Parental Perception of the Transitional Role of Early Childhood Care and Education Centers in Selected Sub Cities of Addis Ababa: Ethiopia

Girma Lemma

Addis Ababa University, Institute of Educational Research, Tele: 00(251)0111239654, Mobile: 251911628551, Fax:0111239744,E-mail:lemma_girma42@yahoo.com
Abstract

The study explored parental perception and understanding of the role of early childhood care and education (ECCE) programs in transiting children to the wider culture of the formal school system in five sub cities of Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. Purposive sampling technique was used to select the sub cities representing residents from low and middle-income groups. Centers were chosen using availability-sampling technique. A nine-item interview protocol was prepared to collect qualitative data, specifically addressing issues related to: reasons for sending children to preschool centers, parental expectation from preschool programs, parental involvement in the activities of preschool centers, and the contribution of care givers in capacitating the preschool child for meeting the demands of primary education. Essential features that came out from the interview were analyzed following the steps suggested by Grenewold (2004) for conducting phenomenological research. The findings revealed that parental perception of the role of preschool centers and their relationship with the centers varied across center types, socio economic status of parents and provisions availed in the centers. Implications to improve relationships and parental involvement in ECCE programs forwarded

Key words: perception, relationship, transition, readiness
The transition from home environment to school environment is conceived as a systematic process in which the child’s development is shaped by the transaction of the two Microsystems in an organized and planned way. The transition ecology as a system contributes to smoothen the path between home and school environments and ensures uninterrupted development of children as they move from less structured preschool care and education program to the wider and demanding primary school programs. Prochner and Kabiru (2008) noted that early childhood care and education (ECCE) program has to make a link between the natural and indispensable fostering of the child in the home and the social life.

The transition ecology assumes mobilization of available support mechanisms within the home, center and community environments in which these micro-systems work in a pulsating way to bring about success at primary school. This process of supporting children to adequately meet the social and cognitive requirements of the schooling system is an organized developmental and educational endeavor by parents, teachers, the community, mainline ministries supported by government policies operating at various levels of the system (Pianta &Kaufman,2006).

The modalities of the “transition ecology” ( Pianta, &Kaufman,2006) are understood in different ways. The skills-only model (Kaufman and Pianta, 2000 cited in Pianta, &Kaufman, 2006) conceptualizes the transition period “in terms of child characteristics such as readiness skills, chronological age, or level of maturation” (p.491). The skills-only model despite its popularity in influencing policy and practice is criticized for its incompleteness to address ecological variables. Furthermore, it de-emphasizes the psychosocial component of transition and readiness.

An alternative to the skill-only model is the developmental/ecological model. This model takes into account the changes observed in the child and the ways in which the micro-developmental niches interact in an integrated manner to configure transformation of children’s competencies along the developmental domains (Pianta,&Kaufman, 2006).The developmental/ecological model is comprehensive in the sense that it views the child in a web of interconnected and interdependent factors such as family, school, peer, and more broadly
community contexts throughout the transition phase that make the child ready to move into the
next hierarchically structured milieu. The broad-based social ecology that shapes competencies
in a reciprocating multi-path ways is the essence of the transition process addressed by the
developmental/ecological model.

The National Policy Framework for Early Childhood Care and Education (2010) and
Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia Pre-primary Curriculum (MOE, 2008) documents
spelled out the benefits of parental participation in ECCE programs as a strategy to enhance
children’s “readiness to learn” (p.18) which Reymonds (1995) set as a “criterion to school
characterized parents as engines of change in early interventions. The challenge, however, is
to achieve high quality family involvement in all aspects of early childhood programs (Knopf,
&Swick, 2007).

Linking ECCE centers with parents would enable to make use of the embedded
indigenous cultural knowledge and draw home experiences to facilitate the child’s development.
It is impossible to tease out the child’s home environment from center-based environment for the
simple reason that the two reciprocate with each other for the optimal development of children.
Hence, building a strong mutual support and relationship between ECCE centers, families and
the community at large facilitates the holistic Psycho-Social and physical development of
children, and at large contributes to the social well being of families (Martito, Biersteker, Sagnia,
&Kabiru, 2008).

To enhance a viable family-preschool partnership there is a need to devise an
empowering strategy so that parents could play pivotal role in all aspects of children’s
acknowledges families’ roles in the overall activities of ECCE centers. The policy framework
states that “The family is the first responsible body for supporting the holistic development of
their children and hence, they need to be empowered and supported to ensure that they are
effective in their roles” (p.21). Knopf,&Swick(2007) suggested diverse supportive and adaptive
family involvement pathways. These include: accessing pathways that enhance participation,
placing a viable set of supportive mechanisms that help and encourage parents to use the
different venues for involvement and facilitate ways to use their talents and strengths. Preschool–
parent partnership is an important component of the transition ecology. The missing elements in the preschool care and education centers can be best grasped through active involvement of parents in building children’s achievement in multiple domains at home setting.

Following the 1998 conference attended by Ministers of Education of African member states (UNESCO, 1998) it has been an urgent task for the Ethiopian government to formulate culturally appropriate and integrated ECD policy that involve the mainstream ministries. The development of the National Policy Framework and Strategic Guideline can be considered as an outgrowth of this conference despite the delay in time. This sector wide approach shown in the National Policy Framework has the advantage of maintaining cross-sector links among concerned bodies working in the area of ECD. To augment the National Policy Framework, Strategic Operational Guideline was endorsed with the intent of delivering quality service for children and parents. One of the four basic pillars upon which these two policy documents are based is empowering and supporting parents to discharge their caring and educational roles adequately. The policy documents as well underline the importance of active involvement of parents in the overall undertakings of ECCE programs. Quality of ECCE program is weighed by the extent to which parents are actively involved in the overall undertakings ranging from participation to collaboration with care givers and preschool management. Hence, the quality of network established between parents and ECCE centers in capacitating the preschool child to meet the demands of the formal school system is an essential component of ECCE research. Parental views and perceptions regarding relationships, care givers behavior, the status of children in possessing the expected skills for the age group, and by large on the overall efficacy of programs to meet the objectives of the curriculum are pivotal issues in ECCE research. In that sense it is essential to capture parental perception and understanding of the various facets of ECCE programs and the extent of their participation and collaboration in enabling effective transition of children to the formal school system. The general objective of this research is to explore the views and perceptions of parents about ECCE programs and explain the contextual situations that shaped the caring and educational roles of preschool care and education centers in transiting the preschool child to the wider culture of school life in Addis Ababa City Administration.
METHOD

Design of the study

The qualitative approach was used to capture meanings and interpretations parents ascribe to early childhood care and education programs. Perceptions, the nature of involvement in the program, and the degree of decision-making by parents would enable to capture experiences of parents. Hauser-Cram et al., (2009) stated that “the perspectivist, participatory, and empowerment models take the point of view of the participants in a program, compared to conventional evaluation designs” (p.494). Figure 1 shows schematic presentation of the research design.

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Themes, Narrations, Contextualization
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Figure 1: Schematic presentation of the research design

Participants

The study area for this research is the capital city of Ethiopia-Addis Ababa. Five sub cities were selected on purposive sampling technique representing residents from low and middle income groups. Centers were again chosen on availability sampling techniques. In each participating centers, kindergarten teachers sent a written message in advance to parents through children to solicit a consent describing the purpose of the study. Centers that have shown consent to participate in the research were selected. Twenty parents who signed the consent message were approached for the study.
Measures

A nine-item interview protocol was prepared to collect qualitative data on parents’ perception and understanding of preschool education program. The items were specifically addressing issues related to reasons for sending children to preschool centers, parental expectation from preschool programs, parental involvement in the activities of preschool centers, and the contribution of care giving in capacitating the preschool child for meeting the demands of primary education.

Data analysis technique

Data collected through interview and field notes were reduced and classified under the five sub cities, center types and interview questions. Description of parents’ profile, statements, feelings and aspirations, ideas and issues were taken in the form of interview transcripts and coded under each question. Essential features that came out from the interview were analyzed following the steps suggested by Grenewold (2004).

1. First the researcher read and rewrote the responses and field notes to have a holistic understanding of the phenomenology of the issue.
2. Then, statements and catching words and phrases that would illuminate the crux of parental perceptions were identified.
3. Third, cluster of non-repetitive words and meanings were formed to surface the essential points. This step is bracketing of the interview content within the ambit of the research questions.
4. The fourth step was to incorporate and assemble the themes and essentials bracketed along the research questions to have a holistic understanding of parental perceptions in transiting the preschool child into the wider culture of the formal school system.
5. Finally, general summary of all interview data based on common themes that reflect the contexts was written.

RESULTS

Reasons for sending children to preschool centers

Reasons for sending children to preschool centers vary with respect to parental economic status and educational level. Despite the variations attributed to these background characteristics,
parents emphasized the socializing role of preschool centers. A mother in one sub city, for example, understood the reason for sending her daughter to preschool centers in terms of gender disparity between boys and girls in the society. To her view, education has the role of narrowing gender inequality: “I am subjected to inequality because I didn’t have the opportunity to go to school. I don’t want this to be repeated. I don’t want my daughter to experience similar life pattern”.

Other parents perceived preschool centers in terms of child rights. For them, children have the right to play with mates and get access to contemporary knowledge. The role of preschool centers therefore is to ensure these rights and/or provide the opportunity.

For low income parents, preschool centers have the role of shading the burden of caring responsibility. Parents such as petty traders, daily laborers, and housemaids see ECCE centers as protective environment that provide custodial service to their children.

In not few cases such parents, for example, lock their children’s meal outside the door, instruct the children to play around and hurriedly walk to their daily errands. Zero-grade government owned centers don’t charge anything for the service they deliver. Unlicensed centers charge 5-10 ETB (equivalent to half dollar)) for a child. These centers have the role of pacifying such parental tensions. As perceived by some parents, the role of such preschool centers was a custodial one. Yet what is interesting is that the views of these same parents had changed through time as they observed difference in their children’s’ behavior. A quote from a parent substantiates this argument.

*If she (referring her daughter) stays at home she bothers me. She does not sit at one place. Now I see change in her. She started reading and counting numbers. I recognized the value of sending children to school. Every child has to join school at age 4. It is when they learn how to read and write they become good citizens. I think the center is equivalent to the former church school. Hence, children should learn. That is why I have sent her to school (A widowed female parent at Kolfe Keraneyo Sub City engaged in petty trade)*
Parental expectations of ECCE program

Parents were asked about how their children should spend their time and what they should acquire in ECCE centers. Safe and hygienic environment was a priority agenda for some parents. More than anything parents highly cherished the well being of their children. They underlined that their children be protected and safeguarded from any threat that could bring physical and psychological harm. The view of one parent, for example, confirms this.

*The most important thing is my child be safe and come home safely being protected from any harm. Parents usually don’t expect much from the centers. The child’s development is enhanced when care givers and parents work together to ensure children’s well being (parent 2 from Arada Sub City).*

Some parents gave due emphasis to the development of literacy and numeric abilities. Accordingly, children’s future school success is determined by what is done at preschool centers. Although they had the opinion that children need to spend considerable time in playing, mastery of basic skills in language and computations were found to be important milestones. A quote from a parent at Kolfe Keranyo sub city substantiates this assertion.

*Mainly learning; I want him to pass much of the time learning basic skills. If they are motivated at this age, it is decisive for their future success. I want him to pass the time being safe, and also learning.*

Some parents emphasized the importance of peer interaction. For them outdoor activities in ECCE centers are significant. This means a combination of classroom activities with play ground interaction was highly valued. A parent from Gullele Sub City stated that:

*I want her to learn and play with her mates. I don’t want her to be alone. If she goes to school every day she learns new things. That is my wish. We want her to spend her time playing, learning basic skills and intermingling with her peers.*

Provisions most preferred by parents

Parents were interviewed about their preferences of childcare services. The choice of services depends on availability, access and parental appraisal of programs in the respective
centers. The popular view in the society is that quality care giving can be realized in the private centers. In most cases parental preference is for the private ones. The parameters by which parents gauge the quality of service varies across a host of factors. English language speaking skill, for example, is considered as mark of excellence. Private ECCE centers seem to be smart in this direction. Some parents ascribed quality service to physical set up and furnishings while others associate it with care givers’ emotional attachment to children. The following quotes support the argument under discussion:

*While she was in the private center she was able to speak English. Her exercise was neat. Now she became lazy. The center is not clean. It has bad smell. I want my child to be safe and reserved from doing evil things. All parents do not have same aspirations. In general, I think all parents aspire to have better learning experiences for their children. Children in this age group need much support and care. Facilities should be there for example, toilets, potable water and better sanitation *(parent 1 from Arada Sub City).*

*I am doubtful about the quality of service delivered especially with regard to care givers competence. What is important is we parents should take our share. We need to follow-up the progress of our children. Some of the problems can be attributed to care givers’ behavior. At times they are so reluctant and careless *(parent 2 from Arada Sub City).*

*Earlier it was not customary to send children to preschool centers. The tradition was to send them to faith-based centers (church and Quran schools). Nowadays you find preschool centers in walking distance. There is no problem of access. Care givers inspire children and play with them. Children nowadays do not complain to go to the centers. There is strong attachment between the preschool care givers and the children. In church-based centers Yenetas (priests) were harsh and punitive. *(Parent 1 from Gullele Sub City)*

This same parent disclosed her disappointment on the quality of service delivery in the following way:

*One drawback I observed is that at times children come home with bruises on their body. Play grounds in the centers are not good. Peebles, stones and other stumbling materials*
are found on the play grounds. At times care givers do not supervise children playing on sliders and get physical injury.

Similarly, another parent also reiterated her aspiration in the following way.

*One shortcoming of preschool service delivery is children do not have adequate space to play. At times children hesitate to go to the preschool centers for fear of care givers’ threatening behavior. Better caring, safe learning and playing environments, and clean compound, are expectations of many parents (parent 2 from Gullele Sub City)*

There was a sharp contrast between the aspirations of parents whose children are cared in the private centers versus those cared in charity-based preschools. Parents whose children enrolled in private centers had serious concern about the increasing tuition fee. In contrast those whose children enrolled in charity-based centers perceived the service delivery in terms of the provisions provided. Two quotes excerpted from interview show the two trends.

> *Moon Light is one of the best schools. My kids’ knowledge is beyond my expectations. I don’t have any problem with the quality of service. My worry is the increasing school fee, though the phenomenon is reflected in all aspects of life. The soaring of cost of living exacerbated school fees.* (Parent 1 from Kolfe Keranyo Sub City).

> *No limitations at all. My son is fed with breakfast and lunch freely. I have no words to thank the organization. Even teachers don’t punish children verbally except seldom reprimand and advice* (parent 2 from Kolfe Keranyo Sub City)

**Parental perception of children’s readiness to meet the demands of the formal school system**

Whether or not ECCE centers have achieved the mission of transiting the preschool child to the formal school system depends on the child’s mastery of basic skills to facilitate the upcoming task. Parental satisfaction and disappointment on service delivery are partly nested on the extent to which these centers achieved their bridging role.

> *She was far better while she was in the private center. Now I don’t think she is better prepared to cope with the demands of primary schooling. I am not sure whether or not this situation is due to the teachers. She is better prepared in reading English and*
translating English words to local language. She is not good in numeric (parent 1 from Arada Sub City)

Two parents from Gullele and Kolfe Keranyo seem to be satisfied by the status of their children enrolled in the private preschools. Quotes of two interviewees support the claim:

My daughter is well prepared to meet the demands of primary education. She outsmarted children attending in grade one and two in government schools. She should have gone to grade one this year (a parent from Gullele Sub City).

I could not tell you my kids’ English speaking skill. Their mathematics competency is high. If they were in government schools I am sure they could not spell even their names. They have already achieved the basics (parent 1 from Kolfe Keranyo Sub City).

My second child Abel is a KG student. But he excels his elder brother enrolled in government school. I wish my two other sons learn there. The KG education given in the private center prepares well for grade one (parent 2 from Kolfe Keranyo Sub City).

An interviewee from another sub city recognized the transitional role of preschool education from a different perspective. He weighed the importance of preschool education in terms of promoting independence and resolving the conflict that could arise from two different Microsystems. According to the interviewee, the centre is a place where the child practices independence, and tries to resolve the problem of separation anxiety which he may encounter in grade one. In grade one he will have emotional stability and thus wouldn’t think of his home and parents.

The extent of parental involvement in the activities of the ECCE centers

The two way flow of information between the home environment and ECCE centers is essential for the child’s development. The medium of information exchange between the two Microsystems in the context of ECCE setting have different forms and structure. Communication letters, home visits, semester-based conferences, student performance transcripts, signatures of parents on children’s exercise books, care giver-parent exchange of information while children are dropped and picked, and summative evaluations at the end of academic year are avenues in maintaining network between ECCE centers and parents. The effectiveness of each of the
medium of communications rested upon the choices made by parents and initiatives taken by the centers to facilitate the linkage.

*I try my best. However, in most cases my participation is minimal. This is because I am so busy. I was not able to attend many of the meetings convened by the center. Though I had many ideas in my mind, I was not able to share them. However, when I was asked to contribute something in material form, I never hesitate to do so* (parent 2 from Arada Sub City).

For some parents what matters was not the communication, the link, or the meeting; rather the output resulting from the networking. The reciprocation between the two micro-systems founded on support and mutual understanding was the essence of the relationships between ECCE centers and parents. The preschool centers are expected to take the initiative and play vanguard role in the process. A comment by one of the interviewees is worth mentioning.

*We are invited to participate in meetings. However, the center does not pay attention to parents’ suggestions. My daughter, for example, experienced physical injury while she was playing. Two or three times her hands and legs were bruised. I reported the case to the center management. As a parent I suggested that the problem could be ameliorated by making the play grounds conducive to children. This can be realized by the cooperation between the center and parents* (parent from Gullele Sub City).

Preschool-home environment linkage involves positive impact on children’s development as children largely benefit from the support and helping relationship. Irregularities can easily be identified and solutions maintained. A progress made by a preschool child is an exemplary of the consequence of this positive relationship between ECCE centers and parents, as reported by a respondent.

*Frequently we communicate with care givers and the center. For example, if the child does not meet the requirements, we discuss with care givers and try to find out solution for the problem. For example if he is not working his assignment, we check that. When he performs well we appraise, reward him and take him to recreation centers. And at times I take the initiative and communicate the problem to the teachers. There is symbiotic*
relationship. Jointly we support each other to support the child (parent 2 from Gullele Sub City).

Failure to maintain close relations between ECCE centers and parents was partly attributed to lack of commitment on the part of parents. Some parents admitted that the reason for the loose contact between the two settings was partly explained by parents’ inconsistent behavior to play their roles. A statement by an interviewee confirms the proposition.

Usually the center takes the initiative in this relationship and it encourages parents to communicate. Every semester they invite us for meetings. However, I hardly attend meetings due to work load. If there is lack of parental participation, it is my problem not the centers. I was called twice for my child’s unruly behavior. And I was communicated once for the child’s failure to do his homework. There is a meeting of all parents. They ask for comments and inform us about new regulations. I like their approach.

What children tell parents about their experiences in ECCE centers

Parents were interviewed to reflect what their children tell them about the overall behavior of care givers. They were also asked to express their impressions about care givers’ behavior based on their encounters in the centers. In general parents seemed to have formed positive images about care givers. The affection, intimacy, smile, the hugs, encouragements, admirations and other related behaviors of care givers towards children was reported as positive experiences. A parent, for example, described care givers’ behavior as follows:

Care givers are blessed and humble. They call children by their names. They show strong affection to all children without exception. All children, without exception, seem adorable in the eyes of care givers. A case in point is, teachers address and call kids name flatteringly. For instance: a kid named Solomon is addressed as ‘Solomonye’ [literally, my Solomon]. They also communicate parents frequently. For example, at one time my daughter had frequent conflict with other children. I was communicated to discuss the issue to which we found simple panacea.

Preschool children commonly quote and/or imitate care givers words and actions. They mimic their dressing style, walking style, and gesturing, among others. . Children developed the
tendency to interpret events in the preschool and home environment from the perspective of care givers profile. Care givers are models of preschool children. A parent from Gullele Sub City described how her daughter had been influenced by care givers personality and the extent to which her daughter used care giver’s wordings to shape the relationship between herself and members of the family as follows.

"Children now days are different. She rehearses what she learnt, heard, saw and experienced in the center. She says “Today Miss showed this or that kind of play. She taught us this and that. Today Miss dressed this way. Today miss was angry with me. She warned me”. At home she sings dances and rehearses her everyday activities. When a family member, for example, exhibits undesirable behavior she criticizes. She quotes the care giver and says “Oh. Miss said lying is bad. We should not lie. Liars are lazy children” (parent 2 from Gullele Sub City)

Similarly, the strong bond maintained between care givers and children was also explained by another respondent:

"I believe it is quite good. Children love the care givers very much. My kids have no complaint. The care givers are their references for all types of knowledge, good or bad behavior. They usually say Miss said “this is bad”. They consider them like their second mothers. I am highly satisfied in the relation children have with care givers. They never feel tired while caring and educating. They love the children just like their own children. I must be lucky to send my children to the preschool center (a parent from Kolfe Keranyo Sub City).

Summary of interviews

- The major reasons for sending children to ECCE centers were: to socialize children, a means to child rights advocacy, to find protective environment, and to share the burden of parenting role and responsibilities.
- Parental expectations from ECCE programs were hygienic and safe environment for their children, maintain synergy between ECCE centers and home environment, acquisition of basic skills in language and computation and provision of outdoor activities.
- Types of services parents’ prefer to get from ECCE centers were proficiency in spoken English, furnishings such as toilets and drinking water, affection from care givers, non-punitive behavior of care givers, conducive play ground, reasonable tuition fee, and feeding program for children from low socio economic background.

- School readiness was understood by parents in terms of acquisition of basic learning and life skills, English language skill, the potential to act independently, and emotional development to accommodate duties and responsibilities in primary schooling.

- Medium of parental involvement in the activities of ECCE centers are diverse. However, preferences were mainly based on access and the extent to which the modality suits one’s own lifestyles. Workload, supportive and helping relationship between ECCE centers and home, commitment to collaborate for the best interests of children, willingness to accept constructive comments were major factors attributed to parental involvement in ECCE activities.

- Children share their ECCE experiences with family members. Overall, parents had developed positive impression about ECCE practices from experience sharing between children and family members. Care givers positive behavior, children’s attempt to mimic care givers’ gestures, walking, and dressing styles were experiences by which children communicate with their family members.

**DISCUSSIONS**

In the Ethiopian context parental choice and consumption of early childhood care and education services depend on their purchasing power and their social status in the society. At least two types of ECCE services can be identified in the Ethiopian context. Paid childcare service provided by the private centers and non-tuition paying scheme implemented by the government, charity and faith-based institutions. In the private centers, the fees charged by ECCE programs vary considerably. As Glinskaya and Garcia (1999) noted, whether or not the amount of fee charged by ECCE centers could be taken as mark of excellence and quality is subject to argument. In the Ethiopian context, MoE or any other government institution in charge of ECCE programs does not set fees. The Zero-grade government preschool centers functioning in the premises of primary schools ,for example, are entirely free service providers As a matter of fact this scheme has tremendously increased the Gross Enrollment Ratio at national level.
One could say that the launching of the Zero-grade scheme is an opportunity for low-income parents. Despite below average care and education provisions in the zero-grade programs, one could possibly argue that it is much better than keeping children in loneliness. Exposure to early literacy and numeric, peer interaction, exposure to varied experiences in the premises of the primary schools are benefits children from low income families can at least accrue from this scheme.

This trend is consistent with the household hypotheses as discussed by Glinskaya, and Garcia(1999) in the Kenyan context. Accordingly, the simulated effect of a policy that fully subsidized the cost of child care quadrupled the use of ECD facilities. The unprecedented Gross Enrollment increment of preschool children in the Ethiopian context partly suggests that parents are quite sensitive to the tuition fee.

Work and family responsibilities seemed to be important mediating factors in the relationship between parents and ECCE centers. What is important is to what extent ECCE centers are responsive to these variations and tune their program towards maintaining a sustained relationship to place children’s development as priority agenda. Sohn, and Wang (2006) conducted an in depth interview with parents to capture their views on the importance of their involvement. All six mothers interviewed reported that they did not feel they had received sufficient support from the school and the teachers; in particular, they complained about lack of opportunities to communicate with teachers. They also felt the conferences held once or twice a year did not provide enough opportunity to establish partnership. Single parents whose livelihoods depend on meager resources obtained from unpredictable income could possibly abstain from meetings convened by ECCE centers. The case of the widowed parent at Kolfe Keranyo Sub City engaged in petty trade substantiates this argument.

The process of transition from preschool to primary school is not clearly delineated issue in the Ethiopian context. In Ethiopia, attending preprimary program (in ECCE centers) is neither compulsory nor a prerequisite for joining primary schools. Findings from the interview indicated that parents’ perception of their children’s readiness to meet the demands of primary school was mainly determined by their ability to read, write and numeric competency. The interview revealed that parents wish their children to be academically and socially competent before they move to the formal school system. This result seems to be comparable with other studies. McIntyre et al, (2007) assessed parents’ experiences and perceptions about children’s transition
to kindergartens. The researchers identified five top concerns of parents about their children’s transition to the kindergarten. The top five concerns parents expressed about their child’s transition to kindergarten were: attending a new school, compliance/following directions, behavior problems, academic skills, and getting along with peers. In the Ethiopian context, readiness was narrowly defined in terms of numeric and literacy abilities. Competency in the area of literacy and numeric is assumed to make the child competent to cope up the demands of primary school curricula.

**SUMMARY AND IMPLICATIONS**

**Summary of major findings**

Major findings from analyses of qualitative data include:

- Many parents perceived the transition of preschool children to the formal school system in terms of children’s capacity in the area of literacy and computational skills with little attention to social and emotional developments.

- Centers seemed to use different avenues to reach parents. Communication letters, signature books, school days were means by which parents and ECCE centers communicated to exchange views and information about the progressions made by the children. Semester based conferences between preschool centers and parents appeared inefficient in maintaining mutual support and cooperation between parents and ECCE centers.

- Parents appeared to have a positive image of care givers behavior. Because of the affection they show and the relentless effort they made to capacitate children’s cognitive abilities, parents seemed to be satisfied by care givers’ profile.

- The relationship between parents and ECCE centers was not grounded on sustained goals geared towards the holistic development of children. Rather the framework of the relationship targeted to the development of children’s cognitive elements. The relationship looked to focus on immediate learning outcomes than conceiving the role played by parents in enriching the preschool curriculum to the best interest of children.
Implications

- The significance of parent-ECCE center relationship must transcend the traditional framework that underscores care givers importance or dominance to one that is based on reciprocation operating at both ends. Hence, centers should work vigorously towards making parental involvement not a sporadic one but as part and parcel of the overall caring and educational process of children.

- The trend of ECCE- parent relationship seemed one directional in which the former called upon to discuss child related problems. Instead, on top of communication letters, signature books, and semester-based conferences, care givers home visits should be ECCE centers’ agenda to establish a sustained relationship. Therefore, ECCE centers need to expend more time and resource to engage parents in their children’s learning and encourage them to share curriculum objectives.

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