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EXPLORING PRESCHOOL CHILDREN'S SCHOOL READINESS ABILITIES BASED ON PARENTAL EXPERIENCES IN GUI ZHOU, CHINA



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YOU CHAOYING

**SULTAN IDRIS EDUCATION UNIVERSITY
2021**



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**EXPLORING PRESCHOOL CHILDREN'S SCHOOL READINESS
ABILITIES BASED ON PARENTAL EXPERIENCES IN GUI ZHOU, CHINA**

YOU CHAOYING

**DISSERTATION TO QUALIFY FOR A MASTER'S DEGREE IN
EDUCATION
(EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION)
(RESEARCH AND COURSEWORK MODE)**

**FACULTY OF HUMAN DEVELOPMENT
SULTAN IDRIS EDUCATION UNIVERSITY
2021**

DECLARATION

I acknowledge that this work is my own work except for the excerpts and summaries of which I have explained the source.

Dis.2021

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research was based on parental experiences to explore preschool children's school readiness abilities. Parents' experiences play a crucial role in helping preschool children smooth the transition from preschool to elementary school. This research aims to determine that in preschool-home, i) parental experiences in cultivating preschool children's school readiness abilities and (ii) strategies for cultivating school readiness abilities. This research was qualitative. Data were collected through triangulation, including interviews, observations, and document analysis. Three university teachers were purposive sampling as respondents from one province in southwest China. Observations on three preschoolers who are all 6 years old are children of three respondents, and their respective teacher's milestones records of the three preschoolers' development, learning, and playing were analyzed. At the same time, three children's performance at home was observed, and their homework was analyzed via the researcher. Duration two months, interviews and observations were conducted twice. The study results revealed that the following nine aspects are beneficial for the school readiness of preschool children, that is, learning ability; reading ability; self-care ability; to respect and accompany children; parental education level; participation in the training of the elementary school-related courses; based on children's interests; complete use of surrounding resources; and game as the elementary way. However, previous research results show three different aspects, the literacy rate is unnecessary for school readiness; preschool children lack self-care ability after entering elementary school, and it is forbidden to teach the elementary school courses knowledge in advance. The implication of learning environmental, development, and physiological factors are more effective and beneficial for preschool children's school readiness, hoping to help parents, preschools, elementary schools, and education departments. Despite this, for preschooler's school readiness, cultivate preschoolers' necessary abilities and good habits, parents are the key and require the active cooperation of preschools and elementary schools to promote preschool children's smooth transition for preschooler children enrolling in elementary school.



MENEROKA KEUPAYAAN KESEDIAAN KE SEKOLAH KANAK-KANAK PRASEKOLAH BERDASARKAN PENGALAMAN IBU BAPA DI GUI ZHOU, CHINA

ABSTRAK

Tujuan kajian ini adalah meneroka keupayaan kesediaan ke sekolah kanak-kanak prasekolah berdasarkan pengalaman ibu bapa. Pengalaman ibu bapa memainkan peranan penting dalam membantu melancarkan peralihan kanak-kanak prasekolah dari prasekolah ke sekolah rendah. Matlamat kajian ini adalah menentukan bahawa di prasekolah-rumah i) pengalaman ibu bapa dalam memupuk keupayaan kesediaan ke sekolah kanak-kanak prasekolah dan ii) strategi-strategi untuk memupuk keupayaan kesediaan ke sekolah. Kajian ini adalah kualitatif. Data telah dikumpul secara triangulasi, ia termasuk temu bual, pemerhatian, dan analisis dokumen. Tiga pengajar universiti dari sebuah wilayah di barat daya China dijadikan responden persampelan bertujuan. Pemerhatian ke atas tiga kanak-kanak prasekolah berusia 6 tahun yang merupakan anak-anak kepada ketiga-tiga respondent, dan rekod pencapaian oleh guru masing-masing ke atas perkembangan, pembelajaran dan permainan kanak-kanak prasekolah tersebut telah di analisis. Pada masa yang sama, prestasi ketiga-tiga kanak-kanak tersebut di rumah telah diperhatikan, dan kerja rumah mereka telah dianalisis menerusi penyelidikan. Dalam tempoh dua bulan, temu bual dan pemerhatian dijalankan sebanyak dua kali. Keputusan kajian menunjukkan bahawa sembilan aspek berikut adalah bermanfaat untuk kesediaan ke sekolah kanak-kanak prasekolah, iaitu, keupayaan pembelajaran; keupayaan membaca; keupayaan penjagaan diri; untuk menghormati dan mendampingi kanak-kanak; tahap pendidikan ibu bapa; penglibatan dalam latihan kursus berkaitan sekolah rendah; berasaskan minat kanak-kanak; penggunaan penuh sumber persekitaran; dan permainan sebagai kaedah permulaan. Akan tetapi, dapatan kajian terdahulu menunjukkan tiga aspek berbeza, kadar celik huruf tidak perlu sebagai kesediaan ke sekolah, kanak-kanak prasekolah kurang keupayaan penjagaan diri selepas memasuki sekolah rendah, dan adalah dilarang untuk mengajar subjek pengetahuan sekolah rendah terlebih dahulu. Implikasi persekitaran pembelajaran, kemajuan, dan faktor psikologi adalah lebih berkesan dan bermanfaat untuk kesediaan ke sekolah kanak-kanak prasekolah, dengan harapan dapat membantu ibu bapa, prasekolah, sekolah rendah, dan jabatan pendidikan. Walaupun demikian, untuk kesediaan ke sekolah kanak-kanak prasekolah, memupuk keupayaan yang diperlukan dan tabiat baik kanak-kanak prasekolah, ibu bapa merupakan kuncinya dan memerlukan kerjasama aktif diantara prasekolah dan sekolah rendah bagi menggalakkan peralihan lancar kanak-kanak prasekolah untuk memasuki kanak-kanak prasekolah ke sekolah rendah.



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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Preface

In the past decade, the nature of preschool and kindergarten has changed. Kindergarten and the preschool is no longer the former children's garden, dedicated primarily to exploration and play (Bassok, Latham, & Rorem, 2016). The pressure on examinations and accountability measures from elementary schools is increasing, have trickled down into preschool and kindergarten, arouse the thinking of children's school readiness among teachers, parents, and policymakers. Children's skills and development are strongly influenced by their families and their interactions with other people and environments before elementary school (Maxwell & Clifford, 2004). If a child is not ready for this transition, or it does not go well, this will create obstructions to their own as well as others learning (Tickell, 2011). When children enter primary

school, the most important thing is that the child should adapt to the system learning. The learning form is no longer the emphasis on the game and the fun, and will gradually transition to thinking and rigor. Schools, parents, and educators try to figure out how to prepare students best to transition to elementary school (Bassok, Latham, & Rorem, 2016). However, the term has often been interpreted to mean that students are academically prepared for first grade (Woolmington, 2017). Many more states are debating how to offer high-quality preschool to best support student development and learning preparation for first grade (Bassok, Latham, & Rorem, 2016). According to Unicef (2012) agrees with school readiness, namely, a good start in life, in a nurturing and safe environment that enables children to survive and be physically healthy, mentally alert, emotionally secure, socially competent, and learn. Ministry of Education China (2012) also refers to pay attention to the integrity of children's learning and development. The development of children is a whole. It is necessary to pay attention to the mutual penetration and integration between fields and goals, and promote the comprehensive and coordinated development of children's body and mind, instead of the one-sided pursuit of one or several aspects of development.

However, in real life, due to the influence of some factors, children's parents have different perceptions of this issue. Although scholars have conducted various studies on school readiness, most of them are discussed in terms of schools, teachers, family environment, and making subjective suggestions to parents. There is still no consensus regarding based on parental experiences to explore preschool children's

school readiness abilities to help preschool children transition smoothly from preschool to elementary school education better.

Therefore, the current research is to determine parental experiences in cultivating preschool children's school readiness abilities, and what are strategies to cultivate preschool children's school readiness abilities? Then, around the above two aspects, to conduct more systematic analysis and discussion. The study was organized as follows: an introduction, background research, problem statement, purpose of the study, objective of the study, research questions, theoretical framework and conceptual framework of the research, the operational definition, limitations, importance, and summary.

1.2 Background Research

Preschools should work closely with families and communities, link up with elementary schools, make extensive use of various educational resources, and jointly create the right conditions for the development of preschool children. Families are essential partners in preschools. They should strive for parental understanding, support, and active participation on the principles of respect, equality, and cooperation, and actively support and help parents improve their scholastic ability (Ministry of Education China, 2012). School readiness is not only the responsibility of preschools, but the family also has the responsibility and obligation to do functional school readiness for preschool children. Family factors are most often cited as influencing children's school readiness (McWayne, Hahs-Vaughn, Cheung, & Wright, 2012).

According to Gredler (2000), school readiness is what preschoolers need to have to benefit from the upcoming formal school education various key characteristics or fundamental conditions of the school. School readiness means the expectation of the development level that children should reach when they enter the school or the level and state of physical and mental development that can adapt to the new learning environment and task requirements (Liu, 2006).

However, not all children are prepared to adapt to the role of first-grade students before entering elementary school. About 15% to 36% of preschool children do not meet the overall developmental level required for admission (Zheng, 2019). Because of these children's lack of sufficient school readiness skills, when the child enters elementary school will create some gaps with other children, such as lack of interest in learning and unable to concentrate on learning (Lv, 2016). Parents should understand children's learning ways and characteristics and attach importance to children's learning quality. To help children gradually develop the learning qualities of being proactive, conscientious, not afraid of difficulties, independent, and confident (Ministry of Education China, 2016). Also, Insist on two-way convergence. Strengthen the sense of convergence, preschools and elementary schools coordinate and cooperate, scientifically prepare for school and adjust to school, and promote the smooth transition of children (Ministry of Education China, 2021).

It is essential to understand what parents think about what constitutes school readiness because parents are usually their children's first teacher (Unicef, 2012). Parents are likely to develop skills and impart knowledge that they consider essential while paying little attention to abilities that they deem unimportant (Barbarin, Early,

Clifford, Bryant, Frome & Burchinal, 2008). The vast majority of parents have never realized the importance of cultivating the critical abilities and habits of preschool children to school readiness. Ma (2019) emphasizes half of the parents of preschool children surveyed said that developing school readiness abilities is not essential, while children's happiness is essential. At the beginning of elementary school, when the children just graduated from the preschool, especially for first-year students, they are full of curiosity about the new environment around them. They have a specific desire to explore and learn, but due to the lack of school readiness abilities, most preschool children don't adapt to elementary schools education.

Whether parental experiences and opinions of school readiness related to parent behaviors in engaging their children in activities that promote school readiness?

It was predicted that there would be a positive correlation between the two, which means that the more parents think skill is essential, the more likely they are to involve their children in activities that improve these skills (Baldwin, 2011). Therefore, parental experiences and opinions of school readiness affect their behavior and interaction with their children, which directly or indirectly affects children's overall willingness to enter school. Like many of our regular practices, our beliefs, attitudes, and opinions affect our choices and actions. Also, to establish an effective families-preschools- elementary schools coordination and communication mechanism, and help parents recognize the harm that includes excessively strengthened knowledge preparation and study the course of elementary schools in advance. To relieve the pressure and anxiety of parents, create a good family education atmosphere, and actively cooperate with preschools and elementary schools to make a good connection (Ministry of Education China, 2021).



1.3 Problem Statement

At the beginning of elementary school education, children cannot concentrate for a long time, cannot deal with problems independently, and are challenging to get along with classmates (Liao, 2007; Lu, 2013). When a 6-year-old child appears to be unable to write simple letters or make simple calculations, parents will be angry and worry about their children's lack of preschool children's school readiness (Ma, 2019). One study found that many children cannot prepare for entering elementary school, and health, emotion, and cognitive development are backward (He, 2016). Parents believe that the teacher should be solely responsible for the education of the children, and what parents didn't need to do or perform their duties well (Li, 2012). Parents lack experiences in school readiness. They want to participate in the child's transition to the elementary school and hope to get information about school readiness (Melton, 2013). Preschools education are the foundation of elementary schools education. The smooth transition from the preschool to the elementary school is a vital part of the growth of preschool children (Ministry of Education China, 2016). Parents with experience of school readiness are crucial, which can help their child adapt to elementary school learning as soon as possible.

Regarding the school readiness of preschool children, whether they are paid attention to in the family depends mainly on the importance that parents regard this matter. They will measure and position it in their value system and respond appropriately (Zhou, 2015). Parents are likely to develop skills and impart knowledge that they consider essential while paying little attention to abilities that they deem unimportant (Barbarin et al., 2008). Some parents think that preschool teachers can





develop their preschool children's school readiness abilities; parents do not need to cultivate deliberately. In this regard, Ma (2019) argues that half of the parents of preschool children surveyed said that developing school readiness abilities is not essential, while children's happiness is essential. However, other parents ignore the cultivation of children's learning habits and interest in learning and only pay attention to whether children understand textbooks (Xu, 2015). It is the same as comprehensively organize educational content in the fields of health, language, society, science, and art (Ministry of Education China, 2016) is contrary to this.

Certain factors have been shown to contribute to some children being less school readiness than others. Such as, parents have not received higher education, low socioeconomic status (He, 2016). Children of mothers without a higher level of education perform poorly in school (Bornstein, 2010). The growth of children is closely related to the education level of their parents (Li, 2012). Parents with backward educational concepts lack the experience to cultivate preschoolers' school readiness skills (Lv, 2016). Parents lack the necessary education knowledge, they cannot understand the problem that children may encounter during the preparation stage of enrollment, and cannot solve it (Lu, 2013). Also, the low use rate of learning resources in the family is significantly negatively correlated with children's school readiness abilities. The fewer children use learning tools, the more lack of school preparation ability (Xue, 2011). Although following the laws of children's physical and mental development, Take games as the primary activity, and integrate education into various activities (Ministry of Education China, 2016), many parents did not follow the above educational ways to cultivate preschoolers' school readiness abilities. Thus, low education levels of parents, insufficient use rate of learning resources in the



family, and lack of educational ways using games will have a negative impact on how to cultivate preschoolers' school readiness skills.

1.4 Purpose of the Study

The preschooler period is a critical period for the formation of social behaviors and abilities of preschool children. The smooth transition from preschool to elementary school is a vital part of the growth of preschool children. Parents are an essential factor that affects the transition from preschool children to elementary school. The purpose of the current study is based on parental experiences to explore preschoolers' school readiness abilities. To help preschool children to smoothly pass the transition stage between preschools education and elementary schools education, to ensure the physical and mental health and comprehensive development of preschoolers, and to help better preschoolers do school readiness. How parents defined school readiness, that is what abilities were essential for a child to possess to begin the elementary school and be successful. To analyze and explore the following two aspects, namely, to determine parental experiences in cultivating preschool children's school readiness, abilities ; to determine to cultivate preschool children's school readiness abilities strategies.

1.5 Objective of the Study

The following are the objectives of this study:

- 1) To determine parental experiences in cultivating preschool children's school readiness abilities during preschool- home..
- 2) To determine to cultivate strategies of preschool children's school readiness abilities during preschool- home..

1.6 Research Questions

Based on the objective of the study, the study sets out to address the following research questions:

- 1) What are parental experiences in cultivating preschool children's school readiness abilities during preschool- home.?
- 2) What are strategies to cultivate preschool children's school readiness abilities during preschool- home.?

1.7 Theoretical Framework of Research

Cognitive Development Theory of Piaget believes that children have excellent cognitive abilities. There are four different cognitive development stages. For the four cognitive development stages of children, each step is unique, representing the



characteristics of an age stage. Each Cognitive Development stage represents the transition from lower to higher stages (Piaget, 1964; Wadsworth, 1989). School readiness skills are considered to be cumulative in that there exists a hierarchy of achievement based on mastering earlier goals, i.e., they build on more first learned skills and behaviors. In other words, advanced skills make upon the mastery of former skills (Unicef, 2012), which means that parents should gradually develop children's school readiness skills by step to step, rather than more haste, less speed.

The Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) refers to when determining the level of child development, two levels of child development must be considered. One is the child's current development level. The other is the level that can be achieved with the help of an adult under guidance. The gap between the two, that is, the difference between the child's current level and the higher level that can be reached through the help of others, is ZPD (Vygotsky, 1978). Besides, Van der Veer (2007) also shows Vygotsky's ZPD theory agrees to complete tasks independently under the guidance and support of an adult. Hence, to cultivate the independence of preschool children, parental guidance and encouragement are essential.

Bronfenbrenner Ecological Systems divides relationships into four interacting environmental systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Because different environments will have different affordances and will be responded to in different ways by other individuals, experienced and objectively defined environments will not be randomly distributed about the developmental processes and the individuals one observes within them (Darling, 2007). Liu and Meng (2009) also found the adolescent was implicitly modeled as a passive agent influenced by parents and peers. Therefore, when the



interaction between children and adults is perfect, once established and often occurs, it will have a lasting effect on the development of children.

The theoretical framework of research is shown in Figure 1.1, parents formed scientific parenting perceptions via the above three theories to better cultivate preschoolers' school readiness abilities and to help preschool children's smooth transition from preschools to elementary schools education.

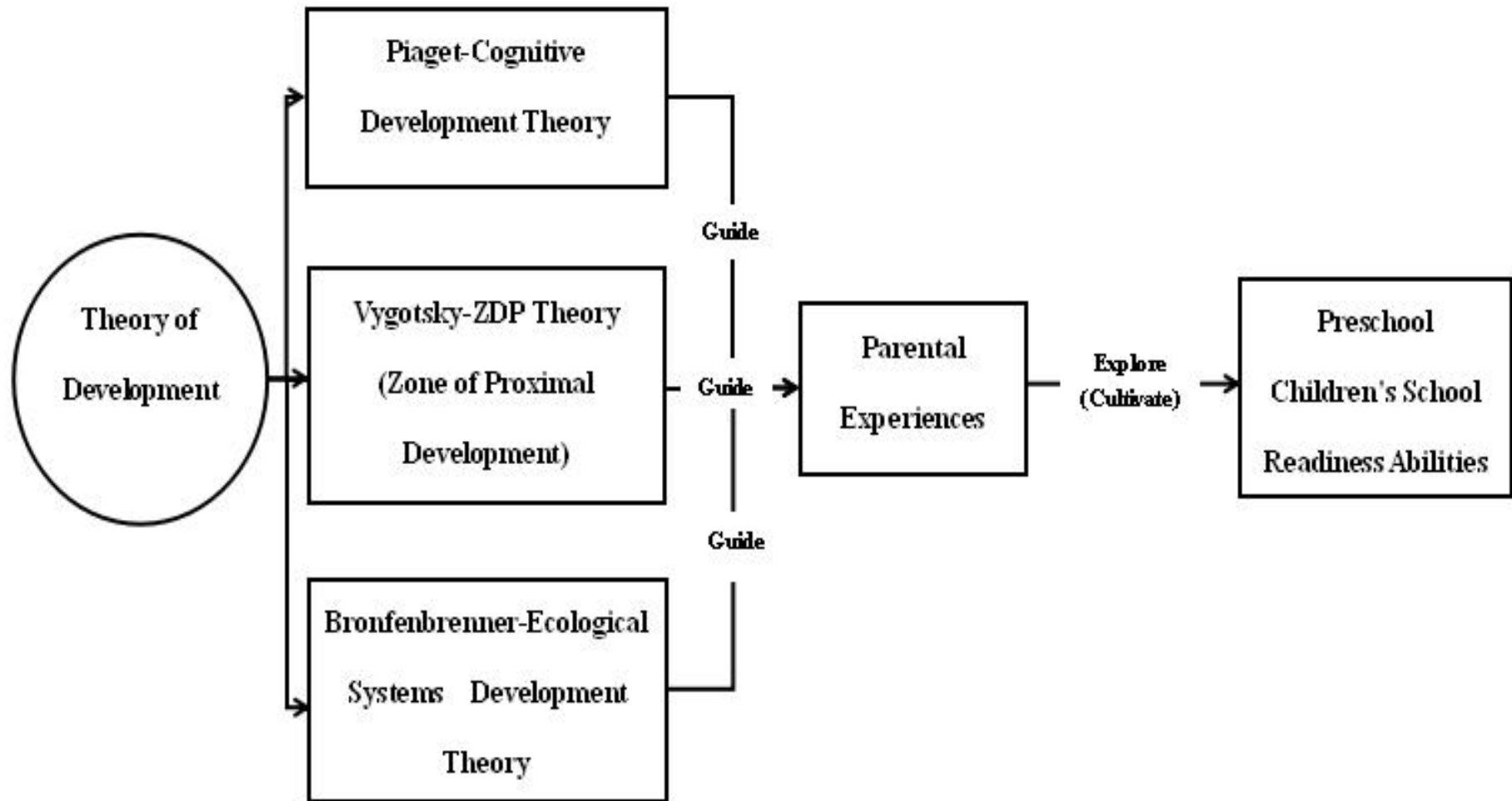


Figure 1. 1 Theoretical Framework of Research

1.8 Conceptual Framework of Research

The three children development theories are the Cognitive Development Theory of Piaget, Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development, and Bronfenbrenner Ecological Systems Development Theory. They can guide parental experiences to form a scientific concept of parenting to cultivate preschool children's school readiness abilities better. In this process, this study uses qualitative research methods and conducted in-depth interviews, observations, and document analysis via case studies. Then, effectively analyze all materials. The ultimate purpose is parental experiences will play a crucial role in cultivating preschool children's school readiness abilities (as shown in Figure 1.2

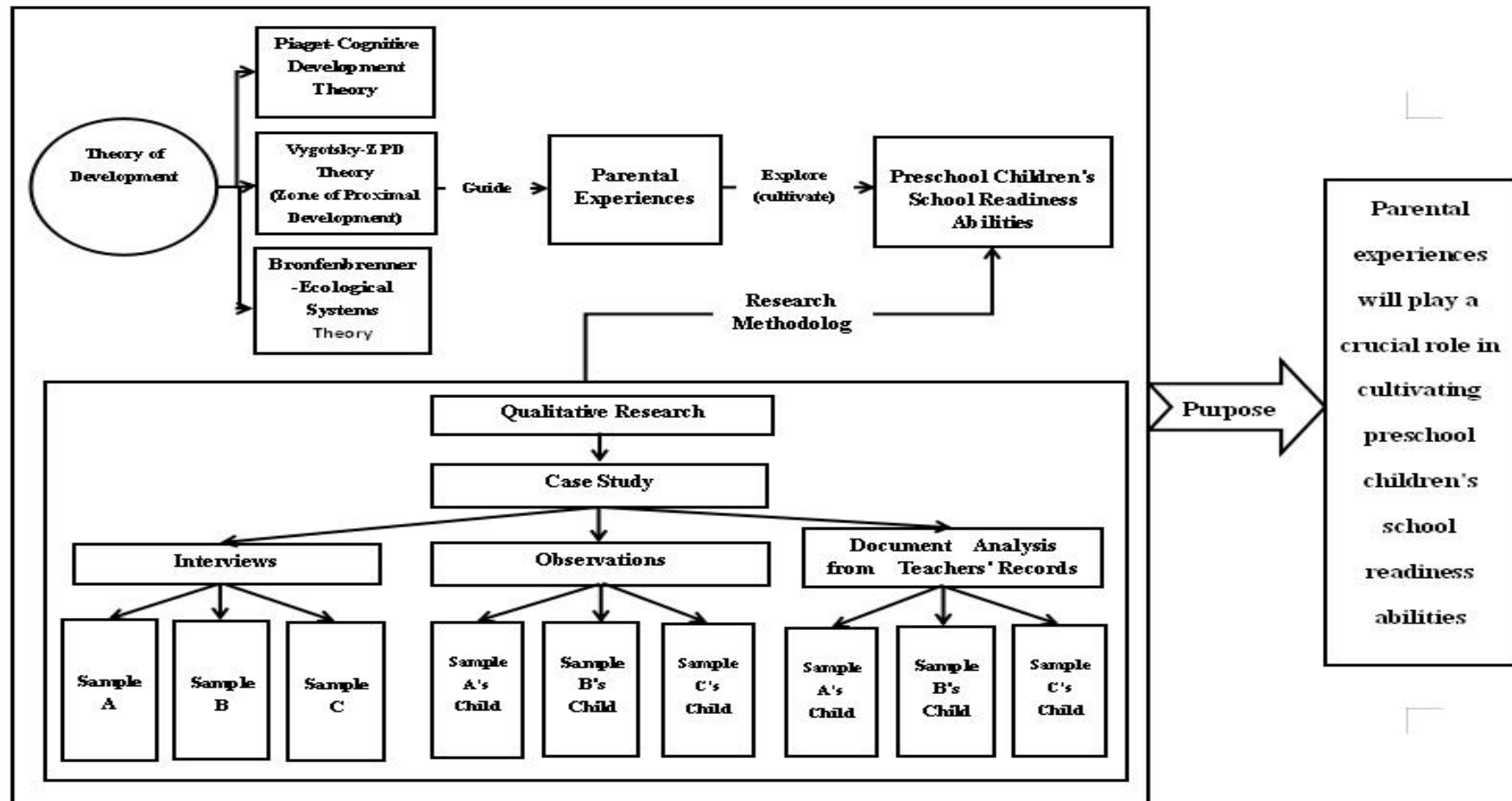


Figure 1. 2 Conceptual Framework of Research

1.9 Operational Definition

The section presents the definition of some of the terms used throughout this study.

1.9.1 Preschool Children

Children develop at vastly different rates, with some more ready for formal school at age five than others. Variance in their experiences and the level of support gained from their families are influential, as are children's natural differences, including any special educational needs (Peckham, 2017, p. 35). Similarly, in China, Ministry of Education (2011, p. 14) emphasizes accelerating the development of preschool education for children aged 3-6, cultivating various abilities suitable for preschool children, and establish reasonable expectations for early childhood development. We are encouraging social forces to organize preschools in multiple forms and strengthening preschools education supervision and management. In this research context, preschoolers refer to preschool children aged six years.

1.9.2 School Readiness Abilities

School readiness should be more broadly defined as developing the mental capacities and skills needed to engage in complex learning processes. It is a product of the interaction between the child and the range of environmental and cultural experiences that maximize the development outcomes for children (Unicef, 2012). Ministry of

Education China (2012) describes the learning and development of children aged 3-6 from five areas of health, language, society, science, and art. Despite this, Peckham (2017) also found that school readiness abilities include: first, a culmination of all of the essential social, emotional, cognitive, and autonomy building competencies that have been developed during the child's early years. Next, school readiness skills that will enable children to adapt to the requirements of school, the acquisition of the skills needed to ensure that children can progress when starting formal schooling, including achievements in speech, concentration, memory, and social conduct, and to respond appropriately to requests from teachers. Similarly, in China, the Ministry of Education (2016) also claims, follow the laws of children's physical and mental development, conform to the characteristics of children's age, comprehensively organize educational content in the fields of health, language, society, science, and art, infiltrate the activities of children's daily life.

Based on the above viewpoints, in this study, school readiness abilities emphasize the development of the following aspects, namely, cognitive ability, learning ability, emotional expression and social ability, verbal ability, physical health.

1.9.3 Parental Experiences

It is essential to understand parents think about what constitutes school preparation because parents are usually their children's first teachers. Parents' education goals for their children and their beliefs, attitudes, and commitment to education are considered to be crucial for school success (Unicef, 2012). Ministry of Education (2012)



emphasizes that teachers and parents should pay attention to the integrity of children's learning and development, respect individual differences in children's development, and understand children's learning methods and characteristics. According to Peckham (2017), warm, supportive parenting and happy parent-child companionship are shown to children aged 5-6 will be more confident because children are feeling supported and treasured, a sense of security and well-being is cultivated. As school beckons, it is this security that allows children to engage head-on with the challenges ahead. Besides, the healthy growth of children is closely linked to the education level of their parents (Li, 2012).

As mentioned above, in this study, parental experiences regard to school readiness mainly includes the following: whether parents attach critical to cultivating school readiness abilities; whether they respect children's physical and mental development laws; whether to give children close companionship; whether parents have received a higher level of education.

1.10 Study Limitations

The study will be of some limitations. Due to regional restrictions, the three samples of the research are from teachers in three universities in one province in southwest China. The small sample size limits to understand that other regions' parental experiences toward cultivating preschoolers' school readiness.



1.11 Importance of Research

As more and more preschool children have difficulties in adapting to elementary schools education, the school readiness of preschool children has gradually attracted the attention of teachers and parents. At present, the research on school readiness is mostly discussed from the aspects of the school, teachers, preschools, families, and related researchers make subjective suggestions to parents. At the same time, it lacks that from the experiences of parents to study the issue of school readiness. Parents are the first teachers for children's growth if parents realize that their experiences play an essential role in cultivating children's school readiness abilities, which will promote the excellent performance of children in school.

1.12 Summary

The first chapter elaborates on the research preface and background and the related issues of school readiness. The results of various studies indicate that family is the first environment for children to grow, and parents are the first teachers for children to grow up. The preschool period is a critical period for the formation of social behaviors and abilities of preschool children. At the same time, parents are an essential factor that affects the transition from preschool children to elementary school. Thus, parental experiences are significant for cultivating children's school readiness abilities. Children whose parents took an active interest in their education exhibited more effort in school, had higher concentration, and paid more attention in class. Students were also more intrinsically motivated to learn, took greater

responsibility for their learning, and exhibited a higher perceived competence. If parents form scientific perceptions about the cultivating of preschool children's school readiness abilities, it will help preschoolers smooth transition from preschools to elementary schools education. Therefore, this study sets out to explore preschoolers' school readiness abilities based on parental experiences.