

PARENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

An important development in the twentieth century has been the growth of early childhood education programs (Nixon and Nixon, 1971). This trend represents a revolution in the way the educational process is viewed. Evidence suggests that early childhood education programs have positive benefits for the child (Braun and Edwards, 1972). However, an important factor influencing the degree to which the child benefits from an early childhood education program is the parents' attitude toward an involvement in the program. Obviously an important factor determining whether a parent enrolls a child in an early childhood education program is the parents' favorableness of perceptions and attitudes toward such programs. Child rearing authorities have long maintained that early childhood education programs are desirable. Very little research evidence exists indicating what the perceptions and attitudes of parents are toward early childhood education programs. Very little is known about what parents perceive to be the most important component of early childhood education programs and what they feel the benefits of early childhood education programs should be. As Schrag (1971) has noted, it is desirable to determine such perceptions and attitudes of parents.

How favorable are the perceptions and attitudes of parents toward early childhood education? What do they perceive as the most important

components of such a program? What do they perceive as the most important benefits that a child should receive from such a program? It is the purpose of the present investigation to gain more knowledge and insight concerning these questions.

Such research information would be of benefit to universities that have early childhood education programs which train teachers, as well as being of benefit to administrative and teaching staffs of nursery school programs and kindergarten programs. By being more aware of the perceptions and attitudes of parents toward early childhood education, administrators and teachers should be in a better position to work more effectively with parents and to dispell misconceptions and better interpret their early childhood education programs to parents.

#### Purpose of the Study

The overall purpose of the study was to ascertain the perceptions and attitudes of parents toward early childhood education and to relate these perceptions and attitudes to various background factors. The specific purposes of this study were:

1. To develop an instrument, Parents' Perceptions of Early Childhood Education Programs, in order to obtain a general indication of parents' perceptions of various aspects of early childhood education programs (this instrument also includes a scale specifically designed to measure favorableness of perceptions toward early childhood education programs).
2. To develop an instrument, The Favorableness of Perceptions Toward Early Childhood Education Scale, to measure the respondents' favorableness of perceptions toward early childhood education.

3. To determine the respondents' favorableness of perceptions toward early childhood education programs as measured by responses to items in The Favorableness of Perceptions Toward Early Childhood Education Scale.

4. To determine the perceptions of parents concerning each of the following:

- a. Needs of children that are most important for an early childhood education program to emphasize
- b. Most important areas of an early childhood education program
- c. Areas that teachers often fail to help children learn
- d. Services offered by an early childhood education program
- e. Amount of money parents are willing to pay to send their child to an early childhood education program

#### Hypotheses

The following hypotheses will be examined:

There is no significant difference in parents' favorableness of perceptions toward early childhood education as measured by The Favorableness of Perceptions Toward Early Childhood Education Scale,

according to each of the following:

1. Sex
2. Age
3. Religious preference
4. Size of community where respondent has lived for major part of his/her life
5. Education of parents
6. Number of children
7. Number of preschool children
8. Socioeconomic status
9. Size of community where respondent presently lives
10. Employment status of mother
11. Attendance of respondents' children in an early childhood education program

### Definition

The following definition is presented to aid the reader: Early Childhood Education--Education for children under six years of age which "provides continuous education programs for children enrolled on a regular basis under professionally qualified teachers" (Leeper, Dales, Skipper, and Witherspoon, 1968, p. 90).

## CHAPTER II

### RELATED LITERATURE

Research examining the perceptions and attitudes of parents toward early childhood education programs is extremely limited, and as a result there is little available literature dealing directly with this topic. Therefore the review of literature includes areas that are related to early childhood education programs and which might provide a better understanding of parents' perceptions of early childhood education programs. The following review of the related literature includes: (a) historical perspective, (b) importance of early learning, (c) needs from birth to six, (d) goals and objectives of early childhood education programs.

#### Historical Perspectives

The historical evolution of early education established the foundation of the attitudes toward young children in the twentieth century. A report of attitudes and perceptions toward young children could not be complete without reviewing some of the contributions made by educators who were responsible for the beginning of early childhood education.

One early contributor was Comenius, a theologian who believed the idea that improved education resulted in improved social conditions. He was concerned with the significance of sense perception in learning and the unique needs of childhood at different age levels. Three

hundred years ago these ideas were new; today these principles are common knowledge to educators of young children (Eby, 1952).

Rousseau, Pestalozzi and Froebel are other notable Europeans whose contributions to knowledge have extended over the past century or more. Rousseau recognized childhood as a distinct and important period in the education of individuals. Pestalozzi was involved with the training of children in the home as witnessed by his series of "Gertrude" books. He was concerned with the education of young children and particularly the socially disadvantaged. Frederick Froebel is usually considered the "father" of the kindergarten. He developed a kindergarten program in Germany in the early 1840's. These ideas have had an impact on the development of early childhood education in the United States in recent decades (Evans, 1971).

Early childhood education has been developing slowly in this country. Robert Owen established one of the early nursery schools in New Harmony, Indiana, in 1826. The first kindergarten in the United States was opened in 1856 in Wisconsin for children who spoke only German. In 1860, a kindergarten was opened in Boston for English-speaking children. In 1873 a kindergarten was established for the first time as part of a public school system in St. Louis, Missouri (Evans, 1971).

After the first quarter of this century, early childhood education slowly took a new form of development under the influence of Dewey, Kilpatrick, Hall, and Thorndike in America. Their counterparts in Europe were Binet, Freud, Montessori, and Piaget. The overall development of early childhood education in America stems from three major sources: (1) the increased employment of mothers, (2) educational

results stemming from research, and (3) the war on poverty in the 1960's (Wilds and Lottich, 1961).

Jean Piaget, director of the Rousseau Institute in Geneva, Switzerland, has probably had the greatest impact of any individual on early childhood education during the past two decades. His ideas have added great intellectual stimulation to recent development in this country. He has provided a series of guidelines that can be used to assess children's levels of development as well as experiences that are appropriate for children at a particular period in their development. In addition, Piaget has highlighted the role of the child as active participant in the education process (Almy, Chittenden and Miller, 1967).

The decade of the Sixties was a period of dramatic activity in early childhood education. The expansion in interest that started early in this period, along with all aspects of education, was accelerated sharply by the Federal Education Act of 1965 and the Head Start Movement. Federal funds generated research and developmental activity. Much of the concern was focused on children with personal difficulties arising from impoverished home environments and other disadvantages (Moore, 1972).

### The Importance of Early Learning

Gardner (1973) stressed that early childhood education at its best can indeed bring about significant change in the lives of young children. Potentially, these positive changes endure and contribute to later school success and healthy personality development.

Weber (1970) explained early childhood education means that a child's total relationship with people and things can become more

productive through organized learning experiences. In this light, a school is an institution for facilitating the child's emerging competence as a human being.

Hess and Croft (1975) suggested the major principle in favor of early childhood education is that it can provide growth experiences that are not otherwise available. There is a substance and strategy to early education along with a special physical setting equipped with particular objects and materials which are not generally available in ordinary homes. In addition, there is a planned social environment supervised by a teacher trained in child growth and development. The availability of such a resource represents, potentially at least, a significant psychological support to parents who normally wish to provide their children with an environment conducive to healthy growth.

#### Needs From Birth to Six

Gordon (1969) indicates the basic needs of children for fullest possible development are the fundamental considerations for designing and operating early childhood education programs. They include physiological, intellectual, emotional, and sociological.

#### Physical Development

The primary physical needs include adequate nutrition, exercise, rest, and sleep (Tanner, 1970). Some childhood diseases are to be expected, but the importance of a comprehensive program of immunization must be stressed (Nossal, 1969). The frequency of accidents, the leading cause of mortality among young children, could be significantly decreased by careful attention to and understanding of the nature of



the young child, and through attention to his physical environment and its hazards (Stuart, 1960).

The major change in physical appearance is a lengthening out process, attributable to growth of the trunk and long bones of the body and a loss of baby fat. Gross changes in size and weight occur much more slowly between 2 and 6 than in the preceding period of infancy. The young child's skeleton is still immature both in size and quality; some ossification centers have not yet made their appearance. The use of X-ray photography has enabled specialists to learn much about the regularities of human development. Care of the deciduous teeth is very important, in part because of the role they play in the alignment of the permanent teeth. Muscular development plays a significant role in the child's expanding efforts to control body action and in relation to all aspects of cognitive and personality development (Watson and Lowrey, 1962).

### Intellectual Development

The need for language development has a high order of consideration in all studies of children. The literature abounds with techniques for improving language skills. McCandless (1961, p. 258) stated:

Language development during infancy has been shown to be more highly related to later tests of "intelligence" than any other measure of infant intelligence. With adult attention, the language development of infants can be accelerated: for example, the more reading infants have been exposed to, the more advanced their language development is likely to be. Love oriented techniques of child rearing, and a home atmosphere characterized by relatively high intellectual stimulation are typical of families whose children are accelerated in language regardless of the social class from which they come.

Hunt (1961, p. 188) explained:

The problem for the management of child development is to find out how to govern the encounters that children have with their environments to foster both an optimally rapid rate of intellectual development and a satisfying life. . . . The fact that it is reasonable to hope to find a way of raising the level of intellectual capacity in a majority of the population makes it a challenge to do the necessary research. It is one of the major challenges of our times.

Bloom (1964, p. 68) stated:

Both the correlational data and the absolute scale of intelligence development make it clear that intelligence is a developing function and that the stability of measured intelligence increases with age. Both types of data suggest that in terms of intelligence measured at age 17, about 50 per cent of the development takes place between conception and age 4, about 30 per cent between ages 4 and 8, and about 20 per cent between ages 8 and 17. These results make it clear that a single early measure of general intelligence cannot be the basis for a long-term decision about an individual. . . . There is little doubt that intelligence development is in part a function of the environment in which the individual lives. . . . The effects of the environments, especially of the extreme environments, appear to be greatest in the early (and more rapid) periods of intelligence development and least in the later (and less rapid) periods of development.

Piaget and Inhelder (1969) emphasized four related factors which help to explain intellectual development of children: organic growth, exercise and acquired experience with physical objects, social interaction, and internal motivation. Piaget and Inhelder (1969, p. 26) summarized the need for a challenging environment to stimulate intellectual development as follows:

It may even seem that affective, dynamic factors provide the key to all mental development and that in the last analysis it is the need to grow, to assert oneself, to love, and to be admired that constitutes the motive force of intelligence, as well as behavior in its totality and in its increasing complexity.

## Social and Emotional Development

Hymes (1974) explained from birth to age six, children's social experiences extend from the intimate interactions within the small family circle to neighborhood groups and to the larger community. They play an active role in all of these experiences. They also react to others and thus learn acceptable social behavior by being a member of social groups. They have a basic need for attention, acceptance, love, and recognition. A number of social scientists emphasize the importance of symbolic play as a means of social interaction and adjustment to reality.

Stott (1972) stressed how the child views himself as playing a major role in the adjustment process. There are many periods of anxiety and frustration during the socialization process. If a child is into dependency by a domineering or oversolicitous parent, he may become overdependent, insecure, and overly anxious. Under normal conditions there are periods of frustration. However, as the child becomes involved with a variety of social groups during preschool and early school years, he should become more successful at handling frustrating situations. If he comes to view himself as one who is about the same size as other members of his social group, who possesses adequate motor skills to play group games, who communicates successfully with the group, and who initiates some activities in which the others will participate, he will certainly possess the basic tools to function effectively in his society.

Hurlock (1972) reported most of the evidence indicates that both maturation and learning are essential in emotional development. Early childhood education helps to meet the needs of children emotionally.

Many lists of needs have been developed and numerous studies have been made to show how essential it is for these needs to be met if the child is to make a satisfactory adjustment in the home or in the school.

Landis (1960) suggested there is a constant increase in the number of mothers working outside the home who have children of school age or younger. There is also a large number of children growing up in homes with only one parent--a situation caused by separation, death, or divorce. It is not easy to determine the degree of emotional deprivation the child experiences in such an environment. If the child's needs are not met in the home, then it is important for the teacher to attempt to compensate for this deficiency.

### Goals and Objectives of Early Childhood Education Programs

The goals of the Compensatory Preschool Education Programs of California established in 1969 offer an example of the basic goals that most educators would agree are important for young children.

1. To provide a wide range of experiences for the purposes of:
  - a. Stimulating the child's interest in the world
  - b. Motivating the child to desire and seek information and understanding
  - c. Providing a basis for the development of concepts
  - d. Developing all of the cognitive processes appropriate to the preschool child including communication skills.
2. To provide the child with a sense of self-worth and well-being.
3. To accustom the child to a varied social environment.
4. To establish rapport with parents.

In addition to these, most educators would add goals related to the emotional and physical development, health, and safety of children.

Nixon and Nixon (1971) point out that at age three most children are mature enough to function well in small groups. These children are becoming independent in caring for themselves--buttoning coats, washing hands, and toileting. At this time in life gross motor coordination is important for total body movement, and balance as seen in climbing, running, and active group play. Fine motor coordination is observed in ability to use small objects such as crayons, paint brushes, and scissors.

Wann, Dorn, and Liddle (1974) explained cognitive development also is receiving more emphasis in early childhood education programs. Many children at three years of age have a vocabulary of one thousand words or more, with a high degree of comprehension. Average sentence length is about five or six words. The speech-sound discrimination ranges from 25 per cent to 75 per cent accuracy, and children of this age are beginning to take on adult language patterns of articulation. The evidence indicates that children at three years of age are ready for an environment that is planned for proper stimulation, challenge, creativity, and satisfaction. The nursery school can provide that environment under guidance of skillful and professional personnel with proper space and materials (Bayley, 1970).

Hymes (1974) described a brief image of an early childhood education program: An instructional unit would consist of 15 to 20 children, all of one age or a mixture of age groups. The staff should consist of a teacher and two aides. The length of the school day for the children should be from two and one-half to three hours for five days each week.

Read (1971) explained the indoor space should consist of 1,500 to 2,000 square feet for a group of 15 to 20 children. The room should be

divided into five or six activity areas: (1) reading and listening; (2) manipulative activities with large objects such as building blocks and toys; (3) manipulative activities with small objects such as puzzles, nesting cups, and peg boards; (4) science activities such as aquaria, small animal cages, rock collections, plants and others; (5) housekeeping activities with dolls, dollhouses, and simple tools; (6) dining area for snacks and lunch; (7) art activities with paper, scissors, and paints; and (8) open space for activity of the total class.

The room should have auxiliary space for storage of heavy clothing, toilet facilities, sink facilities for washing hands, and a storage area for supplies and equipment. In addition, there should be outdoor space of about 2,000 square feet of play area specially equipped and designed for young children (Read, 1971).

These basic characteristics of the physical environment suggest a highly flexible program that is designed for the children. Activity would consist of individual and small group work (or play) throughout the day with exception of snacks, lunch, and group singing. Much of the time would be spent in activities with three to five members. About half of the day would be spent in activities chosen freely by the children (Leeper et al., 1975).

Leeper et al. (1975) states the total program is designed to develop speech, language articulation, problem-solving, self image, and other cognitive qualities. There should be opportunity for free exploration in activities suitable to the children, such as playing at school, listening to music and stories, and building various structures.

## Parental Attitudes

Attitudes are powerful determinants of actual behavior. Similarly, the attitudes and perceptions which parents have toward early childhood education programs influence decisions such as whether or not to send their child, the amount of money they are willing to pay to have their children attend such a program, as well as what type of program they select for their children to attend. Following are some research studies indicating the importance of parental attitudes and child rearing.

Research evidence indicates that there is a relationship between parents' perceived level of expectation for their child and the educational aspiration of the child. Baragona (1964), in a study of personality characteristics among nursery school children, found a negative correlation between parental authoritarian attitudes and parental acceptance of the child. Parents who differed most (one authoritarian and the other nonauthoritarian) tended to have children with the least degree of spontaneity, friendliness, belongingness, and same-sex identification. Parents who differed least tended to have children with a greater degree of spontaneity, friendliness, belongingness, and same-sex identification.

The results of a study by Gildea et al. (1961) supported the hypothesis that a significant relationship exists between the prevalence of behavior problems among children in school and their mothers' attitudes toward their own responsibility and their belief that they influence the outcome of behavior problems in their children. The mother who saw her child's behavior as a result of many causes, who felt responsibility for her child's behavior, and who felt that she

had a great impact in determining the child's behavior had the children who were best adjusted in school. The mothers who denied responsibility as well as their impact upon the children and could see one or more external influences on their children, had children who evidenced the highest disturbance rate.

Various reviews of literature on parental attitudes have noted research results converge in suggesting that parental acceptance, warmth, and support are positively related to favorable emotional, social and intellectual development of children (Walters and Stinnett, 1971).

#### Summary

Important observations from this review of literature indicate:

1. The historical evolution of early education established the foundation of the attitudes toward young children in the twentieth century.
2. Early childhood education has the potential of bringing about a significant, positive change in the lives of young children.
3. The needs of young children from birth to six are a fundamental consideration for designing and operating early childhood education programs. The needs of young children include physical, intellectual, emotional and social needs.
4. Parental attitudes and expectations are powerful determinants of actual behavior of children. For example, research results converge in suggesting that parental acceptance, warmth, and support are positively related to favorable emotional, social and intellectual development of children. Research evidence also indicates that there



is a relationship between parents' perceived level of expectations for their child and the educational aspirations of the child.

## CHAPTER III

### PROCEDURE

#### Selection of Subjects

The 219 subjects of this study were obtained from eight parent-teacher association groups in Edmond, Oklahoma. The subjects were predominantly parents of elementary school children who had previously had a preschool age child.

Cover letters, explaining the research and assuring anonymity, were sent to 500 parents involved in the eight parent-teacher association groups in Edmond. Two questionnaires (one for the mother and one for the father) were included with each letter. Mothers and fathers were requested to complete the questionnaires individually and not to compare answers. The data were obtained during the month of May, 1975. Of the 234 returned questionnaires, 15 were excluded from the analysis because they were incomplete.

#### Development of the Instrument

A questionnaire, Parents' Perceptions of Early Childhood Education Programs, was developed by the investigator, consisting of items designed to obtain information concerning: (1) background characteristics of the subjects; (2) favorableness of perceptions of subjects concerning early childhood education; (3) perceptions concerning needs of children which are met by a successful early childhood education

programs, and (4) perceptions concerning important areas of early childhood education programs and the most important services a child should receive from such a program. The McGuire-White Index of Socio-economic Status (1955) was used to measure the socioeconomic status of the respondents. The items designed to measure the various perceptions and attitudes of respondents toward early childhood education were based upon a review of the literature.

The Favorableness of Perceptions Toward Early Childhood Education Scale was developed to measure the respondents' favorableness of perceptions toward early childhood education. This is a 12-item Likert-type scale. There are five degrees of response to each item, ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. The items are scored in such a way that the most favorable response is given the highest score and the least favorable the lowest score. Items in The Favorableness of Perceptions Toward Early Childhood Education Scale were presented in both positively and negatively worded statements to avoid set response.

Items in The Favorableness of Perceptions Toward Early Childhood Education Scale, as well as the items designed to determine respondents' perceptions concerning the most important components of early childhood education programs and the most important benefits that a child should receive from such a program, were presented to a panel of five judges, all of whom hold advanced degrees in early childhood education. The judges were asked to evaluate the items in terms of the following criteria:

1. Is the item clear?
2. Is the item related to the concept under investigation?
3. Is the item specific enough?
4. Are additional items needed to obtain the desired information?

Modifications were made as a result of the recommendations of the panel of judges.

In a further effort to maximize the validity of The Favorableness of Perceptions Toward Early Childhood Education Scale, a pretest was conducted with a sample of 200 parents selected from various church groups in the Edmond and Oklahoma City areas. Data from this pretest were used to apply an item analysis of The Favorableness of Perceptions Toward Early Childhood Education Scale. The chi-square test was utilized to determine those items which significantly discriminated between those respondents scoring in the upper and lower quartile groups on the basis of total scale scores. This initial item analysis indicated that all of the items except three in The Favorableness of Perceptions Toward Early Childhood Education Scale were significantly discriminating. The three nondiscriminating items were replaced with new items to be administered to the final, larger sample.

In order to obtain an additional indication of the validity of The Favorableness of Perceptions Toward Early Childhood Education Scale, another item analysis was conducted with data from the final, larger sample of 219 parents. The chi-square test was used again to determine those items which significantly differentiated between those respondents whose total scores fell in the highest quartile and those whose scores fell in the lowest quartile.

In order to obtain an index of the reliability of The Favorableness of Perceptions Toward Early Childhood Education Scale, the split-half technique using the Spearman Brown Correction Formula was used.

## Analysis of Data

A percentage and frequency count was used to analyze various background characteristics of the subjects. The percentage and frequency description was also used to determine the respondents' perceptions and attitudes concerning the most important areas of an early childhood education program, needs of children which are met by a successful early childhood education program, and the most important services a child should receive from such a program.

An analysis of variance was used to examine the following hypotheses:

There is no significant difference in parents' perceptions toward early childhood education as measured by The Favorableness of Perceptions Toward Early Childhood Education Scale, according to each of the following:

1. Sex
2. Age
3. Religious preference
4. Size of community where respondent has lived for major part of his/her life
5. Education of parents
6. Number of children
7. Number of preschool children
8. Socioeconomic status
9. Size of community where respondent presently lives
10. Employment status of mother
11. Attendance of respondents' children in an early childhood education program

## CHAPTER IV

### RESULTS

#### Description of Subjects

Table I presents a detailed description of 219 mothers and fathers who served as subjects in this study. Over 34 per cent of the sample consisted of males and approximately 66 per cent were females. The respondents ranged from age 26 to over 46, with the greatest proportion falling in the age category 31-35 years (42 per cent). The smallest proportions were in the age categories 26-30 (11 per cent) and over 46 (9 per cent). The sample was predominantly Protestant (83 per cent). The social level of the sample was predominately upper-middle class (49 per cent). Approximately 38 per cent of the female respondents were unemployed, while 62 per cent were employed. The sample was predominately white (99 per cent). Sixteen per cent of the respondents indicated residence for the major part of life was in a city of 25,000 to 50,000 population. The number of children in each family ranged from one to six, with most respondents (41 per cent) having two children. Only three per cent of the parents planned to have more children. The number of preschool children in most of the families ranged from one to three (51 per cent), and 84 per cent reported that their children had attended early childhood education programs, as compared to 16 per cent who indicated they had not sent their children.

TABLE I  
CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SUBJECTS

Variable	Classification	Number	Per Cent
Sex	Male	75	34.00
	Female	144	66.00
Age	26-30	25	11.42
	31-35	93	42.46
	36-40	53	24.20
	41-45	29	13.24
	Over 46	19	8.67
Religious preference	Catholic	23	10.50
	Protestant	182	83.10
	Jewish	1	0.45
	None	13	5.93
Residence for major part of life	On farm or in country	17	7.76
	Small town under 25,000	90	41.09
	City of 25,000 to 50,000	36	16.43
	City of 50,000 to 100,000	17	7.76
	City of over 100,000	59	26.94
Present residence	On farm or in country	13	5.96
	Small town under 25,000	116	53.21
	City of 25,000 to 50,000	72	33.02
	City of 50,000 to 100,000	3	1.37
	City of over 100,000	14	6.42
Education	Less than grade 8	1	.46
	Completed 8th, did not attend 9th	1	.46
	Some high school	1	.46
	High school graduate	43	19.64
	Attended college two or more years	56	25.57
	College graduate	74	33.79
	Completed graduate work	43	19.63
Socioeconomic status	Upper class	97	44.70
	Upper middle class	106	48.84
	Lower middle class	10	4.60
	Upper lower class	4	1.84
Employment status	Employed	135	61.92
	Unemployed	83	38.07
Preschool children in family	One	90	41.10
	Two	21	9.59
	Four	1	.46
	None	107	48.86

TABLE I (Continued)

Variable	Classification	Number	Per Cent
Number of children in family	One	11	5.05
	Two	89	40.83
	Three	71	32.57
	Four-Five	40	18.35
	Six-Eight	7	3.21
Planning more children	Yes	6	2.74
	No	213	97.26

#### The Item Analysis

In order to obtain an index of the validity of the items in The Favorableness of Perceptions Toward Early Childhood Education Scale, the chi-square test was utilized to determine if each item significantly differentiates between those subjects scoring in the upper quartile and those subjects scoring in the lower quartile on the basis of the total scores. All of the 12 items on the scale were found to be significantly discriminating at the .0001 level.

A split-half reliability coefficient, computed with the Spearman-Brown Correction Formula, of +0.90 was obtained in determining an index of the reliability of the items in The Favorableness of Perceptions Toward Early Childhood Education Scale.



TABLE II

ITEMS ANALYSIS BASED ON COMPARISONS OF THE UPPER AND LOWER QUARTILES OF THE TOTAL FAVORABLENESS OF PERCEPTIONS TOWARD EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION SCALE SCORES

Item	df	$\chi^2$	Level of Significance
1. I feel children ages 3-5 learn a great deal of responsibility in an early childhood education program.	4	59.00	.0001
2. I believe an early childhood education program makes little difference in helping children feel good about themselves.	5	71.36	.0001
3. I feel a child's social development is enhanced by attending an early childhood education program.	5	74.51	.0001
4. I feel attending an early childhood education program helps a child learn to communicate well with others.	4	74.93	.0001
5. I feel a great many children are better off if they don't go to early childhood education programs.	5	68.40	.0001
6. I feel that most children enjoy going to early childhood education programs.	5	44.75	.0001
7. I feel early childhood education programs encourage the development of a child's ability to get along with other children.	3	55.90	.0001
8. I believe most children ages 3-5 would benefit by attending an early childhood education program.	5	76.36	.0001
9. I believe that an early childhood education program really does not make much difference with how a child develops intellectually.	5	66.00	.0001
10. I believe that attending early childhood education programs causes a child to grow up too fast.	5	51.34	.0001
11. I believe that early childhood education programs have very few disadvantages for children.	5	45.62	.0001

TABLE II (Continued)

Item	df	$\chi^2$	Level of Significance
12. I believe early childhood education programs cause children to become too dependent on their peer group.	5	54.35	.0001

Favorableness of Perceptions Toward Early Childhood  
Education Scale Item Responses

The responses to items in The Favorableness of Perceptions Toward Early Childhood Education Scale indicated that the respondents possessed very favorable perceptions toward early childhood education programs. The scores ranged from a low of 24 (least favorable) to a high or most favorable score of 60. The lowest possible score was 12 and the highest possible score was 60. The mean score for the entire sample was 47.42. The great majority of parents felt that early childhood education programs were a positive benefit to children socially, intellectually, and emotionally. The parents responded most favorably to the item, "I feel early childhood education programs encourage the development of a child's ability to get along with other children." Approximately 95 per cent of the parents agreed with this statement.

One criticism of early childhood education programs has been that attending such programs may cause a child to become too dependent on his peer group. Over 78 per cent of respondents disagreed with the criticism. A majority of the parents felt most children like attending early childhood education programs (Table III).

TABLE III

FREQUENCY AND PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONSES TO THE FAVORABLENESS OF PERCEPTIONS TOWARD EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION SCALE

Item	Agree		Undecided		Disagree	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
1. I feel attending an early childhood education program helps a child learn to communicate well with others.	206	94.93	4	1.84	7	3.23
2. I feel a great many children are better off if they don't go to early childhood education programs.	24	11.05	19	8.76	174	80.17
3. I feel that most children enjoy going to early childhood education programs.	191	87.61	20	9.17	7	3.20
4. I feel early childhood education programs encourage the development of a child's ability to get along with other children.	208	94.97	6	2.74	5	2.28
5. I believe most children ages 3-5 would benefit by attending an early childhood education program.	191	87.61	14	6.42	22	5.96
6. I believe that an early childhood education program really does not make much difference with how a child develops intellectually.	37	17.04	26	11.98	154	70.97
7. I believe that attending early childhood education programs causes a child to grow up too fast.	25	11.47	18	8.26	175	80.27
8. I believe that early childhood education programs have very few disadvantages for children.	155	71.43	32	14.75	30	13.81
9. I believe early childhood education programs cause children to become too dependent on their peer group.	11	5.07	36	16.59	170	78.34
10. I feel children ages 3-5 learn a great deal of responsibility in an early childhood education program.	207	77.62	27	12.33	22	10.0

TABLE III (Continued)

Item	Agree		Undecided		Disagree	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
11. I believe an early childhood education program makes little difference in helping children feel good about themselves.	34	15.59	16	7.34	168	77.06
12. I feel a child's social development is enhanced by attending an early childhood education program.	197	90.36	6	2.75	15	6.87

Perceptions of Parents Concerning Needs of Children Which Are  
Met By a Successful Early Childhood Education Program

As shown in Table IV, a majority of parents (52 per cent) felt that children's health needs should be met in early childhood education programs. Twenty-eight per cent felt it was not the responsibility of an early childhood education program to be concerned with health needs of children.

Concerning the four areas of growth and development, 65 per cent of the parents felt that emotional growth and psychological development of children were the most important developmental needs which a successful early childhood education program could emphasize. When considering the least important developmental need, the greatest proportion (47 per cent) thought that physical care of the child was the least important element of a successful early childhood education program.

TABLE IV

PERCEPTIONS OF PARENTS CONCERNING NEEDS OF CHILDREN WHICH ARE MET  
BY A SUCCESSFUL EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION PROGRAM

Item	Classification	Number	Per Cent
1. I feel children's health needs should be met in an early childhood education program.	Yes	114	52.29
	No	63	28.90
	Undecided	41	18.81
2. Which one of the following do you most desire that a child get out of an early childhood education program?	Social development	65	30.81
	Academic growth	15	7.11
	Physical care	1	.47
	Emotional growth-- psychological development	130	61.61
3. Which one of the following do you consider to be the <u>most</u> important element of a successful early childhood education program?	Social development	59	27.83
	Academic growth	14	6.60
	Physical care	1	.47
	Emotional growth-- psychological development	138	65.09
4. Which one of the following do you consider to be the <u>least</u> important element of a successful early childhood education program?	Social development	20	9.13
	Academic growth	92	42.01
	Physical care	104	47.49
	Emotional growth-- psychological development	3	1.37

Perceptions of Parents Concerning the Most Important  
Areas Of An Early Childhood Education Program

Table V describes how the respondents evaluated the importance of the areas of an early childhood education program. When asked to indicate the areas they felt were most important for teachers to assist young children in learning, the greatest proportion of responses (16 per cent) indicated the most important was to "help children feel good

about themselves." The second highest proportion of responses (12 per cent) indicated "fostering creativity" is an important area of an early childhood education program. The least important areas were considered to be "science" (.66 per cent) and "loyalty" (.76 per cent).

TABLE V  
PERCEPTIONS OF PARENTS CONCERNING THE MOST IMPORTANT  
AREAS OF AN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION PROGRAM

Item	Number	Per Cent
1. Help children to feel good about themselves	168	15.94
2. Art activities	16	1.52
3. Music activities	25	2.37
4. Principles of good health	17	1.61
5. Science	7	.66
6. Physical development of their bodies	31	2.94
7. Good nutrition	19	1.80
8. Play activities (outdoor and indoor)	55	5.22
9. Fostering creativity	129	12.24
10. Cooperation	125	11.86
11. Self-discipline	122	11.57
12. Seeing each person as having dignity and worth	108	10.24
13. Self-respect	93	8.82
14. Loyalty	8	.76
15. Honesty and integrity	88	8.35
16. Determination and perseverance	43	4.08

Perceptions of Parents Concerning the Areas that Teachers  
of Young Children Often Fail to Help Children Learn

Table VI reflects the perceptions of parents concerning the areas that teachers of young children most often fail to help children learn. The highest proportion of responses (12 per cent) indicated that "Fostering creativity" and "helping children feel good about themselves" were the areas that teachers most often failed to help children learn. The next most frequently mentioned area (11 per cent) was "seeing each person as having dignity and worth." The smallest proportion of responses (one per cent) indicated "art activities" as an area that teachers most often fail to help children learn.

TABLE VI

PERCEPTIONS OF PARENTS CONCERNING THE AREAS THAT TEACHERS  
OF YOUNG CHILDREN OFTEN FAIL TO HELP CHILDREN LEARN

Item	Number	Per Cent
1. Help children to feel good about themselves	109	12.40
2. Art activities	13	1.48
3. Music activities	18	2.05
4. Principles of good health	34	3.87
5. Science	30	3.41
6. Physical development of their bodies	47	5.35
7. Good nutrition	36	4.10
8. Play activities (outdoor and indoor)	18	2.04
9. Fostering creativity	108	12.29

TABLE VI (Continued)

Item	Number	Per Cent
10. Cooperation	39	4.44
11. Self-discipline	95	10.81
12. Seeing each person as having dignity and worth	97	11.03
13. Self-respect	84	9.56
14. Loyalty	24	2.73
15. Honesty and integrity	48	5.46
16. Determination and perseverance	79	8.99

Perceptions of Parents Concerning Importance of Services  
Offered by an Early Childhood Education Program

The majority of parents (52 per cent) rated parent-teacher conferences with a "5" (the greatest degree of importance) in an early childhood education program. Approximately 46 per cent of the parents felt that being allowed to observe school activities was of the highest degree of importance with only nine per cent of the parents perceiving this service as being of the least degree of importance. A majority of the parents (51 per cent) felt that serving a midmorning or midafternoon snack was of the highest degree of importance in an early childhood education program. The preschool being located in the same building as the elementary school was rated with a "5" by only 14 per cent of the parents, while 72 per cent rated this as being of the least degree of importance, (Table VII).



TABLE VII

PERCEPTIONS OF PARENTS CONCERNING IMPORTANCE OF SERVICES  
OFFERED BY AN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION PROGRAM

Item	Classification	Number	Per Cent
1. The preschool should be located in the same building that the elementary school is located in.	1	136	62.38
	2	20	9.17
	3	32	14.68
	4	7	3.21
	5	23	10.55
2. The teachers of preschool children should make home visits.	1	68	31.92
	2	30	14.08
	3	50	23.47
	4	31	14.55
	5	34	15.96
3. Parents should be allowed to observe school activities at any time.	1	19	8.84
	2	33	15.35
	3	37	17.21
	4	28	13.03
	5	98	45.58
4. The school should provide a nutritious snack at midmorning or midafternoon.	1	24	11.21
	2	27	12.62
	3	53	24.77
	4	40	18.69
	5	70	32.71
5. A rest period should be provided for the children.	1	15	7.07
	2	27	12.74
	3	55	25.94
	4	48	22.64
	5	67	31.60
6. Teachers should have frequent conferences with the parents about their children.	1	12	5.56
	2	10	4.63
	3	34	15.74
	4	48	20.22
	5	112	51.85

Amount of Money Respondents Are Willing to Pay to Send Their  
Children To An Early Childhood Education Program

As shown in Table VIII, the greatest proportion of parents (46 per cent) were willing to pay not more than \$9.00 per week to send their child to a half-day early childhood education program. Twenty-five per cent considered \$10.00 to \$14.00 a week an acceptable amount of money. Only three per cent would pay \$30.00 to \$50.00 a week to send a child to an early childhood education program.

TABLE VIII

AMOUNT OF MONEY RESPONDENTS ARE WILLING TO PAY TO SEND THEIR  
CHILDREN TO AN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION PROGRAM

Amount Per Week	Number	Per Cent
\$ 0 - 9.00	99	46
\$10.00 - 14.00	53	25
\$15.00 - 19.00	30	14
\$20.00 - 30.00	28	13
\$31.00 - 50.00	6	3

Seventy-six per cent of the respondents indicated if there was a preschool in their community they would send their child. Only nine per cent indicated they would not send their child to an early childhood education program while 15 per cent were undecided.

## Examination of Hypotheses

The one-way classification analysis of variance was utilized to examine the hypotheses, that there is no significant difference in total scores on The Favorableness of Perceptions Toward Early Childhood Education Scale according to: (1) sex, (2) age, (3) religious preference, (4) size of community where respondent has lived for major part of his/her life, (5) educational level of parents, (6) number of children in family, (7) number of preschool children in family, (8) socioeconomic status, (9) size of community where respondent presently lives, (10) employment status of mother, and attendance of respondent's children in early childhood education programs. Where the analysis of variance revealed an F value which was significant, the Duncan Multiple Range Test was then utilized to determine where significant differences existed among all possible pairs of groups.

1. There is no significant difference in The Favorableness of Perceptions Toward Early Childhood Education Scale scores according to sex.

The results indicated that no significant difference existed in the scores according to sex. As Table IX indicates, an F value of .36 was obtained indicating no significant difference.

TABLE IX

DIFFERENCE IN THE FAVORABLENESS OF PERCEPTIONS TOWARD EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION SCALE SCORES ACCORDING TO SEX

Sex	Number	$\bar{X}$	F	Level of Significance
Male	75	47.03		
Female	144	47.62	.356	NS

2. There is no significant difference in The Favorableness of Perceptions Toward Early Childhood Education Scale scores according to age.

When the analysis of variance was applied to this hypothesis a significant difference was found to exist in the scores according to age. Table X shows an F value of 2.55, indicating a significant difference at the .04 level. Those respondents over 46 years of age reflected the highest mean scale score (52.10), reflecting the most favorable perceptions of early childhood education programs. Those respondents in the 36 to 40 age group reflected the lowest mean scale scores (46.72 per cent), reflecting the least favorable perceptions.

TABLE X

DIFFERENCES IN THE FAVORABLENESS OF PERCEPTIONS TOWARD EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION SCALE SCORES ACCORDING TO AGE

Age	Number	$\bar{X}$	F	Level of Significance
26 to 30 years	25	47.16		
31 to 35 years	93	46.78		
36 to 40 years	53	46.72	2.55	.04
41 to 45 years	29	47.90		
Over 46 years	19	52.10		

In order to determine where significant differences existed among all possible pairs of age groups the Duncan Multiple Range Test was applied. The Duncan Multiple Range Test indicated that respondents in the 46 and over age group expressed significantly higher Favorableness of Perceptions Toward Early Childhood Education Scale scores when

compared to respondents in each of the following age groups: 26 to 30, 31 to 35, 36 to 40, and 41-45. No significant difference was found to exist between any other pairs of age groups.

3. There is no significant difference in The Favorableness of Perceptions Toward Early Childhood Education Scale according to religious preference.

The results indicated that no significant difference existed in the scores according to religious preference. As Table XI indicates, an F value of 1.20 was obtained indicating no significant differences.

TABLE XI

DIFFERENCES IN THE FAVORABLENESS OF PERCEPTIONS TOWARD EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION SCALE SCORES ACCORDING TO RELIGIOUS PREFERENCE

Religious Preference	Number	$\bar{X}$	F	Level of Significance
Catholic	23	47.65	1.20	NS
Protestant	182	47.14		
None	13	50.23		

4. There is no significant difference in The Favorableness of Perceptions Toward Early Childhood Education Scale according to size of community where respondent has lived the major part of his or her life.

In using a one-way analysis of variance test to examine this hypothesis, an F score of 2.54 was obtained, which is significant at the .04 level. Parents who lived on farms or in the country for the major part of their lives indicated the least favorable perceptions of early childhood education programs, while parents who lived in communities of over 100,000 population indicated the most favorable

perceptions of early childhood education programs, as shown in Table XII.

TABLE XII

DIFFERENCES IN THE FAVORABLENESS OF PERCEPTIONS TOWARD EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION SCALE SCORES ACCORDING TO SIZE OF COMMUNITY, MAJOR PART OF RESPONDENT'S LIFE

Residence	Number	$\bar{X}$	F	Level of Significance
Farm or in country	17	44.00		
Town under 25,000	90	46.99		
City 25,000-50,000	36	46.83	2.54	.04
City 50,000-100,000	17	47.12		
City over 100,000	59	49.51		

In identifying pairs of groups in which significant differences existed the Duncan Multiple Range Test revealed that respondents who had lived the major part of their lives in communities of more than 100,000 population expressed significantly higher Favorableness of Perceptions Toward Early Childhood Education Scale scores than did respondents who reported living the major part of their lives on a farm. No significant differences were found to exist between any other pairs of groups in this analysis.

5. There is no significant difference in The Favorableness of Perceptions Toward Early Childhood Education Scale according to the educational level of the parents.

An F score of 1.83 was obtained when the one-way analysis of variance was used to examine this hypothesis, indicating no significant difference existed in scores according to education of respondents.

TABLE XIII

DIFFERENCES IN THE FAVORABLENESS OF PERCEPTIONS TOWARD EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION SCALE SCORES ACCORDING TO EDUCATIONAL LEVEL OF RESPONDENTS

Education	Number	$\bar{X}$	F	Level of Significance
Graduate work	43	49.32	1.83	NS
College graduate	74	46.22		
College, 2+ years	56	47.61		
High School graduate	43	47.07		

6. There is no significant difference in The Favorableness of Perceptions Toward Early Childhood Education Scale according to the number of children in the family.

A significant difference was found to exist in the scores according to number of children in the family. As Table XIV indicates, an F score of 3.14 was obtained which shows a significant difference at the .01 level. Those respondents having six to eight children expressed the highest mean scale score (53.57), reflecting the most favorable perceptions of early childhood education programs. Those respondents having three children reflected the lowest mean scale scores (45.82), reflecting the least favorable perceptions.

The Duncan Multiple Range Test indicated that respondents who reported having six to eight children expressed significantly higher Favorableness of Perceptions Toward Early Childhood Education Scale scores than did respondents who reported having two children. It was also found that respondents who reported having six to eight children expressed significantly higher Favorableness of Perceptions Toward Early Childhood Education Scale scores than respondents having

three children. No significant differences were found to exist between any other pairs of groups in the analysis.

TABLE XIV

DIFFERENCES IN THE FAVORABLENESS OF PERCEPTIONS TOWARD EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION SCALE SCORES ACCORDING TO NUMBER OF CHILDREN IN FAMILY

Children	Number	$\bar{X}$	F	Level of Significance
One	11	49.91		
Two	89	47.21		
Three	71	45.82	3.14	.01
Four-Five	40	48.82		
Six-Eight	7	53.57		

7. There is no significant difference in The Favorableness of Perceptions Toward Early Childhood Education Scale according to the number of preschool children in the family.

No significant difference was found when the one-way analysis of variance was utilized to determine if there was a difference in parents' perceptions of an early childhood education program according to the number of preschool children in the family. As Table XV shows, an F value of .76 was obtained indicating no significant difference.



TABLE XV

DIFFERENCES IN THE FAVORABLENESS OF PERCEPTIONS TOWARD EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION SCALE SCORES ACCORDING TO NUMBER OF PRESCHOOL CHILDREN

Preschool Children in Family	Number	$\bar{X}$	F	Level of Significance
One	90	48.05		
Two	21	46.28	.76	NS
None	107	47.08		

8. There is no significant difference in The Favorableness of Perceptions Toward Early Childhood Education Scale according to socioeconomic status.

There was a significant difference in scores representing socioeconomic levels of respondents. An F score of 3.82 showed a significant difference at the .02 level. As Table XVI demonstrates, the upper class indicated the most favorable perceptions of early childhood education programs while the lower middle class expressed the least favorable perceptions of early childhood education.

TABLE XVI

DIFFERENCES IN THE FAVORABLENESS OF PERCEPTIONS TOWARD EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION SCALE SCORES ACCORDING TO SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS

Socioeconomic Status	Number	$\bar{X}$	F	Level of Significance
Upper class	97	48.79		
Upper middle class	106	46.40	3.82	.02
Lower middle class	10	44.60		

The Duncan Multiple Range Test indicated that respondents in the upper middle class expressed significantly higher Favorableness of Perceptions Toward Early Childhood Education Scale scores than did respondents in the upper middle class status. No significant differences were found to exist between any of the other groups in the analysis.

9. There is no significant difference in The Favorableness of Perceptions Toward Early Childhood Education Scale according to size of community where respondent presently lives.

The results indicated that no significant difference existed in respondents' scores according to size of community where respondent presently lives. As Table XVII indicates, an F value of 2.08 was obtained showing no significant difference.

TABLE XVII

DIFFERENCES IN THE FAVORABLENESS OF PERCEPTIONS TOWARD EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION SCALE SCORES ACCORDING TO COMMUNITY WHERE RESPONDENT PRESENTLY LIVES

Residence	Number	$\bar{X}$	F	Level of Significance
Farm or in country	13	42.85		
Town under 25,000	116	47.91	2.08	NS
City 25,000-50,000	72	47.54		
City over 100,000	14	46.85		

10. There is no significant difference in The Favorableness of Perceptions Toward Early Childhood Education Scale according to employment of the mother.

No significant difference was found in respondents' scores according to the employment of the mother. Table XVIII shows an F value of .52 indicating no significant difference exists.

TABLE XVIII

DIFFERENCES IN THE FAVORABLENESS OF PERCEPTIONS TOWARD EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION SCALE SCORES ACCORDING TO EMPLOYMENT OF THE MOTHER

Employment Status of Mother	Number	$\bar{X}$	F	Level of Significance
Employed	61	42.66		
Unemployed	82	57.34	.52	NS

11. There is no significant difference in The Favorableness of Perceptions Toward Early Childhood Education Scale according to whether any of the respondents' children have attended early childhood education programs.

A one-way analysis of variance revealed that a significant difference did exist at the .0005 level in the scores of respondents according to whether any of respondents' children have attended an early childhood education program. As Table XIX points out, parents whose children had attended early childhood education programs were more favorable toward them than parents whose children had not attended a program.

TABLE XIX

DIFFERENCES IN THE FAVORABLENESS OF PERCEPTIONS TOWARD EARLY CHILDHOOD  
EDUCATION SCALE SCORES ACCORDING TO ATTENDANCE  
OF RESPONDENTS' CHILDREN

Attendance of Children	Number	$\bar{X}$	F	Level of Significance
Yes	184	48.15		
No	34	43.38	13.94	.0005

## CHAPTER V

### SUMMARY

The purpose of this study was to design an instrument to measure the perceptions of mothers and fathers concerning early childhood education programs and to relate these perceptions to certain background data.

The sample was composed of 219 mothers and fathers who were members of eight parent-teacher association groups in Edmond, Oklahoma. The subjects were predominately over 30 years of age and parents of school age children. They were primarily Protestant and in the upper middle class. The data was obtained during the month of May, 1975.

The questionnaire included the following sections which were utilized in the study: (a) an information sheet for securing various background data, and (b) The Favorableness of Perceptions Toward Early Childhood Education Scale; (c) various questions to gather information concerning parents' perceptions of the most important components and services of early childhood education programs.

The chi-square test was used in an item analysis of The Favorableness of Perceptions Toward Early Childhood Education Scale to determine those items that significantly differentiated between the subjects scoring in the upper quartile and the lower quartile groups on the basis of the total scale scores. The one-way classification analysis of variance was used to determine if perceptions of respondents were

independent of: (1) sex, (2) age, (3) religious preference, (4) size of community lived in for major part of life, (5) educational level, (6) socioeconomic status, (7) employment status of mother, (8) rural-urban residence, (9) number of preschool children in family, (10) number of children in family, (11) attendance of respondents children in early childhood education programs.

1. All of the twelve items of The Favorableness of Perceptions Toward Early Childhood Education Scale were significantly discriminating between the upper quartile and lower quartile groups at the .0001 level.

2. A split-half reliability coefficient, computed with the Spearman-Brown Correction Formula, of +0.90 is an indication of the reliability of the items in The Favorableness of Perceptions Toward Early Childhood Education Scale.

3. In analyzing the responses to the items of The Favorableness of Perceptions Toward Early Childhood Education Scale, it was found that the parents held favorable perceptions toward early childhood education.

4. The greatest proportion of parents felt that: (a) children's health needs should be met in early childhood education programs, (b) emotional needs and psychological development were the most important developmental needs which early childhood education programs could emphasize, while physical care of the child was the least important need, (c) to help a child feel good about himself was selected as the most important area (component) of an early childhood education program, and yet (d) to help a child feel good about himself was believed to be an area in which teachers often fail.

5. The one-way analysis of variance indicates that significant differences exist in The Favorableness of Perceptions Toward Early Childhood Education Scale scores according to each of the following variables: (a) age, (b) size of community where respondent has lived for the major part of his or her life, (c) number of children in the family, (d) socioeconomic level, (e) attendance of respondents' children in an early childhood education program.

#### Development of the Instrument

To the investigator's knowledge, the instrument developed in this study, Parents' Perceptions of Early Childhood Education Programs, is the first comprehensive instrument developed to measure parents' perceptions of various aspects of early childhood education programs.

This instrument can be used by other researchers and teachers in early childhood education programs to measure parents' perceptions of early childhood education. Teachers and administrators of early childhood education programs could find the instrument to be of practical benefit in curriculum planning by determining parents' perceptions of such aspects of an early childhood education program as: needs of children that should be met; most important areas (components) of an early childhood education program; areas that teachers often fail to help children learn; services offered by an early childhood education program; and amount of money parents are willing to pay to send their child to an early childhood education program. Also this instrument, Parents' Perceptions of Early Childhood Education Programs, could be used by teachers at the college and university level as a means of

promoting discussion concerning the needs of children and various areas (components) and services of early childhood education programs.

### Discussion

The results of this study indicated that the parents possessed favorable perceptions toward early childhood education programs. This finding may reflect the rapid growth of early childhood education programs which has served to increase the awareness of parents concerning the availability of and benefits of early childhood education (Nixon and Nixon, 1971). The positive perceptions of parents concerning early childhood education programs is undoubtedly also influenced by the increased industrialization and mobility of families as well as the great increase in the number of women who have been employed in the labor forces during the twentieth century.

An analysis of the perceptions of parents concerning the needs of children which should be met by a successful early childhood education program revealed that parents feel the most important need is that of emotional growth and psychological development. This finding is in agreement with other evidence which indicated that emotional development is an essential aspect of a child's development and should be facilitated in an early childhood education program (Hurlock, 1972). Also, numerous studies have shown the emotional development of the child to be significantly related to a satisfactory adjustment in the home and in the school. This finding is consistent with the increasingly popular view that education should be oriented to the total child (Hymes, 1974).



The finding that the greatest proportion of the parents responses indicated "to make children feel good about themselves" was the most important area in an early childhood education program coincides with the finding discussed previously that parents felt the most important developmental need to be met is that of emotional growth and psychological development. This finding also may reflect an increased awareness among parents of the importance of a child developing a positive self concept. This finding may be partially influenced by the impact of such books as Thomas Harris' I'm OK, You're OK (1972).

In a related finding, results indicated that parents perceived that teachers of young children most often failed "to help children feel good about themselves." This finding suggests that many parents feel that early childhood education programs are not very successful in helping children develop positive self concepts. This finding also suggests a need for closer examination of early childhood education programs concerning ways children could be better assisted to feel good about themselves.

The finding that such a low percentage (0.76%) of the parents' responses listed loyalty as an important component of early childhood education programs is interesting and may have important implications for our entire society. This finding is consistent with a research study by Stinnett and Kreps (1972) who found that when college students were asked to rate values they believed most important for parents to help children learn rated loyalty as the least important value. The present finding is consistent with the thesis of Masters and Johnson (1974) that loyalty and commitment have been emphasized very little in

recent years and have not been considered as sophisticated values particularly in the circles of professional people.

The present study, as well as the one by Stinnett and Kreps (1972), suggests that loyalty is probably not given a great deal of emphasis in child rearing and that loyalty is not considered to be an important value for children to learn. This lack of emphasis on loyalty may contribute to the instability of family life today as has been suggested by Masters and Johnson (1974). Masters and Johnson (1974) have concluded that one of the most important factors in achieving a satisfactory sexual relationship is a high degree of mutual commitment. They further note that the decreased emphasis on commitment has been brought about by the popularity of such concepts as "do your own thing," extreme individualism, open marriage, and consensual extra-marital relationships. Masters and Johnson (1974) conclude that a lack of commitment is contributing to unsatisfying and unstable sexual relationships, family relationships and human relationships.

The analysis of the perceptions of parents concerning services that are important in an early childhood education program revealed that parents desired to be involved in the program. This was indicated by the very high proportion of parents who attached the heaviest degree of importance to having frequent conferences with the teachers about their children as well as being allowed to observe school activities.

As indicated by the results, age was significantly related to favorable perceptions of early childhood education programs. Parents in the age group of 46 and over expressed the most positive perceptions of early childhood education programs, which may be due to these parents having reared at least some of their children without the

availability of early childhood education. Perhaps the fact that early childhood education programs were not as plentiful and available to parents in this age group contributed to their appreciation of the services that such programs offer.

Perceptions toward early childhood education programs were found to be significantly related to size of community where respondents had lived for the major part of their lives. Those respondents who reported having lived in a community of 100,000 and over expressed the most favorable perceptions toward early childhood education programs. A factor contributing to this may be that there are more working mothers in the larger communities and therefore more need for and availability of early childhood education programs. It is reasonable that persons who have lived the major part of their lives in areas where these programs are available would tend to have more favorable perceptions toward them.

An important finding of this study was that those respondents who reported one or more of their children had attended early childhood education programs expressed significantly more favorable perceptions than those respondents whose children had not attended. This finding suggests that those who are familiar with the services offered by early childhood education programs have more favorable perceptions toward these programs than those who are not familiar with them. This also coincides with social science research which indicates that greater exposure to various groups such as different races or older persons is related to more positive perceptions of those groups (Stinnett and Montgomery, 1968).

A significant relationship was found to exist between socioeconomic status and positive perceptions toward early childhood education

programs. A pattern existed in which the higher socioeconomic groups were more favorable and the lower socioeconomic groups were less favorable toward early childhood education. This finding may have been due to the fact that respondents in the higher socioeconomic levels are better able to afford to send their children to early childhood education programs and that they may have a greater awareness of the services offered by such programs.

#### Limitations and Recommendations

This study was concerned only with parents who were members of parent-teacher association groups in Edmond, Oklahoma. The various religious, racial, educational and socioeconomic groups were not represented to the extent that generalizations can be made to the entire population of parents of school age children.

It is suggested that repeated studies of parents' perceptions of early childhood education programs be conducted, utilizing more heterogeneous samples. For example, it would be particularly desirable in future studies to include more representative samples concerning region of country, race, educational levels and socioeconomic levels. Further, more detailed investigations of the following findings of the present study would appear to have potential for obtaining greater understanding of parents' perceptions of early childhood education: (a) the finding that older parents express a more favorable perception of early childhood education than do younger parents, (b) the finding that parents with more children are more favorable toward early childhood education than parents with fewer children, (c) the finding that the upper socioeconomic status parents are more favorable toward early childhood

education than the lower socioeconomic status parents, and (d) the finding that parents who have had children to attend an early childhood education program show a significant and positive perception toward early childhood education than do parents who have not. Greater knowledge concerning the possible reasons for these findings could be very beneficial.

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APPENDIX

PARENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF EARLY CHILDHOOD  
EDUCATION PROGRAMS

May 5, 1975

Dear Parents:

How do parents feel about their children attending early childhood education programs (nursery schools and kindergarten)? What do parents want their children to receive from early childhood education programs? The Department of Family Relations and Child Development at Oklahoma State University is conducting a statewide research project attempting to find an answer to these questions. You have shown an interest in educational development by your involvement in your local PTA. Because of this and because you are a concerned parent we thought you might be interested in this research project and qualified to assist us in this research.

We would like to ask you to participate in this research by completing the enclosed questionnaire. There is a questionnaire for you and one for your spouse. Please complete the questionnaire separately. If both of you cannot complete the questionnaire, we would appreciate receiving a response from one of you. A self-addressed, pre-paid envelope has been enclosed for the return of the questionnaire. Please return the completed questionnaire within two weeks after receiving.

Your answers are anonymous and confidential since you are asked not to put your name on the questionnaire. Please answer each question as honestly as you can. We are not interested in how you think you should answer the question, but we are interested in what you actually believe about early childhood education programs (education of children ages 3 through kindergarten). It is expected that the information gained from this research will be of benefit to educators and persons involved in the education of young children.

We appreciate your participation in this research. It is only through the cooperation of persons such as you that we can gain greater knowledge in helping young children grow and develop.

Sincerely yours,



Anita Buford  
Department of Family Relations  
and Child Development

## PARENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF EARLY CHILDHOOD

## EDUCATION PROGRAMS

Your cooperation in this research project is greatly appreciated. Your contribution in a research project of this type helps us gain greater knowledge and insight into early childhood education.

Please check or fill in an appropriate answer to each question. Since your name is not required, please be as honest in your answers as possible.

The blanks at the extreme left of the page are for the purpose of coding. (Do not fill in.)

\_\_\_ 1-3

\_\_\_ 4. Age:

\_\_\_ 15-20

\_\_\_ 21-25

\_\_\_ 26-30

\_\_\_ 31-35

\_\_\_ 36-40

\_\_\_ 41-45

\_\_\_ 46 and over

\_\_\_ 5. Race:

\_\_\_ 1. White

\_\_\_ 2. Black

\_\_\_ 3. Indian

\_\_\_ 4. Other \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_ 6. Religious Preference:

\_\_\_ 1. Catholic

\_\_\_ 2. Protestant

\_\_\_ 3. Jewish

\_\_\_ 4. Mormon

\_\_\_ 5. None

\_\_\_ 7. For the major part of your life have you lived

\_\_\_ 1. On a farm or in the country

\_\_\_ 2. Small town under 25,000

\_\_\_ 3. City of 25,000-50,000 population

\_\_\_ 4. City of 50,000-100,000

\_\_\_ 5. City over 100,000

\_\_\_ 8. Do you presently live

\_\_\_ 1. On a farm or in the country

\_\_\_ 2. Small town under 25,000

\_\_\_ 3. City of 25,000-50,000 population

\_\_\_ 4. City of 50,000-100,000

\_\_\_ 5. City over 100,000

- \_\_\_ 9. Educational level completed:
- \_\_\_ 1. Less than grade 8
  - \_\_\_ 2. Completed 8th but have not attended 9th
  - \_\_\_ 3. Attended high school but did not graduate
  - \_\_\_ 4. Graduated from high school
  - \_\_\_ 5. Attended college two years or more
  - \_\_\_ 6. Graduated from 4-year college
  - \_\_\_ 7. Completed graduate work
- \_\_\_ 10. What is the highest educational attainment of the principal earner of your family income?
- \_\_\_ 1. Completed graduate work for a profession
  - \_\_\_ 2. Graduated from a 4-year college
  - \_\_\_ 3. Attended college or university for two or more years
  - \_\_\_ 4. Graduated from high school
  - \_\_\_ 5. Attended high school; completed grade 9, but did not graduate
  - \_\_\_ 6. Completed grade 8, but did not attend beyond grade 9
  - \_\_\_ 7. Less than grade 8
- \_\_\_ 11. What is the occupation of the head of your family?  
\_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_ 12. What is your occupation? \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_ 13. The main source of income for the head of your household is:
- \_\_\_ 1. Hourly wages, piece work, weekly check
  - \_\_\_ 2. Salary, commission, monthly check
  - \_\_\_ 3. Profits, royalties, fees from business or profession
  - \_\_\_ 4. Savings and investments
  - \_\_\_ 5. Private relief, odd jobs, share cropping, seasonal work
  - \_\_\_ 6. Public relief
- \_\_\_ 14. How many preschool children (ages 3-6) do you have?
- \_\_\_ 1. One
  - \_\_\_ 2. Two
  - \_\_\_ 3. Three
  - \_\_\_ 4. Four
  - \_\_\_ 5. None
- \_\_\_ 15. Number of children in family:
- \_\_\_ 1. One
  - \_\_\_ 2. Two
  - \_\_\_ 3. Three
  - \_\_\_ 4. Four-five
  - \_\_\_ 5. Six-seven
  - \_\_\_ 6. Eight and above
  - \_\_\_ 7. None
- \_\_\_ 16. Do you plan to have more children?
- \_\_\_ 1. Yes
  - \_\_\_ 2. No
- \_\_\_ 17. Have any of your children attended early childhood education programs?
- \_\_\_ 1. Yes
  - \_\_\_ 2. No
- \_\_\_ 18. Please state your family status.
- \_\_\_ 1. Mother
  - \_\_\_ 2. Father

We want to find out what you think about early childhood education. There is no right or wrong answer. Early Childhood Education is referred to as educational programs provided for children ages 3 through kindergarten, not making reference to day care centers.

For each item below indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree by circling the response which best describes your feelings.

The response code is as follows: SA--strongly agree, A--agree, U--undecided, D--disagree, SD--strongly disagree.

- \_\_\_ 19. I feel children ages 3-5 learn a great deal of responsibility in an early childhood education program.  
SA A U D SD
- \_\_\_ 20. I believe an early childhood education program makes little difference in helping children feel good about themselves.  
SA A U D SD
- \_\_\_ 21. I feel a child's social development is enhanced by attending an early childhood education program.  
SA A U D SD
- \_\_\_ 22. I feel attending an early childhood education program helps a child learn to communicate well with others.  
SA A U D SD
- \_\_\_ 23. I feel a great many children are better off if they don't go to early childhood education programs.  
SA A U D SD
- \_\_\_ 24. I feel that most children enjoy going to early childhood education programs.  
SA A U D SD
- \_\_\_ 25. I feel early childhood education programs encourages the development of a child's ability to get along with other children.  
SA A U D SD
- \_\_\_ 26. I believe most children ages 3-5 would benefit by attending an early childhood education program.  
SA A U D SD
- \_\_\_ 27. I believe that an early childhood education program really does not make much difference with how a child develops intellectually.  
SA A U D SD
- \_\_\_ 28. I believe that attending early childhood education programs causes children to grow up too fast.  
SA A U D SD

\_\_\_ 29. I believe that early childhood education programs have very few disadvantages for children.  
SA A U D SD

\_\_\_ 30. I believe early childhood education programs cause children to become too dependent on their peer group.  
SA A U D SD

Please fill in the blank with the response that most nearly describes your feelings.

\_\_\_ 31. If you were considering the possibility of sending your pre-school child to an early childhood education program, how much money would you be willing to pay each week for your child to be in such a program?  
\$\_\_\_\_\_ per week

Please check the response which most nearly describes your feelings.

\_\_\_ 32. I feel children's health needs should be met in an early childhood education program.  
\_\_\_ 1. Yes                      \_\_\_ 2. No                      \_\_\_ 3. Undecided

\_\_\_ 33. If there was a preschool in my community, I would send my child.  
\_\_\_ 1. Yes                      \_\_\_ 2. No                      \_\_\_ 3. Undecided

\_\_\_ 34. Which one of the following do you most desire that a child get out of an early childhood education program?  
\_\_\_ 1. Social development  
\_\_\_ 2. Academic growth  
\_\_\_ 3. Physical care of the child  
\_\_\_ 4. Emotional growth-psychological development

\_\_\_ 35. Which one of the following do you consider to be the most important element of a successful early childhood program?  
\_\_\_ 1. Social development  
\_\_\_ 2. Academic growth  
\_\_\_ 3. Physical care of the child  
\_\_\_ 4. Emotional growth-psychological development

\_\_\_ 36. Which one of the following do you consider to be the least important element of a successful early childhood program?  
\_\_\_ 1. Social development  
\_\_\_ 2. Academic growth  
\_\_\_ 3. Physical care of the child  
\_\_\_ 4. Emotional growth-psychological development

\_\_\_ 37. Which one of the following do you believe to be the major problem of children attending preschool?  
\_\_\_ 1. Transportation (to and from the school)  
\_\_\_ 2. Immaturity of the child--regarding separation from the mother  
\_\_\_ 3. Finance



\_\_\_ 38-42.

Check five areas you consider most important for teachers to assist young children in learning.

- \_\_\_ 1. Help children to feel good about themselves
- \_\_\_ 2. Art activities
- \_\_\_ 3. Music activities
- \_\_\_ 4. Principles of good health
- \_\_\_ 5. Science
- \_\_\_ 6. Physical development of their bodies
- \_\_\_ 7. Good nutrition
- \_\_\_ 8. Play activities (outdoor and indoor)
- \_\_\_ 9. Fostering creativity
- \_\_\_ 10. Cooperation
- \_\_\_ 11. Self-discipline
- \_\_\_ 12. Seeing each person as having dignity and worth
- \_\_\_ 13. Self-respect
- \_\_\_ 14. Loyalty
- \_\_\_ 15. Honesty and integrity
- \_\_\_ 16. Determination and perseverance

\_\_\_ 43-47.

Check five of the following areas you think teachers of young children most often fail to help children learn.

- \_\_\_ 1. Help children to feel good about themselves.
- \_\_\_ 2. Art activities
- \_\_\_ 3. Music activities
- \_\_\_ 4. Principles of good health
- \_\_\_ 5. Science
- \_\_\_ 6. Physical development of their body
- \_\_\_ 7. Good nutrition
- \_\_\_ 8. Play activities (outdoor and indoor)
- \_\_\_ 9. Fostering creativity
- \_\_\_ 10. Cooperation
- \_\_\_ 11. Self-discipline
- \_\_\_ 12. Seeing each person as having dignity and worth
- \_\_\_ 13. Self-respect
- \_\_\_ 14. Loyalty
- \_\_\_ 15. Honesty and integrity
- \_\_\_ 16. Determination and perseverance

Please rate on a five-point scale the degree to which you feel each of the following is important in an early childhood program. (Five represents most important and one represents the least degree of importance.)

\_\_\_ 48. The preschool should be located in the same building that the elementary school is located.

1 2 3 4 5

\_\_\_ 49. The teachers of preschool children should make home visits.

1 2 3 4 5

- \_\_\_ 50. Parents should be allowed to observe school activities any given time.  
1 2 3 4 5
- \_\_\_ 51. The school should provide a nutrition snack at midmorning or midafternoon.  
1 2 3 4 5
- \_\_\_ 52. A rest period should be provided for the children.  
1 2 3 4 5
- \_\_\_ 53. Teachers should have frequent conferences with the parents about their children.  
1 2 3 4 5
- \_\_\_ 54. The school should provide transportation for the children.  
1 2 3 4 5
- \_\_\_ 55. Check the school your child is now attending.  
\_\_\_ 1. Orvis Risner  
\_\_\_ 2. Sunset  
\_\_\_ 3. Will Rogers  
\_\_\_ 4. Russell Dougherty  
\_\_\_ 5. Northern Hills  
\_\_\_ 6. Ida Freeman  
\_\_\_ 7. Edmond Jr. High  
\_\_\_ 8. Clegern

VITA

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