 1.0 were included in the final solution. Items with factor loadings of .40 or higher were considered to comprise a factor and were interpreted in the solution (Tabachnick & Fidell, 1996). The solution converged easily and could be readily interpreted. Three factors were extracted, accounting for 52% of the variance. These three factors were named: hands-on activities, sports and games, and community-based activities. Table 6 shows the factor loadings for each of the items. After the three main activities were determined, scale reliabilities for these factors were calculated using Cronbach's coefficient alpha. The reliability coefficient for hands-on activities was .86, which is high, while for community activities and sports and games activities the coefficients were .81 and .73, respectively, which are both at the medium level, showing the acceptability of the reliability of questions for the research to be done (Table 7).

After the first phase, in which the three main factors of parent-child activities were determined, in the second phase, correlation analyses were conducted to examine the extent to which parents' ratings of children's activities were correlated with teachers' reports of children's skills, abilities, and experiences. The three activity factors identified in the factor analysis were the predictor variables (hands-on activities; community activities; and sports/games) and the outcome variables were the 14 different skills/abilities/experiences that teachers reported on (i.e. whether or not the majority of children in their classroom possessed the skill) (Table 8).

**Table 6. Factor analysis of child's activities (N = 756)**

<b>Factor loadings</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>
<i>Hands-on activities</i>			
Read to child	<b>.95</b>	.03	.06
Sing with child	<b>.64</b>	.02	.07
Do art activities with child	<b>.83</b>	.29	.25
Help child do chores	<b>.89</b>	.11	.21
Talk about nature with child	<b>.60</b>	.20	.04
Build things with child	<b>.83</b>	.27	.32
Watch television, videos, or DVD's with child	<b>.92</b>	.02	.04
<i>Community activities</i>			
Attend a play, concert, or live show	.05	<b>.61</b>	.05
Visit an art gallery, museum, or historical site	.08	<b>.72</b>	.07
Visit a zoo, aquarium, or petting farm	.06	<b>.84</b>	.10
Attended a Mosque or religious event	.06	<b>.95</b>	.08
<i>Sports and games</i>			
Play games (board/card) with child	.41	.09	<b>.78</b>
Play sports with child	.21	.10	<b>.79</b>
Attend a sporting event	-.11	.16	<b>.61</b>

**Table 7. Alpha coefficients for parent-child activities' factors (N = 756)**

<b>Source</b>	<b>Alpha coefficient</b>
Hands-on activities	.84
Community activities	.81
Sports and games	.73

**Table 8. Pearson correlation coefficient between teachers' rating of children's skills/abilities/experiences and parents' rating of children's activities**

Child skills, abilities, and experiences	Parent-child activities factors			
	Hands-on activities	Community activities	Sports/games	Total
Good language and communication	.13*	.06**	-.03	.06
Positive prior reading experiences	.08	.24**	-.09	.10
Toilet trained	.03	-.04	-.04	-.02
Classroom listening and paying attention	.10	.10	-.07	.09
Following directions and instructions	.20**	.17*	.22**	.28***
Good social skills	.22**	.39***	.38***	.29***
Sitting still	.24	.39***	.41***	.36***
Possessing basic knowledge	.27***	.42***	.14***	.38***
Separate easily from their parents or caregivers	.017*	.23***	.21**	.17*
Exhibit fine motor skills	-.05	.00	.00	.01
Curiosity and an interest in learning	.46***	.47***	.49***	.37***
Care for, or assist in caring for, themselves	.47***	.56***	.56***	.46***
Physically healthy	.28***	.36***	.41***	.29***
Developmentally mature	.46***	.53***	.56***	.42***
Signs of previous experiences with other children	.45***	.52***	.56***	.46***
Total	.38***	.43***	.48***	.40***

\* $p < .05$ .  
 \*\* $p < .01$ .  
 \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

The information in the above table reveals that there was a significant positive relationship between teachers' ratings of children's skills/abilities/experiences and parents' ratings of children's activities. For example, on the one hand, there was a significant positive relationship between children's good language and communication skills and hands-on activities ( $r = .13, p < .05$ ), or a significant positive relationship between children's good language and communication skills and community activities ( $r = .06, p < .01$ ), and a significant positive relationship between children's positive prior reading experiences and community activities ( $r = .24, p < .01$ ). On the other hand, there was a non-significant negative relationship between children's good language and communication skills and sports/games activities ( $r = -.03$ ) and a non-significant relationship between children's good language and communication skills and three group of activities ( $r = .06$ ). In addition, there was a significant positive relationship between all children's skills, abilities, and experiences and hands-on activities ( $r = .38, p < .001$ ), community activities ( $r = .43, p < .001$ ), and sports/games activities ( $r = .48, p < .001$ ). Therefore, the present research found that there was a significant relationship between parents' rating of children's activities at home and teachers' reports of children's skills, abilities, and experiences in school. The highest significant relationship between these skills and parent-child activities was "child's care for, or assist in caring for themselves skill," whereas the lowest relationship was between "child's exhibit fine motor skills" and all three group of activities.

#### 4. Conclusion

As there is no nation-wide system for monitoring children's growth and development or their preparation for school readiness in Iran, it seems that the best way to determine children's skills, abilities, and experiences is to solicit parents and teachers' opinions. The purpose of the present study was to determine (i) the most common parent-child activities of first-grade pupils of Tehran primary schools as rated by their parents; (ii) the skills, abilities, and experiences of children as rated by their first-grade teachers; and (iii) the relationship between parents' and teachers' ratings.

As we already mentioned it, according to the Iran Welfare Organization, in the whole country, available kindergartens cover about 10% of all children under age 5. Therefore, this statistic shows that more than 90% of Iranian children have to learn school readiness skills, experiences, and abilities through the family, which might not be very effective. In 2012, the Ministry of Education approved one-year pre-primary education as compulsory for all 5-year-old children. Although the Deputy of Primary Education in the Ministry of Education has announced that nearly 80% of 5-year-olds children participate in preschool education, informal evidence shows that this percentage is about 60% (Khabar Online, 2013). However, the purpose of this one-year education is to allow the necessary training for children to be ready to enter primary school. In fact, from the beginning of the Islamic Revolution in 1979 until 2004, the Ministry of Education considered pre-primary education as an informal period and did not interfere in the establishment of childcare centers. During the Ahmadinejad's presidency, a long conflict arose between the Ministry of Education and the Iran Welfare Organization over the supervision of pre-primary education. Eventually, it was decided that the licensing and supervision of preschoolers (children 4 and 5 years old) would be the responsibility of the Ministry of Education, and the Iran Welfare Organization has accepted its authority in the supervision of daycare centers for children under 4 years. Interestingly enough, despite the Ministry of Education's insistence on having control of preschool education, this conflict had an administrative nature, expanding the sphere of influence of the two rival organizations. After a short time, and forgetting the quantity and quality of educational services for children, because of financial pressure, the Ministry of Education announced that pre-primary education was informal and not mandatory and assigned it to non-profit and private schools. Nevertheless, based on the "Education for All" document approved at the Dakar UNESCO Conference in 2000, Iran, along with more than 160 countries, has committed to take effective measures to promote the development of preschool care and education, especially for disadvantaged children.

Concerning above points in mind, the finding of present research shows that the most common children's weekly activities among the Tehran's families were reading to the child, watching television channels, helping the child do chores, and playing sports with the child, respectively. Usually, most parents with children in first-grade are young and have only one or two children. They are very concerned about their children's future progress and spend more time on different home activities with child such as playing games, reading storybooks, or helping children read and learn Farsi words and sentences. In cities like Tehran, where most of parents are educated, these activities usually start from age of three onward. In addition, because of the lifestyle in big cities, most families are living in apartments, spending much time in front of the TV with children. In contrast, a few Tehran parents have reported doing activities such as singing with children, doing art activities, or building things with children may be because of lack of parents' competency for doing these activities. In reality, many parents send their children to preschools as a place of learning art activities. This finding supports Belfield and Garcia (2011), who mentioned that parents view preschools as a way of "outsourcing" school readiness. Another finding of this research is that some children attended religious and sporting events with their parents. These programs are usually free of charge, and sometimes there are even free food and confections for audiences (especially for religious events). However, many Iranian families are not able to spend money for children attending a music concert, or other live show where tickets are costly. The overall findings of this study about parents' reports of children's activities are consistent with the findings of previous research (Gershoff, Aber, Raver, & Lennon, 2007; Kim, Sunderman, & Choi, 2005; Lee & Burkham, 2002; Raver, Gershoff, & Aber, 2007), who found similar parents-child activities at home.

A large percentage of teachers reported that the majority of children have skills or abilities such as "be separate easily from their parents or caregivers," "toilet trained," "physically healthy," and "developmentally mature." These findings are similar to the research reports of McBryde, Ziviani, and Cuskelly (2004) and Piotrkowski, Botsko, and Matthews (2001), who found a good level of social and personal skills among children. In addition, according to teachers' reports, the main problems of the Tehran's first-grade pupils were lack of skills such as following directions and instructions, positive prior reading experiences, listening and paying attention in the classroom, and possessing basic

knowledge, respectively. It is very interesting to note that majority of teachers believe that pupils did not receive enough help through home learning to have adequate educational abilities and skills for new life stage. As Carter (2002, p. 5) rightly pointed out, it cannot be assumed that parents instinctively know how to involve themselves in their children's education. In fact, many parents feel inadequate in the teaching role. Therefore, the Ministry of Education and Iran Welfare Organization should arrange effective programs to teach parents how to create a home environment that encourages learning and how to provide support and encouragement that is appropriate for their children's school readiness.

Although much research has focused on differential reports of child behaviors at home or school, discrepancies between parents and teachers' reports of children's school readiness are less explored (Doyle, Finnegan, & McNamara, 2010). To determine the relationship between teachers and parents' reports, the three activity factors identified in the factor analysis (hands-on activities, sports and games, and community-based activities) were the predictor variables, and the outcome variables were the 14 different skills/abilities/experiences that the teachers reported on. Findings indicated that there was a significant relationship between parents' rating on children's activities at home and teachers' reports on children's skills, abilities, and experiences. The highest significant relationship between these skills with parent-child activities were "child care for, or assist in caring for themselves skill" and signs of previous experiences with other children, whereas the lowest relationship was between "child's exhibit fine motor skills" and all three group of activities. Teachers' reports also indicate that many of the children have no adequate abilities on academic skills. This finding is similar with findings of Laidra, Allik, Harro, Merenäkk, and Harro (2006) and O'Donnell and Mulligan (2008), but it is in contrast with research of Knudsen-Linduer and Harries (1989) and West, Hausken, and Collins (1993), who found lack of non-academic skills among children. Furthermore, findings of this research support Kirkorian, Wartella, and Anderson (2008), who found that there is a relationship between activities such as singing with child, doing art, and watching TV and video programs with child and child's good language and communication skills.

In sum, although deficits in school readiness have serious impacts on children's educational potential (Andreassen & Fletcher, 2007), but unfortunately, these services are not available to all Iranian children. Nevertheless, we cannot ignore the impact of two factors, which have improved home learning in Iran. The first factor is a decline in birth rates, which reduced the number of children drastically. Now, especially in big cities like Tehran, the majority of families do not have more than one or two children. The second factor is the economic pressures associated with changing cultural patterns that have caused more young parents to tend to have only one child. This is due to the belief that the quality of children is more important than their quantity. So, nowadays in Tehran, many children have benefited from different training programs; parents prepare more amusement toys and electronic games; and private classes for children are prevalent. However, the present researchers did not find any research that shows to what extent Iranian parents are aware about level of their children's school readiness. In addition, there is lack of research comparing parents and teachers' opinions about school readiness of the child. Therefore, answering questions such as "to what extent teachers consider to be enough activities that parents do to prepare children for primary education; do parents seek with home activities to prepare the children for primary school or just occupy their children time at home, or what kind of articulation is made between parents and teachers before children entering school?" needs further research.

However, it is obvious that in practice there is no relationship between most of the parents with first-grade teachers before entry of the child to primary school. Therefore, the main goal of the Ministry of Education in Iran for creation of a one-year compulsory preschool for children is that to reduce the gap between poor and middle-class children with their rich classmates in terms of school preparation. In addition, more research is needed to explore school readiness and the relationship between students' interest and curiosity in learning and teachers' beliefs and reports on students' interest and learning. Studies could be conducted to explore further the relationship between community events and school readiness skills in Iran. Some variables in further research as they relate

to community events include social skills, sitting still, and stimulating curiosity and interest in learning. Community organizations in Iran can use the information gathered from this research to guide further efforts to promote school readiness. Children benefit when parents, teachers, and the community have a common understanding and definition of school readiness.-

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#### Cover image

An old photo of children and their teachers at the first kindergarten of Iran (Tehran) Sunday, 19 March 1939. Source: Authors.

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