Parental involvement in preschool education and its contribution to children's developmental outcomes

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Abstract

This study aimed to examine parental involvement in preschool education and its contribution for the developmental outcomes of children. To achieve this purpose, the descriptive survey design was used and data were collected through questionnaire from 88 parent-child dyads selected through systematic random sampling technique from participants in four districts of Yika sub-city, Addis Ababa. The data were analyzed using mean, standard deviation, correlation and regression. The result showed that the level of parental involvement in their children's preschool learning was below the average level on both home-based and preschool-based involvement dimensions. Parental monthly income had a significant and moderate positive relationship with home-based parental involvement. The regression analysis also showed an overall significant positive correlation between parental involvement and academic competence and social skills of children. The regression model illuminated that 36% of the variance in academic competence and 10% of the variance in social skills of children were explained by parental involvement. Therefore, it is concluded that parental involvement in their children's education is minimal and highly influenced by the level of parental monthly income. Besides, parental involvement significantly determines the level of children's academic competence and social skills but is negligible in terms of its association with their problem behavior.

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Introduction

Parents are the main educators and primary stockholders in their children preschool learning. Hence, parental collaboration with teachers in educating children is increasingly accepted as an essential ingredient in early childhood care and education (Jeffries, 2012). This collaboration is viewed in the form of parental involvement or participation in their children learning both at home and at school. Parental involvement in preschool includes a wide range of activities such as helping with homework, and reading with children (Mwirichia, 2013), volunteering in preschool, attending parent-teacher conferences, participating in extended class visits, and helping class activities (Jeffries, 2012; Ondieki, 2012). Parental involvement in the present study is the engagement of parents in their children's preschool learning at home and preschool settings with the intention to support children's educational progress.

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Parental involvement bridges the home and preschool immediate contexts of children (Nokali, Banchman & Votruba-Drzal, 2010) that are crucial for their early development and learning. Thus, it relies on Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory which holds that child's development and learning influenced by the multidimensional interconnections of home and preschool contexts (Bronfenbrenner cited in DeWar, 2011).

There are demographic factors determining the level of parental involvement in their children's preschool education. For instance, Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (as cited in Jeffries, 2012) underscored that socioeconomic status (SES) affects the time and energy parents are able to devote to school involvement, where parents with low SES may not allocate adequate time in order to involve in their children learning activities. Moreover, Maphoso and Mahlo (2014) indicated that parents' involvement in their children's learning is affected by their income and education level. That is, parents with high SES including high level of education and income are capable to create structured learning environment and have high interest to involve in reading activities, urging greater effort to praise indications of progress, and frequently providing rewards. On the other hand, Fantuzzoet al. (2004) found that parental involvement in children learning was not significantly correlated with educational and employment status of parents.

It is important to note that parental involvement in children's education has powerful effects on children's developmental outcomes. According to Harvard Family Research Project (2006), parent involvement has the strongest positive relationship to child outcomes. There are also research findings underscoring the important contribution of parental involvement for children's short-term and long-term developmental outcomes including academic, behavioral, and social. For instance, Jeffries (2012) pinpointed that parents' active involvement in their preschooler's learning improve their academic, behavioral, and social outcomes. Powell, Son, File and San Juan (2010) further specified that parental participation in children education positively associated with children's acquisition of literacy and numeracy skills, social skills, and positive attitude towards school. In line with this, McWayne et al. (2004) maintained that parents' regular contact with the early educational setting promotes the social functioning of children.

A study conducted by Fantuzzo et al. (2004), Nokali et al. (2010) and Taylor et al. (2004) also indicated that home-based and school-based parental involvement is the stronger predictor of children outcomes. That is, parental involvement in home and preschool positively related with children's adjustment to the school environment, cooperation behaviors, pro-social peer play behaviors, motivation to learn, attention, task persistence, receptive vocabulary skills, and lower levels of behavior problems. It was also found out that higher level of parental involvement is associated with higher achievement in science and mathematics (Ademola & Olajumoke, 2009), significantly related to higher social skills and lower rates of problem behaviors (Nokali et al., 2010; Powell et al., 2010). On the contrary, it was found out that parental involvement has no relationship with their children's social competence and learning behaviors (DeWar, 2011), and largely unrelated with academic achievement (Nokali et al., 2010).

In sum, many research findings cited above acknowledged that parents' active involvement in their children education is increasingly and widely viewed as crucial for children multidimensional development. This is because "no one is more influential than

parents in sending signals to their children on the importance of good performance in various school activities through their own examples, assistance and involvement" (Ondieki, 2012, p.2). Due to this reason, parental involvement has become a key component of national educational policies and strategies for early childhood programs in different countries (DeWar, 2011; Fantuzzo et al., 2004). It is also true in Ethiopia, where parents' role in preschool learning is considered as one major pillar for the effective implementation of the national Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) policy framework (MoE, MoH, MoWA, 2010a). However, parents' participation in children learning activities is very low (Ayele & Befekadu, 2008; Kurtulmus, 2016; Tirussew et al., 2009).

However, much work was not done and research in this area is generally scanty. Most of the existing global research evidences on parental involvement consider participants in the context of elementary and secondary schools and less attention to preschools. There are few research works conducted in preschools on parental involvement in some parts of Ethiopia like Harar (Tadesse, 2022), Somali region (Beide, Yigzaw& Shine, 2022), and Addis Ababa (Fiseha, 2022). But their research focused on assessing parental views of preschool involvement, status of parental involvement in preschools, and communication of parents with teachers. Studies showing the link between parental demographic profiles and parental involvement; and how parental involvement affects children's developmental outcomes have not got due attention. Hence, conducting research on such issue is vital to cast new light on and provide necessary input to concerned bodies for intervention. Thus, the main purpose of this study is to investigate parental involvement in their children's home-based and preschool-based education and its contribution with children developmental outcomes.

Therefore, throughout the research process, efforts were made to achieve the following three specific research objectives: (1) determine the level of parental involvement in their children preschool education; (2) see the relationship between demographic factors (parental educational level, parental income, number of children, child birth order) and parental involvement in their children's preschool learning; (3) examine the contribution of parental involvement for children developmental outcomes (social skills, problem behaviors, academic competence).

Methods

Research Design

*C*onsidering the research objectives, this study followed quantitative research approach. Specifically, descriptive survey design was used to examine the variables under consideration. This design helps to gather quantitative data at a particular point in time with the intention to describe the variables and determine the prevailing association among them.

Study Site

The study was conducted in Addis Ababa, Yeka sub-city, one of the ten sub-cities of the capital. The sub-city has 13 districts. Of these, the study considers government owned preschools in four districts: 3, 4, 10 and 11. In each district, there is only one government

preschool established in the premise of primary schools. These preschools have all level of programs including nursery, lower kindergarten, and upper kindergarten provided for three years.

The target preschools have their own compound within the premises of primary schools in which they are situated. They are government owned. Amharic is a medium of instruction and communication though children learn English as one major subject.

There are a total of 20 classrooms reserved for children to learn from nursery to upper kindergarten in the study preschools. In addition, there are two sleeping rooms, two coordinators' and two staff offices in all preschools. This means, half of the preschools have no children sleeping rooms, coordinators and staff offices. The total number of children in these preschools is 831 with their age ranging from four to six. Teachers are 34 in number and almost all of them are females certified in the field of ECCE by taking one year training.

The average child-class ratio of the preschools was about 42:1 whereas the average child-teacher ratio in the preschools was about 25:1. The preschools do not charge monthly fee except for registration fee paid at the beginning of every year.

Sampling

The study targeted at lower and upper kindergarten children, and their parents and teachers. This is because children, parents and teachers at this level are believed to be better familiar with the preschool programs. Stratified random sampling and systematic random sampling techniques were employed to select the samples. At the beginning, the four districts and the preschools in the districts and the preschool levels (lower kindergarten and upper kindergarten) were categorized into strata. Then, the researcher involved 152 children and their respective parents (152 child-parent dyads) selected through systematic random sampling procedure from a total 457 targeted children and their respective parents from both categories of the strata. Then, parents of the selected children were written a letter through a letter to come to the preschool by teachers. But, 48 parents were not responsive, and 16 dyads were excluded for the reason that they escaped items in the data collection instruments. That is, 88 child-parent dyads (88 children and 88 parents) participated in the study based on the interest of the parents. Children participants were eligible to be selected in the research after parents filled the instrument.

Table 1

Demographic Information of Participants

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percent
Gender (Children)	Male	47	53.4
	Female	41	46.6
	Total	88	100
Gender (Parents)	Male	26	29.5
	Female	62	70.5
	Total	88	100
Parents' Educational Level	Non-literate	40	45.5
	Primary school level	28	31.8

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percent
	High school level	18	20.5
	Certificate level	1	1.1
	Diploma level	1	1.1
Number of Children in the Home	1-2 children	47	53.5
	3-4 children	32	36.3
	5-6 children	9	10.2
Child Birth Order	First and second	62	70.4
	Third and fourth	19	21.6
	Fifth and above	7	8.0
Parents' Monthly Income	1000 Birr and below	81	92.0
	1001-1500 Birr	6	6.9
	1501 Birr and above	1	1.1

The demographic profiles of the research samples are indicated in Table 1. As depicted in the table, many of parent participants were non-literate and their monthly income was 1000 *Birr* and below. One up to two numbers of children who are first or second born children are found in majority of the participants' home.

Instruments and Data Collection Procedures

Instruments

In order to solicit data about the issue under investigation; an adapted Amharic version questionnaire having three parts was used. The first part contains background information of participants. The second encompasses items concerned with parental involvement whereas the third part constitutes items addressing children's developmental outcomes including social skills, problem behaviors and academic competence.

Family Involvement Questionnaire (FIQ)

It is an instrument used to measure the level of parental involvement in their children's education. An adapted form of FIQ developed by Fantuzzo, Tighe and Childs in (Jeffries, 2012) was employed in this research. The instrument used to measure parental involvement in this research is Likert type consisting 28 items having three point scales representing 0 = never, 1 = sometimes, and 2 = mostly. It has two sub-scales including Home-Based Involvement ([HBI], 13 items; e.g. I spend time with my child working on reading skills) and Preschool-Based Involvement ([PBI], 15 items; e.g. I talk to my child's teacher about my child's accomplishments). HBI measures the engagement of parents in their children's care and education at home whereas PBI measures parents' partaking in preschool related activities. The higher score in the instrument represents better parental participation in their children's education and vice versa. Both sub-scales of parental involvement have acceptable reliability coefficients. For instance, Jeffries (2012) reported that the internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha values) of both HBI and PBI was .85.

Social Skills Rating System (SSRS)

It is a tool developed by Gresham and Elliott in 1990 which is used to evaluate three domains of children's Social Skills, Problem Behaviors, and Academic Competence (Hayner,

1999). SSRS has intended for use with individuals whose age range from 3 to 18 years old. A teacher version of SSRS was adapted to generate the data. The instrument was rated by the lead teachers of children in each classroom since they are close to see every interaction instances of children. It comprises 55 items structured on three scales: social skills (26 items, e.g. invites others to join in activities), problem behaviors (18 items, e.g. gets angry easily), and academic competence (11 items, e.g. easily makes transition from one classroom activity to another) rated on a 3-point scale (i.e. 0 = never, 1 = sometimes, 2 = very often).

The SSRS has been subjected to numerous validation studies and has been shown to be a reliable and valid instrument. As reported by Stuart, Gresham and Elliott (as cited in Hayner, 1999), the internal reliability coefficient of SSRS for the total instrument was .94. The higher score on the social skill and academic competence scales shows positive quality but higher score on problem behavior scale represents the difficulty. Prior to use the instruments, back and forth English-Amharic language translation was made to assure the equivalence of items in both languages.

Before the instruments were used in the actual investigation, pilot test was conducted on 17 child-parent dyads found in two preschools other than the main study sites but with similar characteristics. The result of the Cronbach's Alpha indicated that the reliability coefficient of items for total parental involvement, and sub-scales home-based involvement and preschool-based involvement were .87, .86 and .83 respectively. In addition, the reliability coefficients of the outcome variables were .87, .91, and .93 for social skill, problem behavior and academic competence in respective order.

Data Collection Procedures

Before the commencement of the study, the investigator visited the selected preschools to get introduced and secure willingness of coordinators to participate in the research. After granting the permission, the researcher consulted teacher participants in order to clarify the nature and purpose of the study and obtained verbal informed consent and assurance about their willingness to aid the data collection process. Next, teachers communicate parents of the selected children to come to the preschool to take part in the research. Then, two teachers in each preschool (one in each level of kindergarten) were assigned to read the family involvement questionnaire to parents and record their responses on the questionnaires. These teachers were also responsible to rate a teacher version SSRS questionnaire designed to solicit data about children's developmental outcomes since they were assigned to teach participant children at each level of kindergarten. Clarifications were made promptly to the participants throughout the administration process. This was followed by checking the completeness and consistency of the data. Finally, the distributed questionnaires were collected, arranged, coded and entered in SPSS-Version 23.

Data Analysis

The data collected from the questionnaires were arranged and entered into SPSS-23. Data from the structured questionnaires were analyzed using frequency, percentage, mean, standard deviation, correlation and regression. Frequencies and percentages were utilized to describe the demographic characteristics of the participants whereas mean and standard

deviation were used to determine the level of parental involvement and children developmental outcomes. Spearman rank order correlation coefficient was employed to see the relationship of parental involvement with some demographic variables. Moreover, a number of simple regressions were performed in order to analyze the influence of parental involvement on children developmental outcomes.

Results

Status of Parents' Involvement in their Children's Education

The first objective of the study was to determine the level of parental involvement in their children's preschool education. As it was indicated in the methods part, items of parental involvement were rated on three point scales (0 = never, 1 = sometimes, and 2 = mostly) with 26, 30, and 56 maximum expected scores for HBI, PBI, and total parental involvement scales respectively.

Table 2

Level of Parental Involvement in Children Preschool Education (n = 88)

Variables	Min.	Max.	Total Score on the Scale	M	SD
Home-based involvement	5.00	29.00	26.00	12.80	4.56
Preschool-based involvement	1.00	21.00	30.00	11.28	4.24
Total parental involvement	10.00	41.00	56.00	24.08	6.81

Note. Min. = Minimum; Max. = Maximum

As depicted in Table 2, the mean values of the participant parents were 12.80 (*SD*=4.56), 11.28 (*SD*=4.24), and 24.08*(SD*=4.56) on HBI, PBI, and total parental involvement in their order. This means, the mean scores were below the average on the total scale and sub-scales of parental involvement measure.

Relationship of some Demographic Variables with Parental Involvement

In an attempt to see the correlation between some demographic factors and parental involvement in their children's preschool learning, Spearman rank order correlation coefficient was calculated and the results are depicted in Table 3.

Table 3

Bivariate Correlation Matrix of Parental Involvement by Demographic Variables (n = 88)

Variables		1	2	3	4	5	6
1	Parent's educational level						
2	Number of children	-.10					
3	Parental monthly income	.44**	-.04				
4	Child birth order	-.14	.83**	-.06			
5	Home-based parental involvement	.16	-.10	.30**	-.08		

Variables		1	2	3	4	5	6
6	Preschool-based parental involvement	.03	-.11	.07	-.06	.20	
7	Overall parental involvement	.12	-.13	.25*	-.06	.80**	.76**

Note. * $p < 0.05$ (2-tailed), ** $p < 0.01$(2-tailed)

The inter-correlation matrix shown in Table 3 revealed that parental monthly income was positively and significantly correlated with overall parental involvement ($r = .25$, $p < 0.05$) and home-based involvement dimension ($r = .30$, $p < 0.01$). That is, parental home involvement in their children's learning has intermediate positive and significant correlation with the level of their monthly income. It was also true that educational level and monthly income have moderate and significant positive correlation, whereas child birth order has significantly strong positive relationship with number of children. Similarly, the total parental involvement measure has statistically strong positive correlation with its sub-scales, i.e., HBI and PBI.

The Influence of Parental Involvement on Children's Developmental Outcomes

The last objective of this study was to see the contribution of parental involvement for children's developmental outcomes. To meet this purpose, teachers filled out an instrument consisting of items measuring social skills, problem behaviors, and academic competence of children which were rated on a three point scale (i.e. 0 = never, 1 = sometimes, 2 = very often).

Table 4

The Level of Children Social Skill, Problem Behavior, and Academic Competence (n=88)

Variables	Min.	Max.	Total Score on the Scale	M	SD
Social skill	17.00	39.00	52.00	28.08	5.92
Problem behavior	0.00	18.00	36.00	7.49	4.52
Academic competence	2.00	20.00	30.00	14.09	3.37

Note. Min. = Minimum; Max. = Maximum

The result of descriptive statistics in Table 4 shows that the mean score of children on social skills was M=28.08withSD=5.92 and mean score for academic competence was M=14.09 with SD=3.37 out of the 52 and 30 maximum scores on the scale, respectively. That is, the mean values of children on these dimensions of development concentrated around the mid-point of the scales. On the other hand, the mean scores of children's problem behavior (M=7.49, SD=4.52) was almost five times below the maximum expected score (i.e. 36) on the scale. This means children were not showing problem behaviors.

Table 5

Regression Analysis of Parental Involvement with Developmental Outcome Domains

Dependent Variables	R	R^2	F	B	β	t
Social skill	.31	.10	9.28*	.27	.31	3.05*
Problem behavior	-.02	.00	.05	-.02	-.03	-.23
Academic competence	.60	.36	47.38*	.30	.60	6.88*

Note. **p*<.05, *n* = 88.

Looking into Table 5, the simple regression coefficient revealed that parental involvement significantly related with academic competence of children $F(1,86) = 47.38$, $p< 0.05$. The multiple correlation coefficient of academic competence was .60, and approximately 36% of the variance in children's academic competence accounted for only by parental involvement in their children's preschool education. In addition, when parental involvement enter in to the regression model, its correlation coefficient was .31 and explains 10% of the variance in social skills of children $F(1,86) = 9.28$, $p< 0.05$. But parental involvement in their preschooler's learning had statistically non-significant negative correlation with problem behavior of children and it explains very small percent of the variance in children's problem behavior.

Discussion

The result of the current study demonstrated that parental involvement in their children's education both in home-based and preschool-based activities was below the average of the expected score on the scale. This is consistent with the previous research findings of Ayele and Befekadu (2008), Kurtulmus (2016), and Tirussew et al. (2009).This may be due to low level of parental education that possibly makes them less aware about the importance of their participation in children's preschool education. These parents also have low level of income and are primarily engaged in daily labor activities in order to fulfill the basic needs of the family. This compromise the time parents allocate to activities helpful for children's learning.

Of the demographic factors considered in the current study, only parental monthly income had intermediate and statically significant positive relationship with overall parental involvement and HBI dimension. That is, as the level of parent's monthly income increases, it considerably enhances the participation of parents in their children's learning activities at home. This could be explained in that, when parents have better level of monthly income, they will better fulfill play materials that further help them to engage in their children's learning. This finding is consistent with Maphoso and Mahlo (2014) which revealed that high level of parents' income positively affects their involvement in children's learning.

But, in this study, income had very weak positive and non-significant correlation with PBI. This shows that the significant relationship observed on total parental involvement with parent's monthly income was due to its significant relationship with HBI. However, the level of parental involvement did not significantly relate with parent's educational level, number of children, child birth order. This could be attributed to small differences among parents in

their level of education. Above 77% of parent participants in the study were either non-literate or attended only up to primary education. Similarly, most children were found in one category, i.e. at the bottom (see Table 1).That is, many parents had one to two children (53.5%) with first or second in birth order (70.4%). Regarding educational level of parents, the present research finding deviates from Maphoso and Mahlo (2014), but it coincides with the finding of Fantuzzoet al. (2004), who ascertained that parental involvement in children learning was not significantly related to educational and employment level of parents. This may be due to the difference in research setting and the characteristics of data sources. For instance, the study by Maphoso and Mahlo was conducted in boarding schools and measuring only academic achievement whereas the current research sites were in government owned preschools and measuring social skills, academic competence and problem behaviors.

The data also revealed that parental involvement had significant moderate correlation with both children's academic competence and social skills. Parental involvement in their children education also explains 36% and 10% of the variances in academic competence and social skills, respectively. One of the possible reasons for small percentage of variance in social skills as explained by parental involvement may be due to the fact that children are found at the stage of 'play age' where they prefer to interact with their peers than parents. These findings deviate from the work of DeWar (2011) and Nokali et al. (2010) who found out that parental involvement has no relationship with their children's social competence and academic achievement.

However, in agreement with the findings of the present study, a substantial body of research (eg. Ademola & Olajumoke, 2009; Fantuzzo et al., 2004; Harvard Family Research Project, 2006; Jeffries, 2012; McWayne et al., 2004; Nokali et al., 2010; Powell et al., 2010; Taylor et al., 2004) pointed out that parental active involvement in their children's education has strong positive relationship and strong predictor of child outcomes. These research results maintained that parental involvement improves academic achievement, social skills and problem behaviors of their preschool children. When we single out the contribution of parental involvement in their children's education for improving children's behavior, contrary to the previous studies, the current research result disclosed the presence of very weak negative correlation, and parental involvement has very minimal contribution for reducing problem behaviors of children. This may be attributed to minimal level of problem behavior observed in children as older siblings, relatives, neighbors, and the communities as a whole are responsible to correct the misbehaviors of children. Because, in collective community like presumably the case in Ethiopia; everyone is responsive to child disciplines. This presumption needs further investigation.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The status of parental involvement in their children home-based and preschool-based education activities is below the average of the scale values. This is due to low level of parental education, awareness and income. Though the status of parental involvement is not at the expected level, the presence of such practice is important to improve the academic competence (30%) and social skills (10%) of preschool children. Children's education is a shared venture; hence, parents should be preschool partners and work collaboratively with

teachers for the benefit of their children. Thus, it is recommended that preschools should be responsible to raise the awareness of parents about the importance of their involvement in children educational activities by inviting them to take part in different events (during children registration, welcoming day, holidays, parent days, children graduations), regular meetings, volunteering activities, training and discussion programs. Establishing and strengthening parent-teacher associations is also very vital to enhance the active participation of parents in their children's education.

The level of parental involvement in their children's preschool education was positively related to the level of parental monthly income. As the level of parent's monthly income increases, it enhances the participation of parents in their children's learning activities. Therefore, it is recommended that preschool teachers are highly expected to give advice for parents to allocate time and support their children's learning especially during the night and at weekends when they are off from their work. In the long run, the city government would also be responsible to nominate low income parents and make them beneficial targets of the safety-net program and involve them in income generating activities.

Limitations of the Study

The research site for this study, i.e. the sub-city, was selected purposefully and data were collected from a limited number and group of participants using only questionnaire. In addition, parents provided data with the help of teachers that may affect them to give reliable information about their involvement in children's preschool education. These may limit to provide accurate picture of the issue under investigation in broader perspective. Therefore, the results cannot be generalized to the other sub-cities. Thus, it is suggested that future studies in similar area could consider more preschools, large number and group of participants including teachers, parents, children, and officials using more numbers of instruments for triangulation and generalizability.

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