Exclusion of children with disabilities from early childhood education: Including approaches of social exclusion

Dinke Aga Hirpa

Abstract: Including all children in all educational settings is mandatory to realize the outcome of inclusion. But, there is a denial of enrolment from early childhood settings for children with disabilities. This study explored the exclusion of children with disabilities from early childhood education (ECE) systems in Ambo, Ethiopia. To reach the proposed objective, 13 interviews were conducted with parents of children with disabilities, and focus group discussions (FGD) were conducted with early childhood directors. The study focused on the exclusion and the factors of the exclusion and examining this exclusion through social exclusion perspective. Thematic content analysis was applied to analyze the results. Results of this study revealed that parents, the ECE centers, and government bodies were involved in the exclusion process. Socio-cultural barriers, absences of early identification, scarcity of resources, and reluctances of government were factors for the exclusion of children with disability from ECE. The exploration of this exclusion in social exclusion perspectives points to parents, ECE centers, and the government as agents of exclusion. Whereas those factors for exclusion were identified as causal dimensions allowing social exclusion. This implies the exclusionary phenomenon has the concept of social exclusion which needs numerous interventions.

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PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

The aim of this study is to investigate the reason why children with disabilities absent from early childhood education (ECE). Parents of the excluded children with disabilities were interviewed and FGD was conducted with some selected early childhood education principals. According to the result of the study, socio cultural barriers, absences of early identification, scarcity of resources, and reluctances of government were the reason for the exclusion phenomenon. In addition this exclusion practices were explored in approaches of social exclusion. In social exclusion, there are agents and leading behaviours or factors. Therefore, parent of children with disability, ECE centres and government were identified as agent of the social exclusion. The exploration of this disability exclusion in the concept of social exclusion has implications for policy and practice in ECE and could enable a more critical consideration of inclusive ECE and inclusive society.
Subjects: Education Studies; Inclusion and Special Educational Needs; Early Childhood; Early Years

Keywords: Children with disability; early childhood education; exclusion; social exclusion

1. Introduction

Early childhood development (ECD) is getting attention and recognition internationally, both in developing and developed countries. In developing countries, “investments in ECD by major donors have been rising rapidly” (Wodon, 2016, abstract). It has taken as a core issue in the all-rounded improvement of human development. Regarding its importance, the neuroscientists and educators have agreed on the criticality of the first 1000 days for the development of synapses as well as their future physical, intellectual, socio-emotional, and cognitive development (Hartley & Newton 2009). Further, investing at early age “tends to have high returns, and often higher returns than investments in human development later in life” (Heckman and Masterov 2007 as cited in Wodon, 2016, 1).

In Ethiopia, there is an expressed desire and promise to address the needs of children with disabilities (FDRE, 1991; Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, 1996; MoE, Ministry of Education, 1994), as it has been recognized the importance of early life experience and cover the way for participation in ECE for children with special needs. However, the literature search by the researcher could not produce studies that focus on the inclusiveness of ECE in Ethiopia. It seems that ECE is not accessible for children with disabilities (Admas, 2016; Hirpa, 2014; T. Tefera, 2009; Zewdie et al., 2016). Despite the vital role the ECE plays in their development, children with special needs are excluded from ECE.

1.1. Historical exclusive practices in Ethiopian ECE

Historically, early childhood education in Ethiopia has its own exclusive practices. Its base was the traditional Ethiopian Orthodox Church (Pankhurst, 1955) in which only male and orthodox Christian could send their children and participated in a priest learning system that contained basically of drill and practice of the alphabet (Negash, 1996). Critiques for these exclusionary practices argue that “Church schools did not serve the whole nation, therefore, and so cannot be considered impartial or democratic,” (Wagaw, 1979:12).

Similarly, as literature illustrated the historical introduction of Islam to Ethiopia, brought early childhood care and education for Koran reading and writing in Arabic (Alidou et al., 2006 as cited in Zewdie & Tefera, 2015). However, since it was using the Arabic language as a medium of instruction, the practice was not widespread. Here from both Ethiopian Orthodox Church and Koran reading and writing, we can observe gender, religion, and language-based exclusion. In Orthodox Church, only children from Orthodox Christian families could get an opportunity to attend early learning. Because the education was Orthodox Church oriented. Likewise in Arabic reading and writing, Muslims and who able to read and write Arabic or have a tendency to learn it or take Islamic religion had a chance in participation of Koran reading and writing. In both religions, there was the exclusion of children without disabilities. Nevertheless, children with disabilities were still excluded in the literature of historical development of early childhood education in Ethiopia.

After the establishment of modern early childhood education, for foreigner children, there was still the exclusion of natives (Demeke, 2003). In its slow expansion, it provided education for only 7,573 out of the 3.5 million children aged 4–6 and was limited to urban areas of the country. However, the enrolment rate and the number of early childhood centers increased to 6.2% in 2013 it was also accumulated in urban areas with no or little accessibility for disadvantaged children and rural part of the country where the majority of the population live (Tefera & Yesus, 2015; Woodhead et al., 2009). The ministry of education documents these exclusive practices:
... If the expansion of pre-primary education continues to follow the same pattern across regions and kindergartens remain accessible almost exclusively to those in urban areas, it may only increase educational advantages for children from urban areas whose families can send them to kindergarten. (MoE, 2015, p. 14)

Further, merely a very small number of parents can pay for tuition for their children to attend early childhood education. As indicated in the literature, its growth was while excluding the rural part, disadvantaged such as children with disabilities and the poor who cannot pay the education fee.

1.2. The current state of Ethiopian ECE

International policy frameworks, like Sustainable Development Goals, give attention to early childhood education despite the fact that the practice in Ethiopia is short. The goal commits the states about equity and inclusive early childhood with strong emphasis ‘Ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all (United Nations 2015, Goal 4, 17). It speculated ensuring equitable and quality early childhood development, care, and pre-primary education for all that make them ready for primary education. Goal 10 also talks about reducing inequality within and among countries. Particularly it states the ‘social, economic and political inclusion of all irrespective of age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion or economic or another status (p. 21). Accordingly, this is accepted and applicable by all countries including Ethiopia.

Currently, in line with sustainable development, the ministry of education is taking an action to address exclusive practices, in early childhood education. And emerging different forms and tried to access in a rural and disadvantaged community (Zewdie & Tefera, 2015). Contemporarily, the involvement of private institutions, non-governmental organizations, and religious institutions has begun investing in ECE. The number of preschools is expanding in urban areas (Tefera, 2018). Different documents including National Policy Framework (MoE (Ministry of Education), MoWA (Ministry of Women’s Affairs) and MoH (Ministry of Health), 2010a), Strategic Operation Plan (MoE (Ministry of Education), MoWA (Ministry of Women’s Affairs) and MoH (Ministry of Health), 2010b), and Guidelines for ECCE (MoE (Ministry of Education), MoWA (Ministry of Women’s Affairs) and MoH (Ministry of Health), 2010c) have been developed to enhance the accessibility and quality of early childhood education. The documents have the vision to ‘ensuring the right for all children to a healthy start in life, nurture in a safe, caring and stimulating environment and develop to their fullest potential.

Some forms of ECE are, “O” classes and Child-to-Child programs. They aimed to address the need for ECE for rural and the most disadvantaged community. The “O” class program is a program provided for children aged 5–6 years, alongside the government primary schools. The Child-to-Child approach is considered to deal with an educational practice in which grade 5/6 children have coached their younger siblings (MoE, 2013).

Still, there is no significant change in the quality of early childhood education and enrollment rate compared to the total number of children requiring the service. The enrolment rate, the service delivery process, services delivered to young children are quite insufficient and exclusive and do not show equity and quality education services to preschool children (Lemma, 2014). The 7% national wide coverage only consists of families who can afford the tuition fees for their children. The program is not only inaccessible to children from low socioeconomic status and children with special educational needs but also has its own limitations (MoE, Ministry of Education, 2016).

ECE which considers children from low socioeconomic status and take high coverage [“O” class] is characterized by low quality, in terms of trained manpower, equipment, and other quality indicators. Children with disabilities are still denied the attention of the sector and they are excluded from the programs.
1.3. Social justice and exclusion

According to Kearney, inclusive education has a strong link with human rights and social justice. “Social justice refers to giving all individuals and groups a just share of the advantages and benefits of a society” (Kearney, 2011, 14). It works against marginalization and exclusion. In another way, exclusion in education is unfair, inequitable, and discriminatory education for students. It finds the discrimination and prejudice based on differences in disability/ability or minority status.

The exclusion which children with disabilities experiencing is direct opposition to the legislation that is designed to protect their rights to access mainstream ECE and participate and learn without discrimination. It is also a direct opposition to human rights and feeds social exclusion.

1.4. The exclusion of children with disabilities as social exclusion

Social exclusion has multiple definitions in different settings and is framed differently in different contexts, across disciplines, and within disciplines (Kearney, 2011; Richardson & Le Grand, 2002; Sparkes, 1999). For example, in France and America, it is framed as unemployment and corresponds with the terms like marginalization and the underclass (Burchardt et al., 1999). In another place, it is conceived as unemployed households and poverty including polarization, differentiation, and inequality. Others defined it as emphasizing lack of involvement by separating it from poverty and deprivation (Beall & Piron, 2005). In addition, the expression of social exclusion goes to ‘the unit of analysis from the individual, to socially structured disadvantage’ (Sparkes, 1999,4).

The meaning which is coherent with this issue is the definition given by Burchardt et al. (1999). Social exclusion is framed as “An individual is socially excluded if (a) he or she is geographically resident in a society, (b) he or she cannot participate in the normal activities of citizens in that society, and (c) he or she would like to so participate, but is prevented from doing so by factors beyond his or her control” (p. 8).

According to the Centre for analysis of social exclusion (Richardson & Le Grand, 2002), the meaning of social exclusion in academics has four elements. Those are multiple deprivations, relativity, agency, and dynamics. Multiple deprivations in social exclusion are beyond income, poverty, or lack of employment, but include the absence of community or social interactions. Relativity refers to the inconsistency of exclusion in terms of place and time. It is measured by specific conditions of the excluded and excluder. Exclusion is an act, so agents undertake that act. Those are agencies.

The definition of social exclusion has given by Burchardt et al. (1999) assimilated with the academic definition of social exclusion. The ideas of geographic residence in society and the absence of participation in the normal activities of citizens in that society can be expressed in multiple deprivation and relativity. This means we can define social exclusion in terms of being one group and the absence of doing the normal activity of the individual in that group for a particular place and time. Agency is related to the excluder or who is doing the action. Therefore, it needs to identify who is the actor. Here in education children with disabilities are denied of participating ECE program although they want to attend it(Richardson & Le Grand, 2002).

As indicated by (Beall & Piron, 2005), the concept of social exclusion is referring to the excluded individuals or categories and/or groups, the excluders, including an institutional dimension and the causal dimension allowing this social exclusion. Evidence from the same document showed that some of the emphasis is on “agents (individuals and organizations pursuing particular interests)” and the rules governing the behavior of agents.

Accordingly in this study, to figure out the exclusion of children with disabilities from ECE, there were agents (individuals and organizations), and views or any rules governing the behavior of agents to exclude children with disabilities from ECE.
1.5. Rules/Bases governing the behavior of agents to exclude children with disabilities from ECE

Even though in Ethiopia there is a stated wish and promise, in developing national and adopting international policies to include children with disabilities and their families to ECE, in practice, however, there is no significant progress.

Scholars stated that poverty, disability, and access to education have a multidirectional relationship (Singal 2011 as cited in Brydges & Mkandawire, 2020). In developing [poor] countries like Ethiopia, poverty, and disabilities cultivated each other and aggravated the exclusion of children with disabilities from schools. This affects the possibility of growth and inclusion of children with disabilities and makes them not to attend their developmental potential (Black et al., 2017).

In addition to scarce resources, another issue is a lack of commitment and action to implement the policy. As stated by Brydges and Mkandawire (2020, abstract), “weak political will to experiment with inclusive education policy, and sociocultural barriers can hinder implementation” of inclusion policy. Ethiopia is among the fastest country in ratifying international policies (for example, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child is signed in December 1991 Tigistu, 2013), but lacks commitment in implementation. Other challenges for inclusion are sociocultural barriers (Lui et al., 2015). In Ethiopia, a socio-cultural issue also contributes to exclusion of children with disabilities from ECE. There are misconceptions and resistance to change attitude, on the part of the parents of children with disabilities as well as community members in Ethiopia (Dolisso, 2000).

The exclusion from ECE practiced by parents is due to the lack of early detection and assessment of disability (Hartley and Newton, 2009; Tirusew, 2005). Parents discover their child’s disability quite late after preschool age. Most parents do not know about their child’s disability and may determine these conditions after serious damage. Then, they may prefer to hide the child in the home to avoid social stigma to the family and the possible risk of social exclusion (Teferra, 2005).

Ethiopian children with disabilities and their families are denied enrolment in ECE services. There is deprivation of children with disabilities from enrolment of ECE in Ethiopia (Admas, 2016; Zewdie et al., 2016). They are left without a footprint for inclusion (access, participation, and support).

There is no inclusion without enrolment and no one can talk about quality inclusive ECE or exclusion within ECE in the situation where children with disabilities and their families are excluded. According to Fraser (2007b, 315), the theorist of social justice as cited in Fenech and Skattebol (2019), enrolment is essential and it can allow peer relation.

Being excluded, after all, is considerably worse than being included but marginalized being included in a subordinate way. Those who are marginalized or subordinated can still participate with others in social interaction, although they cannot do so as peers. Those who are excluded, by contrast, are not even in the game (p, 15).

This social justice theorist has emphasized that rejection from enrolment is worse than attending poor-quality ECE or exclusion within the school. Social justice works against marginalization and exclusion. Exclusion in education is essentially social injustice in education (Kearney, 2011).

Exclusion from ECE inspires poor conditions in early life and the complicated risks of disability throughout a child’s life and in adulthood than deprivation within ECE. Further, a study confirmed that poor educational achievements [even which is better than total exclusion] are central in generating and sustaining social exclusion.

In this work, the practices of the rejection from and the reason for their exclusion from ECE are clearly articulated. After that, the researcher wanted to examine the exclusionary practices of
children with disabilities from ECE centres through (Beall & Piron, 2005; Burchardt et al., 1999; Richardson & Le Grand, 2002) conceptualizing social exclusion. According to Khan et al. (2015, 3), ‘social exclusion is a useful perspective because it offers an actor-oriented approach, which points to who is doing what, concerning whom. It also helps to identify and tackle issues of power’. In doing so the researcher was concerned about the agents of these exclusionary practices, and leading bases for the exclusion of children with disabilities from ECE.

Therefore, this study articulated the answer for the following research questions:

(1) Why children with disabilities are excluded from ECE?
(2) How the exclusion of children with disabilities examined in the social exclusion approach?
   (1) Who are the agents for the social exclusion?
   (2) What are the leading behaviours of the agent for the social exclusion?

2. Methods
This study was conducted in a phenomenological approach. This approach was applied in exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to social or human problems (Creswell, 2009). In this strategy of inquiry, the researcher identifies the essence of children with disabilities in exclusionary practices from preschools of Ambo town as described by participants. The procedure focused on studying a small number of subjects through extensive and prolonged engagement to develop patterns and relationships of the meaning of the data.

2.1. Participants, sampling, and tools
The 13 parents (see Table 1) who participated in the study were identified through snowball sampling, based on having a preschool-age child with disabilities, the denial of the child from attendance of ECE, and willingness to participate in the study.

- The diagnostic story – is a disability that is diagnosed by physicians.

- Suspected types of disability- is a disability which was not identified by physicians but supposed by the researcher based on observation, interview with children and parents in the processes of data collection

An in-depth semi-structured interview was conducted with 13 parents (see table 3) of children with disabilities. This interview was aimed to collect data on participants’ insight into why their children were excluded from early childhood centers and the operative in terms of excluding children with disabilities from ECE. The data were collected at the home of participants for an average of 5 hours. Within this time, there was also an observation of the child’s behavior. The participants’ responses were recorded in a tape recorder.

The other tool used to collect data was focus group discussions (FGDs). The FGD was one group and consisted of seven members. The FGD’s participants were two headteachers from each group of ECE (private, governmental, and faith-based) and the officer of the educational bureau of the town, department of ECE (see Table 2).

The purpose of the FGD was to explore the exclusion of children with disabilities from their early childhood centers. In more detail the status of well-coming children and the challenges that the early childhood centers are facing in including/not including. It lasted on average 3 hours and was facilitated by the researcher. The participants’ responses were recorded in a tape recorder.

2.2. Procedures of data collection
First, oral consent was requested from the parents of children with disabilities, and a formal letter was given to the town administrative educational bureau. Once the permission was secured, the
researcher explained the purpose of the research to the participants. Next, the researcher with the participants of the research arranged the time and place to conduct the interview and FGD. The orientation was provided to the participants as the information was carried out confidentially, their response could not be used in ways that would potentially expose them to negative consequences, the data would not be used for other purposes than this study.

Table 1. Demographic overview of the children

| No. | Parents | Child's Age | Child's Sex | Observable Characteristics of the child During Observation and Interview | Diagnosis History | Suspected Types of Disability |
|-----|---------|-------------|-------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|-------------------------------|
| 1   | P1      | 5           | Girl        | Lay on floor, engaged with interviewer                                  | –                 | Cerebral palsy                |
| 2   | P2      | 6           | Girl        | No speech, developmental delay                                          | –                 | Intellectual limitation        |
| 3   | P3      | 8           | Girl        | Speech difficulty and loss of some motor control                        | Traumatic brain injury |                              |
| 4   | P4      | 6           | Girl        | Uses visual clue and community sign language for communication          | Deafness          |                               |
| 5   | P5      | 6           | Boy         | The facial difference, limited words                                    | Down Syndrome     |                               |
| 6   | P6      | 5           | Boy         | Eating problems; needs thickened foods, facially different              | –                 | Down Syndrome, cerebral palsy |
| 7   | P7      | 6           | Boy         | Just trying to walk, difficulty in visual information                   | –                 | Visually impaired             |
| 8   | P8      | 7           | Boy         | The facial difference, developmental delay                              | –                 | Down Syndrome                 |
| 9   | P9      | 4           | Girl        | No speech at all, limited motor activities                              | –                 | Cerebral palsy, autism        |
| 10  | P10     | 6           | Boy         | No response for speech, developmental delay                             | –                 | Seizures,                     |
| 11  | P11     | 7           | Girl        | No motor skill at the upper part-light side of the body limited speech, | Cerebral palsy     |                               |
| 12  | P12     | 6           | Girl        | Difficulty with speech and cognitive function                           | Intellectual limitations |                        |
| 13  | P13     | 4           | Boy         | No response for speech, highly skilled in motor activities             | –                 | Deafness                      |

Note:—P = Parent
2.3. Data analysis
Data analysis was inductively built from particulars to general themes, and the researcher making interpretations of the meaning of the data (Creswell, 2009). Accordingly, in this study, qualitative data were gathered through semi-structured interviews and FDG was themed in its content (see Table 4) and interpreted. Additionally, the social exclusion points of view of the exclusionary practices were applied to identify the agent and the bases of exclusion.

Table 2. Demographic overview of FDG participants

| No | Sex | Age | Year of Experience in ECE | ECE center they came from |
|----|-----|-----|---------------------------|---------------------------|
| 1  | F   | 32  | 8                         | Private ECE              |
| 2  | F   | 49  | 3                         | Government ECE           |
| 3  | F   | 51  | 6                         | Government ECE           |
| 4  | F   | 42  | 11                        | Private ECE              |
| 5  | M   | 38  | 4                         | Education bureau         |
| 6  | F   | 31  | 7                         | Faith based ECE          |
| 7  | F   | 48  | 13                        | Faith based ECE          |

Table 3. Demographic overview of interviewed parents

| Parents | Sex | Age | Educational level            | Occupation                  |
|---------|-----|-----|------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| P1      | F   | 36  | No formal education          | Self-employee               |
| P2      | M   | 34  | Degree holder                | Householder                 |
| P3      | F   | 41  | Diploma holder               | Householder                 |
| P4      | M   | 37  | Degree holder                | Government employee         |
| P5      | F   | 31  | Diploma holder               | Government employee         |
| P6      | F   | 31  | Degree holder                | Government employee         |
| P7      | F   | 44  | High school complete         | Householder                 |
| P8      | F   | 48  | Elementary complete          | Self-employee               |
| P9      | M   | 42  | Degree holder                | Government employee         |
| P10     | F   | 29  | No formal education          | Self-employee               |
| P11     | F   | 37  | Elementary complete          | Householder                 |
| P12     | F   | 35  | MA holder                    | Government employee         |
| P13     | F   | 39  | No formal education          | Householder                 |

Note:—P = Parent
| Categories                          | Themes            | Descriptions                                                                 |
|------------------------------------|-------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Socio-cultural barriers            | Reason of exclusion| - No trend of sending the child to ECE  
|- Parents prefer to care at home    |
|                                    |                   | - Lack of awareness about the importance of ECE, the right to ECE, educability of children with disabilities and misunderstood the purposes of ECE |
|                                    |                   | - Social discrimination, stigma, and prejudice  
|- Hiding the child at home         |
|                                    |                   | - Refusal of ECE centers                                                      |
| Absence of early identification    |                   | - Not considering the difficulty as disability  
|- Waiting for progress at home     |
|                                    |                   | - Absence of demographic data of the beneficiary                             |
| Scarcity of resources              |                   | - Looking for NGO’s  
|- Lack of tuition fee              |
|                                    |                   | - Increment of tuition fee                                                    |
|                                    |                   | - Expensiveness of materials for children with disabilities                   |
| Reluctances of government          |                   | - Lack of giving attention to ECE  
|- Not fulfilling materials        |
|                                    |                   | - Not fulfilling manpower                                                     |
|                                    |                   | - Absence of follow-up and support                                            |
| Lack of professional development on inclusive ECE |                   | - Absence of trend manpower  
|- Absence of trust in professionals already exist  
|- Lack of ongoing professional development |
| Agents (ECE Centres, parents, government) | Approaches of social exclusion | (Continued)                                                                 |
Table 4. (Continued)

| View or any rules governing the behavior of agents (socio-cultural barriers, absence of early identification, absence of early identification, reluctance of government, and absence of professionals) |  |
|---|---|
| Agents of exclusion from ECE as social exclusion | View or any rules governing the behavior of agents |
| ECE Centres and Parents | - Socio-cultural barriers  
- Absence of early identification  
- Limitation of resource  
- Lack of commitment with government  
- Deficiency of professionalism in special needs and inclusive education |
| Government | - Lack of commitment and resources |
3. Results

3.1. The provision of special educational needs
As the basis of associated with stereotypes and prejudices, disability is often associated with immorality and punishment by the majority of the population in Ethiopia (Lewis, 2009). So, children with disabilities were excluded from education and experiencing the consequences of exclusion. But nowadays, accessing children with disabilities to learn mainstream education has been an alarming issue in Ethiopia. There is an increment of enrolment rate in primary school (MoE, 2015), particularly in urban areas. But at an early age, it is not as such considered. Like that of many low-income countries (Baum et al., 2019) parents of children with special needs, the government and other personnel remain forgetful to provide a special educational need for children at the early childhood level.

3.2. Background of the interviewed parents
This study aimed at examining the exclusion practices of children with disabilities from ECE. Its focus was to identify the actors of this exclusion and the factor behind them. It also tends to observe this exclusion through social exclusion perspectives. The data provided from the interviews and FDG. The themes were determined by the objectives of the study. In doing so, the reasons for exclusion were categorized under one theme, actor and the factor behind them is another theme then it examined in social exclusion perspectives from similar data.

3.3. The actors and the leading behaviors
There are different views, attitudes, and beliefs of the parents of children with disabilities. Some of them have no awareness and knowledge about the importance of early childhood education. One of the participants indicated that:

Are the preschools as such necessary … I know some children are attending it. I am not sending to preschool even my elder child who has no disability (Parent 2).

The discussant of an FDG participant also attributed to parents.

… parents think that early childhood program is only for children without disabilities; if the parents request us, there might be room to consider the needs of children with disabilities. We will find trained personnel in the area, and try our best to accommodate them. But, where the parents are not ready to send their children, it is difficult to include them and make them attend the program (FDG participant).

Another FDG participant added that:

I do have information in which the parents prefer not to send the child with a disability to school while his younger sister without disability is attending (FDG participant).

Some parents fail to believe that children with disabilities can learn. One parent expressed the feeling to this as follow:

How can she learn even … with … unable to control her balance even her speech is with difficulty … sometimes she bites others … what is the use of education for here after all (parent 9).

Parents of children with disabilities are not conscious and not well-informed about the importance of early learning for children’s holistic development. As the result, they are not concerned whether their child attends ECE or not.

According to some views of participants, early childhood centers are for children without disabilities but not for those who are not able to hear, speak or see. Those participants failed to
consider the stimulants that their children can get from early childhood centers. Others parents misunderstood the purpose of ECE. They assume that early childhood centers are for employed mothers only, and if the parents are not employed, they can care for the child themselves instead of sending them to ECE centers. They think that the responsible caregivers for the children are the parent themselves. One of the participants said:

   Early childhood centers are established for mothers who are employed and do not have caregivers for their children ... I am a householder ... so I can care for my child (Parent 3).

Another parent expressed the reason for not sending her child to ECE as follows:

   ... there are early childhood centers but not for those who have disabilities. Therefore, how can I send my child to learn and participate in different types of playing activities (Parent 6)?

As indicated by parents the reason children with disabilities are excluded is also claimed that is waiting for the disability to go away and positive signs of progress of the condition.

   Right now my child cannot attend early childhood education ... if it is a will of God, she may get better or show some progress. Then my child may attend even university (Parent 1).

Some are not aware of the presence of disability as the following quotation illustrates:

   My child is 6 years old but he is still having difficulty ... I think this is obvious. Some children have a speech delay but my worry is about his falling (parent 10).

As shown through the above interview parents do not recognize the role of early childhood centers in the progression of their child’s condition. In addition, some downplay the significance of the problem of excluding their child from ECE.

As indicated by the respondent, parent-related reasons that exclude children with disabilities from early childhood programs are insufficient knowledge about disability and the right of the child to the program. Other parents exclude their children because of their economic status. They are waiting or looking for special funding agencies that are responsible for a child with disabilities care and education. They believed that caring for and educating children with disabilities requires full attention to their needs and high-level training of professionals who are responsible for meeting the needs. Further, educating children with disabilities at the preschool level requires additional facilities that could be more expensive compared to other schools. One of the responders (Parent 7) replied as follows:

   The issues of children with disabilities are beyond the capacity of local educational offices and early childhood centers. They need special materials, facilities, trained manpower because their problem is complicated. Therefore, if I get NGO or funding agencies, I will be happy ... unless ... the existing one is unable to manage them.

Other respondents concerned with educational fee:

   My income is only for daily consumption ... therefore, I cannot afford to send my child to ECE (Parent 10, 13).

Another interviewee concerned about stigma and discrimination the child will face in the center because of unprofessionalism and negative attitude:

   ... nobody can understand when my child is hungry, thirsty, and need to urinate. It is difficult for them to understand the child's needs. So they cannot care for her. I do not want
to expose her to prejudices and stigma. If I sent her to early childhood centers, her classmates or playmates may discriminate and laugh at her (Parent 12).

Another FDG participant added the presence of negative attitude regarding parents also:

... parents hide their children with disabilities. Educated parent also do not send their child with a disability to ECE. These children are not even allowed to play with their surrounding peers (FDG participant).

In addition to the lack of confidence in the education system, the parents of children with disabilities excluded the child for ECE because they worry about the possibility of exposing themselves and the child to other complicated societal views that can lead to discrimination practices.

The ECE centers and the government administrations also contribute to exclusion of children with disabilities from attending ECE in the town. Parent 4 and 8 mentioned the denial of ECE centers to accept their children with disabilities as the following quotation illustrates:

Attending early childhood centers will help the child to bring progress in playing with other children, but preschool centers refused to accept my child by saying ‘we do not have facilities and trained personnel for this kind of disability. So, it is better to find other centers or treat him at home’... asked different early childhood centers ... but they have a similar response (Parent 4).

One of the FDG discusants expressed the reason for exclusion as follow:

... it is difficult to accept children with disabilities where there is no trained manpower in the special needs. In our case, we tried to recruit trained personnel ... but we did not get ... so, we have decided not to accept children with disabilities until we employ trained individuals (FDG participant).

The following two excerpts show the expression of parents’ reason for exclusion.

I am existing on a meager diet. I cannot pay school fees as their payment is high. As a result, I prefer to make my child stay at home (parent 10).

... governmental preschools are without fees but lack facilities and trained personal even for children without disabilities ... sending them there means leaving them for abuse ... (Parent 5).

The two discusants of FDG participants also attributed the scarcity of money to include children with disabilities to ECE.

... parents need quality early ECE ... if we discount the tuition fee, it is difficult to run the program[at the required level]. We have to serve our society back ... this is applicable if we have money (FDG participant).

... yes, of course, these preschools especially private preschools are established to make a profit while providing good service for society. We recruited professionals in the area of special needs education and fulfill materials and equipment. In doing, the program become accessible and also fulfills the needs (FDG participant).

In the situations where the parents have awareness about early childhood programs for a child’s learning and development, the ECE centers have exclusionary views and practices. The government administration in the town participates in these practices by not fulfilling its responsibility in the areas of producing professionals and supplying material for children with special needs.
Another FDG participant pointed out the concern to the government clearly in the following excerpt:

... the government knows everything, about policies, the need to include children with disabilities, and the challenges early childhood programs are facing but there is no support and concerns about these issues in practices (FGD participants).

Another FDG participant added that:

... before accepting children with disabilities the school atmosphere should be improved ... and to enable the ECE centers it needs to have the demography of those beneficiaries ... I think the first step is the identification of these children which needs the participation of parents and multidisciplinary professional ... (FGD participants)

Another reason for exclusion raised by parents was the absence of early identification and assessment. The child could miss the ECE while parents were waiting for signs of progress in the condition of disability or because the parent did not recognize the child's disability. This is shown clearly in the following excerpt:

I was waiting for progress ... but when I share this issue with a friend they referred me to the hospital. As I came to know that the condition is incurable, I planned to send my child to primary school, not ECE (Parent 11).

As indicated by participants, children with disabilities are excluded from ECE in the town because of several issues. The preschools are not willing to accept children with disabilities because they lacked trained manpower and facilities in the area of special needs education. In some cases, parents of the children are not aware of the child's disability and they lack the knowledge to recognize the importance of ECE in the child's development. Further, the early childhood programs are profit-oriented and the educational programs of children with disabilities are unaffordable to the parents to pay for their child to attend the programs.

4. Discussion

By 2030, the UN planned to ensure that all children can access inclusive and equitable quality early childhood development care and preprimary education so that they are ready for primary education (UN, 2018, Goal 4). This shows how much the international communities have emphasized early childhood programs. In many works of literature on early childhood programs, there is the accessibility of early childhood programs for all children regardless of any differences but their main challenge is bringing the highest quality inclusive early childhood program (Ginner Hau et al., 2020; Majoko, 2017; McAnelly & Gaffney, 2019).

By contrast, in developing countries of which Ethiopia is one, children are experiencing poor conditions early in life which can have lasting negative consequences in adulthood and throughout a child’s life (Black et al., 2016; Admas, 2019). ECE is not accessible to the poor (Fenech & Skattebol, 2019) and children with disabilities (Brydges & Mkandawire, 2020); while the benefits seem to be greater for them.

The exclusion is getting worse in Ethiopia. Whereas children with disabilities are out of school [preschools], it is the right time to assess and expose instant problems for international communities. Thus, this article’s concern was about the exclusion of children with disabilities from early childhood education. Consequently, it identified the reasons for exclusion and documented evidence from participants [parents of children with disabilities who were practicing exclusion, principal of preschools, and governmental bodies who were responsible for ECE], as they are part of the exclusion practices. These exclusion practices were seen in the sight of social exclusion.
The literature on inclusive education indicates that parents are primary stakeholders in the process of inclusive education (Tryfon et al., 2019; Tefera, 2005). But, parents of children with disabilities are not equitable, respectful and interrelationship with the right of their child with disabilities. Parents of children with disabilities in the study site have excluded their children based on socio-cultural views which already developed in their minds.

The mind-set, attitude, and beliefs of parents are important in their decision-making regarding the inclusion/exclusion of their child with a disability and to influence the policymakers and practitioners (Tryfon et al., 2019). The result indicated that parents lack awareness about the importance of ECE, the right to ECE, the educability of children with disabilities, and misunderstood its purposes. In addition, parents were waiting for progress in the condition of their child with disabilities before they send to ECE. Sometimes, parents do not recognize the condition of disability. This indicates that the absence of early identification and assessment by professionals is found to be the basis of the problems.

Furthermore, parents of children with disabilities were not confident enough that the ECE centers would help their child, since their child has a sort of deficiency in speaking, seeing, walking, or listening. They think that the child may face abuse.

Likewise, the interviewed parents of children with disabilities think that ECE facilitators do not have any awareness about the needs of the children. Similarly, scholars justified that there is a lack of awareness about disability and low levels of pedagogical skills of professionals (Šiška et al., 2020). Similar authors showed the absence of commitment and readiness of school personnel to adapt teaching and learning materials. Further, there is evidence that showed unqualified personnel and facilitators have contributed to the exclusion of children with disabilities (Stevens & Wurf, 2020). As the result, the parents preferred to care for the child at home.

The other concern of parents was the issue of social discrimination, stigma, and prejudice towards their child. This negative attitude towards children with disabilities is the consequence of limited understanding and knowledge about disabilities and it leads them to stigma and exclusion (UNICEF, 2013). Parents think that, if the child goes to preschools, he/she may face discrimination by his/her age/play peers without disability. This is supported by what literature shows that parents of children with disabilities are bothered about social isolation (Lalvani, 2015). In the situation where they feel social refusal and mistreatment in ECE and where the attention given to their child is not similar to others, the parents of children with disabilities can stand as an opponent of inclusive education (Brydges & Mkandawire, 2020).

Parents of children with disabilities are trying to solve the exclusion problem through exclusion itself which is wrong according to literature. The solution for negative attitudes is integrating all aspects of activities, materials, and environments. Specifically, in ECE settings, we can combat negative attitudes, by increasing the representation of children with disabilities in the toys, curriculum, and materials used with children during their developmental years in early childhood environments (Favazza et al., 2017).

Parents also stated that the increment of monthly payment needed to enroll their child was a challenge for them to send their child to ECE centers. They indicated that their income is not enough to support their livelihood and pay for child’s school expenses. Therefore, they couldn't send the child to ECE.

The ECE centers also had their share in the exclusion of children with disabilities from attending ECE. However, scholars, educators, and policymakers directing that inclusive practices should be taken as usual and central instead of extra or optional (McAnelly & Gaffney, 2019), the ECE centers denied accepting children with disabilities because they lack trained personnel to care for and respond to their needs.
Professional development may equalize the knowledge and skills for early educators working in various settings. Inclusive early childhood starts with inclusive early childhood teacher education both preserves teacher preparation and in-service professional development (PD) (Nutbrown & Clough, 2004). Nevertheless, in Ethiopia, there is a lack of professionalism in ECE (Tigistu, 2013) which may prepare both early childhood educators and early childhood special educators to utilizing inclusive field experiences in professional development (Classen & Westbrook, 2020). However the recruited and the participants were lacking professionalism and professional development, now there are graduates in the profession of ECE at diploma and degree level. But still less attention is given to recruiting the graduates to their appropriate position. In addition to the absence of professional development, the existing early childhood personals were poorly paid and deal with large numbers of children consequently they reject children with disabilities considering them as burdensome and unrewarding (Baum et al., 2019; Šiška et al., 2019). Further, the early childhood owner including the government does not want to recruit graduates from the field. They prefer any other person who requires them a low payment than the graduates.

Inclusive practices are a mandate of all educational institutions (Runswick-Cole, 2008). The concerned body should consider effective inclusive ECE instructional practices in context with professional organizations’ preparation standards, recommended practices, and policy statements (Nutbrown & Clough, 2004). By contrast, the ECEs included in the study are exclude children with disabilities from the programs.

Likewise, the respondents indicated that there is a lack of accessible materials and facilities that meets the needs of children with disabilities. This forced the ECE centers to reject children with disabilities from attending. According to participants, the price of materials and equipment for children with disabilities is high, making the ECE centers expensive to run and cost-ineffective. Further, the full profile of children with disabilities, which could help the ECE centers to plan and become accessible, is not available due to the absence of early identification and assessment.

Another issue was tuition fee which was mandatory especially for the private ECE. They pointed out that most ECE was benefit-oriented. But, as shown by Brydges and Mkandawire (2020) parents of children with disabilities have practices of economic deprivation which prevents them from paying money for early education. Similarly, in Ambo majority of parents of children with disabilities are economically poor but ECE centers fail to consider their condition and provide tuition-free education.

The ECE centers are excluding children with disabilities from their centers because of the reluctance of the government to enforce them in line with a document developed by (MoE (Ministry of Education), 2010). Articles reviewed by Wodon (2016) argue that the absence of facilities should not be a reason for the exclusion of a child with disabilities from early childhood education. The limitation of resources should not deny children of disabilities from participating in ECE. According to the respondents, the government assumed that the need for children with disabilities is complex and meeting the need is beyond the capacity of the local government. Hence, even governmental pre-primary schools are poorly monitored by the government and lack the necessary facilities needed for children with disabilities.

4.1. Incorporating social exclusion perspective

Social exclusion has significant implications to be operationalized with disability issues and vice versa (Kearney, 2011). Especially it has a great role in creating an inclusive society if attention is given for early years because early age is a period at which equality and inclusion lays their foundation. Thus, this work is an attempt to see the exclusion of children with disabilities from ECE through the lens of social exclusion. In doing so, starting from the definition of social exclusion, the issue of agents and the leading behaviors which lead agents to exclude children with disability were given a focus.

In defining social exclusion, the excluded group or individual should be geographically resident of a society (Bettes et al., 2010; Burchardt et al., 1999). This concept was defined based on multiple deprivations and relativity approach as stated by (Richardson & Le Grand, 2002). When we define
geographic residence in the elements of social exclusion, the excluded children are preschool. They share the same age boundary with those of children without disabilities who are attending ECE. Though they are age peers, not sharing similar learning opportunities and absent of peer interaction. This showed what Burchardt et al. (1999) defined as the denial of participation in the normal activity of citizens in that society (This denial of normal activity was operationalized as play, education, and right).

The other theme that was identified in this study was the agents. According to the definition of social exclusion ‘who is doing’(Khan, 2015), the identified agents for this particular exclusionary practice were the parents of children with disability, ECE centers, and the government.

The other point which is the emphasis of this study was the leading behaviors or factor of this exclusion. This is one of the main issues that should be defined in social exclusion (Beall & Piron, 2005; Burchardt et al., 1999; Richardson & Le Grand, 2002).

Parents' exclusion of their children from ECE was influenced by the lack of knowledge and the limited awareness level about disability, the importance of ECE, and the right to ECE of children with disability, negative attitude, and fear of peer discrimination. The absence of early identification and assessment also leads to the exclusion of parents where they wrongly wait for the condition to improve before they send their child to ECE centers.

In addition, the participants also raised resource limitation as one of the leading factors for exclusion. Parents stated that as they couldn't send their child to ECE because they couldn't afford to pay the increased tuition fees. The final point that compels parents to exclude their children was the government's lack of commitment to monitoring the ECE centers. This includes deficiency of professionalism in special needs and inclusive education, absence of facilities and equipment for children with disabilities, absence of follow-up and awareness creations.

For the ECE centers, all factors influenced the early childhood centers to exclude the children. Socio-cultural barriers affected them and they become reluctant in improving the situation for children with disabilities. Clear demography of children with disabilities missed which could help for the planning to meet the needs of the children with disabilities because of the absence of early identification and assessment. In addition, the ECE centers required more money and resources to provide quality ECE and become profitable at the same time. The centers did not allow enrolment until the full cost for the child could be paid. To this end, as raised by parents as well, lack of resources is another pushing behavior of early childhood centers to exclude children with disabilities from attending. Further ECE centres lacks professional in inclusive education centers.

The lack of commitment and resources by the concerned governmental bodies' also contributed to the exclusion practices of children with disabilities from attending early childhood education. The government bodies do not fulfill their expected responsibilities such as providing manpower, educational materials and facilities, continuous follow up and awareness creation. This created a condition that the ECE centers do not have the necessary facilities and incentives to respond to the need of children with disabilities therefore they are excluding the children from it.

4.2. Limitations and strength of the study
The researcher acknowledged that the study has limitations. The data was conducted only by two qualitative tools. If another tool had been used the result may be more substantial. Also, the numbers of interview and FGD participants were small in number and from only one town. Thus, the result may not be representative of all exclusive experiences of children with disabilities from ECE. Therefore, the finding cannot be generalized beyond the participants. Yet, the result is in agreement with other studies conducted in other parts of Ethiopia (Admas, 2016; Hirpa, 2014; T. Tefera, 2009; Zewdie et al., 2016). Additionally, the analysis of the social exclusion approach did not include all aspects of social exclusion, rather focusing on limited ideas of it. This may affect the reliability of the relationship between the issues at hand and
social exclusion. Adapting the measurements of social exclusion for children might improve the credibility of the result. But the study, through direct evidence from parents, ECE centers, and the government administrations, still serves as additional evidence in the quest for improving the exclusion of children with disabilities from early childhood education.

5. Conclusion and implication
The literature shows Ethiopian children with disabilities are denied the right to education not the right to inclusion which is prohibited in terms of law and human development. This study presents the evidence that parents, ECE centers, and government bodies are the main actors in the disruption of basic human rights and driving inequity among preschool year children. According to the results, the socio-cultural barriers due to the lack of knowledge and the low awareness level of parents and ECE centres contributed to the exclusion. In addition, the shortage of resources is raised as one of the reason parents, the ECE, and governmental administrations participated in the study. The other factor was the reluctance of governmental bodies to practice inclusive policies.

The paper has framed the exclusive practices in terms of social exclusion such as having similar age boundaries but denial of taking part with age peers while they want to be included. The agents and causes governing the behaviors of agents were also identified. These framing show that exclusion of children with disabilities is complex and all-rounded, far from ideas of denial of enrolment, attendance, and participation, but made them practice social exclusion at an early age which has a long-lasting negative effect on social inclusion.

The results shed light on the need for national and international communities for intervention and the improvement of exclusion of children with disabilities from Ethiopian ECE in general and in Ambo administrative town in particular. The intervention has paramount importance in gaining the benefits of early development. It has high internal rates of returns, in reducing inequalities later in life, regarding human development and capabilities. Further, the intervention has benefits from an economic point of view for developing countries like Ethiopia. Further, the results highlighted that early childhood inclusion is critical not only for individual children’s development but to achieving social inclusion and social justice.

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