

ARTICLE

Preparing children for Kindergarten: Practices and concerns of low-income stay-at-home peri-urban mothers

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ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on transition practices and concerns of 20 low-income stay-at-home peri-urban mothers as they prepare their children for Kindergarten. The children did not have any prior preschool experience. They were chosen through purposive sampling and were interviewed and observed as they engaged in transition practices. The findings provided information about the nature of the mothers' involvement in their children's developmental needs and the provision of a supportive home environment for children. Transition practices of mothers include academic preparation, school visits, buying school supplies, social reminders, and adjusting routines. They tend to focus on paper-and-pen activities, such as writing and coloring, using the workbooks and worksheets of their older children or what they had previously purchased. Future studies may include a bigger sample size and other geographical locations and examine how a variety of initiatives assists families in preparing their children for Kindergarten. Studies may also explore how families prepare children for remote learning in the context of pandemics and disasters.

KEYWORDS

transition to Kindergarten, low-income mothers, early childhood care and development

Introduction

The transition to Kindergarten presents a myriad of remarkable changes in the development of young children (Arnold et al. 2006; McIntyre et al. 2007; Caspe, Lopez, and Chattrabhuti 2015). In 2013, Kindergarten became mandatory in the Philippines as mandated under Republic Act 10157; this level is regarded as the initial experience of formal school for all five-year-old Filipino children. While the Philippine Government focused on creating a legislative framework as shown in the passing of RA 10157, there is little understanding of how Filipino families prepare their young children for Kindergarten. Despite extensive literature on Kindergarten transition programs involving schools, teachers, and families (Caspe, Lopez, and Chattrabhuti 2015; McIntyre et al. 2007; Pianta and Kraft-Sayre 2003; Rimm-Kaufman, Pianta, and Cox 2000), empirical studies that explore such programs for children in the Philippines are absent. Specifically, there is no available data on how Filipino children who did not receive any form of Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) service prepare for Kindergarten. Most research on maternal care and transition to school were carried out in high-income countries like Australia, Canada, and the United States. Transition programs involving teachers and parents were instituted because of these studies (Eckert et al. 2008).

As one of the most anticipated developmental milestones, Kindergarten as the first ladder of formal schooling is noted as a critical period characterized by rapid changes that present a wide array of unfamiliar settings and new roles that pose challenges to young children and their families (Caspe, Lopez, and Chattrabhuti 2015; McIntyre et al. 2007; Pianta and Kraft-Sayre 2003; Rimm-Kaufman, Pianta, and Cox 2000).

This paper focuses on the transition practices of selected low-income, stay-at-home peri-urban mothers whose four-year-old children have not received any ECCD services. As part of a bigger study on Kindergarten transition practices of low-income, stay-at-home peri-urban mothers, it describes why they chose to do the transition activities, and when and how long they engaged in them. The paper also presents the learning materials available in their homes, and their transition concerns. Reasons for not sending their children to an ECCD program were also tackled.

Results of this study can aid teachers, education administrators, and policy makers in establishing an appropriate support system for families in general and for individual children and families with distinct needs.

The country context

Prior to 2012, the Philippines had one of the shortest basic education cycles in the world. In order to catch up with global standards and achieve international commitments—including the Sustainable Development Goals, Dakar Framework for Action, and World Declaration on Education for All and Framework for Action to

Meet Basic Learning Needs (UNESCO 1990)—three pertinent and complementary legislations were enacted: (1) Republic Act 10157, the Kindergarten Education Act of 2012, which made Kindergarten universal for five-year-old children; (2) Republic Act 10533, “An Act Enhancing the Philippine Basic Education System by Strengthening Its Curriculum and Increasing the Number of Years for Basic Education,” which placed Kindergarten as the first stage of the 13-year mandatory basic education; and (3) Republic Act 10410, the Early Years Act of 2013, which recognizes zero to eight years old as the first crucial years of development.

At the pre-Kindergarten level, Republic Act 10410, the Early Years Act of 2013, and Republic Act 6972, the Barangay-Level Total Development and Protection of Children Act, were enacted to prepare all children for Kindergarten and to ensure that they meet the required competencies for the early grades. The ECCD Act of 2000, which was later repealed by the Early Years Act of 2013, institutionalizes an integrated and comprehensive system of early childhood care and development while RA 6972 guarantees the provision of total development and protection for young children in the *barangay*, the smallest political and administrative unit in the country, with the *barangay* as the primary implementer of programs for young children.

According to the Philippine Education for All 2015 review report (UNESCO 2015), the legislative mechanisms and provisions of programs and services have resulted in the opening of more public schools and local government unit (LGU)-assisted ECCD centers. Consequently, ECCD enrollees increased by four per cent from 2011 to 2013. Moreover, Kindergarten education for five-year-old children has made tremendous progress with an 8.5 percentage point average annual increase from school year (SY) 2005–2006 to SY 2010–2011. An improvement was also noted in the number of Grade 1 entrants with some form of ECCD experience from 83.40 per cent in SY 2012–2013 to a 27.12 percentage point increase in SY 2013–2014 (UNESCO 2015).

These achievements may also be attributed to the inclusion of Kindergarten attendance as part of the conditions of the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (4Ps), the conditional cash transfer program of the government. A massive early registration advocacy campaign has proven to be effective as more families have become aware of the need for their five-year-old children to be enrolled in Kindergarten (UNESCO 2015).

To date and as mandated by law, the LGUs, with a total of 42,045 *barangays* nationwide, remain the largest providers of ECCD programs in the country (Department of Interior and Local Government 2019). However, due to the sheer number of children born each year, approximately 1.7 million babies (Philippine Statistics Authority 2011), inadequate ECCD centers have been noted over the years.

Despite the increase in the number of children served, it was reported that in SY 2009–2010, only 41.29 per cent of 7,468,000 children aged three to five years old have attended a center-based and community-based ECCD program provided by DSWD, the Department of Education (DepEd), the ECCD Council, and various non-government organizations (Asian Development Bank 2012). In 2010, only 19.9 per cent of children below the age of five years have received ECCD service in assisted LGU-run child development centers. Under the Early Years Act of 2013, LGUs have the mandate to provide full financial support to these centers. Moreover, limited knowledge and lack of appreciation of the importance of early psychosocial activities have led many parents to send only their older children to school. In relation to this, the 2016 Annual Poverty Indicators Survey (APIS) noted marriage or family matters (42.3 per cent), high cost of education or financial concerns (20.2 per cent), and lack of personal interest (19.7 per cent) as the three top reasons for not attending school among out-of-school children ages six to 14 years old (Philippine Statistics Authority 2017).

With Kindergarten as the first stage of formal education, parents and caregivers are now required to prepare their children to attend school earlier than Filipino families did before. In a poverty-stricken country like the Philippines, education is considered the road to a better life. The Philippine Education for All 2015 Plan of Action articulated that basic education is an anti-poverty instrument that can harness skills, attitudes, and values to ensure that every Filipino can fully participate in the affairs of the nation and in the development of society (National Education for All Committee 2014).

Parental role, school readiness, and transition practices

Parents have been credited for providing direction to children’s growth and development as well as trajectories of learning and academic outcomes (Caspe, Lopez, and Chattrabhuti 2015; Sheridan et al. 2020). According to Kiernan and Mensah (2011), parental involvement is an important factor in how well children do in school and supportive parenting improves the odds of children living in disadvantaged areas. The effects of parental role on home environments and higher cognitive and socio-emotional competencies (Melhuish, Gardiner, and Morris 2017); the relationship of parents’ school readiness beliefs and parents’ involvement to academic achievement; and their involvement in preparing their children for school have been explored (Puccioni, Baker, and Froiland 2019).

“Readiness and transition are closely linked” (Arnold et al. 2006, 6) because it is not only about children adjusting to Kindergarten but also how families and schools interact and cooperate with each other. While most children adjust well to school, some children find it difficult to do so, resulting in school problems (Caspe, Lopez, and Chattrabhuti 2015; Rimm-Kaufman, Pianta, and Cox 2000). Hence, transition to Kindergarten is a crucial time to establish competencies needed for children’s success and achievements (Pianta and Cox 1999). Stressed by

Pianta and Kraft-Sayre (2003) and noted by other researchers (LoCasale-Crouch et al. 2008; Sabol and Pianta 2012), a successful transition from home or preschool to Kindergarten is a key element of school readiness and plays a critical role in helping children have a successful experience when they enter formal schooling.

With the growing attention on Kindergarten transition, numerous studies have documented how families engage in an assortment of home-based activities in preparing their children for school (Bohan-Baker and Little 2002; Caspe, Lopez, and Chatrabhuti 2015; McIntyre et al. 2007). Traditionally, school readiness merely focused on cognitive preparation but, with a deeper understanding of holistic development of children, recent programs and studies on Kindergarten transition concentrated on the development of academic skills, interpersonal skills, physical well-being, motor development, and communication skills (Gill, Winters, and Friedman 2006; Sabol and Pianta 2012).

However, the amount of readiness and most effective kind of transition practice have not yet been clearly established. In countries like the Philippines, it is not certain how the transition to Kindergarten has been operationalized, how parents in general facilitate the preparation of their children for formal schooling, and what amount of parental involvement is related to academic achievement especially in low-income and less educated households.

Theoretical framework

The bioecological systems theory of Bronfenbrenner (1994) posited that, within the larger system, there exists multilayered interconnected subsystems—micro, meso, exo, macro, and chrono. Because these subsystems intricately intermingle with each other, the relationships are bidirectional. These relationships are responsible for the construction and reconstruction of the conditions in the immediate and distant environments of the developing child.

Considered the most immediate, the microsystem consists of the family, school, and peer group. The interactions among these places called the mesosystem are intricately entangled and have instantaneous and unmediated impact on the child. These two subsystems are connected to the external environments, the exosystem, such as the parent's employment setup and the school board decision; and the macrosystem, which encompasses beliefs, practices, and policies. All these subsystems are influenced by environmental modifications marked by events including life transitions and historical periods (Bronfenbrenner 1994).

Within the family alone, relationships and interactions are varied, resulting in an assortment of experiences, which in turn shape the child's history and trajectories of lifelong learning, general health, and well-being as well as educational achievement and economic productivity (Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University 2021; WHO 2018).

The bioecological systems theory is considered suitable for the current research because it offers an understanding that shows the interconnectedness of the

complex processes involved in preparing a four-year-old child for Kindergarten. This model supports the importance of a systematic description of the settings and their relationships as the child transitions to formal education. The emphasis on the relationships underscores the need to involve the most significant person or persons in the life of a child in welcoming one of the most notable developmental milestones.

Brought about by the mandate to enroll young children in Kindergarten when they turn five years old, the mothers' practices at this stage are important insights into the environmental contexts in which Kindergarten transition takes place.

Participants and procedure

Twenty low-income stay-at-home peri-urban mothers of four-year-old children from Barangay Masaya (Happy Village), one of the poorest villages in Antipolo City, participated in this descriptive and qualitative study conducted in January and February, 2014. They reside in an outlying area of the city, 25 kilometers east of the National Capital Region. With the rapidly growing urban population, "characterized by inadequate infrastructure, service provision, and security of shelter and land tenure" (Ooi and Phua 2007, 33), some families have decided to reside in the outskirts where rural-urban zones coalesce.

As of 2015, the total population of one to four-year-old children in Barangay Masaya was 4,380 (PhilAtlas 2020). The four LGU-run ECCD centers in the *barangay* are not enough to cater to all children in need of ECCD services. Since the LGU did not have data on the number of children who are not in school, a sample size of 20 mothers is seen as sufficient for a qualitative study, which is usually concerned with the "social and cultural construction of meaning" (Vanderstoep and Johnston 2009, 166). In recent years, there has been a robust discussion about the appropriate sampling size for qualitative research and an appreciation of in-depth interviews to generate empirical data. A considerable body of qualitative research indicated that 5 to 60 participants are adequate (Dworkin 2012; Vasileiou et al. 2018).

The mothers were selected through purposive sampling, a non-probability sampling technique that involves choosing research participants based on a set of criteria (Cresswell and Plano Clark 2011). The following are the criteria used for this study: (1) a low-income stay-at-home peri-urban mother; and (2) primary caregiver of a four-year-old child who has not attended any ECCD program like the LGU-run daycare program, Supervised Neighborhood Play (SNP), or private child development center. Because the *barangay* did not have a list of children who were not attending daycare classes, the mothers were contacted through house-to-house visits. If the mother did not meet the criteria, the next door was chosen until a qualified mother agreed to participate. It was ensured that data collection would not interfere with the mothers' care work at home. Data collection was done after lunch or in the late afternoon. The researchers remained sensitive to the cues of the mothers and the children all throughout.

For ethical considerations, all mothers in this study agreed in writing to participate in the audio-taped in-depth interview and observation as they answered the activity sheets with their children. While their names and the *barangay*'s name have been changed for confidentiality and privacy, the actual circumstances and places adhered to the truthfulness of their answers and activities. Permissions from the City Provincial Office of Antipolo City, DSWD, and the *barangay* captain were obtained prior to data collection. A courtesy call was done for each day of data collection. Upon the advice of the *barangay* captain, a *barangay* staff accompanied the researchers and introduced them to the research participants. The interviews and observations of teaching sessions were conducted at home. An interview was conducted before or after the teaching session. No child was interviewed for this research.

All participants are stay-at-home mothers from low-income households, with income between Php 7,890.00 (\$154.71) and Php 31,560.00 (\$618.82) a month (Albert, Gaspar, and Raymundo 2015). Seventeen (85 per cent) participants depend solely on their husbands' income as day laborers in nearby establishments. The most common jobs among their husbands are driver, construction worker and security guard. Meanwhile, three participants are solo parents who rely on their relatives for daily sustenance.

In terms of education, 10 or 50 per cent are high school graduates, four or 20 per cent finished elementary grades, four or 20 per cent attended some high school, and two or 10 per cent attended some college. The average number of years in school of the participants is nine years. Their mean age is 31.4 years with 23 years old being the youngest and 43 being the oldest.

Responses to open-ended questions about transition practices and concerns were transcribed verbatim and classified into themes to see relevant patterns in the data (Leedy and Ormrod 2005). The researchers developed a Learning Materials Inventory prior to the study to identify the types of learning materials available at home. This is complemented by an observation guide to document how the mothers interact with their children as they answer the simple activity sheet provided by the researchers. The observation guide noted the behaviors of mothers towards their children.

All research instruments were in Filipino and validated by three experts.¹ These were pilot tested on two mothers from another *barangay* in the same town with similar characteristics as the participants. Pilot testing was necessary to check if the questions were easy to understand and the observation guide was simple to follow. With the intention of clearly illustrating the number of mothers' answers, Mercado's (2006) *Ways of Expressing Percentages* was utilized in interpreting the data.

All research participants were given a simple handbag, crayons, and pencils as tokens of appreciation. Even if the children were not interviewed, the tokens are appropriate for them and can also be used as learning materials.

Results

Transition practices of stay-at-home peri-urban mothers

Five themes emerged from the interviews and observations of the participants in terms of their transition practices. During the interviews, the participants provided multiple answers about how they go about preparing their children for the first day of school. Table 1 presents the list of transition practices of the research participants.

Table 1. Transition practices done by low-income stay-at-home peri-urban mothers

Transition practices	frequency	% of mothers
Academic preparation	20	100
School visits	12	60
Preparation of school requirements and supplies	9	45
Social reminders	7	35
Adjusting routines	1	5

A. Academic preparation

All mothers in this study engaged in a variety of transition practices that focused primarily on reading and writing as well as mathematics.

In terms of activities related to literacy, 14 mothers (70 per cent) reported using paper-and-pen activities such as writing their children's full names and the letters of the alphabet. In teaching the children how to write their names, it was observed that four or 20 per cent of mothers provided step-by-step guidance in accomplishing a writing task or provided a self-made writing exercise. The following vignettes from the observation provide a description of how mothers taught their children to write their names.

Sulat mo muna diyang yung pangalan mo... Hawakan ni mama kamay mo. Sulat na natin ang letter E, ayusin mo, ayusin mo... Guhit pababa, pababa pa, baba. Pababa, o. Guhit pahiga. Guhit pahiga. Pahiga ulit. Guhit pahiga. Letter S, ahas naman, ahas... Very good. Guhit pababa. Pababa pa. Yung letter O, Pababa. Bilog. Bilog. Buntot. Yung buntot. – Gina, 23 years old

(Write your name there. Mother will hold your hand. Let us write the letter "E". Do it well, do it well. Line going down, down some more. Downward. Horizontal line. Another horizontal line and another one. Letter S. Draw a snake, snake... Very good... Draw a line downwards... Downwards. Then letter O. Downwards, draw a circle, a circle, put a tail... The tail.)

Tinutuldok-tuldokan... Nilalagayan ko ng mga tuldok-tuldok yung papel tapos siya na ang magko-konek. – Annie, 30 years old

(I draw dots and he connects the dots.)

O sige, lagay mo ep (referring to letter F), pa-ganun, tapos dalawang ganun (referring to two horizontal lines). Oo ganyan, bilis. Tapos pababa ulit, dito na sa tabi, ganun. Hawakan mo ng maigi yung lapis. Tapos pabilog dito lang sa itaas, tapos buntot dyan. Ayan. – Trish, 28 years old

(All right, you put F. Then make two horizontal lines. Hurry up. Then make a line downwards. Hold your pencil properly. Make a circle then a tail. Okay.)

Apart from the recognition that learning how to write one's name is an essential part of child development, the mothers revealed that they feel proud seeing their children know how to do it.

Other examples of activities related to literacy are reviewing Kindergarten lessons of older siblings, studying with older siblings, storybook reading, and teaching English words.

Sabay silang nag-aaral ni kuya. Pero tinuturo ko na rin sa kanya yung pang Grade 3 para advance siya. – Vina, 39 years old

(She studies together with her older brother. I also teach her Grade 3 lessons for her to be advanced.)

Gusto ko kasi yung nakikinig siya sa akin habang nagbabasa ako ng libro. – Edna, 27 years old

(I like it when she listens to me while I am reading the book.)

Bago matulong nag-ge-game kami. Tinatanong ko sya, “Ano ang English sa aso?” “Ano ang English sa manok?” Para alam niya. – Annie, 30 years old

(Before sleeping, we play games. I ask him to translate Filipino words to English. What is aso [dog] in English? What is manok [chicken] in English? So he would know them.)

Songs, games, rhymes, and animation are considered fun by the children. Hence, mothers tend to give these to them.

Natutuwa sya sa mga actions. Pati ako nag-e-enjoy sa pagkanta ng My Toes My Knees. – Sally, 31 years old

(My child likes action songs. I even enjoy it when my child sings My Toes My Knees.)

“Yung cartoons na pinapanuod niya, may alphabet at mga rhymes. – Edna, 27 years old

(She watches cartoons that have alphabet and rhymes.)

Ganun din sa cellphone, meron kasing Bahay Kubo dun na kanta. Meron din ABC. – Ofelia, 26 years old

(The cellphone has a folk song, Bahay Kubo [Nipa Hut]. It also has ABC.)

One out of 10 mothers reported that memorizing the alphabet, playing games related to letters, and teaching some English words were their most preferred transition practices because they believed that learning some English words would put their children at a great advantage.

With the goal to teach their children how to write, three mothers (15 per cent) manifested their desire to make their left-handed children use their right hands because they believed it was the proper thing to do as society prefers seeing right-handed people. While answering their activity sheets provided by the researchers, these children were constantly reminded to shift to their right hands even if they were comfortable holding pencils and crayons with their left.

Kaliwete sya. Kaya hirap na hirap ako turuan siya magsulat. Hindi naman ako marunong magsulat sa kaliwa. – Sally, 31 years old

(He is left-handed. It is hard for me to teach him how to write. I do not know how to write using my left hand.)

Sinasanay ko nga e dito sa kanan. Ayan kasi hindi naman ako marunong sa kaliwa. Parehas sila ng kuya niya kaya si kuya ang nagtuturo sa kanya na magsulat – Lily, 40 years old

(I want him to write using his right hand. I do not know how to write using my left hand. His brother is also a lefty. He is the one teaching him how to write.)

In one instance, a mother slapped her child's hand every time the child used their left hand to hold the pencil.

Nakakainis na, sinabi nang yung isang kamay ang gamitin eh. Di ba dapat lang talaga sa kanan magsulat. – Trish, 28 years old

(I said use your other hand. We write using the right hand.)

Apart from literacy activities, mothers recognized the importance of having the basic mathematical knowledge of counting, color and shape recognition, and writing of numerals. A big majority of participants (12 or 60 per cent) concentrated on color identification while sizes were not tackled. Three out of ten mothers taught numbers through counting the children's fingers, using common household objects, worksheets and technology aided materials.

Kamay lang niya yung gamit namin. Minsan sasabihin ko, one plus one? Sasagot siya. Two, Mama. – Edna, 27 years old

(We use our hands in counting. I will say, one plus one? Then she will say, two, Mother.)

Bilangin mo itong bilog na ito (mother and child count fruits). Ilan? Sampu? Isulat mo doon, isang one tsaka isang zero. Isulat ang sagot sa bilog. Isang one at isang zero. Isulat mo pahaba, isang bilog saka isang pahaba. Dito sa bilog. Ganito. (Pahabang ganun.) Hindi, pababa. (Ganyan, Ma?) Oo ganito sa bilog. Dito mo isusulat. Ganito o, nakita mo ito? O dito mo isulat. Sige na. Alam mo ito pahabang ganun. Isang pahabang ganun. – Neri, 27 years old

(Count the circles. How many? Ten? Write it there, write one then zero. Write it in the circle. Write one and zero. Write a line, a circle, and a line. Here in the circle. Like this. [Horizontal like this.] No, downward. [Like this, Mother?] Yes, like this in the circle. Write it here. Like this, did you see it? You write it here. Please. You know it, a downward line. One downward line. Like that.)

Numbers are introduced to children using charts and paper and pen. Seven mothers wrote numerals on paper and asked their children to copy them one by one. Meanwhile, colors and shapes were presented using common household objects, clothing, coloring books, crayons, and charts.

Sinusulatan ko yung paper ng numbers. Tuturo ko, may stick pa nga ako e. Sasabihin ko yung number, tapos siya naman. – Paola, 34 years old

(I write the numerals on paper. I say the number then she repeats after me.)

Tinatanong ko sa kanya kung ano ang kulay ng suot niya para alam niya yung pangalan ng mga kulay. – Neri, 27 years old

(I ask her what color she is wearing so that she will know the names of the different colors.)

Pinapakita ko yung mga bagay-bagay sa kanya. Mahilig siya sa yellow, blue at pink. – Didi, 34 years old

(I show her common objects. She likes yellow, blue, and pink.)

Based on the observation, most of the children (16 or 80 per cent) were able to identify primary and secondary colors and can color within the lines of drawings. Mothers reported that children enjoy this activity.

Gustung-gusto niyang nag-co-color. Minsan kukuha lang siya ng papel, kahit dyaryo tapos kulay-kulay lang siya. – Katrina, 34 years old

(She likes coloring. Sometimes she gets paper or a newspaper then she colors it.)

The following vignettes from the observation provide a glimpse of how a mother taught her son about colors. However, the child did not like doing the activity but the mother kept pushing him. Eventually, the mother stopped prodding when the boy did not comply.

... Kulayan na natin. O ayan gusto mong magkulay. Kulayan mo yung araw. Anong kulay yung araw? Hawakan mo nga ang crayons. O anak kulayan mo ang araw. Dali. Asan yung dilaw, kunin mo ang dilaw. Dali... Sige na kulayan mo na. Tapos ayan yung puno o saka yung bulaklak. Anong kulay yung bulaklak? Ayaw niya talaga. – Lily, 40 years old

(Let us color this. You like coloring, right? Color the sun. What is the color of the sun? Hold the crayon. Hurry up. My boy, please color it. Then look at the tree and also the flower. What is the color of the flower? You really don't want to color.)

B. School visit

Majority of mothers (12 or 60 per cent) stressed the importance of school visitation before the start of classes to familiarize their children with the new environment. Meanwhile, six or 30 per cent of mothers said there was no need to do it and two or 10 per cent were undecided.

C. Preparation of school requirements and supplies

Nine mothers (45 per cent) expressed the need to prepare their children's things before the start of the school year such as buying new bags, shoes, uniforms, and school supplies. Some mothers reported having hand-me-down clothes and bags from older siblings and relatives. One mother shared that an original birth certificate is necessary for enrollment.

Yung gamit niya pagpasok, inaasikaso ko na. Yung birth certificate niya, dapat original. Pupunta pa ako sa PSA (Philippine Statistics Authority). – Ofelia, 26 years old

(I have started preparing the school things. Her birth certificate must be original. I will go to PSA to get it.)

Nagpabili siya ng bag. Actually may sapatos na siya eh bigay ng lola niya. Meron na rin kaming uniform, galing naman doon sa pinsan niya. – Gina, 23 years old

(She asked for a bag. Her grandmother gave a new pair of shoes. We also have a hand-me-down uniform from her cousin.)

Hinahanda ko na yung mga gamit niya pagpasok. May mga lapis na siya at papel, uniform, bag. – Cristy, 38 years old

(I am preparing her things for school. She has pencils and paper, uniform, bag.)

D. Social reminders

Seven (35 per cent) mothers gave reminders to their children about proper behavior in school such as making friends, being polite, listening and following the teachers' orders, praying, and taking care of personal belongings. They explained that these reminders are important for their children to remember while in school to foster harmonious relationships with their classmates and teachers.

Tinuturuan ko din siya “wag ka makipag-away sa school.” Kasi sutil ito eh, sinasabi ko,” wag ka maging salbahe, makikipag-kaibigan ka parati, sasagot ka ng opo kay mam.” – Becky, 24 years old

(I teach him not to pick fights in school. I tell him not to be bad, always be friendly and be polite to the teacher.)

Sinasabi ko na makinig siya parati kay teacher, wag mang-aasar doon. – Flor, 30 years old

(I remind him to listen to teacher and not to tease anyone.)

Pina-practice ko rin siya sa pagdarasal. – Hanna, 26 years old

(We practice how to pray.)

Sinasabihan ko siya, “anak, wag mo balibagin yung mga gamit mo kung saan-saan wag mo kakalat gamit mo.” – Cris, 38 years old

(I tell him, fix your things, and take care of your things.)

E. Adjusting home routines

To lessen the stress of transition to Kindergarten, one mother believed that adjusting her son’s sleeping routine would facilitate his smooth transition to Kindergarten. She shared:

Ginigising ko siya nang maaga. Mahirap kasi siya gisingin. Mahirap na kung may pasok. Dapat masanay na. – Annie, 30 years old

(I wake him up early. I have difficulty waking him up in the morning and it would be hard when school starts. He has to get used to waking up early.)

Frequency of engaging in transition practices

Frequency of engaging in transition practices refers to how often mothers conduct preparation of their children for Kindergarten. The period for the preparation for Kindergarten varies and does not begin officially at a particular period or child’s age. Some mothers start it a couple of months before the enrollment for Kindergarten in the public school as they secure requirements like a birth certificate. Others do it throughout the school year when they tutor their older children.

Majority of the mothers (14 or 70 per cent) engage in transition activities at least three times a week. Meanwhile, three mothers shared that they do it every day, and another three said that they do it once a week.

The mothers could not provide an exact time when they engage their children in transition activities as this is heavily dependent on their free time. Since they are all stay-at-home mothers, they are always preoccupied with plenty of things to do around the house and managing the affairs of the home.

One-fourth of the participants (five or 25 per cent) reported engaging their children in transition activities in the morning after breakfast because it is their only free time, while another one-fourth of the participants said that they do it after the afternoon nap, right before they start preparing for dinner.

In terms of the length of time, eight (40 per cent) do it for around 30 minutes to an hour while six mothers (30 per cent) do it for more than an hour. Meanwhile, the rest of the mothers engage their children between 15 to 30 minutes per session.

Learning materials used for transition to Kindergarten

Based on the Learning Materials Inventory, the mothers provided an array of materials in preparing their children for Kindergarten. They did not have materials not included in the Inventory. Majority (14 or 70 per cent) of mothers used paper and pencils because they are simply affordable and readily available. Charts with letters and numerals came second as the most popular learning materials at home. Colorful homemade posters containing letters and numbers were posted on the living room wall. They are usually made from craft or bond paper glued or taped together. One mother shared:

Chart yung gamit ko para mas matandaan niya. Pag nakikita niya, alam na niya yun. Natatandaan niya tinuro ko sa kanya. – Becky, 24 years old

(I use charts for better recall. When my child sees it, she knows it. She remembers it.)

Eight (40 per cent) homes have crayons. Five (25 per cent) homes have coloring books. Meanwhile, seven (35 per cent) have workbooks that contain exercises about letters and numbers.

Sa kulay, krayola ng mga ate niya yung gamit namin. – Vina, 39 years old

(We use her sisters' crayons to teach color.)

Crayons. Tinuturo ko sa kanya yung colors. Kumukuha ako ng isang kulay tapos sinasabi ko sa kanya anong kulay yun. – Hanna, 26 years old

(We use crayons. I get a crayon and tell her what color it is.)

Yung coloring book niya, meron dun mga kwento-kwento. – Ofelia, 26 years old

(Her coloring book has stories.)

One out of ten mothers shared that storybooks were used to teach reading. From the Learning Materials Inventory, two households have five storybooks at home while the rest have less than five or nothing at all. Table 2 presents the materials mothers used for facilitating their children's transition to Kindergarten.

Table 2. Learning materials used at home during kindergarten transition by low-income stay-at-home peri-urban mothers

Learning materials	frequency	% of mothers
Paper and pencil	14	70
Chart: Alphabet	10	50
Chart: Number	10	50
Crayons	8	40
Textbooks/worksheets	7	35
Coloring book	5	25
Electronic gadgets	3	15
Flashcards: Alphabet	3	15
CD/DVD of children's songs	2	10
Chart: Color	2	10
Children's storybooks (with at least 5)	2	10
Counters: Sticks, toys, etc.	2	10
Homemade posters with letters and numbers	2	10
Toys that teach shapes and colors	2	10
Television	1	5
Toy animals	1	5
Building blocks	0	0
Chart: Shapes	0	0
Flashcards: numbers	0	0
Musical instrument	0	0
Paint	0	0
Puzzles (3 or more pieces)	0	0
Scissors	0	0

Transition concerns

Transition concerns are defined as apprehensions or worries mothers have regarding their children's first ever experience in school. Based on the interviews, the mothers provided multiple concerns that are categorized into five, namely coping concerns, teacher concerns, school concerns, financial concerns, and domestic concerns. Three (15 per cent) mothers said they did not have any transition concerns.

Table 3. Transition concerns of low-income stay-at-home peri-urban mothers

Transition concerns	frequency	% of mothers
Coping concerns	10	50
Teacher concerns	8	40
School concerns	7	35
Financial concerns	4	20
Domestic concerns	1	5
None	3	15

Half of the mothers were anxious about how their children would cope academically and socially considering they did not have previous school experience, and how their lessons at home would be beneficial to their children.

Gusto ko malaman kung yung tinuro ko sa kanya magagawa niya sa school kasi di ba importante talaga magsulat at tsaka magbasa para hindi siya lokohin ng kapwa niya. – Annie, 30 years old

(All I want to know is if she would be able to do in school what I have taught her. Because it is really important that she knows how to write and read so she will not be fooled by others.)

Kasi sa pagsusulat madali lang turuan. Yun lang sa pagbabasa lalong ganyang malikot siya at malaro. Kaya mahirap turuan magbasa. – Josie, 25 years old

(It is easy to teach her to write. But reading is different especially that she is naughty and playful. It is difficult to teach her to read.)

Gusto ko malaman kung yung matatandaan ba niya ang mga tinuro ko dito. Iba na yung may mga kasama siyang ibang bata. Baka hindi na niya magawa yung mga tinuro ko sa kanya. – Vina, 39 years old

(I want to know if she would remember what I have taught her here. It is different when she is with other children. She might not be able to do what I have taught her.)

Secondly, eight or 40 per cent expressed concerns about the teachers' teaching strategies and personality. These concerns emanated from their negative personal experiences from their older children's former teachers and from stories of their neighbors.

Maayos ba ang pagtuturo ni teacher? Kasi minsan may mga teacher na pinababayaan lang o hinayaan. Dapat iga-guide din para sumunod yung bata. – Flor, 30 years old

(Is the teacher good in teaching? Sometimes, there are teachers who do not guide their pupils and let them do whatever they please. They have to guide their pupils properly in order for them to follow.)

Sa ngayon hindi pa siya nagsusulat. Hindi nagbabasa. Gusto ko nakakausap yung teacher kung ano ang problema sa anak ko. At least, nalalaman ko. – Gina, 23 years old

(Up to this time my child does not know how to read and write. I want to talk to the teacher to ask what problems my child has. At least, I know from my end.)

Mabait ba yung teacher niya kasi first time kaming enroll sa school na yun. – Hanna, 26 years old

(Is the teacher kind? It is my first time to enroll a child in that school.)

Seven or 35 per cent of the participants expressed a variety of concerns related to school rules and regulations, school requirements, the number of school days, and the appropriateness of the curriculum to the children.

Ano ba yung dapat na requirements nila? Ano ba yung dapat gagawin? Assignments. – Hanna, 26 years old

(What are the requirements? What do the children need to do? Assignments.)

Dapat hindi yung tulad sa ibang school. Labas pasok lang yung mga bata. Nababantayang maigi ba nila yung mga bata? – Neri, 27 years old

(It should not be like in the other schools where children can simply go in and out of the school. I hope they will take good care of the children.)

Madalas daw walang pasok. Minsan naman dahil sa mga meeting daw ng mga teacher. Sabi ko, tutukan ko na lang siguro dito sa bahay. – Didi, 34 years old

(They cancel classes most of the time because of teachers' meetings. I think it's important to have good follow-up here at home.)

Four (20 per cent) verbalized concerns regarding payments in school. While their children will be attending public schools, they are not spared from spending for school projects and other school contributions.

Maraming din pinagkakagastusan sa school, yung mga projects. – Didi, 34 years old

(We need to spend for many school projects.)

Meron akong takot talaga, yung pera kung kaya ko ba paaralin? – Cris, 38 years old

(I am really afraid. Can I afford to send her to school?)

A mother expressed concern about how to take her child to and from school. During the interview, she wished that a hired tricycle can ease her burden.

Reasons for not enrolling children in ECCD program

Despite the age of their children, the participants opted not to send them to an ECCD program.

Six (30 per cent) mothers mentioned that they do not have enough money to secure the needed requirements for enrollment such as an original copy of their child's birth certificate and enough budget for the daily snacks and needs of all their children. Meanwhile, five (25 per cent) mothers cited lack of money due to their husbands' irregular employment and their inability to look for work due to unexpected pregnancy and household chores.

Dami pang inasikaso tapos siyempre hindi ko kaya yung bayarin sa day care. Mahal. – Paola, 34 years old

(I have a lot of things to do. We cannot afford the expenses for a day care. It is expensive.)

Walang pang enroll, siyempre babaunan mo yan. Minsan kasi may trabaho, minsan wala yung asawa ko. – Vina, 39 years old

(We don't have money for enrollment and for snacks. Sometimes my husband doesn't have work.)

Two out of ten mothers shared that their children refused to go to school. Hence, they do not want to force them because they were still young anyway. They explained that children may develop lack of interest in school when forced to enroll.

Two mothers (15 per cent) disclosed that they followed their husbands' instructions of not sending their children to an ECCD program while one mother shared that it was her father-in-law who insisted on not enrolling her child.

Ayaw ng tatay kasi baka daw mahirapan ako kasi ihahatid-hatid ko pa. – Didi, 34 years old

(His father does not want it because I might have a hard time bringing him and fetching him.)

Sabi ng lolo wag muna kasi masyado pang bata. – Gina, 23 years old

(His grandfather said that he is too young to go to school.)

One out of ten mothers cited the health condition of their children as a reason for not enrolling them in an ECCD program upon their doctors' advice.

A mother cited her negative experience with the current teacher as her reason for not enrolling her child in the nearby ECCD program. Meanwhile, one mother said that she wished to enroll her child in a private school for better quality of education but she could not afford it at that time.

Discussion

Although limited to a small sample size of 20 mothers and focused only on low-income, stay-at-home peri-urban mothers, the findings of this study offered glimpses of their actual transition activities as they prepare their four-year-old children for Kindergarten. The findings also provided information about the nature of their involvement in their children's developmental needs (Sheridan et al. 2020) and the provision of a supportive home environment for their children (Garcia-Gonzalez and Skrita 2019; Kiernan and Mensah 2011).

Bronfenbrenner's bioecological systems theory has been beneficial in providing insights on this study as it emphasized the essential factors that are intertwined in understanding the processes involved in Kindergarten transition practices of

low-income peri-urban mothers. The environmental systems that are at play in the context of transitioning to Kindergarten place the children at the center as the ones who benefit from activities prepared by their mothers.

This study shows how the immediate setting is responsible for jump-starting the process of Kindergarten transition. Due to the constant presence of mothers, their four-year-old children relied on them for a variety of activities and essential supervision, which are viewed to be necessary for formal schooling. The nature and the frequency of interactions within the home may have been influenced by their insights about their older children's school experiences. From this perspective, their transition practices are not merely viewed as a function of their individual skills but also as a link to their experiences at home and in school. These interactions may have given the children an expanded avenue to develop relevant skills and attitudes towards formal schooling.

The participants should be credited for their efforts in preparing their children for school and for their recognition of the importance of teaching them some basic skills to cope with the challenges of an anticipated unknown setting. Regardless of their children's sex, it was noted that most of their transition beliefs, practices, and concerns are similar to what have been reported in earlier studies such as academic readiness and sociobehavioral concerns (Gill, Winters, and Friedman 2006; Pianta and Kraft-Sayre 2003; Sabol and Pianta 2012; Wildenger and McIntyre 2011), socioeconomic concerns (Casper, Lopez, and Chattrabhuti 2015), and the need to communicate with the teachers (Petrakos and Lehrer 2011).

While this study did not establish assertions about the effects of transition practices on children's school readiness and academic success as shown in previous studies (Casper, Lopez, and Chattrabhuti 2015; Melhuish, Gardiner, and Morris 2017; Puccioni, Baker, and Froiland 2019), there is considerable utility in examining this group of mothers' ways and means of preparing their young children for school as this may lead to understanding how developmentally appropriate Kindergarten transition practices could be developed, implemented, and sustained (Bredenkamp and Copple 1997) in the Philippines.

Drawing from developmentally appropriate practice, this study intends to raise much concern regarding the mothers' preoccupation with writing, counting, memorizing the alphabet, and coloring activities because it did not only disclose their recognition of the need to prepare their children for school but also the kind of knowledge they possess about teaching their children basic skills. It was noted that the transition activities do not go beyond rote learning and memorization. This is in line with the study of Wildenger and McIntyre (2011) citing that transition practices of families are mostly concentrated on generic activities rather than providing those that consider individual differences and needs. Also, the findings revealed that more often, the mothers did not consider individual appropriateness of transition activities. The mothers' habits of buying coloring books, use of grade school worksheets of their older children, and heavy focus on paper-and-pen

activities, in addition to the insistence of three mothers on using the right hand for writing even if their children are left-handed, one mother teaching her child Grade 3 content so she would have advanced knowledge, and one mother cajoling her child to accomplish a coloring activity are evidence of the mothers' inadequate knowledge about their young children's individual needs and interests to some extent.

Their financial capability and beliefs about school that directly translated into how they chose Kindergarten transition activities and learning materials, and why they decided not to enroll their children in an ECCD program should be accentuated. Given this context, it is interesting to interrogate further the connections of the mothers' transition practices, socio-economic status, and early school experiences, considering that on average they have received nine years of education. This is not to downplay their efforts or to censure their social status but to provide avenues to reflect on how to reach out to these mothers who made do with very little.

There has been a growing interest in maternal education and its effects on child development outcomes (Harding, Morris, and Hughes 2015). Studies investigated how maternal education shapes children's family environment and structure (Jackson, Kiernan, and McLanahan 2017), the consequences of mothers' limited education on children's cognitive development, socioemotional functioning, and academic achievement (Hernandez and Napierala 2014), and the effects of mothers' years of schooling on children's reading and math skills as well as on obesity (Carneiro, Meghir, and Parey 2007). These studies extensively discussed that the mother's number of years in school may cause huge disparities in terms of social mobility and economic, education and health outcomes between children whose mothers have low educational attainment and children whose mothers are college graduates. While this research did not explore the relationship of the participants' educational level and their children's home environment and family structure, the mothers' choices of transition activities and materials divulged their language codes as well as the norms of educational contexts and modeling they have received as students and as mothers of older children. Despite the lack of a comparison group, like mothers who are college graduates, the results of this study may provide directives on how their educational attainment may be used in examining the quantity and quality of maternal engagement in transition practices.

Apart from maternal education, the ages of the mothers caught the attention of the researchers. They found that for every year a mother delays having her first child there is an increase in academic success specifically in math and reading, and a decrease in behavioral problems among children (Duncan et al. 2018). With a mean age of 31.4 years, the participants are considered young mothers who married early, some in their teens. Consequently, they have many children to take care of. It was observed that older mothers who have more children than younger mothers draw from their experiences of preparing their older children for school.

Some mothers utilized their older children's books in teaching their younger children and learned about the schools and teachers from their neighbors and friends. These draw our attention to the older mothers' social capital in preparing their children for Kindergarten, and how interactions "take place between mothers and people in their social networks or between people in mothers' social networks and children" (Harding, Morris, and Hughes 2015, 68).

Combining maternal age and education in a scientific inquiry can provide interesting insights on how the education of women and girls may be designed, taking into consideration how they will decide to obtain further schooling, build their own families, raise children, and prepare them for formal schooling.

As stay-at-home, less educated young mothers who are heavily dependent on the financial support of their husbands and relatives, it was observed that their everyday lives are saddled with unpaid care work and managing their meager resources. All these do not only underscore their vulnerabilities and that of their children but also the social and gender inequality present in Filipino patriarchal society (Dionisio 1993; Ofreneo 2005; Tengco-Labayen 1998; Tongson 2019). Growing up, these mothers had less access to capital, social goods, and other means necessary in advancing their personal growth and development as individuals and as women. During the interview, many of them expressed their desire to earn their own keep but they simply could not because of domestic chores and the belief that the home is where mothers best belong. Their multiple burdens and subordinated status echoed time and again and whenever women's concerns and issues were being tackled—in this case, preparing their children for formal schooling.

Following this point, the study draws attention that transition to Kindergarten should not be viewed as a linear or a one-time event but as an intergenerational journey that starts well before schooling begins. It is not only about school readiness and academic success but also about women's and gender issues. Transition to Kindergarten is best understood and supported by interrelated transactions among various environmental settings and time that involve a wide array of challenges, strategies, approaches, and activities that address differences among families, caregivers as well as children's unique needs and abilities, culture, geographical location, and socioeconomic status (Casper, Lopez, and Chattrabhuti 2015; McIntyre et al. 2010; Pianta and Kraft-Sayre 2003).

Conclusion

The present study shed light on the different transition practices of low-income peri-urban mothers as they prepare their four-year-old children who have never enrolled in an early childhood education program for formal schooling.

While the mothers' involvement exhibited their recognition and desire to prepare their children for Kindergarten, the study revealed their views about what is necessary to facilitate easy adjustment to school. Hence, it addresses a new area of inquiry in the Philippines that can be important in bolstering not only the mothers'

continuous engagements but also the involvement of the entire family especially the fathers. The challenges that these mothers experience as they provide transition activities to their children reveal the strong need for programs and interventions that will capacitate them to be influential teachers of their children at home.

Recommendation

Transition to Kindergarten is about equity (Casper, Lopez, and Chattrabhuti 2015). It does not invite a quick fix process or one-size-fits-all initiative (Kraft-Sayre and Pianta 2000). Taking these into consideration, the findings of this study convey a broader set of questions as there is much to know about Kindergarten transition programs in a poverty-stricken country like the Philippines.

Given the study's small sample size of 20 mothers, further studies should be organized that employ more participants from other geographical locations, considering that the Philippines is composed of thousands of islands with diverse socioeconomic, cultural, linguistic, gender and religious backgrounds. Studies exploring maternal age and educational attainment and their relationships to transition practices and academic achievement of children may be pursued.

How school transition programs are installed for children, families, and communities as well as the barriers to successful transition must be studied. This is to ensure the active and appropriate engagement of stakeholders especially of both mothers and fathers. It is also interesting to examine how birth order, sex of children, number of children in the family, family structure, and parents' ages, education and occupation influence parents' perceptions of transition to Kindergarten.

It is also worth looking into community-based, school-based, and home-based initiatives and government programs to discuss the local constructs of Kindergarten transition practice and school readiness, and to interrogate the similarities and differences among these levels. This is a necessary step to surface the gaps in the current educational setting and to move away from the heavy focus on cognitive development and include equally important matters such as the socioemotional and physical development of learners during the transition phase.

During COVID-19, which threatens the education of many learners, and as the Department of Education has prepared for and implemented blended learning and online educational platforms, it is essential to investigate how families have prepared their young children for formal schooling. Taking this research beyond post-pandemic Philippines will help shape our understanding of how families, the educational system, and society will adapt to the demands of the time.

Endnote

- ¹ They are experts in the field of Family Life and Child Development and Early Education from the University of the Philippines.

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