Teachers' Beliefs on Parental Involvement in Children's Transition from Home to ECE Settings

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ABSTRACT

Children's development is impacted by changes in the environments in which they interact. Normative transitions such as entry into an early childhood education (ECE) setting come with opportunities and challenges for children and their families. Supporting families and encouraging their involvement during the transition period enables children to understand their new environment and make new connections with teachers and classmates. This article analyses case studies from a doctoral research study based in Cameroon and identifies teachers' beliefs on orientation processes and their contribution towards the transition process to ECE. Examples of transition practices in the study context are shared through data gained from semi-structured interviews, observations, and informal conversations, providing educators' perspectives and the role of multiple caregivers in children's daily activities. Findings reveal the need for building connections between teachers and families before families begin attending the educational context, as it allows the families' individual needs to be better supported. The study provides evidence of the implications of orientation processes aimed at familiarising families and aiding their adaptation to a new educational context. The article considers teachers' views on transition and suggests recommendations for effective orientation processes that address the specific needs of families.

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INTRODUCTION

Children undergo a series of transitions from birth and throughout life. However, their first move into a formal education context is crucial for their education and well-being (Bulkeley & Fabian, 2006). Transition processes impact children's later academic and social outcomes (Takriti et al., 2022). Transitions can be poor or less successful for children "if their individual characteristics are incompatible with features of the environment they encounter" (Peters, 2010, p. 2). Knowledge of children's cultures and backgrounds allows for contextually relevant strategies incorporating family culture and childcare practices when planning and preparing for children's transition (Brooker, 2008; Peters, 2010; Peters et al., 2015; Wadende et al., 2016). Peters (2010) notes that relationships between all stakeholders are vital for a smooth transition. While peer relationships and child-teacher interactions are essential for children, respectful and reciprocal home-school relationships are also crucial to successful transitions (Peters, 2010). Effective orientation processes, sharing information in one setting about the other, and respectful and reciprocal parent-teacher relationships will enhance children's learning experience in their new environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1981; Peters et al., 2015).

This article shares findings from a doctoral study (Fenmachi, 2023) that explores parents' and teachers' conceptions of parental involvement in children's learning as well as orientation and transition practices developed by two nursery school settings (where children are aged 3–6 years old). To clarify the differences between orientation and transition practices, Dockett and Perry (2001) explain that orientation programs are presented by educational institutions to parents and children to familiarise themselves with their new educational setting, such as a tour of the educational environment or a parent information presentation. Dockett and Perry (2001) note that transition practices may include aspects of orientation but may be longer term and tailored to suit individual family needs and expectations. Orientation of families to the new educational setting before their child's starting date involves practices that can be viewed in many settings. Bronfenbrenner (1981) recommends that prior to entry into a new setting, it is important that members of both settings (home and ECE setting) who are involved in the child's transition "are provided with information, advice, and experience relevant to the impending transition" (p. 217). Orientation may provide parents with information about the centre or school day, room rules and routines, organisation, and timetables as highlighted in the literature (Fontil & Petrakos, 2015; Harper, 2016; McIntyre et al., 2007). Parents participants in McIntyre et al.'s (2007) study reported their interest in being actively involved in transition practices, preschool readiness, and academic and behavioural expectations. For orientation to be valuable and effective for transitioning families, Peters (2010) recommends that opportunities and information need to be provided before the child's starting date to the centre or school and "is accessible in both quality and quantity" (p. 52). However, as Dockett and Perry (2001) point out, orientation and transition programmes can vary considerably in both quantity and quality across educational settings. Parents in their study had wanted "much more than a walk around the school and a talk from the principal about what is expected" (p. 8). They had wanted the opportunity to be able to ask questions and discuss their child's needs with their new teacher, which will involve several sessions and have a chance to observe their children in the new educational setting to determine how well they are settling in. Teachers also expressed the importance of getting to know children and families initially, as well as ongoing transition programs that build parent-teacher-child relationships. Findings across research establish a connection between the support and information provided to parents before their child's starting date and the effectiveness of the family's overall transition experience (De Gioia, 2017; Dockett & Perry, 2001; Fontil & Petrakos, 2015; Harper, 2016; McIntyre et al., 2007). This study examines teachers' beliefs on orientation processes to support families' transition from home to ECE. It identifies the role of teachers, parents, siblings, extended family and other community members in supporting the ongoing transition practices for children in a new educational context.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Sociocultural theories of childhood emphasise parents and external community participation as valuable aspects of children's learning and development. This article employs Bronfenbrenner's (1981) ecological systems theory to emphasise the need for trustful and respectful parent-teacher relationships as part of the orientation process necessary for a successful transition.

Bronfenbrenner's (1981) ecological systems theory depicts that children's development is influenced by ecological environments, which he classified into microsystems, mesosystems, exosystems, and macrosystems. The microsystem, which he defined as the child's immediate environment where the most direct interactions occur, will include the home and ECE centre in the transition period. The mesosystem depicts the interrelationship between two microsystems and, in this case, home-ECE relationships. Exosystems are environments in which the developing person does not actively participate but is influenced by events occurring within these environments. This represents parent-teacher/school administration orientation meetings where the developing person has no direct involvement but is influenced by the decisions and outcomes of such arrangements. In addition, parents' working conditions affect parent-child interactions and their ability to accompany children to the educational setting. Bronfenbrenner defines broader cultural and political systems of the society as macrosystems and, in this instance, can represent the Ministry of Education which is responsible for overseeing curriculum development and policy implementation associated with the inclusion of parents in transition processes. Chronosystems examine changes over time in the developing person's life (Bronfenbrenner, 1986). Significant life transitions affect developmental changes for an individual as well as family processes. In the context of this study, this includes orientation processes and the changes experienced by children and their families as they transition to formal learning institutions. Understanding children's transition processes within the ecological framework highlights the importance of continuity and shared experience between home, ECE settings and the wider community. Communication and positive connections between teachers and parents are necessary to understand parents' views and needs and rethink strategies to meet parents' individual needs.

Sociocultural views of child development emphasise the importance of context. Therefore, this study considers African concepts of child development, which explains children's learning and development through participation and socialisation processes (Nsamenang, 2008; Okwany, 2016; Super & Harkness, 1986; Wadende et al., 2016). African concepts of child care emphasise children's learning and development within their families and cultural communities and the critical role of parents, siblings, and extended family members in child upbringing. Thus, planning and preparing transition processes must consider the needs of children and their families.

Bronfenbrenner (1981) places emphasis on developing positive links between home and the educational context. The transition from home to ECE may be regarded as a significant milestone in a child's development that affects both the child and their family (Peters, 2010). The ease with which the individual settles into a new context hinges upon their prior knowledge and preparation, as well as the support conferred by the relationships they have formed throughout the transition process. This study reinforces the importance of building connections and relationships between the home and educational settings.

This paper will also draw on Rimm-Kaufman and Pianta's (2000) Ecological and Dynamic Model of Transition, developed from Bronfenbrenner and Morris's (1998) bioecological model. The Ecological and Dynamic Model of Transition considers the relationship between children and their surrounding context (educational institution, family/extended family, peers and the community) as essential to the transition process. The model emphasises the development of these relationships over time, influencing children's development, transition, and academic outcomes. This is to say that transition practices are not only impacted by a network of relationships that affects the child directly (child-parent or child-teacher relationship) or indirectly (parent-teacher relationship) but also how these relationships develop over time. Parent involvement is directly correlated with children's social and cognitive development and positive parent-teacher relationships (Grindal et al., 2016; Winder & Corter, 2016). When parents and teachers engage in relationships of trust and respect, this creates a continuum between home and classroom experiences (Topping & Wolfendale, 2018), positively impacting children's learning and transition processes. Takriti et al. (2020) assert that children's initial transition experiences influence academic outcomes. The main idea about the Ecological and Dynamic Model of Transition (Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000) is the consistency and continuity in these patterns of relationships over time through collaboration, shared goals and decision-making (Epstein, 1995, 2018), frequent and ongoing communication which impacts transition processes positively.

METHODOLOGY

STUDY CONTEXT

As mentioned earlier, this study is part of a broader doctoral research that explored parents' and teachers' perspectives about parental involvement in children's learning while also investigating teachers' beliefs on transition practices in two nursery school settings (private and public nursery schools). The private nursery school incorporates Dewey's (1916) philosophical principles whereby the school administration and teachers collaborate with families to co-construct educational and life experiences for children to become active members of society (Fenmachi, 2023). The private nursery school was divided into Nursery One and Two sections and was part of a primary and secondary school on the same premises. Children between 3-6 years attended the private nursery school, although younger children could be accepted depending on class sizes and child-teacher ratios. A total number of 18 children attended the nursery school. Teaching and learning in the private nursery school, although instructional, followed a learner-centred approach and, in addition to a small class with child-teacher ratios of 4–1, which allowed for quality child-parent-teacher interactions. The public nursery school included both Nursery One and Two levels and was a bilingual institution with French and English sections. However, about 60% of families in the English-speaking section were Francophones. For the public nursery school, only English-speaking parents or families in which one of the parents was an Anglophone participated in this study. The age for admission was 4–6 years, as stipulated by the Ministry of Basic Education (2018). Over 165 children (over 80 in each room) attended the English-speaking section for Nursery One and Two in the public nursery school catered by just four teachers. Therefore, a high child-teacher ratio of approximately 80–2 (higher than the Government required ratios of 30–2) impacted child-parent-teacher interactions, parental involvement and transition practices.

STUDY SAMPLE AND METHODS

The study adopted a qualitative inquiry and a case study approach to analyse teachers' views on the initial transition from home to the nursery school setting and the horizontal transition after children had been in school for two months in both nursery school settings. The qualitative methodology allowed an in-depth analysis of participants' views and ideas using a relatively small sample size (Cohen et al., 2018; Murray, 2010). In addition, a case study design enabled an in-depth understanding of participants' perspectives and preserved the multiple realities of the participants (Crowe et al., 2011; Yin, 2009). Participants included eight female teachers (four in each preschool) aged between 20 and 41 years old, twelve parents and their children (six in the private and six in the public nursery school in Douala, Cameroon). Multiple data-gathering instruments were employed to explore different perspectives and better understand participants' responses (Cohen et al., 2018). Data were obtained through semi-structured interviews (Appendix A), observations (Appendix B) and field notes to record participants' verbal and non-verbal responses after the children had been attending nursery school for two months. Teacher interviews were aimed at understanding the various means of communication and information sharing between the home and nursery school, their perception of the role of families in children's transition from home to nursery school, and their strategies for promoting parent participation as children settle in their new environment. Interviews were scheduled following participants' availability. All teachers preferred the interviews to be carried out in their classrooms at the close of the day after all children had been picked up. Interviews lasted between 20 to 30 minutes, and second interviews were organised to gain additional information or clarify participants' responses. Participants' responses were audio-recorded during the interview process and transcribed word verbatim after the interviews. Transcripts were emailed or printed and handed to participants (depending on their preference) for amendments and confirmation. Observations were conducted for two weeks in each nursery school for Nursery One and Two classes (one week in each class). Observations targeted parent-child and teacher interactions during school drop-offs and pickups and classroom interactions during the nursery school session to understand children's everyday experiences as they move from home to the nursery school and back again. Thus, observations were carried out for the entire nursery school session, usually between 7.30 am to 2.30 pm, with a video recorder, photographs and field notes.

DATA ANALYSIS

After interviews and observations were completed, the scripts were transcribed and labelled for each participant category. Thematic analysis was employed to identify, analyse and report themes within data (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Cohen et al., 2018). This involved coding, identifying patterns and relationships between codes and developing key themes to report the findings (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Codes were developed from participants' responses (Cohen et al., 2018). The next step was to sort out these initial codes into potential themes that would be used to report the data. The data was also interpreted through the lens of sociocultural and African theoretical frameworks, which both emphasise the critical role of the educators, family/extended family, peers and the community in children's learning and development. The final themes that emerged from the analysis were used to report the findings below. These include teachers' perspectives on the transition process, horizontal transitions observed in drop-off and pickup routines, and educators' role in promoting parental engagement in ongoing transitions.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Ethical approval was gained from the University of Waikato, the Division of Education Research Ethics Committee and the Regional Delegation of Basic Education, Douala, Littoral Region of Cameroon. Letters explaining the aims and processes for data collection were emailed to principals, teachers and parents. A verbal explanation about the purpose of the study was provided to participants before data collection began. I also spent a week at each school familiarising myself with staff, children and their families, establishing rapport and trust (Gollop, 2000) before I started collecting data. Participants knew participation was optional; thus, there was no obligation to participate. All participants except children signed consent letters. Informed assent and potential dissent were sought from children, and it was an ongoing negotiation process to understand and respect children's decision to continue participating (Bissenden & Gunn, 2017; Ebrahim, 2010). Upon entry into any classroom for observation, I introduced myself to the children. I also shared some information about myself and the purpose of the study to create some informality (Gollop, 2000) and make children feel comfortable. Children were observed for any signs of verbal or non-verbal assent or dissent, and it was planned that if at any time children displayed signs of distress through oral or facial expression, the research process would be halted. However, for this study, all participants followed through to the end of the study. Cultural consideration was an important aspect considered in the research process. The research was conducted in Cameroon, and as a Cameroonian, I ensured the research was carried out with respect to Cameroon culture and practices. Therefore, before engaging with families, it was ensured that consent had been mutually agreed upon within the family, especially from the father, who is culturally regarded as the family head and responsible for decision-making. Finally, all participants' information was reported using pseudonyms to maintain the participants' anonymity.

FINDINGS

Findings from the study revealed an absence of an orientation process and a lack of parent-teacher communication and collaboration for the vertical transition from home to nursery school. Teachers' beliefs on parental involvement in children's transition from home to nursery school were also analysed. The results revealed parent-child-teacher roles and activities in horizontal transitions between the home and nursery school and within the everyday practices of the nursery school. Finally, the ways in which teachers collaborate with parents to improve children's learning experience as they settle into their new environment are represented.

TEACHERS' BELIEFS ON PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN CHILDREN'S VERTICAL TRANSITION FROM HOME TO ECE SETTINGS (PRIVATE AND PUBLIC NURSERY SCHOOLS)

According to the teachers in this study, parental involvement was not necessary when a child transitioned from home to nursery school. Therefore, the teacher's job was to comfort and help the child adapt during this period. Teachers also believed that the adaptation period for the child might be extensive if parents are involved in the transition process. "Parents can stay

for about 30 minutes, but we don't encourage them to continue staying because it delays the adaptation time for the child" (T2, public nursery school). Teachers provided fun activities, sang songs, read stories, colouring, and allowed children to watch educational TV programs to get them settled in the classroom. Parents were invited to stay with the children in their classrooms for 20 to 30 minutes for a week only and were encouraged to sneak out while the child was engaged in learning activities. The idea was for the child to adapt to the environment independently. One of the private nursery school teachers reported:

> We welcome children with a smile, sing songs, read stories, and watch the TV to make the child comfortable, and when the child is so focused on playing or watching the TV, the parent can just sneak out. Parents could stay for 20 to 30 minutes for a week, but we ask parents to stop staying after a week in order for the child to adapt to the environment independently. (T3, private nursery school)

HORIZONTAL TRANSITIONS OBSERVED IN CHILDREN'S DROP-OFF AND PICKUP ROUTINES (PRIVATE AND PUBLIC NURSERY SCHOOLS)

The results revealed changes in roles and activities in children's daily movement between the home and the nursery school. In these horizontal transitions, drivers or parents drop children off at the school gate in the morning. Children must be picked up from their classrooms at the end of the day, even though they were dropped off at the gate. It was observed that parents spent a very short time (2–3 minutes) dropping off their children, and some children went home using the school bus. Parents reported that children were dropped off at the gate as they were in a hurry to catch up with work. Thus, there were limited interactions between teachers and families during drop-offs. For the private nursery school, the gatekeeper assisted in ushering children into the school premises. In contrast, for the public nursery school, a teacher welcomed children by the gate between 7 am and 7.30 am. The gatekeeper ushered in the children from 7.30 am, the time for the general assembly. In both nursery schools, older siblings were active agents, taking part in and supporting children's daily movement from the home to the nursery school. Older siblings sometimes assisted in dropping off younger siblings in the mornings and ushering them into their classrooms. Extended family members and older siblings helped care for children after school in the absence of parents. This was the case for children who were picked up by drivers or travelled back home by school bus. A private nursery school parent reported: "I drop them off in the mornings, and they go home by school bus. My Mum, including other family relatives who live with us due to the Anglophone crisis, receive them when they get home" (SH's Dad, private nursery school, N2). Table 1 shows the drop-off and pickup routines of six private and public nursery school parents (Nursery One and Two).

Table 1 Drop-off and Pickup Routines of Six Private and Public Nursery School Parents (Nursery One and Two).

PRIVATE NURSERY SCHOOL		PUBLIC NURSERY SCHOOL	
PARENT	**PARENT-CHILD-TEACHER INTERACTIONS DURING DROP-OFF OR PICKUPS**	**PARENT**	**PARENT-CHILD-TEACHER INTERACTIONS DURING DROP-OFF OR PICKUPS**
KE's Mum (private nursery school, N2)	Limited parent-child interactions were observed during drop-off or pickups. Parents reported challenges such as inflexible working conditions, which prevented them from spending time at the nursery school. KE always went back home by school bus. Quality child-teacher interactions were observed between the child and teacher during drop-offs or pickups and for the times spent in class. Usually, there were no parent-teacher interactions as neither Dad nor Mum went into the classroom during drop-offs.	ES's Mum (public nursery school, N2)	Parent-child interactions were evident in most cases as the child was dropped off and picked up from the classroom. Quality child-teacher interactions were inhibited by large class sizes and high child-teacher ratios, which also impacted parent-teacher relationships and children's overall transition experience.
RA's Mum (private nursery school, N2)	RA and her sister were always dropped off by Mum, a school staff member; thus, parent-child interactions were evident in most cases. RA and her sister went back home by school bus. Quality child-teacher interactions were observed between the child and teacher during drop-offs or pickups and for the times spent in class. On average, Mum spent less than five minutes interacting with the teacher during drop-offs.	GS's Mum (public nursery school, N2)	GS's Dad was a motorbike rider, so he dropped off GS in front of the school gate, thus limiting parent-child interactions. Parent-teacher interactions were also impacted by the nature of the classroom setting as well as the parent's working conditions. On average, Dad spent less than a minute during drop-offs or pickups.

(Contd.)

PRIVATE NURSERY SCHOOL		PUBLIC NURSERY SCHOOL	
PARENT	**PARENT-CHILD-TEACHER INTERACTIONS DURING DROP-OFF OR PICKUPS**	**PARENT**	**PARENT-CHILD-TEACHER INTERACTIONS DURING DROP-OFF OR PICKUPS**
SH's Dad (private nursery school, N2)	Parent-child and parent-teacher interactions were evident as SH's Dad was an administrative staff member of the school, so they always arrived together. Positive child-teacher relationships were observed in terms of welcoming and greeting the child by his name and engaging in one-on-one activities in class. SH and his brother went back home on the school bus.	ZZ's Mum (public nursery school, N2)	Parent-child interactions were evident as the child was always dropped off and picked up from the classroom. Despite the overcrowded nature of the classroom, Mum always made contact with the teacher, thus some quality child-parent-teacher interaction in this case.
WA's Mum (private nursery school, N1)	Positive relationships between the parent and teacher were evident as Mum mostly interacted with the teachers during drop-offs and pickups. Generally, the classroom size and low child-teacher ratios allowed for positive child-teacher relationships impacting transition processes and the overall learning experience.	YY's Mum (public nursery school, N2)	Limited parent-child interactions were observed during drop-off or pickups. Interactions between the child, parent and teacher were made only when they met the teacher by the gate during drop-offs. On average, the parents spent less than one minute interacting with the teacher during drop-offs or pickups.
FO's Dad (private nursery school, N1)	No child-parent-teacher interactions were evident, as a hired driver always dropped off and picked up FO. Nonetheless, positive child-teacher relationships were observed in terms of welcoming and greeting the child by his name and engaging in one-on-one activities in class. On average, the driver spent less than one minute interacting with the teacher during pickups.	PT's Dad (public nursery school, N2)	PT's Dad was a parent with an active role in the Parent-Teacher Association (PTA), and he always made contact with the teacher during drop-offs or pickups. On average, Dad spent around ten minutes interacting with the teacher during drop-offs. Thus positive child-parent-teacher interaction and relationships between the home and ECE setting in this situation.
AB's (private nursery school, N1)	Positive child-parent-teacher interactions were observed in most cases as AB was taken into the classroom by her Mum or an older sibling during drop-offs. AB's teacher always welcomed and greeted her by her name, and she spent some quality one-on-one sessions with the teacher. On average, Mum spent less than five minutes interacting with the teacher during pickups.	RR's Mum (public nursery school, N2)	Child-parent-teacher interactions were evident in most cases as Mum or Dad dropped off the child in front of the school gate and picked her up from the classroom. Mum reported that she knew the teacher socially and always greeted the teacher during pickups, and they discussed the child's well-being. On average, Mum spent less than five minutes interacting with the teacher during pickups.

EDUCATOR'S ROLE IN PROMOTING PARENTAL ENGAGEMENT AS CHILDREN SETTLE IN A NEW EDUCATIONAL CONTEXT (PRIVATE AND PUBLIC NURSERY SCHOOLS)

Home-ECE Communications were evident in both preschools as parents and teachers shared information to enhance children's learning experience as they engaged daily at the nursery school. Both preschool teachers and parents reported communicating face-to-face, by phone, by letter, and by note with families. A two-way flow of communication was evident in the private nursery school, and parents' perspectives were welcomed and implemented. However, large class sizes and low teacher-child ratios observed for the public nursery school impacted home-school relationships. Communication was one-way, with parents having to initiate this communication in most cases. Teachers' responses to children and their families' needs were limited by constraints in home-ECE communications and the information families provided to support children's everyday routines.

School Events presented opportunities for preschool children, parents, teachers and administrative staff to participate together in teaching and learning. The private nursery school involved parents in various school-based activities such as Science Fairs, Thanksgiving Ceremonies, Open House, Cultural Week, and End of Year Ceremonies. There was limited opportunity for parent participation in the public nursery school due to the overcrowded nature of classrooms impacting parent-teacher relationships and children's learning experience.

Parent-teacher meetings were avenues for teachers to formally meet and discuss face-to-face children's learning and well-being at the preschool. For the private nursery school, this involved parent-teacher conferences in which teachers communicated with parents one-on-one and the Parent-led Forum, which all parents attended alongside the school administration and teachers to share ideas and consider strategies to improve children's education and well-being. On the other hand, there were no opportunities for public nursery school families to formally meet and discuss with teachers except informally during school drop-offs or pickups. Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) meetings were held at a public nursery school to plan and organise

school activities, inform parents how to engage with their children's learning and organise school repair and maintenance projects. Despite the PTA president being a parent, the public nursery school staff managed the PTA meetings. Teachers reported low attendance during PTA meetings, with sometimes less than 20 parents in attendance. The differences in parents' roles and opportunities within the two preschool contexts impacted developmental outcomes differently.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This study focused on a small sample of research participants, four teachers, six parents and their children for each nursery school so the information presented might not be a complete representation of teachers' beliefs and approaches to transition practices, as well as the types of parental involvement that are experienced in other nursery school institutions around the country. However, the study design ensured a qualitative approach to obtain deeper insights into participants' views and perspectives, which are useful to consider for policy-making and practice. In addition, the main aim of the doctoral study from which this current publication emanates was to investigate parents' and teachers' understandings of parental involvement in children's learning. Therefore, the teacher interview questions focused more on understanding parental involvement, parent-teacher relationships and nursery school transition practices. The limitation was a missed opportunity to explore parents' views on transition practices. Nevertheless, observations and informal conversations with families provided in-depth information about their perspectives on parental involvement, parent-teacher relationships and how these impacted children's ongoing transition experience.

DISCUSSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study examined teachers' beliefs on parental involvement in children's initial and ongoing transition from home to ECE for two nursery schools (private and public nursery schools). The ways in which teachers promoted parents' involvement in children's learning as they settled into their new school environment were also analysed. The findings indicated that information sharing or orientation advice that prepared parents and children as they transitioned from home to ECE was unavailable for families. Observations carried out revealed different stakeholders involved in children's day-to-day movement between the home and the nursery school, the nature of parent-teacher relationships and how these impact children's learning experience and daily transitions. Finally, educators encouraged parental engagement as children settled in the nursery school through communication, school events and parent-teacher meetings at different levels for the private and public nursery schools.

Teacher's beliefs and expectations impacted their ability to plan and prepare a transition program for families before the start of the nursery school. Teachers believed in their ability to support children's initial transition without the intervention of parents; thus, parents were not encouraged to come into the classroom. Given the importance of the roles and activities of parents and educators who are part of the child's microsystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1981), there is a need for close collaboration and information sharing to enhance transition experiences. School orientation practices seeking to provide families with information need to begin in advance of the families' start to school if they intend for families to take an active role in their child's transition. Rimm-Kaufman and Pianta (2000) note that the nature of relationships in the child's immediate context influences children's transition experiences and also learning outcomes. Bronfenbrenner (1981) states that a child's mesosystem links are strengthened if their transition to a new setting is not made unaccompanied. In addition, a continuous flow of information, positive orientation, and mutual trust between the two settings will enhance a child's development in their initial transition and continuously as they settle into the new environment. Parent-teacher communications are essential when planning for vertical transitions from home to the ECE setting, communicating children's interests, likes or dislikes and everyday routines to ensure that teachers have good knowledge about the child to better support them during this period. Dunlop and Fabian (2007) recommend a "partnership approach" in which the perspectives of all participants (children, parents, educators and the wider community) are considered, and information sharing creates a strong support mechanism for children and their families as they transition from home to ECE.

Brooker (2008) describes each family's unique beliefs and values as "family culture". Community care and upbringing are critical aspects of child development and upbringing in the African context (Nsamenang, 2008). The study findings revealed the involvement of multiple caregivers in the day-to-day transition to the educational setting. Individual family experiences and work challenges impacted parents' and teachers' ability to make and maintain connections between the home and school, especially for the public nursery school. Similarly, Takriti et al.'s (2022) study investigating teacher experiences of children starting school in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) found that inflexible parental working conditions impacted children's transition experiences in schools in the UAE. Understanding the needs and preferences of individual families is essential for successful horizontal and vertical transitions. Educators can look past the role of parents alone to include the contributions of other family members when planning strategies for family engagement in transition processes. For instance, given parents' challenging work conditions, opportunities to engage families in the transition process could be extended to include other extended family members (Fenmachi, 2023). In addition, organising meetings in the evenings may be an alternative option to accommodate the needs of some families. A "collective approach to family engagement" will bridge the gap between home-school relationships and enhance children's mesosystem links. Furthermore, "[c]ontext-sensitive policies that consider relationship dynamics" (Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000, p. 502) and local cultural beliefs on child upbringing and development are essential for positive transition experiences.

CONCLUSIONS

This study has identified the need for educational settings to offer a more individualised orientation process for transitioning families. Building connections and relationships between the ECE setting and families is essential to understanding the information families need to support their transition. This serves to develop a positive partnership between home and educational settings and underpins a more practical orientation process in support of transitioning families.

These findings should give ECE Centres pause to reflect and perhaps review their traditional orientation practices. When educators equip families with the tools to cater for their specific needs, parents can share the responsibility for supporting their child's orientation into the new educational setting in a manner that works for them as a family. It is likewise advantageous for families to receive this support in the initial stage of their transition to the ECE setting, providing the opportunity for higher-intensity transitional practices. When considering the ideas in this study, educators may be encouraged to explore more innovative transitional approaches that offer greater possibilities for families to be supported – all through a collaborative and individualised transition process.

DATA ACCESSIBILITY STATEMENTS

Data has not been made accessible for this publication because this study is part of a broader doctoral study, and participants were not asked to consent to their data being made widely available.

ADDITIONAL FILE

The additional file for this article can be found as follows:

Appendices. Appendixes A to B. DOI: https://doi.org/10.5334/ijelt.57.s1

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The author has no competing interests to declare.

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