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A study of relationships between parents’ and teachers’ demographic factors and their judgments about children’s activities and school readiness in primary schools of Tehran

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Abstract
Purpose – The paper describes the relationship between parents’ and teachers’ demographic factors and their judgments about children’s activities and school readiness in primary schools of Tehran. The purpose of this paper is to determine: first, the relationship between the child’s gender and the frequency of parent-child activities; second, the relationship between the parent’s gender, age and educational level and the frequency of parent-child activities; and third, the relationship between the teacher’s gender, educational level and length of service with rate of frequency of the child’s school readiness.

Design/methodology/approach – Multi-stage Cluster Sampling was used to select samples, and the research instruments (questionnaires) were distributed among 36 first grade teachers and 756 parents.

Findings – The study found that there were significant gender differences in hands-on activities. With regards to the parent’s age and gender, there were significant differences only in hands-on activities, while, with respect to the educational level of fathers and mothers, there were significant differences in both hands-on and community activities among children. Finally, the finding indicated that there was a significant relationship between children’s skills and the teacher’s gender and length of service.

Originality/value – Although the research findings are consistent with the reality of Iranian families, more research is needed relating the types of activities in which parents and children engage.

Keywords Parents, Children, Teachers, Demographic factors, School readiness, Tehran

Paper type Research paper

Introduction
For decades, research has focussed on how and what children learn at home, and on the potential effects of family factors on the competencies that children need in order to adapt successfully to school. The parent has been referred to as “the child’s first teacher” (Educate America Act, 1994), and Berger (2000, p. 152) rightly pointed out that the parent is “the one continuous force in the education of children from birth to adulthood.” In the family context, children may acquire fundamental skills, knowledge, dispositions and values that are related to what formal schooling requires.
The everyday tasks of parenting, adequately accomplished, provide children with several essentials for school readiness and for ongoing daily preparedness for the classroom (Connors and Epstein, 1995). Besides supplying nutrition, shelter, clothing, health care, and a safe environment, parents or other primary caregivers usually provide the child’s first experiences with language, numeracy, social interaction and problem solving, all of which help to build the child’s foundation of skills and knowledge that he or she will need for school (Ryan and Adams, 1999; Henderson and Mapp, 2002).

In reality, children’s readiness for school is made up of multiple components and shaped by numerous factors. Improving school readiness, therefore, must address children’s development of skills and behaviors, as well as the environments in which they spend their time. In this respect, parents and teachers — compared with others — have more information about child’s competence, skill and experience before entering school. To measure school readiness of a child, there are two different methods: first, finding parent-child activities at home from birth to school entering; and second, teachers reported on children’s skills, abilities and experiences in the early age of schooling. These two ways help us to find almost a full picture of the ability of children. In fact, present authors believe that ratings on children being able to communicate with others, to engage with their peers, and remain calm in the face of temporary separation from their parents, now provided by teachers, do sound like a direct measure of child school readiness. In the meantime, the factors affecting the assessment of parents and teachers on child’s ability should not be ignored. The main question is that factors such as age, gender and education level of parents or teachers can affect their judgments about abilities and skills of children. The following sections briefly referred to the impact of these factors on school readiness.

Child’s characteristics
Research has shown that there are some differences in school readiness between boys and girls. Janus and Duku (2007, p. 395) pointed out: “There is evidence that whereas some differences may be due to biological factors, they may be magnified or perpetuated by adult behavior.” Some research shows that brain development differs between boys and girls: the lateralization of language to the left hemisphere happens earlier among girls (Bornstein et al., 2004). Added to this is the evidence that mothers tend to engage in more conversations with their infant daughters than sons, an imbalance that persists into later ages (Clearfield and Nelson, 2006; Huttenlocher et al., 1991), leading to differences in children’s abilities at school entry and later. Zill and West (2001) believe that educational institutions have only recently recognized this problem as one requiring attention. As gender is a demographic factor, not an environmental factor, prevention needs to focus on the mechanisms that lead to the gap between boys and girls. There is evidence that schools are tailored to meet educational learning styles more common among girls, who respond better to structured learning activities than boys. Recently, educators have called for the recognition and promotion of boys’ needs in ways that would not be costly and yet would capture their attention (Spence, 2005). For example, adjusting the length of verbal instruction in the early stages of learning and offering nonfiction reading choices in later grades are just two among many possible strategies (Janus and Duku, 2007).

Parents characteristics
Despite their obvious importance, little attention has been paid to the demographic features of parents and their effects on child school readiness. There has been a good
deal of research on school readiness in terms of parental education, race/ethnicity, child age, gender, academic skills, behavior, preschool enrollment, home learning and educational television viewing. Certainly, identifying the effects of parental demographic features on school readiness is a challenge: are there any differences between fathers and mothers in the skills they teach to their children. Are there any differences between younger and older parents in the skills they promote in their children. What is the role of parents’ educational level on child school readiness. A related study by Belfield and Garcia (2011, p. 5) reported that some parents, for example, older or more educated mothers may have a better understanding of how to promote school readiness. In addition, parents’ educational level has been found to affect their views on child’s school readiness (Greenberg et al., 1999; Isaacs, 2012; Isaacs and Magnuson, 2011; West, 1993). West (1993) found that the majority of parents with college degrees believed that academic skills were important for school readiness, whereas the majority of parents with less than a high school education, placed more importance on social and emotional behaviors. Furthermore, researchers have found that young Latino children face certain risk factors for lagging behind in school readiness at primary school entry. Some of these risk factors include increased poverty, low parental education and single parent families (Ansari and Winsler, 2011; Fuller and Garcia Coll, 2010; Isaacs and Magnuson, 2011). Ansari and Winsler’s (2011) research revealed that half (49 percent) of the Latino children in their study have parents without a high school diploma and 45 percent have single mothers compared with 24 percent for white children. In the USA, O’Donnell (2008) found that among three-to-six old children whose parents had not completed high school, 11 percent could recognize all 26 letters of the alphabet, 31 percent could count to 20 or more, 41 percent could write their names, and four percent could read words. These figures were between 17 and 31 percentage points lower than those for children whose parents had completed some college or a vocational program, and between 27 and 40 points lower than those for children whose parents had obtained a bachelor’s degree. In addition, research by Lonigan and Whitehurst (1998) with low-income children in four nonprofit subsidized child care centers reported mixed evidence to support the theory that children’s oral language benefits when both their preschool teachers and their parents engage them in dialogic reading (a form of shared reading experience). Hart and Risley (1995) used behavioral observations of the language experiences of 42 children from three socioeconomic categories: “higher SES,” “working class,” and “families on welfare.” They found that, in the course of daily interactions, the children in the families on welfare heard approximately 620 words per hour, the children in working-class families heard 1,250, and the children in the higher SES families heard 2,150 words per hour. The investigators also found marked differences in the amount of encouraging and discouraging feedback children received, with those in families on welfare receiving far more discouragement than encouragement, and those from higher SES families having the reverse experience.

**Teachers’ characteristics**

Apart from parents, first-grade teachers are also among the people who know the capabilities of children. Asking first-grade teachers about children’s competencies has practical and theoretical value because this information defines the nature of early school adjustment and predicts later school performance for children. Their judgments about the skills, abilities and experiences of children in their classrooms may also reflect teachers’ perception of how difficult it is to teach their classes. Teachers’ views
are particularly important because their early assessments of young children’s readiness play an important role in special education placement, ability grouping and grade retention (e.g. Entwisle, 1995; Gredler, 1992; Powell, 1995), and in shaping children’s subsequent achievement trajectories (Alexander et al., 1988; Piotrkowski et al., 2001). Thus, if children enter school less prepared, teachers will believe that they have more work to accomplish to prepare children for the coming school years. Rimm-Kaufman et al. (2000, p. 150) believed that when teachers perceive that children entering school have difficulty following directions, lack academic skills or show other developmental lags, these perceptions place a burden on classroom teachers. The greater the proportion of children in the classroom with these lags, the greater the workload for the classroom teacher, and the less attention the teacher can devote to the standard educational program. Therefore, parents and teachers share responsibility for the education of young children. Without a shared vision of children’s readiness, parents and primary school teachers may not encourage in children the skills, attitudes and attributes that teachers look for (Hains, et al., 1989; West et al., 1993). Although it seems that most parents and teachers have fairly minimal expectations for children entering school, there is little research on parents’ and teachers’ actual perceptions of children’s school readiness. Furthermore, little is known about the relations of parents and teachers’ demographic features to children’s readiness. For teachers also, it seems that age and gender tend to influence their beliefs and practices concerning children’s school readiness. A number of researchers have addressed teachers’ views of children’s school readiness (e.g. Doyle et al., 2009; Heaviside and Farris, 1993; Hughes and Kwok, 2007; Lewit and Baker, 1995; Welch and White, 1999). In their research Lin et al. (2003) examined kindergarten teachers’ perceptions of children’s readiness for school. The findings of the research revealed that older teachers appeared to have lower expectations for kindergarten children’s academic skills; they were statistically significantly less likely than younger teachers to say that these skills were very important or essential. Lin et al. (2003) indicated younger teachers had a greater concern for academic attainments, which was reflected in a greater emphasis on academic learning in early childhood, particularly as that emphasis would show up in their initial licensure programs. In addition in this study, female teachers appeared to have slightly higher expectations with respect to social skills than male teachers. Moreover, McBryde et al. (2004) found that teachers perceived girls to be more ready for school than boys and chronological age influenced teachers’ beliefs about school readiness. In this paper, school readiness defined as a child’s skills, behaviors, or attributes in relation to the expectations of individual classrooms or schools. In addition, we have summarized parents report on child activities at home to three main categories, i.e. hands-on activities, sports and games and community-based activities.

School readiness in Iran[1]
In Iran the family is the most influential institution in the life of an individual. There is rarely any major decision making and action of individuals through the life course that is not discussed and evaluated within the network of the family. Despite the huge amount of urbanization in Iran (more than 70 percent) (Iran Statistical Center, 2013), which has influenced the residential aspects of the family; the social and economic interaction among family members has remained and will continue to remain (Amanian et al., 2011). The patriarchal line of authority continues to protect the reputation and status of the family through the guidance of the younger generation and control of the
decision making process. In recent decades, the cost of raising a family has been drastically increasing, and children’s education has become an important need for all classes of people. Parents greatly value education for their children, regardless of gender, and there are clear indications that the focus of most families is more on the quality of children than on the quantity. The strong emphasis on children’s education, and the high cost of raising children, has convinced parents to have fewer children (see Tables I and II). Iranian women are not only marrying later, but they are having fewer children once they get married. All these changes have created a very suitable social environment for the education of children and, especially, the expansion of parents’ education, early childhood education and the school readiness of children. In fact, the rising adult to child ratio is a once-and-for-all opportunity for investment in human capital, known in the development literature as the demographic window of opportunity (Barlow, 1994; Salehi-Isfahani, 2002).

In Iran, family and pre-primary centers take care of and educate children from birth to age six. As there is a rational relationship between children’s life before coming to formal education system with participants at kindergartens and pre-primary centers, we need to look at the historical process of preschool education in Iran. Preschool education in Iran dates back to the early years of the twentieth century, but it accelerated only recently (Mofidi, 1997). The first preschools were set up by Christian missionaries in Iran in 1919, which were mostly attended by children from the rich families. In 1924, recognizing the growing importance of preschool education, the government prepared and ratified the bill to regulate their operations and conferred the first permit to operate a kindergarten in Tehran in 1931 (Madandar Arani and Kakia, 2011). During 1943-1953 the government set up centers for training of preschool teachers and enrollments increased from 1,874 to 5,346. 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 employees. By 1972, there were 431 such centers. In 1974 the age for attending preschool was raised from three to five. There was a surge of demand in day

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>0-14</th>
<th>15-64</th>
<th>65 and above</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>23.4</td>
<td>70.9</td>
<td>5.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>25.1</td>
<td>69.7</td>
<td>5.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>39.5</td>
<td>56.1</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1987</td>
<td>45.5</td>
<td>51.5</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1977</td>
<td>44.5</td>
<td>52.0</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table I.** Trend of population’s changes among main age groups

**Source:** Iran Statistical Center (2011)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number of household</th>
<th>Average household size</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>21,185,647</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>17,501,771</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>12,398,235</td>
<td>4.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1987</td>
<td>9,673,931</td>
<td>5.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1977</td>
<td>6,711,628</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table II.** Frequency and average household size in Iran

**Source:** Iran Statistical Center (2011)
care and preschool education during the oil boom years of 1973-1978 before the Revolution, which was met mostly by day care centers attached to places of employment of women (Salehi-Isfahani, 2001). As a consequence, as some women left the labor force or were encouraged to retire early after the Islamic Revolution, many of these centers were closed down and enrollments fell by one quarter. A further decline in primary school enrollments occurred in the mid 1980s, following the huge increase in 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 its previous high of about 260,000 (Ministry of Education, 2005). With the end of the 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 percent of five year olds attended kindergarten, compared to only 7.6 percent in 1993-1994. The number of kindergartens increased from a few hundred in 1970s to 17,291 in 2004-2005. Nearly, 4,000 of these were added in that year, while the number of primary schools decreased by about 1,500.

The latest UNESCO (2006) report which provides comparative cross-country data for 2002/2003 shows Iran’s gross preschool enrollments at 30.7 percent, much higher than the average of Arab countries (17.7 percent), but below countries in transition (34.6 percent), developing countries (34.3 percent) and developed countries (81.1 percent). The report of Ministry of Education reveals Iran’s gross preschool enrollments for years 2006 and 2012 at 48.8 and 75.4 percent, respectively.

In Iran, there is no particular nationwide system for monitoring children’s growth and development or their preparation for entrance at the primary level. Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) programmes are extremely diverse: there is no general model of early childhood provision. Parents, or other custodial careers, are the child’s first educators, and for the youngest age group the home is the prime arena for care. The past decade has seen an increase in the number of parenting programmes that aim to reach children under age three. Home visiting programmes offer support to individual parents and can be particularly positive for at-risk families by favoring the child’s development and raising parents’ self-esteem. Local communities also play a key role in supporting young children and their families through home or community-based child care. Presently, there are two kinds of institutions for the care and education of preschool children, readiness schools (or pre-primary centers) and day care centers. Pre-primary centers are controlled by both the Ministry of Education and the State Welfare Organization and are open only to children above five years of age. While the government has announced its intention to extend readiness schools to economically deprived regions – particularly those areas where ethnic minorities live – preschool education has received little attention in its proposal for educational reform (Bohloli, 2013). Recently, new guidelines for educational reform have proposed that a preparatory course be offered for four and five year olds, before they enter primary school, but younger children remain outside the purview of the national educational system (Ministry of Education, 2010). As a result, Iranian children enter 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.

School education in Iran comprises the followings four phases/levels: preschool (one year, children aged five); primary (six years, children aged 6-11); middle (guidance) (three years, children aged 12-15); and secondary (three years, students aged 16-18). Primary education in Iran is compulsory under the Iranian constitution. As a general
rule, primary, secondary and higher education is free, although private schools and universities do exist and are permitted to charge tuition fees. According to the government figures, over 95 percent of Iranian children currently receive primary and secondary education. All schools are single-sex. Preschool education is non-compulsory and children proceed automatically to primary education at the age of six. Pre-primary education is a one-year period in which five-year-old children are prepared for primary school. The curriculum at this level is standardized through use of two teaching manuals titled Content and Methods of Instruction in Pre-Primary Centers, Volumes I and II. These demonstrate appropriate behavioral and pedagogical techniques as well as a general curriculum focusing on basic life skills, natural sciences, hygiene, literacy, and religious history and practice. Children begin primary education at age six and are given a broad-ranging general education. There is no national exam at the end of the six years, which students have to pass to enter into the middle (guidance) educational level. The primary level is a six-year program and includes study of the Qur’an, Persian composition, Persian reading comprehension and dictation, social studies, arts, hygiene and natural science, mathematics, and physical education. Special emphasis at this level is given to reading comprehension. In grade one, half of the 24 allotted teaching hours are set aside for this discipline. All subjects must be passed in order for students to pass on to the guidance cycle. Textbooks are standardized and must be prepared and approved by the Ministry of Education. However, no studies have compared the effects of parents and teachers’ gender, age and level of education on child school readiness. The present research attempts to shed light on the contemporary school readiness challenges of first grade pupils in the city of Tehran. The present research tries to shed light on the contemporary school readiness challenges of first grade pupils in the huge city of Tehran. The present paper would provide much-needed research documenting relationship between activities parents engage in with their children and parents’ demographic factors and also teachers’ demographic factors and their report of the skills, abilities and experiences that the majority of the students demonstrate in classrooms. However, no studies have compared the effects of parents and teachers’ gender, age and level of education on child school readiness. The present research attempts to shed light on the contemporary school readiness challenges of first grade pupils in the city of Tehran.

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 four clusters of educational districts, the four 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 (a total of 36 teachers) and parents of their pupils in these schools (a total of 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 (from September 23, 2013 to June 22, 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. The information reveals that teachers participants were 22 females and 14 males, between 27 and 60 years (mean = 35.19) from 12 primary schools in Tehran City.
A total of 36 teachers rated the subjects, with an average of about 21 children per teacher (total children 756). The average experience of teachers was about ten years (ranging from 1 to 23). More than 65 percent of teachers are at ages 30 to 50 which show they are at the middle of their professional path. The majority of primary school teachers are female (60 percent) that is similar to many other countries. Most of teachers in the study had at least a Bachelor’s degree and 10 percent had a post-master’s professional diploma; however, approximately 20 percent no obtain proper educational certificates.

Parent participants were 512 females and 244 males, between 24 and 60 years (mean = 32.16). Also, on average there were about 21 parent participants from each class and totally 63 per each school participated in the study. Information shows that majority of parents are young (ages 24-30) which is natural to have a one or two child at primary school. The most parents were mothers may be because of their emotional relation with the child from one side and no job outside the home and being housewife from other side. Family demographics information of research participants reveals that more than 80 percent of families have one or two child; the majority of children are less than 15 years old which is natural with regards to Iran’s population structure; more than 80 percent of children live with their both fathers and mothers. From economical dimension and household yearly income, most of parents participated at the present research have average income and therefore are belong to middle class. Also, there is no difference on percentage of boys and girls at schools and from educational level of parents, majority of parents have some college degree and above although the level of fathers’ education is more compare to the mothers (59 and 56 percent).

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. The data for this study was collected in the fall of 2013 by the first author of paper and five young boys and girls including four who held bachelor in educational sciences, and a master’s student in educational management. The collectors of questionnaires were recognized as responsible, high achievers in their university programs, and were recommended by their teacher at the Department of Education in Payam Noor University, Tehran. The first author of paper trained the collectors of questionnaires in the completing style and the scoring rules before the beginning of data collection. After one week of data collection, a meeting was arranged in order to exchange information and experiences regarding testing and scoring procedures and to discuss the questions raised by the parents and teachers.

The procedure in this study included two phases: the translation and adaptation of the instruments, and the data collection. In phase one several activities were undertaken, according to the guideline suggested by Geisinger (1994). Two instruments including one School Readiness Questionnaire for Parent (SRQP) and one Student Readiness Questionnaire for Teacher (SRQT) were used to gather information for this study (Moore, 2002). The parent questionnaire (SRQP) covered five general areas: family demographics (eight items), child health (15 items), family and children’s activities (14 items; nine weekly and five monthly), household information (14) and parenting programs (three items). Also, teacher questionnaire (SRQP) was used to
gathers information about children’s skills, ability and experiences. The questionnaire covered two general areas: personal information (five items) and children’s skills, ability and experiences (15 items). All of the items of the SRQP and SRQT were first translated from English to Farsi by the third author of paper. Special attention was paid to reproduce reliable versions of these scales in Farsi. An attempt was made to write the translated items in simple sentences in order to ensure understanding. To check the validity of the translation, a panel was arranged to compare each item in the translated versions with the original items. The panel was directed by the first and third authors of paper and composed of three Iranian university teachers; three from the Department of Education and one from Department of Foreign Language, Lorestan University. The panel members were asked to discuss the validity of the translation on an item-by-item basis. The panel met three times to refine the changes to the wording and sentence expression of the items. In order to ensure the equivalent meanings of some of the concepts across both languages, a few items in each scale (a total of 15) were translated back to English by another native Farsi speaker who is proficient in both English and Farsi, and is unfamiliar with the scales. The procedure of validation of the translation resulted in the construction of a second draft of the scales in Farsi. After reviewing the validity of the translation, the panel members met again to check the fairness of the scales’ items for use in Iran. The researcher trained the collectors of questionnaires to review each scale on an item-by-item basis using the guideline suggested by Tittle (1982). Although some items were modified or adapted no items were eliminated from these scales. The item review resulted in the construction of a third draft of the Farsi version of the scales. Trial administrsations of the scales were conducted with ten parents and five teachers of first grade at one primary school in Tehran. From this pilot test, it was found that: first, the basal rule suggested in the scales can be applied to Iranian primary school children; and second, the time requirement for each scale may increase due to questions by the parents and teachers. It was also found that some minor changes in the format of the scales were necessary (i.e. in the spacing).

The SRQP and the SRQT were administered to parents and teachers. Parents who had a high school diploma or higher education degree completed the SRQP themselves. Subsequent to the parent questionnaire, the child’s teachers were asked to assess the child on the SRQT within a week. The researcher met and taught the teachers how to complete the questionnaire for each child and requested that they observe the student informally for three to three days before completing the scale. The SRQPs 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. The SRQP form requires about 20 minutes to complete by parents, while the SRQT form can be completed by a teacher and for each pupil within less than ten minutes. Concerning the reliability and validity of the instruments, the median internal consistency using Cronbach’s α for the SRQP was 0.90, and for the SRQT it was 0.84. The data were compiled and analyzed by the researchers using SPSS programs.
Results
To determine the relationship between parents and teachers’ demographic factors and their judgments about children activities and school readiness, the data were analyzed in two phases: 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 0.40 or higher were considered to comprise a factor and were interpreted in the solution (Tabachnick and Fidell, 1996). The solution converged easily and could be readily interpreted. Three factors were extracted, accounting for 52 percent of the variance. These three factors were named: hands-on activities, sports and games, and community-based activities. Table III shows the factor loadings for each of the items.

After determining the three main activities, scale reliabilities for these factors were calculated using Cronbach’s coefficient α. Reliability coefficient for hands-on activities is 0.86 which is high, for community activities is 0.81 and for sports and games activities is 0.73 which for both is at the medium level showing the acceptability of the reliability of questions for the research to be done (see Table IV).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor loadings</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hands-on activities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Read to child</td>
<td>0.95</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>0.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sing with child</td>
<td>0.64</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>0.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do art activities with child</td>
<td>0.83</td>
<td>0.29</td>
<td>0.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Help child do chores</td>
<td>0.89</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td>0.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talk about nature with child</td>
<td>0.60</td>
<td>0.20</td>
<td>0.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Build things with child</td>
<td>0.83</td>
<td>0.27</td>
<td>0.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Watch television, videos, or DVD’s with child</td>
<td>0.92</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>0.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community activities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attend a play, concert or live show</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.61</td>
<td>0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visit an art gallery, museum or historical site</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>0.72</td>
<td>0.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visit a zoo, aquarium or pet farm</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>0.84</td>
<td>0.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attend a Mosque or religious event</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>0.95</td>
<td>0.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sports and games</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Play games (board/card) with child</td>
<td>0.41</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>0.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Play sports with child</td>
<td>0.21</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>0.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attend a sporting event</td>
<td>−0.11</td>
<td>0.16</td>
<td>0.61</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: $n = 756$

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>$\alpha$ coefficient</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hands-on activities</td>
<td>0.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community activities</td>
<td>0.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sports and games</td>
<td>0.73</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: $n = 756$

Table III. Factor analysis of child activities

Table IV. $\alpha$ coefficients for parent-child activities factors
At the end of the first phase, and after determining three main factors concerning parents’ activities with their children – hands-on activities, sports and games, and community-based activities – in the second phase, a correlation analysis was conducted to examine to what extent parents’ ratings of child activities and teacher reports of children’s skills, ability and experience were correlated with their demographic factors: age, gender and level of education. The three activity factors identified in the factor analysis were the predictor variables (hands-on activities; community activities; 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). To determine the relationship between child’s school readiness and demographic factors, there were four research questions in the present study. The first question was: “To what extent are the frequencies of parent-child activities related to children’s gender.” Tables V and VI show the results.

Findings in Table IV show that the lowest average rate was for girls/sports-games activities (mean = 95.88) and the maximum average rate was for boys/community activities (mean = 106.60). The results of an ANOVA for gender differences in hands-on activities (sig. 0.02 < 0.05) and sports/games activities (sig. 0.03 < 0.05) showed that there was a significant difference between children with regards to their gender. The second demographic question was: “To what extent are the frequencies of parent-child activities related to parent’s gender and age factors.” Tables VII and VIII show the results.

Finding of Table VI shows that the lowest average rate was for fathers under 40 years/hands-on activities (mean = 11.58), and the maximum average rate was for mothers below 40 years (mean = 15). Results of an ANOVA for gender differences between parents in reporting parent-child activities showed significant difference in hands-on activities (sig. 0.04 < 0.05) but no differences in other activities with regards...
to parent’s age and gender. The third demographic question was: “To what extent are the frequencies of parent-child activities related to parents’ level of education?” Tables IX and X show the results.

Means and standard deviations for parents’ ratings of child activities by different levels of education and among mothers show that for hands-on activities the lowest mean was for mothers whose level of education was college (mean = 90.95), and the highest mean was for mothers with bachelor degrees (mean = 103.70). In contrast, for fathers, the lowest mean for hands-on activities was for those whose level of education was college (mean = 90.91), and the highest mean was for fathers with a master’s degree (mean = 103.76). Also, the findings showed that for community activities, the lowest mean was for mothers whose level of education was college (mean = 102.39), and the highest mean was for mothers with a master’s degree (mean = 109.65). In contrast, for fathers, the minimum mean for community activities was for those whose level of education was college (mean = 101.24) and the highest mean was for fathers with master’s degree (mean = 109.70). There was no difference between fathers and mothers in sports and games activities with regard to their level of education. The results of an ANOVA for educational level differences between parents in reporting parent-child activities showed significant differences in both hands-on and community activities but no difference in sports and games activities. The fourth demographic question was: “To what extent teachers’ judgments about frequencies of

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parent-child activity sub scale</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>$f$</th>
<th>$p$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hands-on activities</td>
<td>1,100</td>
<td>5.729</td>
<td>0.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community activities</td>
<td>1,065</td>
<td>3.126</td>
<td>0.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sports/games</td>
<td>1,113</td>
<td>4.386</td>
<td>0.88</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table VIII. ANOVA for gender differences in parent-child activity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of parent education</th>
<th>Female Mean SD</th>
<th>Female Mean SD</th>
<th>Male Mean SD</th>
<th>Male Mean SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High school and less</td>
<td>101.55 11.25 108.68 8.19</td>
<td>98.86 16.12 101.30 15.54</td>
<td>102.43 13.69 101.37 15.54</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some college</td>
<td>90.95 15.81 102.39 10.63</td>
<td>97.60 12.35 90.91 15.01</td>
<td>101.24 12.45 99.10 13.21</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BA or BS</td>
<td>103.70 13.88 108.04 8.07</td>
<td>98.26 13.88 103.66 12.11</td>
<td>106.22 8.33 98.00 13.91</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MA/MS and above</td>
<td>103.34 12.89 109.65 7.77</td>
<td>100.03 14.11 103.76 12.90</td>
<td>109.70 11.12 99.23 13.55</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table IX. Means and standard deviations for parents’ ratings of child activities by different education level groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parent-child activity sub scale</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>$f$</th>
<th>$p$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hands-on activities</td>
<td>3,172</td>
<td>8.074</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community activities</td>
<td>3,162</td>
<td>4.073</td>
<td>0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sports/games</td>
<td>3,157</td>
<td>0.591</td>
<td>0.62</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table X. ANOVA for difference by parents’ education level in parent-child activity sub scales
children’s skills, abilities and experience related to his/her gender, level of education and length of service?" Table XI shows the results.

The results of $\chi^2$ analysis for teachers reporting children skills depending on their gender, level of education and length of service indicated that:

1. there was a significant relationship between teachers’ gender and length of service experience in teachers reporting children’s good skills in language and communication;
2. there was a significant relationship between teachers’ gender and length of service experience in teachers reporting children’s physical health;
3. there was a significant relationship between teachers’ education degree and length of service experience in teachers reporting children’s signs of previous experiences with other children;
4. there was a significant relationship between teachers length of service experience in teachers reporting children separating easily from their parents or caregivers; and
5. there were no differences in teachers reporting other children’s skills according to teacher gender, level of education and length of service.

Conclusion
The purpose of the present study was to determine the relationship between children activities and school readiness and the demographic features of parents and teachers in primary schools in Tehran. In Iran, parents have the main responsibility for preparing their children for formal schooling. From an historical point of view, Iran’s revolutionary changes and the war with Iraq led to high birth rates and large family sizes in the first part of the 1980s. In recent decades, and since the Islamic Republic entered into an era of post-war reconstruction and sustained development, child and infant mortality rates have

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skill</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Level of education</th>
<th>Length of service</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Good language and communication</td>
<td>6.456  0.011*</td>
<td>7.465  0.058</td>
<td>0.137  0.00137*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive prior reading experiences</td>
<td>1.065  0.302</td>
<td>1.485  0.686</td>
<td>0.409  0.134</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Toilet trained</td>
<td>0.403  0.526</td>
<td>3.14  0.37</td>
<td>0.961  0.113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom listen and pay attention</td>
<td>0.572  0.45</td>
<td>3.831  0.28</td>
<td>7.968  0.437</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Follow directions and instructions</td>
<td>0.593  0.441</td>
<td>1.197  0.754</td>
<td>5.378  0.716</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good social skills</td>
<td>1.177  0.278</td>
<td>0.62  0.892</td>
<td>6.434  0.599</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sit still</td>
<td>1.865  0.179</td>
<td>0.174  0.982</td>
<td>8.046  0.429</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Possess basic knowledge</td>
<td>0.403  0.526</td>
<td>5.182  0.159</td>
<td>6.092  0.637</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Separate easily from their parents or caregivers</td>
<td>0.308  0.579</td>
<td>3.844  0.279</td>
<td>0.591  0.017*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exhibit, fine motor skills</td>
<td>1.955  0.162</td>
<td>2.929  0.403</td>
<td>6.454  0.597</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curiosity and an interest in learning</td>
<td>2.744  0.098</td>
<td>1.415  0.612</td>
<td>5.072  0.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Care for, or assist in caring for, themselves</td>
<td>1.792  0.181</td>
<td>0.627  0.702</td>
<td>3.563  0.894</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physically healthy</td>
<td>6.514  0.011*</td>
<td>1.814  0.891</td>
<td>0.301  0.027*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developmentally mature</td>
<td>1.747  0.387</td>
<td>2.407  0.492</td>
<td>4.739  0.785</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Signs of previous experiences with other children</td>
<td>0.003  0.957</td>
<td>8.555  0.036*</td>
<td>3.297  0.914</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table XI. $\chi^2$ analysis for teachers reporting children skills depending on their gender, level of education and length of service

Notes: Total no. 36 (female = 22; male = 14). $p < 0.05$. *Significant at 0.001 level
continued to decline, especially in rural areas where the government has expanded basic health services and provided better water facilities and other amenities. For more than three decades (1990-2010), the government had a strong policy of support for families to have fewer children. Currently, there are clear indications that the focus of most families is more on the quality of children than on the quantity. In addition, a strong emphasis on the education of children and the high cost of raising children has convinced parents to have fewer children. All these changes have made a very suitable social environment for the education of children and, especially, the expansion of early childhood education and the promotion of children’s school readiness. However, as in many developing countries, the demand for preschool education for Iranian children comes largely from families in which both parents work. Iran’s government accords relatively low priority to pre-primary education and school readiness in its spending. The mix of public and private providers and a lack of data make it difficult to calculate the total national expenditure for ECCE and the level of children’s school readiness. In addition, there is limited research on the topic of what parents do at home to help their children become ready for school in Iran. With regards to these facts, for the first time the present study has tried to examine relationship between children activities and school readiness and the demographic features of parents and teachers in primary schools in capital city of Tehran.

The finding of the present paper indicated that there is a significant difference between children with regards to their gender. According to the parents’ reports, the lowest average rate of activities was girls’/sports/games activities, whereas the highest average rate was boy/community activities. This finding support SeydAmery et al. (2011) in Iran and Jandrić (2010) and Van Sluijs et al. (2008) who revealed that playing games is a significant predictor of differences in physical activities between boys and girls and that boys spend more time playing games than girls do. In addition, the highest rate of boys’ social activities compared to the girls in Iran could be caused by some Iran’s cultural factors (Naghdi et al., 2011; Tavakoli, 2015).

The findings in relation to the research question concerning the effects of parents’ gender and age on ratings of child activities revealed that the lowest average rate was for fathers under 40 years/hands-on activities, and the highest average rate was for mothers under 40 years. In addition, the results of the ANOVA for gender differences among parents in reporting parent-child activities showed significant differences in hands-on activities but no differences in other activities. This finding is consistent with the reality of Iranian families in that fathers often have less opportunity to address their children’s need for social activities. As recently stated by Yao and Rhodes (2015) various studies have examined the moderating effect of parental gender in boys’ and girls’ physical activities, yet the finding have been unclear and speculative. For example, findings of research by Bauman et al. (2012), Sterdt et al. (2013) and Trost and Loprinzi (2011) do not support a link between child activities and parent activities, while present study support researchers who found a positive association for father-son physical activities (Beets et al., 2010; Biddle et al., 2005; Edwardson and Gorely, 2010).

In addition, the finding of study revealed significant differences in both hands-on and community activities and no difference in sports and games activities with regards to parent’s educational level. However, it seems that parents in higher education groups were more likely to participate in their children’s activities than were parents in lower education groups. The higher the fathers’ educational level, the greater the fathers’ involvement in children’s readiness activities. This finding support Campbell and Von Stauffenberg (2008), Flouri (2005), Pleck (2010) and Sarkadi et al. (2008) who found fathers’ involvement with their children linked with their higher educational achievement.
As Doyle et al. (2010) rightly have pointed out one potential explanation for differing teacher reports may be related to the level of teaching experience. For example, the expectations of less experienced teachers may differ from more experienced teachers who have observed multiple cohorts of children entering school. The present research indicated that the more experienced teachers have and the higher their educational level, the more able they are to recognize children’s abilities. This finding is contrast with Lin et al. (2003) who found that younger teachers compared to older teachers valued academic skills more highly in school readiness. However, more research is needed on how teachers’ beliefs about the diverse factors of school readiness relate to his/her gender and education level.

The present study has several strengths. First, the survey received a high response rate from both parents and teachers. Second, to the authors’ knowledge this is the first study comparing parent and teacher ratings of school readiness in Islamic Republic of Iran. Finally, the study highlights the need to consider effects of demographic variables on parents and teachers’ judgments in an educational context, in order to create a non-biased and holistic picture of children’s school readiness. Meanwhile, the current study was limited to parents’ and teachers’ reports on first grade pupils. More research is needed relating the types of activities that parents and children engage in. In addition, parents’ reports of school readiness activities in this study were at the individual level. It should be remembered that Iran is a multi-ethnic country with a considerable number of different ethnic and social groups. Therefore, the generalizability of the findings of this study to all Iranian preschoolers and their teachers and parents is limited. Conducting similar studies with samples from other regions of the country is recommended. However, school readiness assessments need to be reassessed with caution in Iran. 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. Some variables in further research as they relate to community events may include children's social skills, children sitting still, and children’s 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.

Note
1. For more information about development of school readiness in Iran, see Kakia et al. (2015).

References


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Further reading

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