Limited English Proficient Mothers' Perceptions of the Transition Process From Early Intervention Programs to Preschool Programs: Cultural and Linguistic Barriers

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LOYOLA UNIVERSITY CHICAGO

LIMITED ENGLISH PROFICIENT MOTHERS’ PERCEPTIONS OF THE
TRANSITION PROCESS FROM EARLY INTERVENTION PROGRAMS TO
PRESCHOOL PROGRAMS: CULTURAL AND LINGUISTIC BARRIERS

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

PROGRAM IN CULTURAL AND EDUCATIONAL POLICY STUDIES

BY
CELIA ARRESOLA

CHICAGO, ILLINOIS
AUGUST 2011
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DEDICATION

To my parents, Alicia and Abel Arresola
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ABSTRACT

This study explored the satisfaction level of limited English proficient (LEP) mothers with the transition process from early intervention programs to preschool special education programs in a culturally and linguistically diverse Illinois public school district. The research focused on understanding if LEP parents of students with disabilities perceived that their own cultural and linguistic diversity affected the overall transition process. It also reviewed the mothers’ perceptions about the cultural and linguistic considerations provided to them during the transition process, including the provision of translated materials and interpreters during meetings. The research indicated the level of satisfaction experienced during the transition process in relation to parental perceptions about 1) the information received about the transition process, 2) the level of parent and child preparedness and level of parental involvement in the transition as well as 3) the consideration provided to the cultural and linguistic diversity of the families.
CHAPTER I  
INTRODUCTION

The most common transition for families is their child’s entry to school. The emotions that every parent experiences as they watch their child grow and enter school programs are magnified when their child has a disability (Ray, Pewitt-Kinder & George, 2009, p.16). One of the first education transitions for most children with disabilities is from an early intervention (EI) program to a preschool program that includes early childhood special education (ECSE).

For some children, the special services provided from the early intervention (EI) programs are enough to transition them into early childhood programs. Other children require the supports and services to continue throughout their placement in early childhood special education programs. Planning for the transition from early intervention programs to early childhood special education programs (ECSE) is important to insure that appropriate special education services and supports are furnished (Bruder, 2010, p. 345). This process may create additional challenges when the children and their families are from culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) groups.

As demographic changes in the United States have brought the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse children with disabilities to the forefront in education, school districts and local community agencies work to address this student population. Though early childhood programs and early intervention programs have been employed to service these children, students’ families and school administration often disagree on the types
and intensity of the programs to be provided. Culturally based perceptions about student expectations and education are frequently the source of differences in opinion between schools and families (Cheatham & Santos, 2005, p. 4).

The focus of this study was to gain a better understanding of the transition process from EI to EC / ECSE from the perspective of culturally and linguistically diverse parents. The intent of the study was to determine if parents perceived the level of native language supports and culturally responsive services available to them during the transition between the two programs as a positive component of the services and support available to the child. The investigation of the topic was completed through a qualitative examination of the transition experience from the perspective of LEP mothers.

**Background of the Study**

A child’s development, especially during the first few years of life, is critically important. While the majority of children achieve developmental targets as expected, some children develop more slowly due to mental, physical, or ecological factors. Research suggests that the provision of comprehensive services to an infant or toddler who exhibits developmental delay and his family may have a positive impact on the child’s progress (Karoly, Kilburn, & Cannon, 2005, pp. 74-75).

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) is the federal law that guides the provision of early intervention services. The law contains two separate parts that stipulate the provision of services to children with disabilities based on age. IDEA Part C specifies the provision of services for infants and toddlers from birth through 2 years, while IDEA Part B, Section 619 addresses the provision of services for preschool children from 3 to 5 years (IDEA, 2004).
IDEA Part C was established to ensure the provision of early intervention services to appropriately address the needs of infants and toddlers from birth through age 2 with disabilities or at risk of developing a disability. The focus of Part C includes improving the family’s ability to meet the child’s needs as well as reducing educational costs by minimizing the need for special education when the child is older. Part B, in contrast, requires that services be provided in educational settings, such as classrooms, to the extent that this is possible. Part B aims to “ensure that children with disabilities have access to a free, appropriate, public education (FAPE)” (IDEA, 2004).

Each state determines which of its agencies is to oversee Part C. The designated agency in 16 of the states is the health department, and in 11 of the states, it is the departments of education. The remaining 23 states have opted for a combination of oversight by the states’ health and human services departments. In Illinois, the Illinois Department of Human Services (DHS) oversees services to children in early intervention (EI) programs. Families access EI services through a local Child and Family Connections (CFC) office, where they are assigned a Service Coordinator. Individual service providers and agency providers who have provider agreements with Illinois DHS EI programs are used to provide direct services to children, and supports to families. Speech therapy and developmental therapy, addressing a child’s individual deficits in meeting identified developmental milestones, are the services most frequently provided to children in Illinois (IDHS, 2010).

In the past decade, the United States experienced an increase in the numbers of children requiring special education services. This increase is also observed in the programs that address the needs of infants and toddlers served under Part C of IDEA,
under the early intervention umbrella. Likewise, Illinois has seen an increase in the number of referrals and services provided to children from birth through 2 over the past five years. As indicated by the Illinois DHS data in Table 1, there was an increase in the expenditures and the in the number of children receiving services under IDEA Part C in Illinois from 2005 to 2009. In 2009, services were provided to 18,883 infants and toddlers under the age of 3. This was an increase of 14.4% from the 16,647 infants and toddlers provided services in 2005 (IDHS, 2010).

Table 1

*DHS Early Intervention Program Data 2005-2009*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>FY05</th>
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<td>$126,026.0</td>
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The Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) is the agency charged with overseeing the provision of services to children with identified disabilities including those in preschool programs, serving 3 to 5 year old children. A review of Illinois data from 2005 to 2008 reveal an increase in the number of 3 to 5 year old students receiving special education services under IDEA Part B. In addition, data shows that the number of students with disabilities identified as Hispanic, Black and Asian has increased by 23.8 percent between 2005 and 2008. The percentage of students identified as White has decreased by 4.6 percent during the same period (U.S. Department of Education, 2009)
Both state and federal laws and regulations governing the administration of educational programs for students with disabilities have recognized the important role of parents in the special education process. Parent participation remained a fundamental principle in all of the amended versions of Illinois law over the years, pursuant to the legal mandates of the 1975 Education for All Handicapped Children Act (PL 94-142) and its reauthorizations. However, studies have indicated that the process for the Individualized Education Program (IEP), a critical component required by IDEA Part B to develop a learning plan specifically appropriate to each child’s needs, remains a source of frustration and confusion for parents. Parents’ interviews reflected that they felt their presence at the meeting was more to satisfy a requirement of parental participation in the IEP process than it was to have a collaborative approach to the IEP development (Stoner et al., 2005, pp. 45-46).

The level of confusion about special education and the IEP process is often magnified when parents lack the language skills to fully comprehend the information presented during the IEP meeting. The jargon and acronyms used during IEP meetings, combined with the lack of diverse staff to communicate appropriately with parents often leads to a parent’s lack of understanding about their child’s special education issues and needs (Fish, 2008, p. 11). Studies such as Salas (2004), and Lo (2008), have focused on the experiences of culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) parents during IEP meetings. These studies included interviews with parents that revealed they felt language differences between themselves and school personnel were a barrier. The studies also indicated poor interpretation and translation services were a concern for limited English proficient (LEP) parents.
Statement of the Problem

The early intervention / early childhood special education system was developed as part of the IDEA mandate to foster the development of disabled infants and children while minimizing the effects of the disabilities on the children, their families, and the children’s education. Though the transition between the two levels of programming provided by the EI/ESCE system should be seamless, those families that are culturally and linguistically diverse may experience difficulties that monolingual English speaking families do not, owing to the lack of appropriate linguistic and cultural supports available.

While the transition from early intervention to early childhood education is a crucial part of the educational process for many students with disabilities, there is insufficient information about the perceptions of limited English proficient (LEP) mothers about this transition. Thus, this deficit has prompted two aims for the research in the present study:

1. To explore how parents characterize the transition process, and
2. To discover whether parents indicate culture and/or language as an influence on the transition process.

The study also examines what barriers and/or promising strategies mothers identified as being effective during the process.

Purpose of the Study

Hanson et al. (2000, p. 280) noted the ample body of published research addressing the need for cross-cultural competence and best practices when working with culturally and linguistically diverse students. As Cheatham and Santos (2005, p. 4) assert,
children come to school displaying culture-based behaviors, practices, and perspectives
that teachers and school personnel may view as conflicting with conventional instruction.
However, a lack of information specific to meeting the needs of culturally and
linguistically diverse students with disabilities makes the education process additionally challenging.

**Research Questions**

The present study focused on the interview responses of ten limited English proficient (LEP) mothers of children who transitioned from an early intervention program to a preschool program in a suburban Illinois school district. The transition would have taken place on or before their third birthday, within twelve to twenty-four months prior to the date the interviews were conducted. The ten participants consisted of five Spanish speakers, three Gujarati speakers, one Korean speaker and one Romanian speaker. All of the participants had encountered different degrees of access to native language educational and related service staff. The goal of the initial inquiry of the present study was to document the mothers’ general perceptions of the transition process. In addition, the study investigated the provision of information in the native language including the use of native language interpreters when necessary. The researcher then examined and compared responses with one another.

The central research problem of the current study was whether the cultural and linguistic diversity of the parents played an important role in the overall transition process. The study was designed to answer three primary questions:
1. Do the mothers believe they received sufficient information about the transition process to prepare them and their children to go from one program to the next?

2. Do limited English proficient (LEP) parents who have more native language supports including interpreters and related service and educational staff display a higher level of satisfaction than those with less supports and services?

3. Do LEP mothers view their native language and/or culture as a barrier, an advantage, not a factor in the transition process, or do they see their languages and/or cultures as playing some alternative role?

**Overview of Research Methodology**

Individual, semi-structured interviews combine the flexibility of survey methods with the organization of the structured interview process. Pre-defined, open-ended questions are prepared, but interviewers amend the questions and add new ones as necessary, as the interview unfolds. Hatch (2002, pp. 92-93) identified unstructured interviews as informal conversations that take place at the research site. Hatch also indicated that the unstructured interviews are usually not a primary data source, but instead provide insight into observational studies.

The researcher chose semi-structured interviews as the qualitative research design for the present study because they allow the participant to express meaningful information about a practice or event by using their own words. Accordingly, the participant feels more relaxed and more open in his or her responses. As a result, greater insight may be gained into the participant’s experiences, opinions, and experiences on the
topic. As Mertens (2010, p. 225) asserts, the researcher then attempts “to make sense of a situation without imposing preexisting expectations on the phenomena under study.”

According to Kvale (1996, pp. 30-31), the interview is a tool that is frequently used to access people’s experiences, perceptions, and attitudes about situations or ideas. Through interviews, the researcher gathers descriptive data in the subject’s own words to understand participants’ views. The value of this technique is that the researcher can investigate what is meaningful to the individual (Corbetta, 2003 p. 270).

The present study explored how LEP mothers characterized and interpreted the transition from early intervention programs to early childhood special education programs. Due to the nature of the research questions and the variations of the parents’ backgrounds that went through the transition process under investigation, a qualitative approach was the most appropriate means to examine these mothers’ responses.

Significance of the Study

The limited information about LEP children with disabilities, their parents, and the parents’ perceptions of the transition period forms a strong theoretical rationale for further investigation. The present study furnishes a conceptual structure to provide guidance for further research, and contributes to the literature on current transition practices. Thus, the study establishes a starting point for improving transitions and subsequent child outcomes by addressing cultural and linguistic diverse parents with children in educational programs for children with disabilities.

Definition of Key Terms

1. At-risk infant or toddler - “The term ‘at-risk infant or toddler’ means an individual under 3 years of age who would be at risk of experiencing a substantial
developmental delay if early intervention services were not provided to the individual.” (P.L. 108-446, Section 632(1)).

2. Culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) – For the purpose of this study, students and parents whose race, ethnic, or language background differs from the dominant culture.

3. Developmental delay – “A delay in physical development, cognitive development, communication development, social or emotional development, or adaptive development (may include children from three through nine years of age).” (23 Illinois Administrative Code, Section 226.75)

4. Early Intervention (EI) – Services to infants and toddlers, and to their families, which are designed to address the needs of each eligible child and the needs of the family related to enhancing the child’s development, in conformity with an individualized family service plan (Part C of IDEA).

5. Individualized Education Program (IEP) -- A written annual education plan for students identified as having a disability. The plan identifies the needs of the child, as well as the special education and related services needed to meet those needs. Annual goals and short-term objectives are developed for identified deficit areas. The plan also identifies how the child’s progress will be assessed, the date of initiation services, and the projected duration of those services. (34 Code of Federal Regulations Section 300.320)

6. Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP): “A written plan for providing early intervention services to eligible children/families that:

- Is developed jointly by the family and appropriate qualified personnel providing early intervention services;
• Is based on the multidisciplinary evaluations and assessment of the child and the assessment of the strengths and needs of the child's family, as determined by the family and as required in 34 CFR 303.322; and
• Includes all services necessary to enhance the development of the child and the capacity of the family to meet the special needs of the child.” (IDHS, 2010).

7. Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 2004) -- An education act that assures special education and related services to eligible children with disabilities through federal financial assistance to State and local education agencies.

8. Infant or toddler with a disability – “Individuals from birth through age 2 who need early intervention services because they—

- Are experiencing developmental delays, as measured by appropriate diagnostic instruments and procedures, in one or more of the following areas:
  - Cognitive development.
  - Physical development, including vision and hearing.
  - Communication development.
  - Social or emotional development.
  - Adaptive development; or
- Have a diagnosed physical or mental condition that has a high probability of resulting in developmental delay.” (34 Code of Federal Regulations Section 303.16(a))
9. Limited English Proficient (LEP) – “An LEP (or English Language Learner-ELL) student is an individual age 3-21, who is enrolled (or about to enroll) in a U.S. elementary or secondary school and meets these two requirements:

- Belongs to one of the following categories:
  - Was not born in the United States or speaks a native language other than English;
  - Is a Native American, Alaska Native, or native resident of outlying areas and comes from an environment where language other than English has had a significant impact in the individual’s level of English language proficiency, or
  - Is migratory, speaks a native language other than English, and comes from an environment where language other than English is dominant.

- May be unable, because of difficulties in speaking, reading, writing, or understanding the English language, to:
  - Score at the proficient level on state assessments of academic achievement;
  - Learn successfully in classrooms where the language of instruction is English; or
  - Participate fully in society” (Public Law 107-110, Section 9101(25))
10. Transition – Webster’s Dictionary defines “transition” as the “passage from one state, stage, subject, or place to another: change.” For the purpose of this study, transition refers to the movement or transfer from early intervention (EI) programs to early childhood special education programs (ECSE).

Summary

This dissertation is divided into five chapters. Chapter I introduced pertinent background information, the statement of the problem, and the significance of the study. Chapter II reviews the literature and research relevant to the broader topics associated with early intervention, early childhood special education, and the transition process. This chapter includes an examination of issues associated with culturally and linguistically diverse students. Chapter III provides a detailed description of the research design, the data collection process, and the data analysis process. The results of the data analysis and the overall results including emergent themes are presented in Chapter IV. The final chapter discusses the study and its implications and applications for future studies.
CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

This chapter examines two key aspects of the present study. First, it presents pertinent aspects of federal laws related to early intervention, early childhood special education, and the transition process between these two facets of service provision under IDEA. Secondly, it reviews relevant scholarly studies about the demographic changes in the United States and Illinois that have influenced the education of limited English proficient students (ELLs) with disabilities. The terms English language learners (ELL) and limited English proficient (LEP) student are used interchangeably by the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) to describe students who are less than proficient in English. In the present study, the term LEP refers to parents and families who are not proficient in English, while it uses the term ELL in discussing students who are not proficient in English.

Introduction to Federal Legislation

The ratification of the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (P. L. 94-142) in 1975 mandated a “free appropriate public education for all children with disabilities”. The law also ensured due process rights and required the development and implementation of Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) for each child. Details about legislation specified disability categories that states were to use to identify children requiring special education services. Preschool children became eligible for special and related services under the same disability categories as older children (IDEA, 1997).
Congress added amendments to P.L. 94-142 in 1986 that addressed the eligibility of preschoolers in future reauthorizations of the legislation. The Education of the Handicapped Act Amendments established Part H (now Part C) of IDEA. This section asserted that providing early intervention services to children with disabilities and their families improves child developmental outcomes. Early intervention services identified children’s deficiencies in physical, cognitive, communication, social/emotional, and adaptive development. This early intervention program was a statewide, interagency system that insured services for children with disabilities from birth through age 2 (IDEA, 1986).

P. L. 102-119 was amended in 1991 to allow states the option of including developmental delays as a disability category for children ages 3 through 5 years. In 1997, Congress amended the law again to enact P. L. 105-17. This legislation required states to define developmental delay, specify an age range, and create the procedures and tools to determine these delays. Illinois chose to use the term developmentally delayed to describe 3 through 5-year olds who met the criterion of at least one of the other disability categories and delay in at least one area of development (ISBE, 2010a).

**Federal Policies on Transition**

Early Intervention programs provide services, referrals, and support to assist students and enable their parents to enhance their children’s development. Parts B and C of Public Law 94-142 of IDEA govern early intervention programs and preschool special education programs and services. Part B specifies requirements of special education programs and services for students from ages 3 to 21, while Part C states requirements for early intervention programs for children from 0 to 2 years.
Though the IDEA was passed in 1975, Part C was added in 1986, in part to reduce the need for special education by mitigating developmental delays and disabilities identified by educators through the provision of early intervention services. The expectation of numerous policy makers was that interventions would be sufficient to reduce future educational costs associated with disabilities. Revisions to Part C, added in 2004, included requirements to address the child’s transition from early intervention programs to early childhood special education programs. In addition, Part C mandated the Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP). Ensuring a seamless transition for families and children from one program to the next was a central goal of IDEA (Brandes, Ormsbee, & Haring, 2005, p. 205).

Part B of the IDEA furnishes the criteria for the transition from an early intervention to a preschool program, including conditions that constitute changes in eligibility for services, such as physical therapy and occupational therapy. In addition, as the child transfers from one program to another, the focus of provided services shifts from addressing developmental needs to educational needs. For many children, the transition to Part B programs comes with a significant reduction in services and a more student-centered approach to education. In addition, as the child transitions to the preschool program, the professional team assigned to the child, consisting of disability specialists, parents, and a district representative develops an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) to replace the existing IFSP. The IEP is a legally binding document, specifying the services and supports provided for a child identified with an IDEA-recognized disability. Although parents are required participants in the IEP process, the
focus of Part B programs is strictly on students and their educational needs (Hanson et al. 2000, pp. 284-285).

Thus, though providing families an opportunity to participate in their child’s education and its processes is a mandatory part of IDEA, a greater emphasis on parent participation exists in the early intervention programs where parents take on the role of decision-maker. In addition, providers make services available, including parent education and counseling as they work to enhance their child’s developmental progress. In contrast, early childhood programs are far more student focused, providing instructional and specialized services to address existing deficiencies. In addition to services that address those deficits that may influence educational skills, physical therapy, speech-language therapy, or other related services augment the support provided to address overall development (Chandler, Fowler, Hadden, Stahurski, 1995).

The obligations of states and local programs to families of infants and toddlers younger than 36 months of age (Part C) differ markedly from those related to families of school-aged children (Part B). The level of participation of many parents is limited to that of team member at the required annual IEP meeting. In their study of 75 families who entered early childhood programs after participating in the EI process, Fantuzzo, Tighe, and Childs (2000, pp.373-375) found a significant decline in school-based parental involvement in early childhood education programs. Their study further revealed that, as children transitioned to school-age programs, teacher and parent contact decreased as parent-initiated communication declined.

**Overview of Research about Transition**

Transitions occur at many points in our lives. Milestones include grade levels achieved, employment attained, marriage, and the birth of children. Bridges, (2009, p. 3),
defined transition as the psychological process of coming to terms with predictable and unpredictable changes in our lives. Bridges also indicated that an essential part of a successful transition is that people come to terms with the change by letting go of how things were and focusing on how things are or will be. For many, transitions are a difficult and often painful process. In the field of education, transitions are associated with the process of moving from one program or one grade level to another.

Lazzari and Kilgo (1989, p. 41) asserted that early transitions with positive results may help families and children deal with future changes some children with disabilities and their families view transitions as a life-long process. Entwistle and Alexander (1998, pp. 361-362) found that a child's initial transition to school had a direct impact on the child's later academic and social successes. They also indicated that poor transitions may produce a higher level of future problems in developing sound social relationships and a lower rate of academic success.

Powell (2004, p. 141) reported that the relationships between families and early childhood programs in the United States have been built on inconsistent levels of service and connections with parents. While programs often promote the position of parents as partners, many continue to maintain the practitioner vs. client distance between themselves and the families they serve. Nevertheless, the field of early childhood as a whole has produced strategies that are more creative for engaging parents than any other segment of education (Powell, 2004, p. 148).

Rosenkoetter, Whaley, Hains and Pierce (2001, pp. 9-10) suggested that an uncomplicated transition between programs improves subsequent procedures for children with special needs. This includes making placement decisions that appropriately attend to
the child’s needs. Hains, Rosenkoetter, and Fowler (1999, pp. 40-45) further suggested a multiphase plan for supporting a higher level of family involvement in the transition process. This plan establishes communication between parents and the receiving agency and incorporates strategies to increase parents’ ability to advocate for their children. In addition, it provides procedures to evaluate the families’ satisfaction with the transition, resulting in programs that sustain and improve the level of support provided to families by the early intervention program.

**Parent Perceptions on Transition**

In 1986, an exploratory study by Johnson, Chandler, Kerns, & Fowler (pp.13-15) found that 80 percent of the parent respondents stated that although it was stressful, they were satisfied with the transition process from a preschool program into the school program. In a later study, Fowler, Chandler, Johnson, & Stella, (1988, pp. 209-215) developed interview protocols using rating scales and open-ended questions to enable parents to identify elements they felt were necessary for a child’s transition. Their results indicated that 80 percent of the parents interviewed appreciated participating in the planning and selection of the next course of action for their child.

Hanline reported similar results from a survey that explored parents’ needs and concerns regarding their children’s transition, (1988, pp.99-104). Questionnaire responses indicated that insufficient information about school district services and uncertainties about the appropriateness of services for their children were parents’ major concerns. However, this survey also revealed that many parents were satisfied with the opportunities programs offered in the transition process. Parents also indicated that they felt that staff in their child’s early intervention program was more cooperative than the
staff at their children’s public schools. Rous, Myers and Stricklin (2007, pp 12-13) conducted a study as part of the research conducted by the National Early Childhood Transition Center (NECTC). They identified practices linked to successful transitions for children and families. Participants identified three types of visits that they felt would assist in improving the transition process. Family visits, child visits and the staff visits would, participants asserted, allow all stakeholders involved to meet and exchange information prior to the child’s start date (Rous, Myers and Stricklin, 2007).

New placement brings many changes in the ways parents experience and perceive the services that their children receive. According to Hanson, et al. (2000, p.280) parents often feel that the new provisions are inadequate because these services may differ greatly from their child’s previous program. They also may fear that the service changes will result in a lack of support for the student and the family. These feelings are markedly increased for individuals who are culturally and linguistically diverse, especially when parents believe there is a lack of support and understanding for their children’s needs and they do not have the language skills to convey their concerns. In addition, appropriate resources to address their cultural and language differences are frequently not furnished (Rous, Schroeder, Stricklin, Hains & Cox, 2008, pp. 4, 14-15).

**The Changing Face of Education**

The Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) annually produces a School Report Card for every public school, public school district, and for the state itself. ISBE generates the Report Card from information provided by school districts and includes demographics, standardized test scores and financial data. A comparison of data presented in the 1998 and the 2010 State Reports Cards shows that Hispanic children
were the fastest growing racial and ethnic group in Illinois. The percentage of Hispanic students increased from 13.3 percent of the child population in 1998 to 21.2 percent in 2010. In addition, school-age children who were eligible for transitional bilingual programs increased from 6.4 percent, or 122,976, students in 1998 to 7.8 percent, or 156,888, students in 2010 (ISBE, 1998; ISBE, 2010b). The Illinois State Board of Education’s 2008-2009 Annual State Report on Special Education Performance, identifies 37,404 children aged three to five as receiving special education services in Illinois in 2009. This reflects a 1.0 percent increase from the 37,035 children identified in 2008 (ISBE, 2010c).

Reflective of the demographic changes in Illinois over the past decade, classrooms are also increasingly diverse. According to the 2007 U.S. Census, 10.9 million children between the ages of 5 to 17 spoke a language other than English at home; 25.7 percent of those children, or 2.8 million, spoke English less than “very well”. Of these, many came from homes where English is not spoken or where U.S. Census standards identify the home as a linguistically isolated household -- one “in which no person 14 years old or over speaks English at least very well” (Shin & Kominski, 2010).

In addition to conducting a census every ten years, the U.S. Census Bureau conducts an ongoing survey to gather annual data about the social and economic needs of communities in the United States known as the American CommunitySurvey (ACS). Data from the 2008 ACS identified 4.8 percent of U.S. households and 5.7 percent of Illinois households as linguistically isolated. ACS data also indicated that 19.7 percent of the national population five years and older spoke a language other than English, while in Illinois, this rate was 21.9 percent. (U.S. Bureau of Census, 2010).
Identification and Education of ELLs with Disabilities

Despite the growth in the English language learner (ELL) population, most local education agencies (LEA) have not developed policies and procedures to address the needs of students identified as ELLs with disabilities. In 2003, Zehler, et al. (pp.27-33) found that, due to the way districts categorize their students many school districts were unable to provide an accurate count of ELLs with disabilities. For example, an ELL who receives special education resource services may be identified as ELL and not as a student with disabilities, while an ELL who receives the majority of services within a special education classroom may be identified as only a student with disabilities. Thus, these students receive services from two educational programs that operate in isolation. Moreover, LEAs, due to a lack of staff members with knowledge in both special education and second language acquisition, had difficulty in distinguishing between language acquisition issues and learning disabilities in ELL students (Zehler et al., 2003).

The scarcity of information and supports available to educators who worked with ELLs with disabilities augmented their lack of knowledge about the education of ELLs with disabilities. Although Illinois offers a certificate for those completing an approved program in bilingual special education, few universities offered teacher preparation programs that furnished teacher candidates opportunities for certification in this area. Illinois has nine public state universities with twelve campuses and forty-eight private universities that offer state approved teacher-training programs. Of these sixty university programs, only one has a program to train educators to address the needs of ELLs with disabilities (ISBE, 2011).
IDEA requires that children be assessed in their native language (IDEA, Section 612(a) (6) (B)). This is done, in part, to limit assessment bias due to cultural and linguistic variables. However, Hamayan, Marler, Sanchez-Lopez, and Damico (2007, pp. 2-7) report that the complex nature of assessment does not take into consideration the factors associated with testing of culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students including the student’s previous educational experiences and contextual issues. In addition, school staff’s lack of understanding in language acquisition and diversity issues often influences the referral for evaluations. In many districts, this results in teachers identifying a student’s lack of English proficiency as a disability. In addition, overly cautious districts wait an exceedingly long time to identify students as ELL, because they fear misidentifying the student. Both misidentification and neglecting to identify true capabilities are equally detrimental and result in students who do not receive an appropriate education (Cummins, 1997, pp. 109-110; Sideridis, Antoniou & Padelia, 2008, pp. 200-201).

The Influence of Culture on Assessment

Assessment enables the school to identify a child's learning difficulties and to use data gathered during the evaluation process to address identified deficiencies. However, the cultural circumstances of the interactions during the evaluation between the student, the evaluator, and the tool being used are also important aspects of the assessment process. Assuming that testing tools reflect a level of culturally specific knowledge, the evaluator may misinterpret results and make incorrect assumptions about the student tested if there are evident cultural differences (Chamberlain, 2005, pp. 196-201).
Concerns about bias in testing and resulting disproportional and inappropriate placement have existed for decades in the field of education. By the time of the 1997 reauthorization of P.L. 105-17, IDEA, the Congressional Findings addressed these injustices. The 1997 and the 2004 reauthorizations of IDEA required the development of policies and procedures to assess and eliminate the disproportional placement of culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students. Adherence to this legislation includes the administration of tests in the child’s native language, in conjunction with the use of multiple assessment instruments to determine the existence of a disability. These practices would serve to reduce testing bias that often results in the placement of children from minority cultural groups in special education programs. In addition, this application may also increase access to gifted programs for these students (U.S. Department of Education, 2004, pp. 1-7; Klingner, et al., 2005, pp. 5-8).

**Families of Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Children with Disabilities**

Families and their children with disabilities that come from culturally diverse backgrounds often experience language barriers associated with a lack of native language speaking staff in schools, limited access to culturally and linguistically appropriate evaluation tools, and the unavailability of appropriately trained, native language interpreters and translators (Lo, 2008, p. 25; Turney & Kao, 2009, pp. 263-265).

Klotz and Canter (2006, p. 14) emphasized the need for culturally sensitive approaches to assessment, interventions, and programming. Klingner, Artiles, and Barletta (2006, pp. 115-116) concurred, asserting that many educators and related service providers lack the training to conduct nondiscriminatory assessments with children from diverse backgrounds. In addition, the lack of culturally and linguistically appropriate
assessment tools makes it difficult to determine whether a faulty learning process is impacted by limited English ability or if a disability is the source (U.S. Department of Education, 2004).

Varying perceptions about the importance of education within families may contribute to different expectations in the educational process. Conflict between the family’s cultural values and beliefs and the practices of educational programs in school systems provides an additional barrier that culturally and linguistically diverse families encounter (Moore, & Perez-Mendez, 2006). Locke (1992) avers that it is critical for the clinician to obtain a complex understanding of the specific cultural identifications present in the family of the student with disabilities.

**Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Supports and Services**

States annually report their teacher shortages to the U.S. Department of Education (USDE). Since the 2003-2004 school year, Illinois has reported shortages in special education teachers, bilingual teachers, and speech-language pathologists (USDE, 2011). In addition, the numbers of individuals who are certified as bilingual special education personnel is also limited. This includes school psychologists, speech-language pathologists, and school social workers who speak languages other than Spanish. While a need remains for Spanish-speaking special education personnel, there is a greater availability of Spanish-speakers than those speaking other languages (ISBE, 2010b).

In many communities, deficits exist in the identification of limited English proficient children with disabilities and the provision of educational and related services to in their native languages. Zehler et al. (2003, p. 24) indicated that Spanish-speaking students comprised 80.4 percent of the ELLs with disabilities. The majority of the
communities in the Chicago area have access to qualified Spanish-fluent personnel to address the needs of ELLs with disabilities. However, many languages such as Arabic, Hmong, and Chinese remain underserved by qualified bilingual personnel (ISBE 2010). This often leads to students receiving instruction only in English. Zehler et al. (2003, p. 27) report that interviews with district level personnel revealed that 63.0 percent of ELLs with disabilities are more likely to receive their instruction in English than in a native language.

In the absence of bilingual school staff, parents and school district staff often depend on children or family members to interpret for them. Plata (1993, pp. 19-21) indicated that there are risks and disadvantages in the use of interpreters. One of the most significant identified disadvantages includes the loss of meaning in the interpretation process. This is often due to the interpreter’s use of regional words, and the omission of and adding to information. Another risk is the interpreter acting as a third party who expresses his or her own opinions as interpreted statements. A review of sessions with interpreters in the medical field revealed interpreter errors that resulted in repercussions to patients’ health in 12 percent of interactions when using trained interpreters, while occurring 22 percent of the time when untrained interpreters were used (Gany, et al., 2007, pp 320-322). Similarly, the lack of qualified bilingual personnel often impedes or prevents the provision of culturally and linguistically appropriate services to ELLs with disabilities.

**Summary**

This chapter presented a review of research and literature on the two central aspects of this study. First, it focused on studies on early intervention, early
childhood special education, and the transition process between these two facets of service provision under IDEA legislative mandates. This review included an overview of legislation, as well as demographic data about those infants and children receiving services in the United States and in Illinois. Then, it provided an examination of relevant scholarship that pertained to the research questions explored in the present study and the changing needs of students with disabilities and their families. The next chapter will look at the research methodology employed in this study.
CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

The present study explores the perceptions of a sample of culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) parents about the transition process from early intervention programs (EI) to district-based early childhood/early childhood special education (EC/ECSE) programs for their children. To better understand whether the cultural and linguistic diversity of the parents might have played an important role in the overall transition process, the researcher asked three central research questions:

1. Do the mothers believe they received sufficient information about the transition process to prepare them and their children to go from one program to the next?

2. Do limited English proficient (LEP) parents who have more native language supports including interpreters and related service and educational staff display a higher level of satisfaction than those with less supports and services?

3. Do LEP mothers view their native language and/or culture as a barrier, an advantage, not a factor in the transition process, or do they see them as playing some alternative role?

This chapter identifies the research methodology used in the study. It is composed of the following sections: (a) rationale for the research approach, (b)
description of the research sample, including the selection of the public school
district; (c) methods of data collection; (d) description of data analysis, categorization
into themes, and synthesis; (e) reliability; and (f) limitations of the study. A summary
concludes the chapter.

Rationale for Qualitative Research Design

The aim of qualitative research is to elicit understanding about an educational or
social phenomenon from the perspective of the research participant (Bogdan & Biklen,
2007, p. 2). Qualitative methodology emphasizes identifying and then extracting and
interpreting the possible meanings of the participants’ experience. This approach utilizes
methods designed to provide extensive description of the phenomenon under study that
will afford insight into the meaning that individuals have constructed of the world and
their interpretation of it (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 3.). Thus, the present study
developed research tools to gain an understanding of how LEP mothers perceived and
defined the EI programs and the EC/ECSE programs, and their children’s and their own
transitions between them. In particular, it used a qualitative approach to explore parents’
perceptions of whether cultural and linguistic differences between themselves and the
special education administrators, teachers, and related service personnel from the school
district affected both the success of program meetings and/or the level of services
provided to their children (Patton, 2002, pp. 39-43; Mertens, 2010, p. 225)

Cultural and linguistic differences have a bearing on the quality of relationships
between parents and educational organizations. As part of their studies on special
education, Cho & Gannotti (2005), Salas (2004), and Lo (2008) conducted interviews
with CLD parents in the United States about the level of satisfaction they felt about the
programs provided for their children. The results revealed an overall satisfaction with services, though parents reported feeling marginalized and isolated by school personnel during the individualized education plan (IEP) meetings. This body of research also indicated a need for increased parental engagement and the promotion of a positive educational experience for children of diverse cultural backgrounds and their families (Cho & Gannotti, 2005, pp. 7-8; Salas, 2004, pp. 190-191; Lo, 2008, pp. 99-102).

Rubin & Rubin (2005) characterize the qualitative research interview as “conversations in which a researcher gently guides a conversational partner in an extended discussion. The researcher elicits depth and detail about the research topic by following up on answers given by the interviewee during the discussion” (2005, p. 4). According to Hatch (2002), a semi-structured interview approach allows the researcher freedom for greater exploration, since he or she need not follow a detailed interview guide while adhering to a framework of predetermined themes (Hatch, 2002, pp. 38, 94-95). Accordingly, the current study used a semi-structured interview that provided the flexibility to add new questions based on the interviewees’ previous responses.

The Research Sample

The selection of the research sample was the result of multilevel review of data from the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE). The researcher used the first level of review to identify a district whose English language learner population was comprised of Spanish speakers and those who spoke at least one other language. The second level of review was identifying the districts by the county in which they were located to allow for close proximity to the researcher’s home and place of employment.
School District Selection

The Illinois State Board of Education’s SY 2008 ELL Student Statistical Report detailed the numbers of ELLs by school district. Seeking school districts whose demographic information revealed diversity in the overall student population and a high percentage of students identified as limited English-proficient, the researcher reviewed the individual districts’ Illinois Report Cards and information from the districts’ websites. As discussed above, the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) annually produces a School Report Card for every public school, public school district, and for the state itself. The ISBE generates the Report Card from information provided to ISBE by school districts and includes demographics, standardized test scores and financial data. This resulted in a preliminary list of twenty school districts that met the first level of review.

Based on the identification of school districts located in suburban Cook County, the researcher selected five suburban Illinois school districts as possible research sites, telephoned and emailed school district representatives, and then scheduled meetings with those who were willing to discuss participation in the present study. At these meetings, the researcher advised district representatives about the purpose, design, and procedures of the study, providing the school district representative with an informational packet that included a study overview (See Appendix A) and a sample letter of cooperation (See Appendix B). The researcher informed the representatives that the study required the participation of ten limited English proficient parents -- five Spanish speakers and five who spoke other languages since a major aspect of the study was a comparison of the level of satisfaction between the two groups of CLD parents- Spanish speakers and speakers of a non-English language other than Spanish. Although three districts indicated
an interest in participating in the study, only one had a sufficient number of possible participants who met the established criteria. Consequently, this district became the research site for the present study.

The district chosen is a large suburban Illinois school district with an enrollment of over 3,000 students that come from five different communities. Among the schools that comprise the district, two house the district’s pre-kindergarten programs. The district’s 2010 Illinois Report Card identified over 25.0 percent of students as “low income,” defined as “families receiving public aid; live in institutions for neglected or delinquent children; ... supported in foster homes with public funds; or ...eligible to receive free or reduced-price lunches” (ISBE, 2010, p. 1). In addition, the district had a mobility rate of over 9.0 percent: this rate is determined by the number of times students enroll in or leave a school during the school year. A high student mobility rate is associated with lower academic performance by many of the students identified as making numerous changes in their school of attendance during an academic year (Hartman, 2002, p.1).

According to the district’s Illinois Report Cards for 2000 and 2010, the district has experienced several noticeable changes in their student demographics. The Report Cards revealed that the percentage of students identified as black increased from 3.5 percent to 5.0 percent, and the percentage of Hispanic students grew from over 12.0 percent in 2000 to over 20.0 percent in 2010, with the percentage of students identified as white decreasing from over 49.0 percent in 2000 to about 35.0 percent in 2010. However, the district’s demographic information for the racial category of “white” may be misleading, since individuals with origins in Europe, the Middle East, or North Africa
are included in this category. In other words, the decrease in this category does not accurately reflect the district’s increase in students from Middle Eastern, North African, or Eastern European countries in the past five years who may also be LEP (ISBE, 2010b).

According to the district information, over 75 percent of its students reside in homes with a primary home language other than English. In addition, the SY 2008 ELL Student Statistical Report (ISBE, 2010a, pp. 19-29) showed an increase in the school district’s percentage of students identified as limited English proficient (LEP) during this period. This percentage increased from over 15.0 percent in 2000 to over 25.0 percent, representing over 700 students, in 2010. More than five hundred students, or over 60 percent of the total, spoke languages other than Spanish. As indicated previously, the researcher was in search of a district with students who spoke languages other than Spanish. This district was one of the few that had a higher percentage of students who spoke languages other than Spanish exceeded the district’s Spanish speakers.

**Population and Sample**

The participants in the present study were ten limited English proficient (LEP) mothers whose children had transitioned from an early intervention (EI) program to an early childhood special education program (EC/ECSE) sometime during the twenty-four months prior to the date of interviews. Demographic variables gathered about the participants included age, length of time in the United States and their level of education (see Table 2). The participants ranged in age from 26 years to 37 years. Three parents completed less than five years of school; five completed elementary school but did not complete the U.S. equivalent of high school; one completed some college and one earned a degree in business in her native country.
Table 2

*Demographic Characteristics of LEP Mothers*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Percentage or Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>English Proficiency</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full-time</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part-time</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Employed</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U.S. Residency</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0-5 years</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-10 years</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-15 years</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education (years)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0-5 years</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-12 years</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13-16 years</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3 provides a breakdown of demographic information for each of the participants. The participants’ age as well as the number of children they have has been included in the table.
Table 3

*Individual Parent Demographic Information*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parent</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>No. of Children</th>
<th>English Proficiency</th>
<th>U.S. Residency</th>
<th>Education (years)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Selection of Students for the Study**

The researcher enlisted participants for this study with the assistance of what J. Amos Hatch terms a “gatekeeper” (Hatch, 2002, p. 45). Gatekeepers assist the researcher in gaining access to and developing trust with members of the community of study. In this case, the gatekeeper was the district supervisor for the early childhood program who was knowledgeable about the children enrolled in the district’s ECSE program and their families. In addition, as the district’s representative for the transition process for those
children with disabilities who received early intervention (EI), the gatekeeper provided a list to the researcher of children who met the established criteria. For this study, these are requirements specific to the participant’s child:

1. The child must have been in the early intervention program for at least one year (Part C under IDEA)
2. The child must have been diagnosed with a developmental delay with speech language services as the only possible related service provided, and
3. The child must have transitioned into an early childhood program within 24 months prior to the date of the interview.

The gatekeeper made initial queries about participation in the study with individuals that met the criteria and forwarded the names, native languages, and contact information for those interested to the researcher. After arranging that interpreters in several languages would contact interested individuals and provide basic information about the study, the researcher and an interpreter discussed the details of the study with individuals who wished to participate. With the assistance of the interpreter, the researcher reviewed the Consent for Participation form with participants in their native languages and provided them the opportunity to ask questions before signing the form. (See Appendix C)

**Data Collection Methods**

The researcher developed an interview guide by, first, considering the central questions of the present study, then by developing specific queries about the transition process, early intervention, and early childhood special education (See Appendix D). A sample of three English-speaking parents and three bilingual Spanish-speaking parents of
children in ECSE programs at schools outside the present study’s research sites piloted
the interview guide in English. These six parents provided feedback on the scope of
protocol questions using a rubric developed by the researcher. The rubric evaluated the
clarity of the questions, their relevance to the study, and the ease with which they led to
follow-up questions or probing when necessary. The researcher then combined
individual, semi-structured interviews with information from field notes collected during
and following interviews with each participant. Often, informal conversations with
parents of children with disabilities who had participated in the transition process
between EI and EC/ECSE programs revealed topic points and questions in the interview
guide requiring revision or augmentation. The researcher conducted a second round of
reviews with two parents from the same EC/ECSE program used for the first review and
made additional adjustments to the interview guide after reviewing the suggestions made
by these parents.

Translation of the Interview Guide

Brislin, (1970, pp. 185-186), recommends that the researcher first write an
English document that is easily “translatable” using simple language without idioms and
slang. In addition, he advises the use of two translators, one to translate the source
document to the target language, with the second translator blindly translating the
document back into the source language. According to Brislin, “blindly” refers to
completing the translation without having previously reviewed the original document.
The researcher used Illinois certified bilingual educators who evaluated the translated
documents to identify errors within the translations. If necessary, the researcher would
change the source document that would then go through the same method of translation.
Following Brislin’s process with the interview guide and consent forms, the reviewers administered the documents to bilingual colleagues in practice sessions. The researcher repeated the process of identifying and correcting portions of the translated document until the translation met the reviewers’ established level of acceptability (Brislin, 1970, p. 190).

**The Interview Process**

The researcher scheduled the interviews during the informational meeting conducted with each participant, and a location for the interview that was safe and convenient to the participant was determined. Since the district offered the use of an offsite meeting room that allowed for privacy, quiet, and comfort, interviews were held there. Interview sessions lasted for 45 to 60 minutes, focusing on five themes: learning about the family, the child’s disability, the family's experience with the early intervention program, the early childhood special education program, and the transition process. Each interview was audio-recorded and the researcher documented nonverbal behaviors. The researcher requested that the non-English interviewer include supplementary observations and remarks to the researcher’s notes at the conclusion of each session.

Interview sessions began with a brief meeting with the participant. The interpreter reviewed the consent form that the participant signed at the initial meeting and reiterated the assurance of confidentiality. The interpreter also reminded the interviewee that participation was voluntary and that ending the interview and their involvement in the research was acceptable at any time. In addition, the researcher stated through the interpreter that the researcher and the interpreter would review responses with the
participant within 48 hours of the interview. This helped to ensure accuracy in the participant’s responses.

Cross-language qualitative research occurs when researchers conduct studies on or with people from communities that do not share the researcher’s language. Thus, this research requires the involvement of interpreters and translators to negotiate language barriers (Squires, 2008, p. 2). The researcher of the current study used translators to translate the forms and the interview guide and interpreters to both conduct and transcribe interviews in the participants’ native languages. The interpreter and the translator then separately transcribed the interviews into English.

Qualifications for interpreters included: (a) prior experiences in educational settings, (b) demonstrated ability to successfully both translate and interpret, and (c) demonstrated language proficiency through the credentialing process developed by a professional translator/interpreter association, such as the American Translators Association or the American Association of Language Specialists. In addition, the researcher sought individuals who appeared professional and knowledgeable, yet approachable. To verify their skills, those initially chosen first completed the translation of a portion of the interview guide. Their success on this task resulted in their participation in a brief, video-recorded mock interview with the researcher and a person who spoke the language of the interpreter. Later, an additional reviewer, a school district bilingual program administrator, conducted an appraisal of the video-recorded interviews.

Consecutive interpreting which requires that the interpreter speak after the source language speaker has finished speaking was initially included in the interview process (Paul, 2009). However, during several mock interview sessions, interview times
increased significantly with the use of this approach. In addition, interviewees revealed that the use of consecutive interpreting interrupted the “flow of the conversation,” thereby limiting information that was shared with the interviewer. Thus, the researcher decided that the use of interpreters to complete all interviews was the most effective and efficient method available.

**Data Analysis**

The researcher conducted data analysis as soon as the translation of each interview and pertinent notes were completed. The researcher separated the process of analyzing the data into three steps of (a) preparing the data, (b) exploring the data, and (c) analyzing the data, a process suggested by Creswell and Plano (2007, p. 129).

Preparing the data included transcribing the text of the interview and organizing the text of the transcriptions for analysis. Upon completion of each interview, the researcher and the interviewer discussed the interviewer’s preliminary thoughts about the interview and the participant’s responses. The interviewer transcribed each interview immediately following the discussion. An independent transcriptionist reviewed the interpreters’ transcriptions for accuracy. As each transcription was complete, the researcher made multiple electronic copies of the transcript and stored the original transcript of the interview, its translation and the multiple copies of the interviews as locked files on the researcher’s personal computer. The researcher used the multiple copies of the interview as working documents for the various levels of review. The researcher also transferred the digitally recorded interviews as locked files to the researcher’s computer. The researcher erased the original digital recording from the audio recorder.
In the second step of the process, the researcher explored the data, reading each transcript twice: the first to become familiar with the emerging concepts, perceptions, and events present in the participant’s responses. Using the highlight and comment tools of the word-processing program during the second reading of transcripts, the researcher identified those sections that were pertinent to answering the research question on a working copy of the interview and made margin comments to document impressions identified while reading the data. The researcher reviewed each interview transcript using the same process, as it became available (Creswell & Plano, 2007, pp 129-131). The researcher categorized related topics in the same way. A broad label described the theme identified in a particular passage or quote. New observations and insights produced new labels.

In the third step of the process -- analysis of the data – the researcher reviewed the data for a third time. This review began by making a list of the participants’ responses for each interview question. The researcher compared the responses of all of the participants and identified similarities and differences in the words, phrases, and participants’ descriptions of feelings contained in the transcripts. The researcher sorted the responses with the same or closely related topics into groups labeled with a word or phrase that captured the theme of that group. Those labels identified during the second review were used when the label matched a theme. A further review of the groups allowed the researcher to insure that all labeled groups were relevant to the research questions, and that each item related to the label assigned. The researcher developed subgroups when appropriate that added dimension and specificity to the categories that appeared during the reviews (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, pp. 84-95). The researcher then
grouped all the responses into the subcategories identified during the review, using index cards, simple tables, and lists to keep track of the identified themes. The researcher developed trend charts for each step of the analysis. For example, one chart identified all of the responses elicited for each question asked. A second chart for each question identified the categories and the subcategories that emerged from the responses to each question. The third question-specific chart organized participants’ responses detailed in the first chart into the subcategories established in chart two. This process continued until sorting the information no longer provided additional insight into the category.

As Nancy K. Farber wrote, “A qualitative researcher is never entirely bias-free; the objectivity of any study can be enhanced by utilizing multiple individuals to code your data” (2006, p. 372). The researcher of the present study employed the assistance of a professional colleague familiar with the analysis of qualitative data to complete the categorizing of data from the transcripts. Each reviewer used the trend charts described above for classification; on the completion of each transcript, the researcher and the reviewer discussed the results and reviewed resolved discrepancies of assessments that arose.

**Ethical Issues**

Ethical issues are of critical importance when researchers interact with human subjects, and it is imperative that researchers inform participants about the study and the research process. After receiving approval of the research plan from Loyola University Chicago’s Institutional Review Board, the researcher for the present study took steps to protect the participants from risks of breaches of privacy or confidentiality and potentially detrimental psychological results from their cooperation in the research.
The researcher addressed concerns about privacy and confidentiality by using data collection procedures that did not connect identifying information with participants’ responses or data. The researcher identified each interview transcript with a number rather than the participant’s name. A list of the participants’ names with their assigned numbers and the signed informed consent forms were locked in a file cabinet in a secure location, far from the school district. As a further precaution, the researcher shredded the list of names and subject numbers after the data analysis was completed.

The researcher developed a plan to track participants’ levels of distress to avoid risks associated with possible psychological distress participants might experience during the interview. The interpreter and the Informed Consent form notified participants that questions asked could cause some emotional distress. The researcher also emphasized to participants that they could stop the interview at any time to collect themselves or end the interview, if necessary. In addition, the researcher had developed a list of contact information for local community based agencies with bilingual staff members that provided counseling support to families. Agencies that provided resources and supports to parents of students with disabilities were also included on the list. The research would provide the list of resources to any participant that was interested in either seeking counseling or seeking resources about special education.

Finally, as stated previously, the researcher used an Informed Consent form, required by Loyola University’s Institutional Review Board, to provide a high level of protection for the participants in the present study. The safeguard of securing informed consent from potential participants is an essential part of research, since it ensures that they comprehend all aspects of the research and are capable of deciding whether to
participate. As indicated in the Selection of Students for the Study section of the current chapter, all participants provided the researcher with informed consent for participation in the current study.

**Issues of Trustworthiness**

In qualitative research, the concept of trustworthiness includes issues such as credibility and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba 1985, p.290). In the current study, multiple data validation methods ensured that the data were trustworthy. These methods included respondent validation, or member checking, and multiple levels of data review and categorizing. Respondent validation procedures determine whether the information obtained through the interview process was accurate (Creswell & Plano, 2007, p. 134).

Using respondent validation procedures, the researcher reviewed interview transcripts with each mother by having them read aloud by the interpreter. Participants indicated whether the records of their responses were accurate by responding “yes” or “no” after listening to the transcription of their interview question by question. By this means, respondents themselves affirmed the reliability of the interview data.

Multiple levels of categorizing afforded the researcher the opportunity to review the interviews and the transcripts numerous times. These reviews provided additional information about the relationships and connections between the emerging categories. The expert reviews of the procedures and methodology confirmed their reliability. In addition, the study furnished detailed descriptions of the procedures implemented to establish credibility and dependability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 290.).
Limitations of the Study

The present study analyzed the interview responses of a small population of participants whose children transitioned between educational programs in one suburban Illinois school district. Interviews with a greater number of parents from a variety of districts might serve to both amplify themes that emerged from this study and identify new ones. In addition, the present study focused solely on the perspectives of mothers. While mothers are most likely to be the primary caretaker stakeholders, there may be others, such as fathers, and school personnel whose perceptions are not included, but who might lend additional insight about the transition process.

Lastly, Lopez, Figueroa, Conner, and Maliski (2005) discuss the complexity associated with conducting research in a language other than the researcher’s primary language. The researcher’s use of interpreters to conduct and transcribe interviews in the current study allowed a unique window into the experience of mothers with limited English ability. As useful, as this process was, however, it did create some limitation on the interactions between the researcher and the participants (Lopez, et al., 2005, p. 1731).

Summary

A qualitative design provided the framework for the research in the current study. The present chapter described the measures used to obtain, organize, and analyze data resulting from interviews conducted with culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) parents. In addition, it addressed the trustworthiness and ethics required in research of this kind and discussed the study’s limitations. This chapter concluded with details about the process used to analyze the collected data. Chapter IV presents the research results gained from interviews of the participants in this study.
CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

The present study explored the perceptions of a sample of culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) mothers interviewed about the transition process from early intervention programs (EI) to district-based early childhood/early childhood special education (EC/ECSE) programs for their children. Chapter IV presents the three findings and four central themes that were the results of that research and includes examples of participants’ statements. The chapter concludes with a summary these results.

Research Findings

The purpose of the current study was to explore the perceptions of a sample of culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) participants about the transition process from early intervention programs (EI) to district-based early childhood/early childhood special education (EC/ECSE) programs for their children. This study collected and analyzed qualitative data through a semi-structured interview approach. Three major findings resulted from this study:

1. The overwhelming majority (9 of 10) of the participants indicated that they did not believe they received sufficient information about the transition process to prepare them and their children to leave the early intervention program (EI) and enter the early child/early childhood special education program.
2. The majority of limited English proficient (LEP) participants (4 of 5) who had more native language supports (i.e., Spanish-speakers), including interpreters and related service and educational staff displayed a higher level of satisfaction than those with less supports and resulting services (3 of 5).

3. Many of the participants (6 of 10) view their native language as a barrier in the transition process.

The discussion that follows examines the findings and uses information from the interviews to support and explain each finding. Descriptive quotations taken from interview transcripts offer examples of the opinions and perceptions of the participants.

**Finding 1**

The overwhelming majority (9 of 10) of the participants reported that they did not believe they received sufficient information about the transition process to prepare them and their children to leave the early intervention program (EI) and enter the early child/ early childhood special education (EC/ECSE) program.

Since the central research problem of the present study was to discern participants’ perceptions about this transition, it is of key importance that participants did not feel adequately prepared for the transition process. Participants stated that the information provided was ineffective in preparing them for the changes in programs, staff changes, and anticipated level of parental participation. Participants also identified difficulty in receiving information directly from the school district about many topics, importantly, including the evaluation process. This lack of contact and inability to receive answers to what they perceived to be important questions left participants feeling anxious. Some of their responses were:
I was not ready for the changes we experienced. We used to have a close relationship with the teachers that came to our home. I knew all of the teachers that worked with my son. They explained what we did not understand. They listened to our concerns. But, the school program was different. Everything takes a long time. It still takes a long time to get answers. They said it would be different but I did not think there would be this many differences (Participant 1).

I understood that there would be differences between the home program and the school program. I felt prepared until I realized that I had no understanding of what was going on. I felt involved in the home program. My opinion was important in deciding what happened next to my child. The information I received about the school programs did not tell me enough about the difference in programs. The programs have different plans; they have different services for participants. I learned much from the participant information provided from the home program. I have yet to learn about the school’s program. I have many questions about the IEP. I want to know about how it is decided what services are to be provided to my child. We should not have to wait so long after our children begin school to learn what is happening (Participant 9).

The information that I was given was not useful. I wanted to know what options were available for my child. I had so many questions and no one to answer them. I wanted to know what the school looked like. What was the teacher like? How
many children were in the class? How many teachers were in the class? Would I be able to visit the school? I started with such little information about what was going to happen and you know I was nervous because I felt the two programs did not communicate. Why are they not talking? If this is what you do every year, then why is there such little information available to me (Participant 4)?

Eight of ten participants cited the lack of relevant information about special education as a concern. In addition, they indicated that when provided with information, it was too technical for them to comprehend. These participants also indicated a fragmentation in the overall transition process. Six of ten participants assumed there would be a collaborative approach to the transition process between the school district and the early intervention (EI) program. However, the interview responses indicated confusion as to which agency would be charged with answering their transition questions prior to and during the transition process.

Finding 2

Four of five participants who were provided with more native language support (Spanish), including interpreters and related service and educational staff, conveyed a higher level of satisfaction than three of five participants receiving less supports and services (non-Spanish speaking) through their statements.

Of the five Spanish-speaking participants, four identified receiving an appropriate amount of support from the school district in their native language. Participant 2 found
the availability of an interpreter as well as some Spanish-speaking related service staff
“reassuring.” Four of the five participants also indicated satisfaction with the overall level
of services provided to their children. The participants were confident that school district
had their child’s best interest in mind, although they lacked a thorough understanding of
special education and the services available for their child. One participant from this
group was not satisfied with the supports provided to her and her child. Her concern was
that the availability of services in her native language was lacking. She also conveyed
uncertainty of the district’s ability to sustain an appropriate level of service to its students
should there be a significant growth in the numbers of students who come from homes
where a language other than English is spoken. Two participants that received fewer
supports (non-Spanish) reiterated this concern. One of the Spanish-speaking participants
asserted:

If they can have an interpreter for me then they can do a better job of providing
services in Spanish. Many schools offer services to children in Spanish. My
cousin’s daughter receives services in Spanish- everything, even speech therapy,
is in Spanish. The district has been good to us. But, what if my son needs more
help, as he gets older? Will they be able to help him? It is not that I see him
getting worse, but you have to think of those things. Are they prepared if more
people who do not speak English move in this area? What my son gets now is ok
because he is little and he is getting help. I am glad that I am receiving some
information in Spanish, but sometimes I wonder if I getting all of what I am
supposed to get. I do not understand all of the programs or the process but I also
do not want to ask so that the teachers [district personnel] do not think I am asking for too much (Participant 5).

Two of five participants who received less supports and services (non-Spanish speaking) agreed with Participant 5’s perception that the services were adequate for now. While unsatisfied with the overall level of supports available to them or their children, they also stated that they were grateful for what they were receiving and did not want to cause problems by asking the district for more supports. As another participant said:

We can manage for now. It is not that I am not happy, but it does take time to get used to changes. I just thought it would be faster. It is difficult to rely on others to help you with the language. I am lucky because my husband and my father-in-law speak English. But, when we first met with the school district, it was very difficult because the people at the meeting were talking about things even my husband did not understand. He would ask them for more information and they tried to explain it as best as possible. But, it is not the same because you are never certain if you really understood what they were talking about. Perhaps we are walking around with a false understanding of what was said. It would be even worse if we used that information to make decisions about our child.

The participants conveyed their level of satisfaction with the transition and the provision of services in response to a number of questions. (See Appendix D) Identifying their level of satisfaction with the transition process was difficult for some of the
participants. They were eager to clarify that while unsatisfied with a number of things including the transition process, they were still very grateful for the services provided to their children. Overall, participants asserted that the provision of native language supports was an important aspect of the educational process.

Finding 3

Six of ten participants viewed their native language as a barrier in the transition process. Six of ten participants also indicated that communication between the school district and the participant was a concern. The Spanish speakers had access to many of the documents and forms. The school district sent all information about the transition process to the five non-Spanish speaking participants in English. The participants relied on family or friends to translate the documents for them. However, since some parents learned to compensate for a lack of native language resources, this resulted in fewer parents that stated that language was a barrier in their responses to questions for the present study. For some parents, the availability of information in their native language was not as important as insuring that their children received the most appropriate services.

While parents hoped that schools and community programs would provide the necessary language services and supports to them and their families, those who were not Spanish-speakers no longer assumed its availability and stopped requesting it. As indicated previously, the participants that spoke languages other than Spanish were surprised that a native language interpreter was available for the interviews for the present study. As one participant stated, “I knew it was too good to be true. The district
does not have interpreters for us.” However, all of the participants indicated being grateful for what they were receiving.

Several participants indicated that a lack of English skills was a barrier when the participant or the school district allowed it to become one. While acknowledging that there is a need for native language supports to insure that communication between school and participant produces the best services for their children, participants also found ways to cope.

I know that it would make things easier to have the supports that would allow better communication. It can be frustrating to have to schedule meetings when there is a relative available to go with me to translate, but I have lived in the United States long enough to know that sometimes things do not go as planned. We cannot sit and wait for things to happen or we risk the chance of not moving forward or in this case not getting services for my child. I do see that language barriers exist, but I cannot allow them to stop me from doing what is best for my daughter. It is frustrating and sometimes I want to say something but I stop myself so that I do not do anything to jeopardize the relationship that I have with my child’s teacher (Participant 10).

**Emergent Themes of the Research**

In addition to the transition process, the researcher also explored the participants’ perceptions about the impact of the early intervention (EI) and the early childhood special education programs on their child and the family. After extensive review and analysis of the transcripts of the interviews, the researcher identified four common themes that
emerged from participant responses to interview and follow up questions: (a) Change is stressful; (b) Insufficient staff levels of concern; (c) Participants’ difficulty comprehending special education; and (d) Language differences and communication issues.

**Theme 1: Change is Stressful**

Participants described the transition from early intervention to early childhood/early childhood special education (EC/ECSE) as an intimidating process. Their concerns about their children’s transition from early intervention to preschool classrooms included being away from their child on a regular basis for the first time. In addition, seven of ten participants were concerned that their relationships with the EC/ECSE staff would not be as supportive as the one with the EI staff. All of the participants cited the importance of establishing and developing a positive relationship with the school’s staff. Each identified a feeling of safety and comfort from their participation in the early intervention program. All of the participants reported that not knowing what changes to expect and what those changes meant for their children was of great concern to them. Four of ten participants also cited fears stemming from the loss of some of their “power” in dealing with staff. Participant 3 stated that she understood “all of the rules from that program [EI] and now I had to learn it all again. I knew what to do and when to do it. I was scared that I would never learn the new program.”

Eight of ten participants cited their child “leaving” them as a concern. All of the children had received early intervention (EI) services at home. The early intervention (EI) staff also conducted meetings to review the children’s progress at the participants’
homes. In contrast, the district provides EC/ECSE services at one of the district’s schools. Eight of the ten participants indicated that having their child transported to school by bus was of great concern. Their fears ranged from something happening to their child such as an injury resulting from a bus accident to fear that their children would feel abandoned. Participant 7 recalled having her husband miss work for the first week that their child participated in the EC/ECSE program, so that they could follow the bus to school each day. Participant 1 and Participant 3 recounted similar stories about actions they took during their children’s first bus rides.

Prior to the transition process, participants indicated they did receive information about the change in programs. However, they also stated that they were uncertain as to what the information meant. Participants stated that the district did not offer them an opportunity to visit the school or the classroom. When the district representative informed participants that bus service was available for their children, seven of the ten participants asked if they could ride the bus with their children until the child was accustomed to the experience. A district supervisor informed the participants that school district policy prohibited them from riding the bus.

Participants were also uncertain about whom to direct their questions about the new setting and the new program. Basic questions about the school day, bus service, the classroom, and services that district staff would provide remained unanswered until the day of the transition meeting with the district. However, the school district staff answered the majority of the participants’ questions at the transition meeting. Other questions remained unanswered for months following the transition. The majority of the
participants indicated that the “wait-and-see” approach to transition left them feeling nervous and frustrated. As Participant 2 stated, “I wasn’t sure who to ask my questions to. I felt as if I should be doing something to get ready for school but I just did not know what to do. It made me a little crazy.”

**Theme 2: Staff Levels of Concern**

Early intervention (EI) services staff provided to the participants’ children at their homes. A partnership develops between provider and participant. The rapport that is established is conducive to personal communication as well as the sharing of information about the children’s progress. The majority of the participants noted that the nature of early intervention (EI) services allowed a level of bonding with EI staff and they had a relationship with each service provider. This relationship that was not initially evident with early childhood/early childhood special education (EC/ECSE) staff. The early intervention (EI) program coordinator knew the participants even if it was through an association with their child’s name (i.e. Billy’s mom), and consistently followed up when children were sick or an issue required discussion. In addition, EI staff sought out resources and information to provide to the participants about a variety of topics associated with their child’s development or parenting.

The change from a family focused early intervention program (EI) to the child centered early childhood/early childhood special education (EC/ECSE) program was difficult at for the majority of the participants, at first. EC/ECSE staff was not involved with the participants as the early intervention program staff had been. Because the services were no longer at their homes, participants felt they had to make opportunities to
interact with the school staff. Establishing communication with the district’s early childhood/ early childhood special education (EC/ECSE) staff was difficult for those participants that relied on their spouses or family members to transport them to the school and to act as interpreters. Communication with the school’s early childhood/ early childhood special education (EC/ECSE) staff was difficult since the staff failed to respond to requests for information in a timely fashion. The majority of the participants viewed this as a lack of concern for them and their children.

**Theme 3: Participants’ Comprehension of Special Education**

None of the ten participants had previous experience with special education services or the special education process. Nine of the ten did not recognize that the services provided to their child were special education services. The participants identified the services as “school” or “help” but did not comprehend that these services were part of a larger system called “special education.” The majority of the participants had no knowledge that special education offers a spectrum of services and service levels based upon the child’s individual needs. Four of ten participants understood “disabled” to mean only a child with visible traits. Three of ten participants discussed their understanding of the restrictive practices imposed on students identified with disabilities in their own countries. Four of ten also believed there were lifelong negative consequences associated with the disability for those children.

Participants objected to the length of the Individualized Education Plan (IEP) and considered it a document that was difficult to follow or understand. All of the participants assessed the information provided by the EC/ECSE staff during the IEP meeting
similarly. Even with a family member present to act as interpreter, they found the language used and the ideas conveyed confusing. Several of the participants wondered if they “were allowed” to contribute information about their child and their needs given that the forms appeared to have been partially filled out. Participants indicated that early childhood/early childhood special education staff (EC/ECSE) did not provide participants with information of the IEP meeting procedures, the accepted level of parent participation, and their rights in seeking additional supports for their children. Participant 4 stated that she felt as if she “was just sitting there listening to people who already knew what they were going to do for my child. Who was I to ask questions?”

Theme 4: Language Differences and Communication Issues

The five non-Spanish speaking participants were surprised to have an interpreter present during meetings and interviews for the present study. Participant 8 indicated that while she had never requested an interpreter, the district had not offered one for any meetings about her child. Other non-Spanish speaking participants indicated relying on family or friends to assist with meetings with teachers or other school staff, since it seemed implicit that an interpreter was not available. Participant 7 stated that she “would do what I have always done- make sure my husband or my father-in-law is available for the meetings.” Both her husband and father-in-law acted as interpreters for her during both early intervention (EI) meetings and meetings with school district early childhood/early childhood special education (EC/ECSE) staff.

The majority of the Spanish-speaking participants indicated that the district made a Spanish-speaking interpreter available to act as a liaison between the participant and the
school. While communication with the school staff often depended on the times the
translator was available, some teachers at the school spoke Spanish and were often
willing to interpret. Three of the five Spanish-speaking participants also indicated that
they contacted the district translator when they needed help with personal business. In
contrast to experience of the non-Spanish speaking participants, these translators
indicated an openness and level of support consistent with that provided during their
child’s participation in the early intervention program. As Participant 5 attested, “having
someone to ask questions even if they weren’t about education or school was refreshing. I
needed to feel as if I had a connection with someone at the school even if it was not a
teacher.”

According to the interviews, all of the children received their services in English.
None of the participants indicated a need for services for the children in their native
language. Many participants asserted that it was important for their children to learn
English and that it might as well begin early. Participant six stated that while she would
be unable to assist her child with homework and school tasks, her child’s older sibling
would provide help. Participant 3 and Participant 8 echoed this response. While they
were accustomed to the lack of native language support during meetings, participants
recognized that deficient communication affected their participation in those meetings.
Many of the participants spoke of learning English as a way to help them better address
the needs of their children.
Summary

This chapter described the results of the present study’s research of the perceptions of a sample of culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) mothers about their child’s transition from early intervention (EI) to early childhood/early childhood special education (EC/ECSE). Interviews conducted with participants illustrate the complicated nature of the transition process. Discussions by participants revealed the feelings and perceptions about the process from the point of view of individuals whose understanding of a complex educational system was further complicated by a language barrier. This chapter also identified factors that participants perceived as additional barriers or supports in their participation. The final chapter will present conclusions based on the research results and discuss the implications and contributions of this study. The chapter will also include recommendations for future research.
CHAPTER V
DISCUSSION

This present study explored the perceptions of a sample of culturally and
linguistically diverse (CLD) mothers about the transition process from early intervention
programs (EI) to district-based early childhood/early childhood special education
(EC/ECSE) programs for their children. Chapter V presents: (a) a brief summary of the
present study, (b) a discussion of the results of research for this study, (c) implications for
further research, and (d) implications for practice and recommendations. A summary
concludes the chapter.

Summary of the Study

This researcher used a semi-structured interview approach to collect qualitative
data. The researcher developed an interview guide in English that the researcher had
translated into Spanish, Gujarati, Romanian and Korean. The use of interpreters to
conduct interviews allowed the participants to share their experiences regarding the
transition process in their native languages. Open-ended questions in the interview guide
allowed the participant to provide details about their experiences in the early intervention
(EI) program, in the early childhood/early childhood special education (EC/ECSE)
program and during the process of transition between the two programs.

The researcher began a series of data reviews to classify, organize and analyze
data by categories. The researcher developed these categories by sorting the participants’
interview responses with the same or closely related topics into groups labeled with a word or phrase that captured the theme of that group. In the data reviews that followed, tighter categories and subcategories were developed. The researcher based the study upon three research questions:

1. Do the mothers believe they received sufficient information about the transition process to prepare them and their children to go from one program to the next?

2. Do limited English proficient (LEP) parents who have more native language supports including interpreters and related service and educational staff display a higher level of satisfaction than those with less supports and services?

3. Do LEP mothers view their native language and/or culture as a barrier, an advantage, not a factor in the transition process, or do they see them as playing some alternative role?

These three questions framed the research findings presented in the previous chapter. The dominant finding was that the overwhelming majority (9 of 10) of the participants indicated that they do not believe they received sufficient information about the transition process to prepare them and their children to leave the early intervention program (EI) and enter the early child/ early childhood special education (EC/ECSE) program. Parents perceived a disconnection between the early intervention program and the school district -- the two agencies involved in the transition process. In addition to the lack of information noted, this same group of participants indicated not knowing the
appropriate agency to consult for questions as a key area of concern. Because of the lack of guidance by school and agency staff, some participants indicated feeling frustrated and confused with the transition process. While insufficient information was the central problem to these parents, deficient or non-existent language assistance was a crucial component in creating this problem.

**Discussion of Results**

As indicated in Chapter 4, the majority of the participants found the information provided to them about the transition process deficient in its usefulness to prepare them to prepare them for transition. In addition to the deficiency indicated above the majority of the participants (8 of 10) noted that information provided was too technical and did not seem relevant. Further, participants indicated that they were uncertain whether it was the district’s responsibility or the early intervention program’s responsibility to answer questions about the transition process, and if and when they were permitted to contact the district to discuss program options and receive answers to basic questions about the classroom, their child’s schedule, and the bus service.

Hanson et al (2000, p.286) described the experiences of 22 families throughout their transition process from early intervention programs to preschool programs. Hanson’s study found that parents that received information about program options and the transition process prior to the transition meeting reported a positive experience reported a more positive transition experience than those who did not receive similar information. Lovett and Haring (2003, p. 375) conducted a longitudinal study examining the perceptions of parents of 48 infants identified with a disability at birth. They found
that 43 percent of the families stated they felt “uncomfortable” with the transition process from early intervention to preschool. Lovett and Haring defined uncomfortable as “unprepared and anxious.” Families identified as uncomfortable indicated that they did not feel like “full participants” in the IEP planning process and that they had difficulty communicating with service providers about the transition.

**Related Literature**

The findings of the present study include: (1) participants’ perceptions that the information provided was not helpful in preparing them for transition; (2) those with access to more native language supports had a higher level of satisfaction than those with fewer supports; and (3) that some participants perceived their language as a barrier to securing necessary services. Of these, parents’ single major concern with the transition process was the lack of the information provided prior to the transition. In addition, participants indicated their concern with the disengagement between the two agencies and their overall lack of collaboration. Earlier studies about the transition from early intervention (EI) programs to early childhood/ early childhood special education (EC/ECSE) programs that examined the perceptions of parents about the transition process emphasized the importance of communication and the collaboration between agencies and parents. However, research on the experiences of culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) parents in the transition process remain limited.

Bruns and Fowler (2001, p 2) indicate that the transition process can be divided into three phases of activities. The phases include preparation, implementation, and evaluation. The preparation phase includes planning activities such as parent training and
acquiring and disseminating information to stakeholders about the process. The focus of this phase is to insure that both parents and agency staff involved have the information and the skills to attend to the transition process. In addition to parent training, supports for parents include visiting potential classrooms or programs and providing parents with pre-IEP meeting information (Kaczmarek et al, 2004, p. 216). The findings in the current study did not reveal the implementation of pre-transition or transition preparatory activities to improve the process for children and their families.

Similarly, Conn-Powers, Ross-Allen, and Holburn (1990) wrote that timely transition planning insures parent participation as equal partners, interagency collaboration, and the provision of the most appropriate student centered services, reducing stress on parents and children (Conn-Powers, Ross-Allen, Holburn, 1990, pp. 95-97). In addition, Rous, Meyers and Stricklin (2007, p. 10) suggest that communication between agencies and between parents and agencies is critically important. They also suggest that interagency collaboration is essential to prepare children and families appropriately for the transition process (p.11). Rous, Hallam, Harbin, McCormick and Jung (2007, pp. 141-142) developed a transition framework identifying three vital interagency variables: (a) communication and relationships between the child, family, service providers, and agencies within the community; (b) interagency administrative support to ensure communication and relationship building between agency staff; and (c) continuity across programs.

Thus, the present study helps to reduce the paucity of research specific to the transition process for culturally and linguistically diverse students. As stated in Chapter
II, despite the growth in the English language learner (ELL) population, most LEAs have not developed policies and procedures to address the needs of students identified as ELLs with disabilities. As the findings above serve to emphasize, the level of confusion about special education and the IEP process magnifies when parents lack the language skills to fully comprehend the information presented during the IEP meeting. The jargon and acronyms used during IEP meetings, combined with the lack of diverse staff to communicate appropriately with parents often leads to a parent’s lack of understanding about their child’s special education issues and needs. Studies such as Salas (2004) and Lo (2008) have focused on the experiences of CLD parents specifically during IEP meetings. As reported in the present study, these studies included interviews revealing that parents felt language differences between themselves and school personnel were a barrier and that poor interpretation and translation services were a concern for LEP parents.

While the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act mandates parental involvement in the educational process for students with disabilities, special education programs in the United State still lack active involvement of culturally and linguistically diverse parents. The present study confirms the findings of Lo (2008) that language barriers for these parents include a lack of native language speaking staff in schools, limited access to culturally and linguistically appropriate evaluation tools, and the unavailability of appropriately trained, native language interpreters and translators (Lo, p. 25).
Finally, the present study’s findings agree with the assessment by Turney and Kao (2009), that a limited proficiency in English affects the level of parental participation in their children’s educational process (Turney & Kao, pp. 263-265). These parents often lack the confidence in their English proficiency levels to communicate with school personnel and may not fully understand the child’s disability and its impact on learning (Al-Hassan & Gardner, 2002, p. 52).

Conclusions

The researcher drew several conclusions from the results of the current study that may help increase the understanding of the relationships and processes that occur among the various stakeholders in the transition process from early intervention (EI) to early childhood / early childhood special education (EC/ECSE) programs. Interviews with parents conducted for the present study revealed a group of individuals in need of native language support, information, and guidance. It was unclear whether the lack of information resulted from agencies’ failure to cooperate or whether the district provided the information but in a manner unclear to the participants. Nevertheless, it was evident that the majority of the participants did not understand the transition process or special education. This left them feeling frustrated, excluded, and confused.

The present study indicates the vital need for a collaborative partnership between families and service providers to promote a successful transition experience and desired outcomes for the child and the family. A perceived deficiency in collaboration between the two agencies involved produced key areas of concern for parents. Parents’ lack of
clarity as to which agency was responsible for answering questions or providing parents with the guidance they were seeking also lead to critical frustration with the process.

**Implications for Further Research**

This exploratory study revealed some issues related to the transition process for culturally, linguistically diverse (CLD) children, and their families from early intervention to early child / early childhood special education programs. Currently available literature on this transition originate from a number of sources including state and federal reports, surveys and qualitative studies sponsored by universities and non-profit agencies.

Although many parents encountered some difficulties during the transition process regardless of cultural or linguistic background, (see Lovett and Haring, 2003) challenges related to both culture and language appear with greater frequency among parents of CLD children. Thus, future research might explore the extent to which the families’ culture influenced their interpretations of the transition experience. Additional research about the interaction between early intervention personnel and school district staff will be fruitful and studies that engage fathers of culturally and linguistically diverse children would provide additional insight into parents’ and children’s experience of the transition process.

The researcher identified two additional topics for future research that are an extension of the transition topic. Participants for the current study indicated that the provision of services to limited English proficient students in English only was a common practice. Further research on the impact of that practice on the language
development skills of limited English proficient English language learners (ELLs) with disabilities would be of interest to EI and EC/ECSE communities. Additional investigation of district efforts to communicate with parents who are illiterate in their native language and lack proficiency in English would be useful. However, this research would prove especially difficult if the parent spoke a lower incidence language.

**Recommendations for Future Practice**

The participants’ perceptions and feelings about the transition process presented in the present study indicate a need for further support, information, and opportunities for collaboration between parents and school districts. Service providers could address these needs through procedures associated strictly with the transition process or with approaches that may also serve a broader group of district stakeholders. These targeted and generalized approaches could furnish tools that all families would access to fulfill their need for information and a greater partnership with the school district. For example, many school districts have developed *Welcome Centers* with an aim to provide parents the tools necessary to become more successful at supporting their children in the educational process. The Centers administer a range of programs to facilitate and coordinate parent involvement activities and to establish parents as partners. Resources available range from educational supports for students, community service options for parents and families, and resources for those needing native language supports. This type of program would make the connection between community based early intervention programs, district programs, and parents -- especially those of differing cultures -- easier to establish.
This researcher for the present study also recommends that districts develop and implement a series of parent workshops to provide detailed program transition information in regular and accessible sessions. Each workshop would focus on one aspect of the transition process and provide district-specific information. The development and the presentation of the workshops would require collaboration between the early intervention programs and the school district. Presenters would furnish information in native languages when needed. These workshops would afford parents knowledge about the transition while providing them with the opportunity to meet district personnel.

It is essential that service providers furnish parents with relevant information in a timely fashion, develop and implement simple organizational tools that identify roles and responsibilities of specified individuals within each agency. Developing transition specific tools to provide clarity about the roles of each agency and the timelines associated with each task would benefit both agencies. Further, providing parents with a bi-lingual checklist detailing required tasks and meetings and identifying those responsible for each required activity would be of great benefit to parents and agency professionals, alike.

Finally, the need to increase collaboration between the early intervention (EI) programs and the early childhood/early childhood special education (EC/ECSE) was also evident from participant responses in the current study. The researcher further recommends that the programs schedule quarterly workshops about a variety of topics, especially the transition process that would increase parent involvement and collaborative practices is recommended. Finally, the development of a formal plan that delineates
responsibilities specific to the aforementioned activities that would allow for increased collaboration between stakeholders.

**Summary**

Transitioning between service delivery terms and programs can be an intimidating process for any parent. The extent to which service providers presented families with relevant and useful information to empower them to be equal decision makers in a critical process was of concern to the majority of the participants in the study.

The experiences of the study participants confirm the need to insure the availability of resources to make parents well informed and sufficiently skilled to participate in the transition process. This study indicated a need for a collaborative partnership between families and service providers in promoting a successful transition experience and desired outcomes for the child and the family. It also suggested that agencies must find ways to coordinate transitions so parents understand the interactions so crucial to their children’s future.

In conclusion, the present study examined the transition process from early intervention (EI) programs to early childhood/ early childhood special education (EC/ECSE) by exploring the perceptions and experiences of limited English proficient mothers, using a qualitative methodology to analyze data acquired from semi-structured interviews. The results of this research indicated that while parents are satisfied with services they received from both the early intervention program and the school-based program, the transition process was a source of stress and confusion. Parents cited the lack of provision of useful and timely information as well the lack of collaboration
between agencies concerned. Thus, the current study opens the door for further research about these program inadequacies and suggests the need for a change in practice for community based programs and school districts.
Limited English Proficient Mothers’ Perceptions of the Transition from Early Intervention Programs to Preschool Programs: Cultural and Linguistic Barriers

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PURPOSE FOR THE RESEARCH

There are two purposes of this research:

1. To explore how parents characterize the transition process and

2. To examine if parents indicate culture and/ or language as an influence on the transition process.

This study will provide insight into the satisfaction level with the transition process, and then examine how that satisfaction is expressed by mothers of children with disabilities who are limited English proficient (LEP). Due to the limited number of studies examining the perceptions of LEP parents on the transition process, this research can contribute new insights into transition as a process. While this research aims to answer specific questions regarding mothers’ perceptions of transitions, it also provides a space for the parent to explore and reflect on their relationships with school staff including teachers and related service providers involved in the transition process.
Results of this study may help school administrators and educators become aware of immigrant or LEP parental needs in becoming a partner in education. In providing insights into what mothers view as a successful transition into preschool programs, educators and administrators can begin to reflect on current practices that are in place and consider ways in which schools can become more receptive to the needs of the LEP or immigrant parents for students at-risk or identified with a disability.

OVERVIEW OF THE RESEARCH

This study will focus on the responses of ten mothers whose children have transitioned from an early intervention program on or before their third birthday within the last twelve to twenty-four months. The participants will be comprised of five LEP Spanish speakers and five LEP speakers of lower incidence languages in Illinois such as Arabic, or Hmong. The participants will be identified by the Director of Special Education of the identified district.

The initial review will be of the mothers’ general perceptions of the transition process. Interview responses will also be reviewed to compare perceptions between the LEP parents who may have different degrees of access to linguistically qualified personnel.

The following aspects of the general transition experience will be addressed:

1. The services involved in transition, including
   - An explanation of the changes in the child’s eligibility,
   - A change in the level and types of services available to the child and
   - The change from family centered support to student centered support.

2. Level of contact with the school, and the early intervention center/ provider(s)
3. Information provided regarding the IEP, its components, and services provided,
4. The level of collaboration between previous services providers and the school/school district,
5. The type and level of support provided to students and their families during the transition process, including native language support, and
6. The mothers’ perceptions about the cultural and linguistic considerations provided to them during the transition process, including the provision of translated materials and interpreters during meetings.

The underlying question of the study will be if the cultural and linguistic diversity of the parents, impact the overall transition process. The study will use semi-structured interviews to collect data from mothers specific to the levels of satisfaction during the transition process. The interview questions have been developed in English with translation to Spanish and other languages to follow. The interview responses will indicate the level of satisfaction experienced during the transition process in relation 1) to information received about the transition process, 2) the level of parent and child preparedness and level of parental involvement in the transition as well as 3) consideration provided to the cultural and linguistic diversity of the families.

The selection of participants will be determined by the following criteria specific to their child:

- The child must have been in the early intervention program for at least one year (Part C under IDEA)
• The child must have been eligible for Part B under IDEA and diagnosed
  with a developmental delay with the speech language services as the only
  possible related service provided, and
• The child must have transitioned into an early childhood program within
  24 months prior to the date of the interview.

STUDY DESIGN

A semi-structured interview approach will be conducted with the participants.
Each of the ten parent participants will be interviewed once for approximately 45 minutes
to an hour. The interviews will be scheduled directly with the parent and will be
conducted in a designated location within the district.

Each individual interview will be audio-recorded for transcription purposes only
and all audiotapes and paper data will be kept in a locked filing cabinet at the home office
of the researcher when not being used for analysis. The investigator will have all audio
tapes transcribed by a qualified native language transcriptionist. The investigator and the
transcriptionist are the only two individuals that will have access to the recordings or be
allowed to hear the audiotapes. Once the tapes have been transcribed and the
transcriptions verified by the researcher, all audio-recordings will be immediately
destroyed. Any information kept electronically will be kept on a password protected
laptop that only the researcher has access to. Any information that could be used to
identify parent participants or their children will be altered to ensure confidentiality. The
parent will be identified by a number and be referred to by that number in all documents.
The list of the parents’ identities will be maintained electronically on the password
protected laptop and revealed to no one.
APPENDIX B

SAMPLE LETTER OF COOPERATION
Dear IRB Members,

After reviewing the proposed study, “Limited English Proficient Mothers’ Perceptions of the Transition from Early Intervention Programs to Preschool Programs: Cultural and Linguistic Barriers” by Celia Arresola, Ed.D. candidate at Loyola University Chicago, I have granted permission for the study to be conducted in our district.

I understand that Ms. Arresola will receive consent from all participants. I have confirmed that she has the cooperation of the Director of Special Education to assist in the recruitment and contact of parents. Ms Arresola has agreed to provide my office with a copy of all Loyola University Chicago IRB-approved, stamped consent documents before she recruits participants. Any data collected by Ms. Arresola will be kept confidential and secure. Ms. Arresola has also agreed to provide to us a copy of the aggregate results from her study.

Sincerely,

Mr. B. Good, Superintendent
Good kids Elementary School District
APPENDIX C

INFORMED CONSENT FOR PARTICIPATION
Project Title: Limited English Proficient Mothers’ Perceptions of the Transition Process from Early Intervention Programs to Preschool Programs: Cultural and Linguistic Barriers

Researchers: Celia Arresola  
Faculty Sponsor: Dr. Erwin Epstein

Introduction:

You are being asked to take part in a research study being conducted by Celia Arresola for a dissertation for an Ed. D. degree under the supervision of Dr. Erwin Epstein in the Cultural and Educational Policy Studies program at Loyola University of Chicago.

You are being asked to participate because you have a child with a disability, who transitioned from an early intervention program to an early childhood special education program, from March 2008- February, 2010.

Please read this form carefully and ask any questions you may have before deciding whether to participate in the study.

Purpose:

The purpose of this study is to examine the perceptions of mothers about the transition process.

Procedures:

If you agree to be in the study, you will be asked to:

- Participate in an interview in your native language about your child’s transition from the early intervention program to the early childhood special education program. The interview will take approximately 45 to 60 minutes. The interviewer will ask you questions about your child, the disability, and the two programs in which your child participated. The interview will be tape-recorded, with your permission, so that I may review our conversation in its entirety.

- Two groups of mothers will be interviewed. One group will be Spanish speaking mothers and the other group will be mothers who speak other languages. All participants will be asked the same questions.

Risks/Benefits:

There are minimal risks involved in participating in this research. There is the risk that you may find some of the questions about your child’s disability conditions to be upsetting. There is also the risk that your child’s diagnosis may be unintentionally disclosed to others not involved with your child’s education. However, these risks do not involve undue psychological or emotional stress.
If you begin to feel upset during the interview and want to take a break, you may do so. After a few minutes, we will ask if you want to continue or stop the interview.

If you become very upset, we may decide to stop the interview. If this happens, we will stay with you until you are calmer. You will be given a list of phone numbers for agencies where you can seek support from a community agency to address these feelings. We may ask permission to call one of your family members or your friend. There is also a chance that you may feel upset after the interview.

There are no direct benefits to you from participation in this study, but the information may help schools or agencies improve the transition process for linguistically diverse children and their families.

Confidentiality:

- Each participating parent will be identified by a randomly assigned participant number. The list which identifies the individuals will be maintained in a locked file cabinet along with all other confidential data acquired during this study. Written documentation and audio recordings of the interviews will be maintained securely for one year from the date of the interview. All confidential data including documents and audio recordings will be maintained in a locked file cabinet in the researcher’s home office with access available only to the researcher. At the end of the year, all information, including the audio tapes will be destroyed.

- Bilingual interpreters will conduct the interviews with the mothers in their native language. Therefore, these individuals will have access to the information provided by the mothers. These individuals will sign a statement of confidentiality to insure that they understand that all information gathered must not be discussed.

Voluntary Participation:

Participation in this study is voluntary. If you do not want to be in this study, you are free to withdraw. Even if you decide to participate, you are free not to answer any question or to withdraw from participation at any time.

Contacts and Questions:

If you have questions about this research project or interview, feel free to contact Celia Arresola at (312) 262-8568 or the faculty sponsor, Dr. Epstein, at 312-915-6273.

If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Compliance Manager in Loyola’s Office of Research Services at (773) 508-2689.
Statement of Consent:

Your signature below indicates that you have read and understood the information provided above, that you have had an opportunity to ask questions, and that you agree to participate in this research study. You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records.

____________________________________________   __________________
Participant’s Signature                                                   Date

____________________________________________  ___________________
Researcher’s Signature                                                  Date
INTERVIEW GUIDE

LEP MOTHERS’ PERCEPTIONS OF TRANSITION FROM EI TO EC

Part 1: The Study

Thank you for making time to talk with me today. My name is Celia Arresola. I am a student at Loyola University who is conducting research about mothers and their experiences with their child’s transition from early intervention programs to early childhood special education programs. When children have special needs that appear between birth and two years old, they might receive services at an agency from people such as teachers, speech therapists, physical therapists, or social workers. These people are trying to help your child build up his or her skills in any areas that he or she might need help. When your child turns three, he/she may go to a public school to an early childhood program. Moving from one program to another program is called transition.

Today I would like to ask you questions about this transition. Some of our questions about your experiences may be a little complicated. I will be using the information gathered from all of the mothers interviewed to write the research paper. Your name or your child’s name will not be used in our research paper. The information that you provide might help improve the transition process for other children and their families.

Would you like to ask any questions before we begin?

May we tape record your interview? It will insure that we have your response just as you said it.
Part 2: Background Information

FAMILY, HOME, and SCHOOL:

Question 1) Tell me about your family.

Additional questions about the child’s family:

a) Besides your husband and your children, who lives in your home with you?

b) You mentioned that you were from _____, how long have you lived in the United States? In Illinois? What has been the most difficult part of moving here?

c) What language do you speak at home? Do your children speak that language?

Question 2) Tell me about your child.

Additional questions about the child:

a) What are the areas of strength and difficulty that your child shows at home?

b) With which disability has your child been identified?

c) What concerns do you have regarding your child and his education?

Questions 3) Please share with me anything you may know about your child’s experience at school.

Additional questions about the child’s school experiences and academic abilities:

a) What type of services is your child currently receiving?

b) How was your child’s disability first noticed and by whom?
Part 3: TRANSITION

Your child has been part of two programs - the first one was_____ and the second one is ______, which is the program your child currently attends.

Question 4)

Tell me about the early intervention program that your child previously attended.

Additional questions about the parents’ experiences with the two settings and the transition process:

a) What services did your child receive while in the early intervention program?

b) How did the services provided assist your child to develop skills?

c) Did the staff from the early intervention communicate with you on a regular basis?

d) Was there a person at the early intervention program with whom you had frequent contact? (Indication of identified point person.)

Question 5) Tell me about your child’s current school.

Additional questions about the parents’ perceptions of the current placement/program:

a) How is the school age program different from the early intervention program?

b) Are there differences in the services child receives now and the services that were provided in the early intervention program?

c) Did you have an opportunity to visit the program before your child was placed there? Tell me about the visit. Tell me about the information that was
provided to you about the school and/or the program before your child was placed there.
d) Is there a person at the school age program with whom you have frequent contact? (Indication of identified point person.)
e) How did the current program or school communicate with you about your child? …and their progress?

Question 6)
Tell me about moving from the early intervention program to the early childhood special education program.

Additional questions about the parents’ understanding and experiences with the transition process:

a) What is your understanding of the transition process?
b) Did you feel like a valuable and contributing member of the transition/ IEP team? Were suggestions, comments and, information that you made accepted in a positive manner?
c) What concerns did you have with the transition process?
d) Did you feel that the family’s linguistic and cultural differences impacted the services available to your child or the relationship you had with teachers and/or service providers?
REFERENCE LIST


VITA

Celia Arresola graduated from Western Illinois University in 1986 with a Bachelor of Science degree in Special Education. In 1997, Celia completed her Master of Education in Educational Leadership and Policy Studies at Northern Illinois University. In 2003, she completed a Type 75 School Administrative Certificate Program at Loyola University Chicago where she earned the Superintendent's endorsement. Celia received her Director of Special Education endorsement in 2005.

Celia began her career as an educator of students with special needs. Celia has worked as a teacher of students with behavioral and emotional disabilities in public schools and private special education programs in Illinois and Texas. In Texas, she served as an educational specialist in the area of early intervention special education. She has also been an assistant principal, a principal and the director of pupil personnel services in public school systems in Illinois. Celia has worked for the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) as a principal consultant in the Special Education Services Division.
The Dissertation submitted by Celia Arresola has been read and approved by the following committee:

Erwin Epstein, Ph. D., Director
Professor, School of Education
Loyola University Chicago

Lynne Golomb, Ph.D.,
Clinical Assistant Professor, School of Education
Loyola University Chicago

Leanne Kallemeyn, Ph.D.,
Assistant Professor, School of Education
Loyola University Chicago