Readiness
A Review

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Abstract

Readiness is not just a single trait, it encompasses various skills and competencies, presence of which needs to be ensured for appropriate placement of a child. Various educationists have tried to give certain dimensions to this concept. The domains of readiness as identified in various studies conducted in this area are cognitive, social, emotional, motor and language. In addition to these domains, the related factors need to be taken into account while addressing the concept of readiness.

Literature review reveals different perspectives and different dimensions in this regard, namely concept of readiness and its domains, factors affecting readiness, class and school readiness, readiness tests and programme-evaluative studies. The present paper reviews the literature on readiness in Indian as well as global context and intends to explain different perspectives in its understanding.

Various gaps have been identified in this area, be it the identification and classification of characteristics leading to the accurate, specific and functional definition of the concept of readiness or be it the readiness assessment and programme designing. These gaps need to be addressed in order to cater to the readiness requirements of a child.

INTRODUCTION

No matter how many times the child attempts a skill, no matter how many times it is explained or spotted, challenging a child with skills they are not yet ready to perform correctly is setting the child upto fail.

—Jeff Lulla

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Education plays a vital role in a person's life. Educational reforms have always been point of concern for our government as well as educationists. School is a place where the personality of a child is built-up and shaped in order to face the challenges of life and outside world and ultimately to be a responsible citizen. A child enters into formal education system at around 3.5 or 4 years of age and spends around 15 to 18 years of their life in this system transiting from one stage to another. This transition ranges from pre-primary through secondary to senior secondary to graduation and so on. During each transition stage the child needs some sort of scaffolding or may be just a spur in order to make this transition smooth and more natural. The child needs to be ready to enter the system and be ready to move across the system. A readiness programme can really help. Several countries have a formal school readiness programme aiming at readying the child to enter the school already equipped to face the challenges that might be presented by the new environment. This state is a stage where parents, schools, teachers and policy makers have to give more attention and importance.

Every time a child transits from one stage to another or one level to another, they need some bridge connecting and facilitating this transition. The ultimate purpose of such bridge or a programme would be creating readiness among the students. This would contribute towards not only improving the learning outcomes but also ensuring quality in access to education.

This can be an area of interest for academicians, teachers, policy-makers and researchers as to check the effectiveness of such programmes, the purpose that these programmes are serving with, the extent to which it is successful in creating readiness, the modification required in such programmes, what else should be there in order to achieve the objectives, etc.

Several studies have been conducted in India and abroad in this area. A good amount of studies have been conducted on school readiness, college readiness and reading readiness. The present paper intends to review the studies conducted under various sub-areas of readiness. This will add to the knowledge of the concept and identify the gaps in this area.

Based on previous studies conducted by various educationists (Amod, Z. and Heafield, D., 2013; Carlton, M.P. and Winsler, A., 1999) and organisations (UNICEF, 2012), the whole concept of readiness comprises different areas like class readiness, school readiness, readiness tests and readiness programmes— evaluative studies, in order to cover all the aspects of the concept. In the light of the above aspects, the present paper reviews the literature on readiness in Indian as well as global context. It

aims to explain different perspectives in understanding of the concept.

READINESS — GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE

Readiness has been defined variedly by various academicians and organisations involving a wide range of skills and competencies. Broadly, the concept explains how well a child is prepared to succeed in school physically, socially, cognitively and emotionally. UNICEF's (2012) module on 'School Readiness and Transitions' defines readiness in terms of three interlinked dimensions — (a) Ready Children, (b) Ready Families and (c) Ready Schools.

For ensuring a smooth transition from preschool to primary school, The National Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Curriculum Framework (2013) developed by the Ministry of Women and Child Development (MWCD), also defined 'school readiness' as "making children ready, the school ready and the family ready to ensure required skills and competencies in children in all domains of development".

Powell, P.J. (2010) in the article The messiness of readiness puts up readiness as something which holds different meaning for different people. The idea of readiness would be different for teachers, parents and paediatricians. Then, whose idea shall be taken as central. Usually, age-graded systems are used in school education which itself is actually having a whole one year span. This whole one year can have children

varying from being over-aged, small-aged and having a myriad of social and emotional differences. Even if the schools have a specific readiness index still there is a wide variety of students on that index. A range of abilities might be there. Children are deemed ready to enter school through various assessments, analysis and observations. Yet uniformity in terms of readiness is not possible in age-graded system.

Powell (2010) talks about ready schools. Such schools believe in the philosophy that every child is at a different point at different times and all children will learn. Ready schools believe that one size does not fit all.

In the article *The Importance of Developing Learning Readiness prior to Teaching New Movement Skills to Kids*, Jeff Lulla (2015) talks about the importance of developing learning readiness prior to teaching new movement skills to kids. It emphasises that the child should possess the necessary reading components in order to achieve success. These necessary components are enlisted below —

- Learning Readiness
- Physical Readiness
- Mental Readiness
- Emotional Readiness
- Social Readiness

This article lays emphasis on creating readiness in order to create successful learning experience for children.

UNICEF's child friendly schools manual *School Readiness and Transitions*, a module written by Pia Rebello Britto, aims at providing guidance to policy makers, educators, programme professionals and practitioners. It promotes a holistic approach towards early learning and development. The module raises three crucial questions—

1. Are children entering school with the social and cognitive skills and competencies needed to achieve success in school?

2. Are schools equipped and ready to provide optimal learning environments for children?

3. Are families and communities ready to help their children make smooth transitions to school?

All these studies emphasise the importance of family and school in promoting children's holistic development and learning. In fact, all three dimensions, i.e. child, school and family are interlinked. The study conducted by Powell (2010) puts up a new dimension in the field of readiness by asserting that instead of expecting readiness from children, schools should ready themselves for catering to the needs of children. Another important aspect to consider is the wide range of abilities among students.

DOMAINS OF READINESS

There seems to be a consensus between the various studies and reports framed from time to time across a long timeline. They claim some common domains to constitute the readiness of a child. Some studies have considered cognitive domain while defining and assessing readiness, while others included social and emotional aspects.

Kagan, S. (1992) claims that readiness consists of five essential and integrated domains i.e. physical well-being and motor development, social and emotional development, approaches towards learning, cognitive and general knowledge and language usage. Kagan talks of a more refined construct which bears the strengths of both chronological approaches as well as maturationist approach. While using chronological approach at entry stage we can ensure the equitability and clear determination of child's age at any point of time while, maturationist approach helps in conforming to the needs of the individual child. This can be done by listening to the child be it their verbal expression or be it their physical expression.

US National Education Goals Panel in their document *Reconsidering Children's Early Development and Learning: Toward Common Views and Vocabulary* (1995) identified and defined five domains of school readiness to be language and literacy, cognition and general knowledge, approach towards learning, physical well-being and motor development, and social and emotional development.

Sujata Missal (2012) used five domains namely — physical health and well-being, social competence, emotional maturity, language and cognitive development, communication and general knowledge, to determine the school readiness of children.

All these domains focus on certain skill areas and skill sets pertaining to the different aspects of a child's behaviour and life. Also, they put forth that any readiness programme or initiative shall focus and include on all these domains so as to be comprehensive and complete in its approach. However, Kagan had broadened the concept of readiness by spreading it from measurement to implementation, from family to schools to community.

Factors Affecting Readiness

When it comes to factors affecting readiness, again there seems to be no consensus in the studies conducted in this area. On the basis of the literature review, following factors have been identified as the factors affecting readiness—

• Genetics
• Environment
• Emotional Maturity
• Socio-economic Status
• Cultural Context
• Social
• Policy perspectives

High (2008) puts child's readiness for school, school's readiness for child and family and community's ability to support healthy child development, as the important factors affecting school readiness.

Jean-Pascal Lemelin, et al. (2007) examined the contribution of genetics and environment towards individual differences in terms of four components of cognitive school readiness i.e. cognitive, language, motor and socio-emotional component; general ability under these four components; and relation between school readiness and achievement. The results show that genetic effects are more important to develop the core abilities of school readiness while the environment is the major factor in overall school readiness. The study contributes to the knowledge that genetics and environment can be the early determinants of school readiness.

Bhise and Sonawat (2016) enlisted the factors like cognitive readiness, early language skills, print awareness, social-economic status, maternal education, pre-school experiences, curriculum planning and teacher experiences as factors influencing school readiness of a child.

UNICEF's child friendly schools manual says that the readiness is influenced by various factors involving cultural, economic, social, policy and historic factors. These factors influence how schools, families and children interact.

A wide range of factors have been included by various studies, in the list of the factors affecting readiness.

The literature highlights the importance of language awareness, pre- numeracy skills, and social skills for successful entry to school. Here, early childhood experiences and pre-primary education are recognised as having significant impact on children's school readiness. Though socio-economic status of family is a major factor in providing stimulatory experiences, education of mother can compensate it by being more responsive and utilising available resources. This focuses the crucial role of family in developing children's readiness for school.

CLASS READINESS AND SCHOOL READINESS

While talking about readiness the three aspects assessment, monitoring and evaluation, as are put-up by UNICEF's child friendly schools manual, should be included. Any readiness programme should be able to answer—

- Whether teachers are prepared to meet-up the needs of students?
- To what extent schools and teachers seek and encourage student participation during classroom interaction?
- Whether adequate and environmentally sustainable resources are available?

Mistry, Parekh and Mankodi (1985) from M.S. University, Baroda developed a comprehensive School Readiness Programme (SRP). It aimed at creating a bridge between pre-primary and primary stage by offering a readiness programme. Also, Soni (1996), NCERT, developed a school readiness programme aiming at reducing the drop-out rate at primary level. Though these programmes arecapable in ensuring school readiness among children, but with the changing times they arefound to be less relevant. The curriculum at the pre-primary stage has been modified since then. Also, there is so much disparity in the curriculum being followed by the different schools. In addition to this, even the types of schools also add-up to this diversity at pre-primary stage offering less structured curriculum which is the requisite component of school readiness.

Further, NCERT developed school readiness programme, 'Little Steps' (Soni, 2005) and launched the books *Readiness Activities for the Beginners — Vol. I and II* (Soni, 2011). The focus of these programmes was more on the readiness of children. There is a need to also address the other two components — school ready and family ready.

Haryana government initiated Class Readiness Programme (CRP) in 2013 at school level to ensure all round development of children. The CRP is based on the concept of activity based learning to enhance the quality of education and to boost creativity among students in government schools. Telangana government implemented School Readiness Programme (for classes I and II)

and Class Readiness Programme (for classes II to VIII) at school level in 2017.

Amod and Heafield (2013) in a chapter on 'School readiness assessment in South Africa' criticises the school readiness testing approaches in South Africa. They call these testing approaches as child deficit and advocate that this approach is discriminatory as it denies a child to begin school at an appropriate age without offering an alternative to child. This chapter proposes to provide a holistic view of school readiness. It projects that there has been a gradual shift in the conceptualisation of school readiness. Now, holistic approaches addressing the child's physical development, cognition and sociology-emotional functioning are considered as compared to the traditional knowledge and skill-based approaches used previously.

Docket and Perry (2009) suggests, "The focus on developing community measures of readiness, rather than measures of individual children's readiness for school, is one approach that is worthy of further consideration".

These community measures include the Early Development Instrument (EDI) and Australian adaptation of this, Australian Early Development Index (AEDI). This index assess all the aspects of a child across the following five dimensions—

• Physical health and Well-being

• Social competence

• Emotional maturity

• Language and Cognition

• Communication skills and General knowledge

One thing peculiar to this community model is that instead of individual level the results are interpreted at group level.

It also explores the research trends in school readiness. Majorly the authors identify three categories of research being conducted in this area. First is surveys exploring the perceptions of the stakeholders (pre-school teachers and parents). Second is exploring the concept of school readiness involving cognitive skills and chronological age as variables. And, the third one evaluating the outcomes of early educational experiences and family social processes with respect to school readiness and performance. The author concludes by placing the responsibility over schools and education system, of providing the adequate support structures accommodating a range of children.

Carlton, Martha P. and Winsler, Adam (1999) focused on the paradigm shift in the focal areas of school readiness. It states that now the school readiness is receiving increased attention from schools, parents, teachers and policy makers. It says that the practices of Delayed Entry, Retention and Transition Classes are not at all supported by the literature and studies. It argues in favour of a new theoretical framework and demands for a paradigm shift

in the area of school readiness. The perspective presented by this article is based on Vygotskian Socio-Cultural theory and Contemporary Developmental Theory. Readiness is said to be a bi-directional process of both the school and the child. Both has to adjust flexibly to each other in order to reach success.

Flexibility of adjusting to each other (the Programme/Curriculum and the Child) can be the guiding principle for any readiness programme.

In her survey A Survey on School Readiness among Preschoolers, Sujata Missal (2012) aimed at studying the school readiness among pre-schoolers and determination of percentage of children lying in various levels of school readiness. Early Development Inventory (EDI) was used to collect the information through the teachers of children of age range from 3 years to 5 years across the scale of Very Ready, Ready, At Risk and Vulnerable. It was found that 57% of the children were ready for school while the rest 43% were not ready for school. Further, it states that 23% were vulnerable and 20% were at risk. The study suggests that EDI can be used on Indian Children as a screening tool for assessing school readiness.

Reetu Chandra (2017) in her paper 'School Readiness in India Perspective, Initiatives, Practice and Approaches', discussed various research studies and literature on school readiness both globally as well as Indian. Various initiatives

taken by the Indian government and organisations were discussed and analysed in this paper. It suggests that despite so many initiatives by India there are gaps in terms of lack of pre-primary education in all the schools, absence of national standards defining school readiness nationally, need-based readiness programmes and appropriate assessment strategies and devices.

Thus, it can be concluded that there is a paradigm shift in the whole concept of readiness, be it class readiness or school readiness. Now the purview of readiness is being broadened by considering and placing the responsibility of readiness on the parents and society as well in addition to the schools and teachers. As compared to the traditional approaches, now the focus has shifted towards the holistic approach which talks more of the social and emotional readiness. Also, the pre-primary and primary education system needs to be revamped, structured and organised in order to provide readiness nation-wide readiness standards.

ASSESSING READINESS

In order to assess the readiness or to select an appropriate test, we need to know why this readiness is being measured. There may be many purposes of testing readiness, it may be for understanding stages of development or aiding in curriculum designing or instructional planning or determining the eligibility of an individual. While individual

assessments are done for diagnostic purposes, group assessments are done to check for the effectiveness or for evaluating a programme intervention.

Bremer, N. (1959) in his study 'Do Readiness Tests Predict Success in Reading?' tries to find whether tests can help in predicting the child's academic growth accurately. For this 2069 students from primary grade were selected out of these 1056 were boys and 1013 were girls. Each child had atleast 140 days of schooling and had been taught by one teacher. Metropolitan Readiness Tests, Form R, Gray-Votaw-Rogers General Achievement Tests, Primary Test and Form Q were used to collect the data. Pearson product-moment coefficient of correlation was used to test for the significance of the difference in scores of readiness test and achievement test. The study concludes that reading readiness tests cannot be used to predict accurately the reading achievement of the students. It says that such tests can serve diagnostic purposes very well.

The sixth edition of the Metropolitan Readiness Tests (originally published in 1933) was given by Nurss and McGauvran in 1995. It intends to assess initial reading, quantitative concepts and story comprehension. This test has two levels. Level 1 is administered individually and assesses skills needed for before and during kindergarten while level 2 is administered on group and assesses the skills needed for mid-kindergarten

to first grade. The test consists of various sub-tests. These are—

• Visual Discrimination (Level 1)

• Beginning Consonants (Level 1 and 2)

• Sound-letter Correspondence (Level 1 and 2)

• Aural Cloze (Level 2)

• Story Comprehension (Level 1 and 2)

• Quantitative Concepts and Reasoning (Level 1 and 2)

The raw scores of visual discrimination, beginning consonants and sound-letter correspondence are taken as composite to form the beginning reading. And, story comprehension and beginning reading composite are taken as composite to form the pre-reading composite score. Raw scores and composites can be converted to the different forms of norm-referenced scores like percentile, scaled scores and normal curve equivalents.

Here we can conclude that readiness tests can very well serve the diagnostic purposes but can not predict the achievement of a student with accuracy. Several readiness tests are available for testing the different readiness. The one Metropolitan Readiness Test referred here classifies and considers certain areas like reading, quantitative concepts and story comprehension to be the major constituents of the concept of readiness. The UNICEF (2012) manual on school readiness states that any readiness testing

should ensure that readiness tests are never meant to exclude children from learning opportunities.

READINESS PROGRAMMES EVALUATIVE STUDIES

Various evaluative studies have been conducted to check the effectiveness of readiness programme on the understanding level of students and on creating readiness among the students for various subjects.

Blakely, W. and Shadle (1961) in their experimental study compared the effectiveness of two reading readiness programmes namely Basel Reader Program and Experience Activity Program. The results say that boys developed readiness more with the experience-activity program while girls developed almost equal readiness through both the programs. The study further recommends the experience-activity program to be used at kindergarten level to develop reading readiness.

Scott (1947) in the study titled 'An Evaluation of Training in Readiness Classes' compared the effect of readiness program to those who didn't undergo any readiness program. This experimental study found that the readiness program was effective in creating readiness among the students for level I than those who were not a part of the readiness program.

Devi, Sharda M. and Devi, Uma L. (2011) examined the impact of a school readiness programme in their study titled 'Impact of School Readiness Programme- Pratyusha on First Standard Tribal Children'. In this study the researcher explored the impact of school readiness programme 'Pratyusha' on the tribal students of first standard. The study was conducted on 92 children from 5 tribal mandals of East Godavari district which were selected randomly. The researchers prepared a checklist based on Pratyusha handbook. Ex-post facto research design was used. The results put-up that the programme is highly effective in helping students with the understanding of the concepts related to family, concept, school and story as categorised in the 'Pratyusha' programme.

Malofeeva, E.V. et al. (2007) examined the relationship between participation in MSRP (Michigan School Readiness Programme) and outcomes at middle school level. They investigated five outcomes—

- 7th grade MEAP (Michigan Educational Assessment Program) scores (Criterion-referenced test, based on model core curriculum outcomes and the content standards approved by the Michigan State Board of Education)

- Grade retention (Grades 6-8)

- School attendance (measured at the end of each grade i.e. 6-8)

- Enrolment for Maths and Science courses

• Special education services received

For grade retention, it reported that MSRP attendance accounted for decreased retention in grades 6, 7 and 8. Further, the results provide strong evidence about the significant relationship between MSRP attendance and participant's lower grade retention rate and relatively having more MSRP graduates taking MEAP at the appropriate grade level.

In conclusion it can be put forth that, at primary stage experiential and activity based learning environment proves to be beneficial for students while creating readiness in them. As found by the evaluative studies mentioned above, the readiness programmes are effective in creating interest, increasing attendance, creating better understanding, and decreasing the grade retention.

CONCLUSION

Ensuring and defining readiness is neither easy nor definite as the term sounds. It is not a dichotomous trait which can be categorised as 'Ready' or 'Not ready'. Readiness may hold different meanings for different stakeholders but one thing is common in all the perspectives that, all the stakeholders (family, school and society) are equally responsible for creating readiness in a child. Hence, recognising the importance and the broad nature of readiness, there are few aspects which need to be taken into account.

It is important that all the domains of child's development are covered while planning and implementing any readiness programme. Thus, to identify child's preparedness, it is essential to assess her development outcomes in physical, cognitive, socio- emotional and linguistic domains (Kagan, 1992; Missal, 2012) while giving due consideration to the intervening factors such as maturity, environment, socio-economic condition, social and cultural context, preschool experiences maternal education and curriculum planning (Lemelin, et al., 2007; Bhise and Sonawat, 2016).

School readiness assessment serves two major purposes- ensuring required skills in each child for successful achievement and developing plan to evaluate children at risk. It further helps in planning instructions according to the individual needs. There is a need to discourage assessment approaches that are discriminatory and deny a child to enter a new level without offering an alternative. These approaches should rather be used in the form of readiness indicators instead of the readiness levels. Various feasible methods of assessment could be employed for different purposes.

Both, nationally and internationally a lot of initiatives have been taken in the area of improving school readiness. A collective effort in addressing the

diverse needs of young children by considering their diverse backgrounds and experiences could result in helping them make a smooth transition from one level to another as well as improving the learning outcomes at further levels. In order to promote better and uniform readiness practices, best resources and practices in creating readiness should be compiled and made available for reference of all the stakeholders. We need to accept and understand that it is not just that a child should be ready for school and learning, it is also vice-versa which requires that the schools, teachers, family and society should also be made ready to provide the optimal learning environment to the child.

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