COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION IN PRESCHOOL EDUCATION OF ETHIOPIA: THE CASE OF SOUTH WEST SHEWA ZONE

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Abstract. The objective of this study was to examine the state of community participation in preschool education and factors affecting their participation in selected woredas of South West Shoa Zone. Survey research design was used. Data were collected from 192 preschool teachers, 58 preschool principals, 12 cluster supervisors 4 woreda education expert, and 58 PTA members by using questionnaires, interview and focus group discussion. The findings of the study revealed that the participation of the community in preschool education is very low; the most common areas of community participation are cash contribution and participation in a meeting for the improvement of student behavior. Finally, the major factors identified are lack of awareness, failure to attend the meeting and failure to send their children to preschools. It is suggested that the preschools should be designed effective strategies of cooperation to work with the community in supporting preschools. In addition, continuous efforts should be made by preschools in the orientations and reorientation of community members about the objectives, scopes, principles, methods, and activities of preschool education.

Keywords: Community Participation; Preschool Education; Factors; Ethiopia

I. INTRODUCTION

Preschool education is a foundational period manifested by rapid changes in physical, cognitive, language, social and emotional development. It characterizes a window of opportunity for a lifetime development of a person (UNESCO, 2010). From this it is clear that education before primary education has wide importance in every aspect of child development.

Recognizing this fact countries in the world give due attention for expansion and improvement of preschool education in their Education for All (EFA) Dakar Framework. The link between early childhood care and education are strong and mutually reinforcing. Preschool education helps build skills at a time when children's brains are developing, with long-term benefits for children from disadvantaged backgrounds (UNESCO, 2014; Befekadu, Wudu & Worku, 2017). It is obvious that preschool education is an integral part of basic education and characterizes the first and essential step in achieving the goals of Education-for-All in particular and human skill formation in general (Goodman & Sianesi, 2005).

The success of preschool education is determined by the amount of input spend by the key players or contributors and their commitment to support preschool education. The input may include financial support labor, information dissemination, provision of materials and management. For instance, Wondemetegegn (2017) and Kituta (2003) explained that education for children is the duty of the whole community including the elders. He therefore called for all community members to take key roles in educating their youth. He also made clear that studies conducted in Sub-Saharan Africa indicate that many African communities still provide labor and financial support to their early childhood development centers.

The engagement of the community members in preschool education plays a significant role in the development of

young children. It is recognized that high- quality preschool education center is the ones who get good support from the community (Henderson et al., 2002). When the community is involved in supporting schools at the earlier stage, children have a better chance of achieving at school and in life in general (Mulugeta, 2015). If the connection between schools and communities is strong, it is easier for children to develop the skills needed to be successful socially and emotionally, physically and academically (Edwards et al. 2008; Oakes and Lipton, 2007).

The overall goal of community participation in preschool education is to improve the educational delivery so that more children learn better and are well prepared for the changing world. There are various reasons to support the idea that community participation contributes to achieving this goal (Hidalgo & Urzua, 2010; Addisu & Wudu, 2019).

Even though, preschool education has its own variety of contributions as indicated by different researchers in different countries, its access is insufficient. For example, according to Young Lives research findings, there are significant inequalities in access to early education in Ethiopia, India and Peru, as well as clear discrepancies in the quality of services. Hence, it requires an increased focus on the most marginalized groups in society, targeted investments to improve the quality of services, and effective governance of both public and private sector provision, to support every child to have a good start in life (Young Lives, 2010; Eshetu, 2015). To fulfill this gap it was clear that countries have to give attention in promoting general education starting with focusing on early childhood care and education to assure quality of education. Thus, Ethiopia, in its Education Sector Development program (ESDP IV), made the issue of ECCE among the priority action programs, within general education quality improvement program to increase equity and access with early childhood care and education, primary and secondary education (MoE, 2010).

Moreover, in 2010, the Government of Ethiopia adopted a new policy framework and strategic operational plan to provide a holistic and comprehensive approach to the development of children from the prenatal period to seven years of age. There is strong ownership of the National Policy for early childhood education, which was developed through a participatory and multi-sectoral process spearheaded by the Minister of Education, in coordination with the Ministers of Health and Women's Affairs (MoE, MoH, & MoWA, 2010). Therefore, this policy framework made the pre-primary education to be run by both by communities and non-governmental organizations such as faith-based institutions (World Bank, 2012).

Even though the policy documents clearly stipulated that the success of quality preschool education is determined by the participation of the community; there is a critical lack of research on the community participation in Ethiopia in general and in South West Shewa Zone of in particular. Specifically, there is a literature gap on the extent of community participation on preschool education in South West Shewa Zone of Ethiopia. Therefore, this study sought to answer the following questions:

1. To what extent the community participates in preschool education in South West Shewa Zone of Ethiopia?
2. In what areas the community participates in preschool education in South West Shewa Zone of Ethiopia?
3. What are the factors that affect community participation in preschool education in South West Shewa Zone of Ethiopia?

II. METHODOLOGY

A. Research Design

The main objective of this study was to assess the extent of community participation in preschool education in selected woredas of South West Shoa zone. Survey research design was used for this study since it would enable the researchers to collect and describe large variety of data. Besides, qualitative data were used in the study to support quantitative data gathered through questionnaires (Creswell, 2014).

B. Sample Size and Sampling Procedures

According to the data obtained from South West Shewa Zone education office, there are 11 woredas in the zone. From these woredas 4 woredas were selected by using simple random sampling technique. Then, four woreda education office experts were selected from the four woredas using purpose sampling method (individuals who were in charge of preschool education at woreda level). Fifty-eight school principals of the selected preschool centers and all preschool teachers of the sample school were included as respondents based on availability sampling method. Finally, 12 cluster supervisors who accounted for 24% of their respective population, were randomly taken as respondents. Population and the number of samples are summarized in the Table I.

TABLE I
SUMMARY OF POPULATION AND THE NUMBER OF SAMPLES

Woreda	Preschool Centers			Teachers					
	#	S	%	Total Number			Sample		
				M	F	T	M	F	T
Ameya	38	16	42	27	25	52	27	25	52
Wonchi	29	13	45	17	21	38	17	21	38
Woliso	28	12	43	23	26	49	23	26	49
Becho	38	17	45	24	29	53	24	29	53
Total	**133**	**58**	**44**	**91**	**101**	**192**	**91**	**101**	**192**

Symbol: S= Sample; #= Number; %= Percentage; M= Male; F= Female; T= Total

C. Data Collection Instruments

Data were collected using the following instruments:
Questionnaires: The questionnaires were administered for teachers, school principals, and cluster supervisors. This instrument was designed to collect both qualitative and quantitative data on community participation in preschool education and factors affecting preschool education. For this purpose both open and close-ended types of questions were prepared based on the review of related literature. To ease

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the work of filling of the questionnaire, it was translated in to local language by expert.

Interview: Semi-structured types of interview guide was used to collect data from the experts of the woreda education office. Issues that were focused in the interview were the community participation and factors affecting community participation in preschool education. Again the interview guide was translated in to local language and held in such a way to reduce difficulties of communication.

Focus Group Discussion: It was employed to collect data from PTA members. This method of data collection was intended to explore different ideas from the participants about the given issue. Using this instrument, the main issue that was addressed was the community participation in preschool education.

D. Validity and Reliability of The Research Instruments

To maintain the validity of the instruments of data collection, the questionnaires were given to language expert & educational expert so that they would check grammatical clarity and validity of instrument respectively. Finally, the instrument was corrected based on the comments given. In addition, to address the issue of reliability, the pretesting of instruments were made. The instruments were then pretested with randomly selected 18 teachers, three school principals and one cluster supervisor. The schools which were involved in the pilot test were not included in the sample of the study. Thus, a test of reliability was conducted on the scales used in the questionnaire and the result was found to be 0.894 which is considered as highly reliable as a coefficient was above 0.70 is accepted (Jackson, 2009).

E. Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed by using qualitative and quantitative analysis techniques. The data collected through questionnaire were presented through frequency distributions and percentage. On the other hand, data from interviews and focus group discussion were presented in a narrative form.

F. Ethical Consideration

The objective of the research was communicated to the participants of and they have been requested to give their consent to participate in the study. They were also informed that the information they have provided will not be given to a third party. Accordingly, the information that the participants provided was used only for the study purpose. In addition, the researchers ensured confidentiality by making the participants anonymous.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Results

In this section, the major results the study such as the extent of community participation in preschool education, their area of participation and factors that affect community participation are presented. To encourage demand for preschool education, considerable communication effort is needed to create a sense of participation, ownership, investment and responsibility by parents, families, communities and other stakeholders. Regarding the level of community participation respondents were asked to respond questions and the result is summarized in the Table II.

TABLE II
PARENT-SCHOOL PARTNERSHIP

Item	Response					
	Low		Medium		High	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
Parent-school partnership to assist children's learning	140	53.4	70	26.7	52	19.8
Parents situation to welcome to the invitations of the school	163	62.2	76	29.0	23	8.8

Symbol: #= Number; %= Percentage

Table II shows that most of respondents, 140 (53.4%), rated parent-school corporation to assist children's learning as low; whereas the rest respondents 52 (19.9%) and 70 (26.7%) replied as the parent-school partnership as high and medium respectively. The responses exposed that there is low corporation in most of the studied preschools.

In this respect, the interviewed woreda education experts expressed their views that parent-school partnership to assist children's learning was very negligible. According to the discussion of the experts, most of the parents have no adequate exposure about the objectives and methods of preschool education. As a result they did not realize the importance of the link between parent and preschool. Thus, they tend to left every responsibility to kindergarten teachers considering themselves as if they cannot contribute anything to education of their children. On the other hand, some teachers lack know how to work with parents; as a result they blame their lack of practical training to work with parents as the limitation of their teacher education institutions. The participants of the focus group discussion agreed with the opinion that many parents lack clear awareness in the program's objectives and activities.

On the contrary, the result indicated the existence of gap between parents and preschools to maintain proper partnership. Many of the preschools fail to promote the idea that parents are main part of preschools education. Parents also lack clear awareness about the activities of preschools to work together effectively and harmoniously. Teachers professional commitment to collaboration with parents and an attempt to share responsibilities for children's educational success seems minimal.

Parent-teacher's relation is vital to strengthen the children's learning. So as to strengthen mutual responsibility and involvement, a closer partnership between teachers and parents is essential. Hence, respondents were asked to rate parents situation to well come to the invitations of the schools as to high, medium and low. Accordingly, most of the preschools 163 (62.2%) judged, the parents situation to

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welcome to the invitations of the preschools as low. On the other hand, 158 (60.3%), replied that parental involvement in preschool management aspect is absent.

Beside to this, the interview result with experts made clear that there is absence of parental involvement in the management aspects of many preschools due to the lack of willingness, awareness, time and favorable conditions to act accordingly. Furthermore, the interviewed PTA members also agreed with what experts had suggested and added the lack of encouragement from preschools.

On the one hand, in the studied preschools, parents were not encouraged to take part in the operation of the preschools as educational institutions. Furthermore, because of the amount of time required, lack of awareness, and many parents were unwilling to take the legal responsibility involved in becoming a preschools management body. Consequently, parents participation in the management aspects of many preschools seems minimal or low.

Concerning the means of communication used with parents, most of the respondents 148 (26.01%), 144 (25.3 %) and 134 (23.55%) indicated written letters, verbal messages and telephone calls as the most commonly used means of communication respectively. Whereas, meetings and discussions, conferences, a forum for parent education and children's circulating books were the least used means of communication for parents to participate (see Fig. 1).
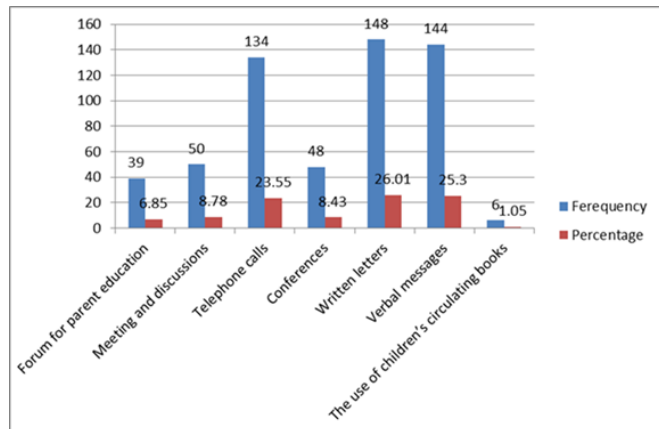

Fig. 1 Commonly used means of communication for parents to participate

The interviewed woreda education office experts explained that the major means of communication with parents was attendance at annual parents meetings at the beginning and end of the year. During this time because of shortage of time and other reasons, parents were often rushed and enforced teachers passing on information. This leaves little room for discussion or debate and made communication one directional and less effective.

On the contrary, in many of the studied preschools the mechanisms through which the preschools work and underlying values were not well-established features. An attempt made to use a forum for parent education, conferences, meetings and discussions, parental visits, and the use of children's circulating books which are very effective means of communication found to be one of the

most difficult aspects of their work. In contrast, greater dependency on written letters, verbal messages, and telephone calls provide minimum opportunities for brief and concrete personal exchange of ideas in face-to-face situations.

As it is made clear in the Table III, the community never participate in woks like contributing labor, contributing materials for infrastructure projects, visiting the school to check on progress of improvement projects and conducting or managing income generation projects. On the other hand, the community participation was better in areas of cash contribution, monitoring student attendance, responding to teacher requests for meetings regarding monetary contribution or student behavior, participating in community meetings about improving the school, electing members of the PTA and meeting with teachers regarding student academic performance.

In this respect, the interviewed woreda education experts expressed their views that the area of works where the community participates was very limited. For instance, one participant said that, *"...most parents come to school at the opening day of school just to borrow books for their children."* The Other participants added that, *"Parents appear only twice a year first when teachers invited them for disciplinary and academic issue of their kids and second at the end of the year to celebrate parents' day."* Additionally, the participants of the focus group discussion maintained related idea that had been raised by the interview.

In order to examine factors that affect the level of community participation in preschool education the researchers extracted from the participants through open ended questions, interview and focus group discussion. The major factors related to community participation are lack of awareness, failure to attend regularly to the preschool meetings, and parents' failure to send their children to preschools.

With this regard most of the participants of the FGD raised that they must do a lot to improve their partnership with preschools. One participant of the FGD has to say this: *"I did not realize that parents and the community have something to do in the provision of preschool education."* He added that, *"I thought that parents' role is limited in primary school education"* Some of the participants rose that they do not send their children and attributed the reason to the protection of their kids and low economic condition.

B. Discussion

In this section discussion are made on the level of community participation in preschool education and factors that affect the involvement of the community in preschool education. It is evidenced that effective preschool education programs often include an intensive family or community support component that facilitates parental involvement and commitment to the child's education and promotes parents' personal growth. These may include parent education programs which involve livelihood and practical skills. However, the results of this study revealed that there is low involvement of the community in preschool education. This

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is due to the school and the parent themselves. The schools did not try their best to involve the community. On the other hand, the parents also have no understanding on preschools

objective and the activities done their so as to work together with preschools.

TABLE III
AREAS OF COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION

Items	Always		Often		Sometimes		Never		M
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	
Cash contribution	30	11.5	34	13	169	64.5	29	11.1	2.25
Labor contribution	11	4.2	3	1.6	53	20.2	195	74.4	1.35
Material contribution	10	3.8	8	3.1	51	19.5	193	73.7	1.37
Monitoring student attendance	4	1.5	61	23.3	184	70.2	13	5	2.21
Respond requests for meetings	8	3.1	93	35.5	147	56.1	14	5.3	2.36
Participate in community	11	4.2	71	27.1	162	61.8	18	6.9	2.29
Elect members of the PTA	16	6.1	68	26	171	65.3	7	2.7	2.35
Visit the school to check on project progress	26	9.9	12	4.6	63	24.1	161	61.5	1.63
Manage income	2	1	24	9.2	68	28.6	168	64.1	1.47
Discuss with teacher on student performance	29	11.1	82	31.3	125	47.7	26	9.9	2.44
Aggregate Mean									**1.97**

Symbol: #= Number; %= Percentage M= Mean

On the other hand, diverse research evidences have shown that parent-school partnership in early years is quite important for children's overall development during early years. Partnership between both parties will benefit the preschools, the parent and the child. Benefits to the preschools include fostering parents' positive attitudes toward the school so that they can support the effort of the institution in such ways as fundraisers, resource persons, decision makers and implementers. On the other hand the partnership also has benefits to the parents. They can also have a chance to get more accurate pictures of their child's strengths and weaknesses. Moreover, students will be benefited from joint work of institutions. It can foster confidence, independence and increases the chance for greater success and rouses wholesome attitudes toward the teachers and the program (Powell et al., 2010).

Regarding the means of communications commonly used by schools to communicate with the community, the results of this study indicate that written letters and verbal messages were the most commonly used means of communication. On the contrary, the least used ways of communication for parents to participate are conference, meetings and discussions and parents forum. Moreover, parent- teacher's relation is vital to strengthen the children's learning. So as to strengthen mutual responsibility and involvement, a closer partnership between teachers and parents is essential. The result of this study shows that the parent's situation to welcome to the invitations of the preschools was very low or minimal.

Many studies indicated that creating smooth and effective communication between preschools and parents is important for exchange of information and establish link in ways that value and respect the role of childern, parents and the school. Among these, parent education is said to be an excellent strategy to maintain parents' confidence, increase their knowledge of child development and help cope with school activities at home. In addition, the use of children's circulating books to communicate daily with parents help to

keep parents informed about day-to-day practices and give information about program procedures. Furthermore, conferences, meetings and discussions provide valuable opportunities to exchange clear and concrete information about the program (Fitzgerald, 2004; Lawrence, 2004).

The community participates in different activities of the school. One of the areas is community's participation in management of preschool education. With regards to this, the result disclosed that the participation of parent in preschool administration is negligible. In the studied preschools. However, various evidences have shown that partnerships that recognize the rightful role and responsibility of parents can provide an opportunity on decision making in various aspects of the preschools activities. Parents can serve in policy councils, on sub-committees, and play a supportive role in fund raising and various issues related to children's learning. Side by side, with increase in the involvement of parents with their children's education, the school needs to introduce the concept of accountability of school to parents. For instance, community participation in school management has great potential for removing mistrust and distance between people and schools through nurturing transparency of information and culture of mutual respect (National Education Association [NEA], 2008; Powell et al., 2010).

Regarding the areas of community involvement in preschool education the result of this study showed that the community never participates in most activities related to preschool expansion. On the other hand, the community participation was better in areas of cash contribution, monitoring student attendance, responding to teacher requests for meetings regarding monetary contribution or student behavior etc. However, various studies have shown that involving parents in the educational process is particularly important for maximizing low income children's opportunities for academic success, as it has the potential to lessen the discontinuity between the home and school environment. Parental involvement plays an important role

in students' education, and the advantages of it for students are numerous (Pascal & Bertram, 2012; Powell et al., 2010).

In order to examine factors that affect the level of community participation in preschool education the researchers extracted from the participants through open ended questions, interview and focus group discussion. The major factors related to community participation are lack of awareness, failure to attend regularly to the preschool meetings, and parents' failure to send their children to preschools. Supporting the above result scholars such as Kuçukturan & Akbaba (2017) revealed the reasons why parents fail to send their children to preschools is due to economic conditions, perceiving the child as too young; concerns over practices at school, perceptions about the mother's role, and distrust of the transportation system were the main.

IV. CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

A. Conclusions

The quality of experiences in the early years, influence the quality of later life. Thus, services for preschool children must meet and reflect the complexities of their lives to develop fully in all aspects. Therefore, based on the main results of the research the following conclusions were made:

The cooperation between parent and preschools to help students' learning was weak. Furthermore, the use of effective mechanisms to work with parents, were not a well-established features of most kindergartens. Consequently, parents' participation in the management aspects of many preschools seems minimal or low. Therefore, the preschools fail to promote effective partnerships with parents as recommended in the policy.

Various factors related to the status of preschool education intimidated the effectiveness of preschools. Generally, the policy claimed that formal education in the region begins at preschool level. However, successfully implementing the policy to meet the desired educational objectives remained a great challenge in the studied preschools. Therefore, any program that is founded on unreliable basis destined to fail even if the policy is excellent. Definitely, preschool education in the studied area had been a neglected level of education. It had never been considered as an integral part of formal education. And, not yet received due attention and support it deserves. Unless, the prevailing problems were resolved, any gain that was expected from preschool education in the region would be hardly obtained. Consequently, it would be difficult to meet the regional goals and profiles set in the policy in the studied preschools.

B. Suggestions

So as to improve the current community participation in preschool education of the region, and achieve the intended objectives, the following measures should be taken:

Preschools should design a workable strategy based on the context for working with parents. Besides, continuous efforts should be made by preschool in the orientations and re-orientations of parents about the objectives, scopes, principles, methods, and activities of preschool education.

It is advisable that Woreda education office should provide strong supportive services in creating community awareness, advocating the issue of cooperation among community, parents and schools for effective implementation of preschool education. In addition, Woreda education office should provide continuous technical advice and consultancy service for sponsoring agencies to effectively run preschool education. Besides, a minimum of one kindergarten should be used as a model of good practice in each woreda. Furthermore, it should collect, compile, and disseminate worthwhile experiences and information using newspaper, pamphlet, etc, among the kindergartens to be adopted.

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