Students’ and guardians’ views and experiences with the Alternative Basic Education (ABE) program in the Amhara National Regional State of Ethiopia

Åsa Elisabeth Linusson

Master of Philosophy
Comparative and International Education
Institute for Educational Research

UNIVERSITY OF OSLO
Fall 2009
Abstract

The objective of this study was to investigate how participants and guardians of participants perceive the quality and relevance of the Alternative Basic Education (ABE) program in the Amhara National Region of Ethiopia. The ABE program is a condensed version of the first cycle of Formal primary school (grades 1-4) and is a variation of Non-formal education (NFE) with features similar to the ‘community school’ approach to education. The interest in the program and the research focus arose from the fact that the Ethiopian educational authorities, like governments in several other developing countries have embraced this type of educational programs, apparently in an attempt to achieve Education For All. In 2005/06 the Gross Enrolment Ratio in ABE was at least 5, 5 % in Ethiopia and a steadily increasing share of the school age population is enrolled in the program. Findings on previous research on this type of NFE initiatives indicate that on one hand this type of approaches to education may be more relevant and accessible to the learners and the communities, including that it may enhance the participation of girls and marginalized populations. It may also be less costly to both the implementers and the communities than Formal education. On the other hand there were concerns expressed in the reviewed literature over that NFE in reality may be, or be perceived as being, of second rate to Formal education, and thus neither be more relevant to the communities nor enhance the demand and participation in education.

In order to investigate the research problem a mainly qualitative methodology was applied. The research design has features of an instrumental multiple case study, and there are also some aspects of formative evaluation. Primary data was obtained during field studies in Ethiopia in February-March 2009. Students enrolled in the last year of the ABE program, students who had transferred from ABE and were enrolled in the 5th grade of the Formal school system and guardians of present and former students in ABE participated in Focus Groups and interviews. During the field studies information about the study area and the situation with regard to education in the area was also obtained. Relevant literature on the education sector in Ethiopia, on the contemporary history and culture of the country, in particular on Ethiopian children and literature on Non-Formal Education, quality and demand for education was reviewed. The findings are discussed in light of this literature and previous research on the ABE program and other NFE initiatives for children and young people.

The findings indicated that the participants of the program and guardians of participants in ABE which were included in the study to a large extent valued the ABE program positively. The program however scored higher or lower on different quality-dimensions. In some areas, such as the infrastructure of the Alternative Basic Education Centers (ABEC), the order and discipline in the ABECs and the attendance of the facilitators, there is apparently a lot of room for improvement and these issues deserves serious attention from the implementers. In other areas, such as the organization of the education, the intended strategies on adapting to local needs seemed to be correct, but it should be ensured that intentions are followed up in practice. Some modifications of the school calendar, in order to make it more compatible with the farming seasons would possibly also signify an improvement and lower the risks of some students dropping out from school. There is also room for improvement of the curriculum, which with regards to the wide age-range of the participants in ABE, preferably should be differentiated to suit the needs of the different groups of participants. There also appeared to be an unfulfilled potential of the ABECs also serving as centers for adult education.
Acknowledgements

I wish to thank all those who have contributed to making this study possible and supported me over the long time it has taken to go through the process of producing the present thesis. First and foremost I wish to thank my supervisor, Rosah Moonga Malambo, whom has given me indispensible support and advice on the work with the thesis, which has been an interesting process through which I have also learnt a lot, but at the same time challenging. Thanks also to Professor Wim Hoppers and Professor Eva Poluha for feedback on thesis drafts. The study grant which I was given by the Nordic Africa Institute, and included a one month stay in Uppsala Sweden, helped a lot in preparing the study. Although the time there was dedicated to reviewing literature related to the initial study which focused on education in Somaliland, it gave me access to literature which was relevant also in relation to the present study, and it helped me to in general improve my research skills and find and use relevant literature. The field studies were financially made possible through a scholarship from Save the Children Norway’s Research Fund, and I am ever thankful for the support. The field studies in Ethiopia would also not have been possible to conduct without the support of the staff of Save the Children Norway-Ethiopia. In particular I wish to thank Negusie Shenkutie, Shumiye Woldesillasie and Haregewoin Tadesse at the North Gonder field office, and also the head of their partner organization Handicap National in Ayckel town, Nurele´gne Ewnetu. The data collection process was to a great extent facilitated on the way these persons received me in Ethiopia, and did their outmost to support me during the field studies. I moreover owe much to my research assistant Eden Fenta, who not only interpreted during the sometimes long hours of focus groups and interviews, but spent late nights helping me with transcriptions and assisted me in many other ways. Thanks also to Hanna Abebe Degeffie. Both Eden and Hanna were greats friends during the stay in Ethiopia, who helped me accommodate in the for me unfamiliar environment.

Thanks also to my son Ibrahim, for being the light of my life and inspiration in all my doings, and for handling so well that his mother was often busy in front of the computer or burried in books for such a long time. I in addition owe thanks to his father Mohamed A Ibrahim, to my own mother and father Ingrid Nordlander and Lasse Linusson, to Sofie Regnander and to my dear friends the Sadeghi family, in particular Sapideh Sadeghi, and Rebecca Hauge and Herman Mbamba. They all helped me to make life brighter for Ibrahim during the time I have been working on the thesis, and also made it possible for me to be away from home during the field studies.
Contents

ABSTRACT .................................................................................................................................................. I

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ................................................................................................................... III

CONTENTS ................................................................................................................................................ V

TABLES .................................................................................................................................................... XI

ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS ................................................................................................... XII

1 INTRODUCTION ........................................................................................................................................ I

1.1 FOCUSING ON NFE FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE .............................................................. 1

1.2 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS ............................................................. 3

1.3 STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS ........................................................................................................... 4

2. CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND ........................................................................................................... 6

2.1 COUNTRY CONTEXT: ETHIOPIA ........................................................................................................ 6

2.2 THE ETHIOPIAN EDUCATION POLICY AND EDUCATION SYSTEM ................................................... 8

2.2.1 Early Childhood and Care ............................................................................................................. 11

2.2.2 Primary Education .......................................................................................................................... 11

2.2.2.1 Enrolment in Primary education ............................................................................................... 12

2.2.2.2 Repetition, completion and drop out rates at primary education level ...................................... 12

2.2.2.3 The teacher force, PTR and PSR at primary education level .................................................. 13

2.2.2.4 Infrastructure, facilities and student-textbook ratios at primary education level .................. 14

2.2.2.5 Findings of the 2007 NLAs for grade 4 and 8 ........................................................................... 14

2.2.3 Post-primary education .................................................................................................................. 16

2.2.4 Challenges to the education sector ............................................................................................... 17
2.2.5 Strategies of ESDP III for coping with the challenges at primary level ............................................................. 18
2.2.6 The role of Non-formal education and Alternative basic education ................................................................. 19

2.3 THE AMHARA NATIONAL REGION AND THE EDUCATIONAL SITUATION .................................................. 21

2.3.1 The Amhara National Regional State’s ABE Program Strategy ............................................................................. 22
2.3.2 The study area ...................................................................................................................................................... 25
2.3.3 The educational situation in Chilga Woreda ......................................................................................................... 27
2.3.4 The ABECs included in the study ......................................................................................................................... 29

2.3.4.1 ABEC 1 .......................................................................................................................................................... 29
2.3.4.2 ABEC 2 ......................................................................................................................................................... 30
2.3.4.3 ABEC 3 ......................................................................................................................................................... 31
2.3.4.4 Enrolment, Promotion and Drop Out in the ABECs 2006/07-2008/09 ......................................................... 32
2.3.4.5 Facilitators ................................................................................................................................................... 33
2.3.4.6 Attendance ................................................................................................................................................... 33

2.3.5 The Formal schools included in the study ......................................................................................................... 34

2.3.5.1 School A ..................................................................................................................................................... 34
2.3.5.2 School B ..................................................................................................................................................... 36

3. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW ......................................................... 37

3.1 UNDERLYING THEORIES ................................................................................................................................. 37

3.1.1 Human Capital Theory and education .................................................................................................................. 37
3.1.2 Empowerment theory and education .................................................................................................................. 39

3.2 NON-FORMAL EDUCATION (NFE) AS A CONCEPT AND PRACTICE-FIELD ................................................. 41

3.2.1 A brief history of the concept of NFE .................................................................................................................. 41
3.2.2 NFE today ......................................................................................................................................................... 43

3.2.3 UNESCOs prototype conceptual framework for NFE ......................................................................................... 46
3.2.4 Rogers' suggestion on a new paradigm for education ................................................................. 47
3.2.5 Strengths and weaknesses of basic education NFE initiatives for children and young people ........ 49
  3.2.5.1 The 'Community schools' approach ...................................................................................... 51
3.3 QUALITY OF EDUCATION AND DEMAND FOR EDUCATION ......................................................... 54
  3.3.1 Quality of Education within the framework of EFA .................................................................... 55
  3.3.2 Demand for education ................................................................................................................. 58
    3.3.2.1 Factors outside the school system affecting the demand for education in Ethiopia ............. 58
    3.3.2.2 The impact of quality of education and school quality on the demand for education .......... 60
3.4 ETHIOPIAN CHILDREN’S LIFE WORLDS .................................................................................... 63
  3.4.1 Children in the Ethiopian social landscape ................................................................................. 63
  3.4.2 Work, responsibilities and school ............................................................................................... 64
  3.4.3 Factors affecting girls education ................................................................................................ 66
  3.4.4 The role of religion in children’s lives- in urban and rural areas ................................................ 68
3.5 PREVIOUS FINDINGS ON THE ABE PROGRAM ............................................................................ 69

4. METHODOLOGY ............................................................................................................................... 74
  4.1 METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH ............................................................................................... 74
  4.2 RESEARCH DESIGN ....................................................................................................................... 75
  4.3 FIELD STUDIES .............................................................................................................................. 76
    4.3.1 Study site ................................................................................................................................. 76
    4.3.2 Gatekeepers and access ........................................................................................................... 77
    4.3.3 Positioning of the researcher ................................................................................................... 77
    4.3.4 Working with a Research Assistant ....................................................................................... 78
  4.4 SAMPLING PROCEDURES AND SAMPLE SIZE ......................................................................... 80
4.4.1 Selection of ABECs ........................................................................................................... 81
4.4.2 Selecting students .......................................................................................................... 81
4.4.3 Selecting guardians of present and former ABE students ............................................ 82
4.5 DATA COLLECTION METHODS ......................................................................................... 83
  4.5.1 Focus Groups .................................................................................................................. 84
  4.5.2 Semi-structured individual interviews .......................................................................... 86
  4.5.3 Informal interviews and conversations ......................................................................... 87
  4.5.4 Observation .................................................................................................................. 87
  4.5.5 Documents and Secondary Sources ............................................................................ 88
4.6 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS ............................................................................................. 88
  4.6.1 Reciprocity .................................................................................................................... 89
  4.6.2 Informed consent ......................................................................................................... 89
  4.6.3 Confidentiality ............................................................................................................. 90
  4.6.4 Research Permit ........................................................................................................... 90
4.7 VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY OF THE STUDY ................................................................. 90
4.8 LIMITATIONS AND DELIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY ..................................................... 91
4.9 ANALYSIS .......................................................................................................................... 91
5. FINDINGS ............................................................................................................................... 93
  5.1 BACKGROUND OF THE PARTICIPANTS ............................................................................ 93
    5.1.1 Participants in the study and their relation to ABE ....................................................... 93
    5.1.2 Participants’ (students’) age ....................................................................................... 94
    5.1.3 Participants’ religious affiliation ............................................................................... 94
    5.1.4 Participants’ households/families .............................................................................. 95
5.1.5 Family/household-members occupation ................................................................. 95

5.1.6 Literacy in the households of the participants .......................................................... 96

5.1.7 Distance from home to the ABECs ........................................................................ 97

5.2 ENROLMENT IN ABE ......................................................................................... 97

5.2.1 The decision to enrol the students in ABE ............................................................... 97

5.2.2 Reasons for enrolling in ABE ................................................................................ 98

5.3 VIEWS AND EXPERIENCES WITH ABE AND COMPARISONS WITH FORMAL SCHOOL .............................................................................................................. 101

5.3.1 Views and experiences with the school calendar and schedule .................................. 101

5.3.3 Views and experiences with the teaching-learning process and the facilitators in ABE .............................. 102

5.3.4 Students’ perceptions of the ABE subjects’ level of difficulty .................................. 105

5.3.5 Opinions on the infrastructure at the ABECs and teaching-learning materials .......... 106

5.3.6 Views and experiences with the transfer to Formal school and the equivalency of ABE with Formal school .... 108

5.3.8 Students’ preferences for their own children’s education ....................................... 112

5.4 OUTCOMES AND BENEFITS OF THE EDUCATION ................................................. 113

5.4.1 Literacy and Numeracy skills among the students .................................................. 113

5.4.2 Usefulness of the education .................................................................................... 114

5.5 CHALLENGES AND SUPPORT TO EDUCATION IN THE HOME-ENVIRONMENT ................................................................................................................. 116

5.5.1 Guardians support or lack of support to the children’s education ......................... 116

5.5.2 Actual and possible reasons for dropping out of school ......................................... 118

6. DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS ........................................... 123

6.1 WHAT TYPE OF NFE PROGRAM IS ABE? AND WHAT CAN THUS BE EXPECTED OF IT? ................................. 123

6.2 PARTICIPANTS’ VIEWS AND EXPERIENCES WITH THE ABE PROGRAM SUMMARIZED .................................................. 126

6.2.1 Positive features of the program ............................................................................. 126
6.2.2 Negative features of the program

6.2.3 Differences in the views and experiences with regards to participants’ background or relation to ABE

6.3 The quality and relevance of ABE

6.3.1 Relevance of the organization of the education

6.3.2 The role of ‘value quality’

6.3.3 Quality inputs and processes?

6.3.4 ABE’s equivalence to the first cycle of Formal primary school

6.3.5 The quality and relevance of the learning outcomes

6.3.6 Addressing gender equity in education

6.3.7 Possible challenges of multi-age classes

6.4 Conclusions

References

Appendix 1 Interview Guides

Appendix 2 Interviews and Focus Groups Conducted

Appendix 3 Informed Consent Form
Tables

TABLE 1 THE EDUCATION FOR ALL (EFA) GOALS .............................................................. 12
TABLE 2 THE MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS (MDG) ........................................ 13
TABLE 3 ACHIEVEMENT PERFORMANCE LEVEL GRADE 4 NATIONAL LEVEL .......... 26
TABLE 4 ACHIEVEMENT PERFORMANCE LEVEL GRADE 8 NATIONAL LEVEL .......... 26
TABLE 5 EDUCATION STATISTICS FOR CHILGA WOREDA 2006/07-2008/09 ............. 38
TABLE 6 ENROLMENT IN THE ABECS INCLUDED IN THE STUDY 2006/07-2008/09 ...... 42
TABLE 7 STUDENTS´ PROMOTED AND REPEATED IN THE ABECS INCLUDED IN THE STUDY 2006/07-2008/09 ................................................................................................................. 42
TABLE 8 STUDENTS DROPPED OUT FROM THE 3 ABECS INCLUDED IN THE STUDY 2006/07-2008/09 ...................................................................................................................... 42
TABLE 9 NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS IN THE STUDY AND THEIR RELATION TO ABE ................................................................................................................................. 98
TABLE 10 PARTICIPANTS´ (STUDENTS´) AGE .................................................................. 99
TABLE 11 PARTICIPANTS´ DISTANCE FROM HOME TO THE ABECS ........................... 102
TABLE 12 PARTICIPANTS´ STATED REASONS FOR ENROLLING IN ABE ................. 102
TABLE 13 STUDENTS´ PREFERENCES FOR THEIR OWN CHILDREN'S EDUCATION 117
## Abbreviations and acronyms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbr</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AABE</td>
<td>Alternative Approaches to Basic Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABE</td>
<td>Alternative Basic Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABEC</td>
<td>Alternative Basic Education Center</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACCESS</td>
<td>Appropriate, Cost-effective Centers for Education within the School System</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BRAC</td>
<td>Bangladesh Rural Advancement committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BOFED</td>
<td>Bureau of Finance and Economic Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CIA</td>
<td>Central Intelligence Agency (US)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSA</td>
<td>Central Statistics Agency (ET)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSO</td>
<td>Civil Society Organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DFID</td>
<td>Department For International Development (UK)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ECCE</td>
<td>Early Childhood Care and Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EFA</td>
<td>Education For All</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EPRDF</td>
<td>Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESDP</td>
<td>Education Sector Development Program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ETP</td>
<td>Education and Training Policy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FG</td>
<td>Focus Group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FGM</td>
<td>Female Genital Mutilation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GER</td>
<td>Gross Enrolment Ratio&lt;sup&gt;1&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GDP</td>
<td>Gross Domestic Product</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HTP</td>
<td>Harmful Traditional Practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IMF</td>
<td>International Monetary Fund</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INGO</td>
<td>International Non-Governmental Organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LOI</td>
<td>Language of Instruction</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<sup>1</sup> The number of students enrolled at a certain level in the education system, regardless of age, expressed as a percentage of the population of official school age for the level.
MDG  Millennium Development Goal
MOE  Ministry of Education
NER  Net Enrolment Ratio
NFE  Non-Formal Education
NGO  Non-Governmental Organization
NLA  National Learnings Assessment
PSR  Pupil-Section Ratio
PTA  Parent-Teacher Associations
PTR  Pupil-Teacher Ratio
REB  Regional Education Bureau
RA  Research Assistant
SCN-E  Save the Children Norway-Ethiopia
SCD-E  Save the Children Denmark-Ethiopia
SIDA  Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency
SNNPR  Southern Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples Region
TTC  Teacher Training Certificate
TTI  Teacher Training Institute
TVET  Technical and Vocational Training and Education
UNDP  United Nations Development Program
UNESCO  United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF  United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
UPE  Universal Primary Education
USAID  United States Agency for International Development
WEO  Woreda Education Office
ZEB  Zonal Education Bureau

2 The number of students within the official school age enrolled at a certain level in the education system, expressed as a percentage of the population of official school age for the level.
1 Introduction

1.1 Focusing on NFE for children and young people

The reason for the interest in the ABE program rose from an interest in the field of Non-formal education. As NFE includes a great variety of programs and approaches to education, it appeared relevant to focus on a type of program which increasingly has become an interest in developing countries. It appears as the EFA project has lead to a general renewed interest in NFE for children and youth, and this so also in Ethiopia, and in particular in types of equivalency schooling and so called accelerated learning systems; condensed versions of the Formal school program. In UNESCOs view the EFA goals which were revised in Dakar in 2000 and expressed in the Dakar Framework for Action do not specifically refer to the field of NFE, but NFE is however at the heart of the EFA challenge, since achieving the EFA goals by conventional or Formal education would not be possible. According to UNESCOs all but the second goal in the Dakar Framework for Action relate to NFE (UNESCO 2005).

Table 1 The Education For All (EFA) goals

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The six goals of the Dakar Framework for Action (UNESCO 2004)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Expanding and improving comprehensive early childhood care and education, especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Ensuring that by 2015 all children, particularly girls, children in difficult circumstances and those belonging to ethnic minorities, have access to and complete free and compulsory primary education of good quality;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Ensuring that the learning needs of all young people and adults are met through equitable access to appropriate learning and life skills programs;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Achieving a 50 per cent improvement in levels of adult literacy by 2015, especially for women, and equitable access to basic and continuing education for all adults;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Eliminating gender disparities in primary and secondary education by 2005, and achieving gender equality in education by 2015, with a focus on ensuring girls' full and equal access to and achievement in basic education of good quality;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Improving all aspects of the quality of education and ensuring excellence of all so that recognized and measurable learning outcomes are achieved by all, especially in literacy, numeracy and essential life skills.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
UNESCO (2005) is also of the opinion that although the second Millennium Development Goal (MDG) focuses on Formal education, NFE learning opportunities are implicit in several of the MDGs. Elaborating on this it is pointed to that the MDG to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger will be difficult to achieve without investing in all forms of education. Putting particular efforts into NFE would according to UNESCO be of importance in this relation, as NFE most effectively reaches disadvantaged populations. The MDG for reducing child mortality and improving maternal health requires in UNESCOs view as well investment in non-formal training in ECCE and NFE programs in life skills for women. Also the MDGs of combating HIV/AIDS and malaria and for ensuring environmental sustainability would require more focus on NFE (UNESCO 2005).

Table 2 The Millennium Development Goals (MDG)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Millennium Development Goals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Goal 1: Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goal 2: Achieve universal primary education of good quality.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goal 3: Promote gender equality and empower women.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goal 4: Reduce child mortality.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goal 5: Improve maternal health.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goal 6: Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goal 7: Ensure environmental sustainability.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goal 8: Develop a global partnership for development</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Research on various types of NFE initiatives has found that NFE has certain strengths, and may be more suitable than Formal education in some contexts. It is also possible to view NFE, not as a different type of education than Formal education, but that there are non-formal education elements which are applicable and may be useful in the Formal system of education. Among the claimed or experienced strengths of NFE are that the provision of the education decreases the costs of the education to the learners and communities and that the implementation costs may be lower than for Formal education. Common measures taken for this end are for example localizing of schools and
education centers close to the learners, use of flexible school calendars and schedules, and some places where populations are nomadic or semi-nomadic mobile schools are used. The curriculum of the education may also be made more relevant to the learners and their communities through involvement of guardians and community-members in the planning and implementation of the educational programs, more elements of life skills education, and through the use of local, often para-professional staff. Overall NFE is often claimed to take a demand-side to education and may enhance the participation of groups which may see the Formal education as irrelevant or non-affordable when weighed up against its costs (Hoppers 2005a, Bekalo and Bangay 2002, Bekalo et al 2003). It is at the same time important to focus on how NFE in practice is implemented, as rhetorics may not always have support in reality, and take into account the less promising findings on NFE. Among the weaknesses are that the target groups of NFE may view NFE as second rate to Formal education (Hoppers 2005b). This includes that localization of the curriculum may be viewed with skepticism when certification of education and the external efficiency of education is emphasized rather than the content and its more immediate usefulness. This may be the case also in Ethiopia (Bekalo and Bangay 2002, Bhalalusesa 2005). Thus NFE may in fact not enhance the demand for education. The total costs of the education may in fact also not be much lower to the communities, when much of the responsibility for the provision is laid on those rather than taken by the government, and there is an important question of equity to be raised (Bekalo et al 2003, Hoppers 2005b, Rogers 2005).

1.2 Objectives of the study and Research questions

The Alternative Basic Education (ABE) program in Ethiopia is a program which aims at both providing the equivalency to the first cycle of Formal primary school, through a condensed version of the curriculum for Formal school, and making the program more relevant to the communities (which are predominantly rural and poor). Much of the responsibility for the provision of ABE is laid on the communities. In 2005/06 the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) for ABE was 5.5%, but as 4 of the 9 regions which make up the Federal state of Ethiopia did not report data on ABE to the Ministry of Education (MOE), the number of participants in the program may be assumed to be much higher. NFE, and in particular ABE is increasingly an important part of the national education strategy to cope with the challenges of the Formal system (MOE 2005, MOE 2007). The program
thus concerns a large number of children and young people in the country, and when preparing the present study I was interested in trying to capture some of these children and youth’s perspectives on the program. In particular I wanted to investigate how those directly involved with the programs, the participants and their guardians, viewed the quality and relevance of the program. The research questions which guided the study were the following:

1. How do present and former students view their participation in the ABE program; how do they perceive the quality of the program and the value of the education for their daily lives and for their future?

2. How is the quality and relevance of the ABE program perceived by guardians of present and former participants of the program?

3. Do the students and guardians views and experiences with the program match the implementers’ aims of the program?

Initially I had planned a study which focused on the Alternative Approaches to Basic Education (AABE) program in Somaliland (North-West Somalia). Due to the suddenly deteriorated security situation in Hargeysa in the fall of 2008 the plans however had change. This lead to that the study was instead focused on the ABE program in Ethiopia, a choice which was made after recommendations from the Norwegian Refugee Council in Somaliland and after communication with Save the Children Norway (SCN-E). Though it is lamentable that it was not possible to carry out the planned study, focusing on the ABE program in Ethiopia had its advantages during the research process. The ABE program has been run in Ethiopia for a much longer time than the AABE program in Somaliland and there were more previous studied on the program carried out. Thus there was more information available which helped in preparing the present study and it also helped in analyzing the present data, as it was possible to compare the present data with previous findings.

1.3 Structure of the thesis

After this introduction to the present study Chapter 2 presents the general context and background to the study. Also the more immediate study context and the Formal schools and Alternative Basic
Education Centers (ABEC) where the study was conducted are presented in this chapter. In Chapter 3 the methodological approach taken to the study is outlined, the research design and some methodological and ethical issues are discussed. In Chapter 4 the Conceptual framework of the thesis and review of relevant literature and research is presented, to be followed by a presentation of the Findings from the field studies in Chapter 5. Finally, in Chapter 6, the findings are discussed in light of literature and research presented in Chapter 4, and the conclusions of the study are presented.
2. Context and Background

In this chapter the context and the background of the ABE program, and the present study is presented. The first part of the chapter presents the country context and the educational situation at the national level. Most of the information provided is on the primary educational level and on the first cycle of primary education, as this is the level equivalent to ABE within the Formal school system. The strategy of the ABE program at regional level, which is also the strategy used at zonal and woreda (municipality) level, is also presented. The latter part of the chapter provides information on the more immediate study context and on the Formal schools and ABECs included in the study.

2.1 Country context: Ethiopia

Ethiopia, situated on the horn of Africa, has been described as a piece of mosaic with regards to its geography, history and people. It is the home of 80 ethnic groups with different languages or dialects, cultures and religions, and also one of the most populous countries on the African continent. According to figures from the 2007 Population and Housing Census the country has a total population of 73, 5 million inhabitants and of these 84 % are found in rural areas (CSA 2008). Other estimates from 2009 however set the total population as high as 85, 2 millions (CIA 2009). Based on the latter figure the age composition of the population in 2009 are that 46, 1 % are in the age group 0-14 years, while persons 15-64 years of age count for 51, 2 % and persons 65 years and older for as little as 2, 7 %. The estimated population growth rate is 3, 2, on average a woman in Ethiopia gives birth to 6.12 children, and the infant mortality rate is 8 %, while the under five mortality rate was 12, 3 % in 2005 (CIA 2009, DFID 2009). The life expectancy at birth is 52, 9 and 58 years for men and women respectively (CIA 2009). About 85 % of the population lives from rain-fed subsistence agriculture, and agriculture accounted in 2005/06 for 46 % of the country’s GDP (DFID 2009, MOE 2005). 85 % of the country’s export earnings are generated from the agricultural sector, coffee, hides, livestock and oil being the most important export products (Bekalo

---

3 Conventional population census excludes population residing in the collective quarters such as universities and colleges, Hotels and hostels, monasteries and homeless population, which in 2007 made up a population of 416 489 persons in total in the country.
This makes the country’s economy and access to food vulnerable to external shocks and changes in the weather, and drought has several times in the last decades led to widespread famine (DFID 2009). The country is one of the poorest in the world, with per capita income not exceeding 100 USD, and about 39% of the population lives below the poverty line (DFID 2009, MOE 2005). The adult literacy rate is according to MOE (2005) 41, 5% (33, 8% for women and 49, 2% for men). There are however large regional disparities, ranging from 83% in Addis Ababa to 25% in the rural Amhara Region (UNESCO 2009). Major health challenges are for example Malaria and HIV/AIDS. In 2007 it was estimated that the adult HIV prevalence was 2, 1%, but there are large differences between the regions and between urban and rural areas (CIA 2009). In 2008 33% of the population had access to safe drinking water (DFID 2009). According to DFID (2009) there is progress towards most of the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) in Ethiopia, but not fast enough to ensure that any of the goals will be achieved by 2015.

In the last century the country was governed by highly centralized regimes; first the feudal imperial regime and after the military coup in 1974 when emperor Haile Selassie was overthrown, the Derg and Mengistu Haile Mariam ruled the country through its military regime and “the red terror” until 1991 when also this regime was overthrown. Since then the country has been governed by the Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), and the new regime made Ethiopia a federal republic. Ethiopia is composed of nine regions based on ethnicity and linguistic affiliation: Afar, Somali, Amhara, Oromia, Gambella, Benishangul Gumuz, Tigray, Harare and the Southern Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples Region (SNNPR), and 3 city charters; Addis Ababa, Dire Dawa and Harare. The regions are divided into zones and further into woredas (municipalities). Many mandates have been evolved first to the regional states, and then to the zonal authorities and woredas, though it has been contested whether this seemingly decentralization of power is actually a sign of increasing democracy (CIA 2009, Aalen and Tronvoll 2009). The claimed democratic features of the current regime have as well been questioned and increasingly so since the last elections in 2005. The EPRDF were then re-elected but faced serious accusations of fraud from the opposition, and domestic and international observers reported widespread irregularities in the election process. There are also limited possibilities of political opposition, and restricted freedom of speech, as the government uses both restrictive laws (for example the media law), fining, harassments, torture and imprisonments to curtail political oppositionist, journalists, lawyers and others expressing critical opinions on the current order and regime (Aalen and Tronvoll 2009). In
January 2009 a law was also passed which restricts the activities of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), as organizations getting more than 10% of income from abroad are prohibited from working with issues such as human rights, including children’s and women’s rights, conflict resolution and reconciliation and justice and law enforcement services. A government-appointed agency is also given rights to interfere in internal affairs and also deny CSOs license if it wishes so. If implemented fully the law would have serious consequences for Ethiopian CSOs as well as INGOs operating in the country as very few CSOs at present are Ethiopian-based according to the new definition, and the penalties for breaking the law are up to several years of imprisonment. So far the law has not been implemented as the organizations it may affect have been given some time to reorganize their activities and finances (Aalen and Tronvoll 2009, Human Rights Watch 2009, CIA 2009). At the same time as the Ethiopian at present is challenging the CSO-sector, it calls for cooperation in among other areas education. In the following section we take a closer look at the education system and the educational situation at national level in Ethiopia.

2.2 The Ethiopian education policy and education system

The federal MOE (2005) states that high priority is given to poverty reduction for overall socio-economic development and education is considered a priority alongside roads, agriculture and natural resources and the health sector in the poverty reduction strategy. This so as the government recognizes the need for substantial additional skilled and trained human power at all levels. It is as well pointed to by the MOE (2005) that international research has showed that a person with at least 4 or 5 years of primary education is more productive than someone who is illiterate. This minimum of education generally implies higher income which in turn decreases the level of poverty, and also more responsiveness to attitudinal changes on matters such as nutrition, health, family planning, which has importance for non-income poverty (MOE 2005). Since 2001/02 the Ethiopian government has allocated the highest proportion of its national budget to the education sector, and the share of the education and training expenditure out of the total government expenditure for the year 2004/05 was 17, 82% (MOE 2007, Anís 2007). The activities in the education sector are since 2005/06 directed by the third Education Sector Development Program (ESDP III), which is part of a twenty-year education sector indicative plan, within the framework of the Education and Training Policy (ETP). The ETP was adopted in 1994 as the country’s new constitution became effective and
among the important changes which came with it was that education administration was decentralized to the regional states (MOE 2005). The MOE has a coordinating role in the provision of education, and sets forward frameworks and policies while the regions are the main implementers and they control the financing of education (Anís 2007). Other important changes which came with the new ETP were that the ethnic or regional languages were made languages of instruction (LOI) in the first six grades of primary education. Since then 22 languages are reported to be used as LOIs. The new policy also opened up for private providers of education (Anís 2007, Negash 2006). The first ESDP was launched in 1997 and lasted between the years 1997/98 and 2001/02, ESDP II lasted between 2002/03 and 2004/05 and the current ESDP III spans from 2005/06 to 2010/11 (MOE 2005). Primary education is the highest priority for the government and receives the highest share (50, 6 %) from the total estimated expenditure of ESDP III (MOE 2005). The federal ministry funds regional governments which allocate funds to Regional Education Bureaus (REBs) which in turn allocate funds to Zonal Education Bureaus (ZEB). Regions have a great deal of discretion in allocating funding to education and in choosing priorities and strategies. In a separate funding stream, the regional councils directly allocate funding to the woreda administrations through block grants and the woredas also have a large amount of discretion in how to allocate these grants (Anís 2007). The majority of the woreda block grants, ranging from 33 % to 66 %, usually go to education, with most of the resources being spent on teachers’ salaries. The non-salary budget per student is small (Anís 2007, MOE 2005).

When the current regime came into power the participation in education, and the efficiency and quality of the education provided, was rather low at all levels. At the time the ETP was launched the GER in primary education was below 22 % and in 1996/97, the year before the launching of the ESDP the Net Enrolment Ratio (NER) in primary education was 24, 9 %. 426 495 students were enrolled in 369 secondary schools and the intake capacity of government higher education institutions was as low as 9 067, with a share of 20, 2 % female students. The repetition and drop out rates for the whole primary level were 11, 9 % and 15, 8 % (16 % for boys and 15, 6 % for girls) respectively and in grade 1 as high as 16, 7 % (18, 6 % for girls, 15, 7 % for boys) and 29 % respectively. The Pupil-Teacher Ratio (PTR) was however reasonably low; 42 at primary level and 35 at secondary level, though the Pupil-Section Ratio (PSR) was higher; at primary level 57 and at secondary level 65. The repetition and drop out rates for grade 9 were also high: 23, 2 % (17, 9 %
for boys and 29, 7% for girls) and 9, 2% (9, 5% for boys and 8, 9% for girls) respectively (Transitional Government of Ethiopia 1994, MOE 2005).

The vision of the education sector is;

“...to see all school-age children get access to quality primary education by the year 2015 and realize the creation of trained and skilled human power at all levels who will be driving forces in the promotion of democracy and development in the country” (MOE 2005: 5).

This is in line with the priorities of the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper 4 which was presented to the World Bank and the IMF in 2002, and the MDGs (MOE 2005). The mission of the education sector is stated to be to:

- "Extend quality and relevant primary education to all school-age children and expand standardized education and training programs at all levels to bring about rapid and sustainable development with increased involvement of different stakeholders (community, private investors, NGOs, etc.)

- Ensure that educational establishments are production centers for all-rounded, competent, disciplined and educated human power at all levels through the inclusion of civic and ethical education with trained, competent and committed teachers.

- Take affirmative actions to ensure equity of female participation, pastoral and agro-pastoral and those with special needs in all education and training programs and increase their role and participation in development” (MOE 2005:5-6).

In sum the ESDP has as its main thrust to improve quality, relevance, equity, and efficiency and to expand access to education in order to achieve Universal Primary Education (UPE) by 2015. Special attention is given to primary education in rural and underserved areas and education for girls (MOE 2005). A strategy to achieve the goals set up for the education sector has been to decentralize decision-making and responsibility from regions and zones to woredas and kebeles5 and further to school level, with the aim of improving direct response and service delivery. Communities and Parent Teacher Associations (PTAs) are also playing important roles in all aspects of education. The involvement includes resource mobilization for building classrooms and schools, hiring and remuneration of teachers and construction of teachers’ houses. It also includes awareness-raising of the general community on the benefits of education and in encouraging parents to send their

---

4 The Ethiopian Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper is also known as the Sustainable Development and Poverty Reduction Program.

5 Kebele = community; neighborhood or village.
children to school, school management, preparing annual plans and follow-up of disciplinary cases. Community involvement has according to the MOE become instrumental for enhancing enrolment, lowering dropout and repetition rates and restoring good discipline in schools. It is however considered that PTAs and communities need further capacity enhancement in order to support schools to function to the desired level (MOE 2005). As mentioned in section 2.1, and which is also discussed further on in the thesis it is however also a question whether the decentralization of responsibility in practice signifies decentralization of power, and to what extent it contributes to “direct response and service delivery” for the communities.

2.2.1 Early Childhood and Care

The education system in Ethiopia consists at the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) level of Preschool or Kindergarten of 3 years for children aged 4-6 years old. The ETP states that education at the ECCE level should be focused on the all round development of the child in preparation for Formal schooling (Transitional Government of Ethiopia 1994, Camfield and Tafere 2009). At present it is however only provided in the major urban areas and often private or run by NGOs. Though the GER in 2005/06 was as high as 40, 3 % in Addis Ababa the GER in the other regions varied between 6, 1 % in Harare and 0, 5 % in Afar. At national level the GER was by the MOE reported to be 2,7 % in 2005/06 though it is commented that the data did not include all NGO- run preschools, and the figures thus might be higher (MOE 2007, Camfield and Tafere 2009). In order to enhance access to preschool an ECCE strategy was adopted in 2008 which aims at providing government-funded preschools and extend the provision of ECCE to rural areas (Camfield and Tafere 2009).

2.2.2 Primary Education

Primary education is of eight years duration. The ETP states that primary education should offer basic and general primary education to prepare students for further general education and training. As part of basic education the focus of primary education is on literacy, numeracy, environment, agriculture, crafts, home science, health services and civics (Transitional Government of Ethiopia 1994). The primary level is divided into two cycles of 4 grades each in which children of the ages 7-10 and 11-14 respectively should be enrolled. Education is compulsory up to grade 7, which relates to that the legal age to start working in Ethiopia is 14 years. In the first cycle, grades 1-4, there is
one teacher for all subjects, which are English, Environmental Sciences, Mother Tongue Language, Mathematics and Aesthetics and integration of the subjects is pursued. Progression is automatic up to grade 4 when there is an examination held to determine promotion. In the second cycle there is progression by examination, and teachers are specialized in the different subjects. Environmental Sciences at this level split into Physics, Chemistry, Biology and Social Studies. The LOI is supposed to be the mother tongue of the learners, though in practice the dominant regional language is often used, and in some regions the LOI is English from grade 6 or 7. In both cycles lessons are often provided in a shift-system in the rural areas, while in urban areas full-day school is more common (Transitional Government of Ethiopia 1994, Camfield and Tafere 2009, MOE 2007).

2.2.2.1 Enrolment in Primary education

The GER, not including enrolment in ABE, for the whole primary level in 2005/06 was 85.8 %, (92.9 % for boys and 78.5 % for girls), whereas the NER, including ABE, was 77.5 % (81.7 % for boys and 73.2 % for girls) in the same year (MOE 2007). There are however large differences between regions and urban and rural areas. In 2005/06 the GER varied between 148.5 % in Addis Ababa and 21.9 % in Afar, and the urban-rural gap in GER was as high as 85.3 percentage points in 2004/5 (MOE 2007, MOE 2005). The girls to boys ratio is 0.84 at national level, ranging between 1.19 in Addis Ababa and 0.62 in Gambella (MOE 2007).

2.2.2.2 Repetition, completion and drop out rates at primary education level

Students are allowed to repeat maximum two grades of primary school (MOE 2007). The repetition rate in grade 1 was 2.94 % (3.1 % for girls and 2.8 % for boys) in 2003/2004 and the repetition rate for the whole primary level was 3.8 % (3.8 % for boys and 3.7 % for girls) in 2004/05 (MOE 2005, MOE 2007). The proportion of students who leave school varies from grade to grade. In most cases this figure is higher for grade one, and lowest in grade 6. In all grades except grade 8 the rate of drop out is higher for boys than girls. The drop out rate in grade 1 was 20.6 % in 2004/05, while for the whole primary level the figure on drop out was 11.8 % in the same year (MOE 2007). There are however regional differences with the capital, where the large majority of children attend school, showing low drop out rates while there are high drop out rates in regions such as Gambella and Afar. The drop out rates for girls are also much higher in regions such as Gambella and Somali (MOE 2005, MOE 2007). The completion rate for the full primary school level is by the MOE
(2007) approximated by the gross intake ratio in grade 8, which in 2005/06 was 41, 7 %. The survival rate at grade 5 is used to estimate the percentage of students completing the first cycle of primary education, and was 62, 7 % in 2005/06. The completion of the first cycle is counted as important as the completion of at least 4 years of schooling is considered as a pre-requisite for a sustainable level of literacy. There are at both levels recognizable gender disparities in favor of boys, and especially so with regards to completion of the full primary school level.

2.2.2.3 The teacher force, PTR and PSR at primary education level

The quality of the teacher force is considered important for the quality of the education provided and much effort has been made during ESDP to improve the teaching force in Ethiopia in terms of both quantity and training. Pre-service teacher training has been expanded as well as the use of various types of in-service teacher training programs such as distance education, extension classes and summer programs. A school cluster approach has been used as a platform for a school-based training system, focusing on teachers’ effectiveness in classroom teaching, including training in effective implementation of continuous assessment, child centered teaching approaches and better classroom management skills (MOE 2005). At the time of the launching of ESDP III the size of the teaching force had increased by 61, 4 % since the start of the first ESDP (MOE 2005). The proportion of certified primary school teachers was 97, 6 % in 2005/06 at the national level for the first cycle of primary school, which requires Teacher Training Institute (TTI) certificate. While for the second cycle, requiring Teacher Training Certificate (TTC), it was 59, 4 %. 43 % of teachers at first cycle primary level, and 19 % of the teachers in the second cycle were female in the same year (MOE 2007). The increase in the teaching force has however not kept up with the increase in enrolment and the PTR at primary level has been increasing continuously since the launching of the ESDP. The standard set for the PTR is 50 for the primary level. The MOE (2007) explains that while on one hand a low PTR gives more opportunity for contact between teachers and students and thus may enhance the quality of education, a low PTR may also mean inefficient use of resources. Similar reasons are given for the target set of ESDP III for the PSR at 66, 2 for the primary level. In 2004/05 the PTR at primary level was 66 and in 2005/06 the PSR was 69 (MOE 2005, MOE 2007).
2.2.2.4 Infrastructure, facilities and student-textbook ratios at primary education level

Harare and Addis Ababa had in 2003/04 attained a 1:1 student-textbook ratio, while the ratio varied from 2:1 to 5:1 in the other regions (MOE 2005). With regards to the infrastructure and facilities of schools 40, 8 % of primary schools and 76, 1 % of secondary schools reported in 2005/06 that they had water facilities and 71, 7 % of all schools at primary and secondary level reported having latrines. 65 % of the primary schools reported that they had pedagogical centers, and of all schools at primary and secondary level 2, 4 % reported that they had clinics serving students (MOE 2007). School feeding was identified as a strategy in ESDP II to raise and maintain school enrolment and in 2004/2005 about 544 000 primary school students were reached in 6 regions (Afar, Somali, Oromia, Amhara, Tigray and SNNPR). The program is reported to have contributed to reducing drop outs, stabilizing attendance, improving children’s ability to learn, and reducing the gender gap (MOE 2005).

2.2.2.5 Findings of the 2007 NLAs for grade 4 and 8

The latest National Learnings Assessments (NLA) for grade 4 and grade 8 students were carried out in 2007 and included students from schools all over Ethiopia. Among the findings for grade 4 were that the majority of the students performed at a “below basic” level, signifying below the mean score, while around a third of students performed at a “basic” level, signifying within 1 standard deviation above the mean score. Only a minority performed at a “proficient” level, meaning 1 standard deviation or higher above the mean score. The gender differences ranged between 0, 23 % and 2, 36 % in favor of the boys in the subjects tested, and students from rural schools performed better than students from urban schools in all subjects. There were also large regional differences in students’ performances, with Amhara and Addis Ababa on top and Gambella and Somali at the bottom. Among variables found to have a relation with higher academic performance were parents’ economic capacity to provide clothes, school materials and adequate meals for the students, availability of books, dictionary and radio in the home, students’ attitudes to school and self-esteem. Supervision and in-service training for teachers, availability of teaching-materials and teachers’ perception of the students’ attitudes towards school, punctuality and discipline were also positively correlated with achievement. Income generating activities of the schools and community involvement in school affairs were also factors found to contribute to students’ achievements. Distance to school, television in the home, and absence of factors related to higher academic
achievement were found to be related to lower academic achievement. Students’ attitudes towards issues related to health and environment, civics, ethics and culture were also investigated and it was found that the “social development curriculum is making a difference in shaping students’ attitudes towards socially relevant issues” (MOE 2008a: 55), and that the development was in a positive direction. It was however found that guardians of students in most regions had doubts over the quality and the relevance of what the children learned in school (MOE 2008a). In the NLA conducted on 8th grade students an even larger majority of the students performed “below basic”, though the share of students performing at a “proficient” level was similar to students’ achievement in the 4th grade. Like in the NLA for the 4th grade, boys achieved higher mean scores than girls in all subjects (3, 3 - 4, 8 %), students in rural schools performed better than students in urban areas in all subjects except English, and there were large regional differences, with Tigray on top and Gambella at the bottom. Other findings were similar to those of the NLA for 4th grade students, but it was also found that when local languages was used as LOI students performed better than when the LOI was English (MOE 2008b).

Table 3 Achievement performance level grade 4 national level

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Proficient (%)</th>
<th>Basic (%)</th>
<th>Below basic (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reading (mother tongue)</td>
<td>14, 6</td>
<td>33, 7</td>
<td>51, 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>16, 9</td>
<td>31, 5</td>
<td>51, 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mathematics</td>
<td>17, 1</td>
<td>29, 0</td>
<td>53, 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environmental Sciences</td>
<td>16, 3</td>
<td>38, 5</td>
<td>45, 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Composite</td>
<td>14, 7</td>
<td>37, 8</td>
<td>47, 4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: General Education Quality Assurance and Examinations Agency (MOE 2008a)

Table 4 Achievement performance level grade 8 national level

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Proficient (%)</th>
<th>Basic (%)</th>
<th>Below basic (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>15, 2</td>
<td>25, 1</td>
<td>59, 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mathematics</td>
<td>14, 5</td>
<td>26, 0</td>
<td>59, 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biology</td>
<td>17, 0</td>
<td>25, 1</td>
<td>57, 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chemistry</td>
<td>14, 8</td>
<td>29, 2</td>
<td>56, 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physics</td>
<td>14, 2</td>
<td>31, 6</td>
<td>54, 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Composite</td>
<td>13, 9</td>
<td>24, 0</td>
<td>62, 1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: General Education Quality Assurance and Examinations Agency (MOE 2008b)
2.2.3 Post-primary education

Secondary school consists of 4 years, of which the two first years are General secondary education (grades 9 and 10) which is aimed at “...enable students identify their interests for further education, for specific training and for the world of work” (Transitional Government of Ethiopia 1994: 14). Following this is High school which consists of grades 11 and 12, and is preparatory to tertiary education. An additional year qualifies students for Diploma. The LOI at secondary level is English, though due to teachers’ low levels of proficiency in English classes may be held entirely or partly in a vernacular in some places (Negash 2006). Most secondary schools are located in urban centers (Camfield and Tafere 2009). In 2005/06 there were 1 066 423 students enrolled in General secondary school and of these 36, 4 % were girls, which gives a GER of 33, 2 % (41, 6 % for boys, 24, 5 % for girls). The total number of students enrolled in High school was in the same year 123 683, out of which 25, 7 % were girls (MOE 2007). Although there has been an increase in the student population at this level, the growth for female students has been much less than that of boys. Among the teachers at the secondary school level 49, 6 % were in 2005/06 certified at secondary level, with the minimum standard for secondary school teachers being a first degree in a major subject, though the teachers’ qualifications varied between regions from 85, 1 % in Dire Dawa to 32, 3 % in Somali. The PTR for the secondary school level was 57 in 2005/06 and the PSR was 82 in 2004/05 (MOE 2007). To cope with the shortage of teachers and low proficiency to teach in English televised teaching (plasma education), beamed from South Africa, has been in use in secondary schools since 2004 (Negash 2006).

Technical and Vocational training and education (TVET) is also provided at this level, for the development of middle level manpower. At the level of general secondary education Junior TVET is provided. At the level of high school it is possible to take 2 years of Medium TVET, with an additional year qualifying for a Diploma which also allows for application to University after a period of work-training (World Bank 2005, Camfield and Tafere 2009). In 2005/06 there were 113 government and 156 non-government TVET institutions in the country enrolling a total of 123 557 students. The share of female enrollment was 50, 3 %. During the same year, there were also 25 government TVET centers run by the Ministry of Agriculture, reporting enrolment of a total of 37 029 students (88 % male). Total enrollment in TVET was due to lack of data from all TVET-institutions however estimated by the MOE to be higher than this (MOE 2007). Teacher-training
consists of general secondary education and 1 additional year in Teacher Training Institute (TTI) or 3 additional years qualifying for a Teacher Training Certificate (TTC) (World Bank 2005).

6 Universities (Mekelle, Jimma, Bahir Dar, Debub, Gonder and Arbaminch) have been established since the start of ESDP in addition to the then existing ones (Addis Ababa and Alemaya). The government has also been encouraging private investors in tertiary education (MOE 2005). The total enrolment in Higher education institutions, both government and private, has increased severely during the ESDP, from 42,132 in 1996/97 to 192,165 in 2004/05, with the share of female students being 24.8 % in 2005/06. The total number of graduates from all programs was 26,723, of which 15.8 % were females, in 2005/06 (MOE 2005, MOE 2007).

2.2.4 Challenges to the education sector

According to what has been presented until now, it is possible to say that important achievements have been made in several areas during the ESDP, but there are still major challenges to be faced in order to achieve the goals set up for the education sector. There are also different opinions on whether primary education will be universal in Ethiopia by 2015. UNDP has suggested that Ethiopia has considerable potential to achieve the goal of UPE even before 2015, while at the same time recognizing that that there are persistent problems within the formal education system, as well as external factors that affect household decisions on schooling could prevent the goal from being met (Jones and Pereznieto 2006). According to the 2009 EFA Global Monitoring Report the prospects are that there still will be 1.1 million children outside the education system in 2015 (UNESCO 2008). What the MOE (2005) considers to be the among the most prominent and persistent challenges facing the Ethiopian education system is the quality of education, which has been a cost of the rapid expansion of access and the shortage of qualified teachers, especially in the second cycle of primary school and in secondary schools. There is also the challenge with over aged children in addition to the school-age group, and lack of adequate textbook management systems resulting in inefficient procurement and distribution. Other challenges are low budget utilization in civil works and procurement, which is said to be a result of weak program management and implementation capacity, including high turnover of professional personnel leading to educational personnel with little or no experience or expertise in the relevant field. Inadequate planning and management capacity is according to the MOE (2005) in particular a problem at woreda level. There is also a lack of harmonization of donor and government procedures with regard to planning,
approving, implementing, procuring and reporting, and this has contributed to delays in the implementation process (MOE 2005). To the challenges on the supply-side adds the constraints for enrolment and completion of education from the demand-side perspective, which are discussed in chapter 3 of this thesis. The World Bank (2005) also claims that the first cycle of primary school is insufficient to ensure that most children achieve permanent literacy, but that 8 years may be beyond what is minimally required and therefore suggests a 5 or 6 year cycle of primary education. Moreover, has the use of English as LOI at secondary level been pointed out as a serious problem with the Ethiopian education system, as teachers are not qualified, and the LOI is therefore a hindrance to students learning (Negash 2006).

The MOE (2005) states that there is a need to further address the inequities in access to education, that the restricted human and financial resources available must be used more efficiently and that there is a need for capacity building programs in planning, management, monitoring and evaluation at all levels of the system. The quantity and quality of critical inputs such as teachers, textbooks, classroom etc, must be improved in order to improve the internal efficiency of the education system. Curriculum reform according to the MOE (2005) is also needed for the improvement of the relevance and quality of education, for this end and in order to maintain the confidence of parents in the school system. Improvement are also seen to be needed take in among other areas the teaching methods and teacher discipline, the system of examinations and assessment, provision of teaching resource materials in the classroom, and teachers supervision.

After having looked at the present educational situation in Ethiopia, and highlighted some of the challenges the education sector is struggling with at the moment, we shall now turn to the strategies the Ethiopian government has adopted to face the problems. In this relation emphasis is laid on the role of Non-Formal education and in particular the ABE approach.

2.2.5 Strategies of ESDP III for coping with the challenges at primary level

Strategies of the ESDP III to improve the situation at primary level include encouraging alternative approaches such as low cost schools and multi-grade classes, as well as the implementation of a stronger and wider role for Non-formal Education (NFE) and other alternatives in order to increase access to basic primary education. Measures for the improvement of the quality of education include
repeated (every 5 year) revision of the curriculum in order to assure its relevance, that it connects learning to the child’s experience and environment, responds to parental expectations and demands, and at the same time prepares students for a society in development. NLAs and examinations should be used to maintain standards and for feedback to be used in interventions to improve the educational quality. Efficient school leadership and management is to be established in schools and educational inspection and in-school supervision should be strengthened, pre-service and in-service training of teachers should be intensified and the school-cluster resource centers shall be strengthened and expanded. The quality of textbooks shall also be improved and adequate textbook management system put in place. Proactive measures are to be taken to enroll out-of-school children and in particular girls, including expansion of the school-feeding program, in particular in pastoral and food insecure areas and chronic food deficit areas, sensitizing of the communities, supervision of head teachers and an expanded recruitment and training of female teachers at all levels. The government recognizes that its own resources are not sufficient in facing the present challenges to the education sector efficiently and achieving the goals set up for the future. Thus, while at the same time recognizing the past and current contribution of the private sector and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in the provision of education the MOE (2005) calls for more involvement from these actors. An increased role of communities in constructing low cost schools and classrooms is also assumed as well as it is a wish that parents and the communities become more involved in making decisions regarding the quality and efficiency of the education provided. Policies and programs to strengthen the role of the community in the management and financing of schools are to be implemented. The communities shall also be encouraged to mobilize their own resources to construct additional classrooms and schools, using cost effective school construction. Where the communities cannot afford to contribute cash or materials, it is however stated government intends to contribute sufficiently for school construction. The woredas’ role in governance and management of education shall as well be further strengthened, including partnerships with NGOs and other donors at woreda level (MOE 2005).

2.2.6 The role of Non-formal education and Alternative basic education

Non-formal education (NFE) should as stated in the ETP be provided beginning and integrated with basic education and at all levels of formal education (Transitional Government of Ethiopia 1994). Within ESDP the adult- and NFE program includes a range of basic education and training
components for out-of-school children and adults. The program includes a program for out-of-school children 7-14 years of age, a literacy program for youth and adults above 15 years of age, and basic skill training to youth and adults in the Community Skill Training Centers. The focus is on "...literacy, numeracy and other relevant skills to enable learners to develop problem-solving abilities and change their lives" (MOE 2005:11). As mentioned earlier the government aims at expanding NFE severely during ESDP III. It is perhaps especially in the field of NFE where the involvement of actors outside of the Formal education system is and will continue to be of highest importance. International donors and agencies such as the World Bank, USAID, the Italian Cooperation Agency and the Netherlands Embassy have been active in funding NFE in Ethiopia in the past. The governance of NFE is largely decentralized and many regions have "regionalized" their approach to NFE and in particular embraced Alternative basic education (ABE). While the REBs have the main responsibility for implementation, they have in many cases went into partnerships with NGOs and a range of donors and formed regional forums on NFE, in which the REBs plays a facilitating role. At the same time many NGOs are in the process of handing over NFE centers to government management. Regional governments in addition often press for rapid conversion of Alternative Basic Education Centers (ABEC) into primary schools (Anís 2007). Alternative basic education was initiated in Ethiopia in the nineties by several NGOs, Action Aid being the pioneer in 1992, and with time the government has incorporated the concept into its national education strategy (Bedanie et al 2007). As commented by the MOE (2000) most programs seem to have been highly inspired by the Bangladesh Rural Advancement committee (BRAC) model. Alternative basic education programs are by the MOE (2005) seen as an emergency short-term measure, but critically important in order to achieve UPE by 2015. ABE programs are also seen as strategic in reaching the hard-to-reach remote rural and dispersed communities, pastoralist- and semi-agriculturalist societies. The ABE curriculum is a condensed version of the first cycle of primary school curriculum, aimed “...to meet the demands of the learners and establish horizontal and vertical link with the formal education system” (MOE 2005:44), in order to help learners to smoothly transfer from ABE to the Formal education system. The instruction in ABE should be focused, sustained and targeted to reflect the learners’ local life and community and it is stated that the program “...will be flexible enough to accommodate local conditions and needs of learners and parents” (MOE 2005:45). The Alternative Basic Education Centers (ABEC) are also aimed at serving as an important venue for community meetings and adult learning. This is expected to create collaboration between facilitators, parents and learners and shared goals, ideas and high level of
involvement of the community, to bring about participatory management. The government aims at encouraging communities, community-based organizations and NGOs to expand the provision of secular basic primary education through ABE. The MOE also commits itself to establishing and running ABECs in areas where others are not able to, though also in these cases communities’ involvement in the construction and management of the ABECs is required (MOE 2005). The GER for ABE was in 2005/06 at national level 5, 5 % (5, 7 % for boys and 5, 4 % for girls) and the NER 3, 5 (3, 7 for boys and 3, 4 for girls). The MOE (2007) however reports that there were 4 regions and 1 city administration who did not provide information on the enrolment in ABE for their 2005/06 education statistics and thus the GER for ABE is probably much higher. If the available data on enrolment in ABE is included in the 2005/06 national GER for the primary school level, the total GER at this level increases to 91, 3 % (98, 6 % for boys and 83, 9 % for girls). If including enrollment in ABE in the GER for the first cycle of primary school, it becomes as high as 117, 6 % (MOE 2007). As mentioned earlier in this section many ABECs are being transformed into Formal primary schools and according to Aníis (2007) the experience with these processes has not been overwhelmingly positive. Community members in various areas has expressed dissatisfaction with among other things a perceived decrease in quality of the education provided, sometimes a long delay in securing teachers, more frequent absence of teachers, inflexibility with the teaching schedule and the closing of night classes.

As commented above several regions have regionalized their approaches to NFE. Amhara Region was among the first which developed its own strategy for ABE, and this is presented further on. Before looking at this, some aspects of the reality in the Amhara Region are presented, including the educational situation.

2.3 The Amhara National Region and the educational situation

The Amhara National Regional State is the second largest federal state in Ethiopia covering 161 831 square kilometers, at an altitude ranging from 700 to 4 620 meters above sea level. The region is divided into 11 zones and 140 woredas (Bedanie et al 2007). According to the 2007 census there are 17, 1 million inhabitants in the Amhara Region and of these 88 % are resident in rural areas (CSA 2008). 42 % of the population in the region is under the age of 15 and 70, 8 % are under the age of 30. The average household size is 4, 3 persons (3,3 in urban areas, 4,5 in rural areas), the average
number of children for a woman in delivery age (15-49 years) is 5, 1 and the infancy mortality rate is 9, 4 % while the under 5 mortality rate is 15, 4 % (CSA 2008, BOFED 2006/2007). The livelihood of about 89 % of the population of the region is based on mixed agriculture. Out of all woredas in the region 42, 5 % are exposed to food shortage, due to recurrent drought and shortage of rainfall. The health coverage is estimated to be about 41, 4 % and drinking water coverage is limited to about 23 % in rural areas. Child labor and harmful traditional practices (HTP) such as child marriage, female genital mutilation (FGM), abduction and physical maltreatment of children are common in the region, as well as HIV/AIDS is rampant creating a large amount of orphans (Bedanie et al 2007). At primary level the GER in education was 86, 4 % (89, 4 % for boys and 83, 3 % for girls) in 2005/06. The enrolment in the first cycle of primary school; 109, 8 % (112, 1 % for boys and 107, 5 % for girls) is however much higher than for the second cycle; 57, 6 (61, 5 % for boys and 53, 5 % for girls). The NER of the region was for the whole primary level in the same year 76, 8 % (77, 2 % for boys and 76, 4 % for girls) and at the first cycle of primary school 79, 8 % (77, 9 % for boys and 81, 7 % for girls) (MOE 2007). Most out-of-school children in the region are reported to be from rural areas and girls and the non-participation is in particular high among marginalized groups. The PTR for the first and second cycle primary school was 63, 5 and 64, 7 respectively in 2005/06. The repetition rate in primary education was 2, 1 % (2, 2 % for boys and 2, 1 % for girls). 98% of the teachers in primary school were certified at the first cycle and 60, 8 % of the teachers were certified at the second cycle of primary school (MOE 2007). NGOs like Save the Children Norway (SCN-E) and Save the Children Denmark (SCD-E) have been active in the region since the late nineties and contribute funds directly to the REBs. The funds are used for among other activities, supporting government- and NGO- run implementation of ABE, printing of textbooks, supporting the monitoring capacity of the region and training of ABE facilitators and Formal school teachers (Anís 2007). In 2004/05 there were 1883 ABECs in the region, with 251 753 students, of which 48 % were female, and in these centers worked 4 122 facilitators of which 41 % were female (MOE 2007). In the following section the ABE strategy for the regional level is presented, which is also the strategy used at the lower administrative levels of the region, i.e at zonal and woreda level.

2.3.1 The Amhara National Regional State´s ABE Program Strategy

In the Amhara Regional Children´s Alternative Basic Education Program Strategy (Amhara REB 2003) reads that ABE aims at using all means to provide cost effective quality learning and enhancing the participation of out of school children in basic education programs, putting special
effort to increase the participation of girl children. The program should encourage the students enrolled to make use of the acquired learning for the immediate benefit of themselves and their family members, and at the same time prepare children to stay in the mainstream of learning. ABE should be piloted in a few selected communities and then the program should be scale-up considering what is available in the localities. Experiences of ABE and Formal education should be shared between them as well as among ABECs through the school cluster programs. Among the guiding principles of ABE is that the community is the major stakeholder of the program and that community members should be involved in all stages (planning, organization, implementation, monitoring and evaluation). The ABECs should be constructed close to the residential areas of the communities and at a central location to the surrounding communities to enhance accessibility. Locating the education centers close to the learners is also aimed at helping in decreasing the opportunity costs of sending children to school. Other measures taken for this aim are flexible schedules and shorter duration of the education program. It is stated that the exact schedule can be decided with the consultation of the parents and the total number of schooldays and contact hours can be decided with the involvement of parents, students and educational offices. It is however also clearly stated that the school calendar is a 3 years cycle of 630-660 days (210-220 days/year) with classes 5 days per week 3-4 hours daily. Continuous assessment is aimed at enabling automatic promotion and when completing grade 3 in ABE the students are certificated and allowed to join grade 5 in the Formal school system (Amhara REB 2003).

It is further stated that ABE to a large extent depends on local human and material resources. The communities should take part in the construction of learning centers, preparation and organization of teaching-learning materials, and make use of locally available materials and resources. The ABECs are supposed to have minimum 3 classrooms which can serve 40-50 students and a shift-system or multi-grade classes should be used to ensure efficient use of the facilities. Though permanent buildings are preferred other options may be ABECs built from local materials, private houses, halls of kebeles or other organizations in the community. There should be a 1:1 student-textbook ratio and if possible poor needy students should be provided with free learning materials. There is also supposed to be reading rooms in the ABECs until proper libraries are established, including grade 1-4 textbooks, supplementary reading for children, locally prepared newspapers, and collections of local folktales and posters. Other financial sources apart from the communities’ contribution are the government budget, support solicited from individuals, organization of income-
generating activities wherever possible, partner-NGOs and other CSOs. The program owners should be organized in a board or committee responsible of providing overall leadership at each program level. At the level of the ABECs there should be a parents assembly every third month. This assembly should also elect an ABEC-committee responsible for issues of ABE, with a gender balance of 50-50 or 1:3 if this is not possible (Amhara REB 2003).

The program participants should be 7-14 years of age, including children who did not have the opportunity to learn in Formal school, those children who for some reason have dropped out from Formal school, street children in urban centers and those marginalized as a result of poverty, gender and religion. For the goal of gender equity and enhancing girls´ participation in education the ABECs should, as earlier mentioned, be constructed close to the communities. Involving mothers or women in management committees and having female teachers, whom in ABE are called „facilitators“, are also stated as strategic ways to create a conducive learning environment for girls.

The core subjects in ABE are Mother Tongue Language (in the Amhara National Region: Amharic, Oromiffa, Awigna, Himitigna), English, Arithmetic and Environmental Science; which includes physical and social sciences, aesthetics, music and civics and ethics education. The LOI should be the mother tongue of the learners. The curriculum should focus on developing problem-solving capacity, skills and innovativeness, the value of love for learning and students´ appreciation of their local communities. It is stated that the teaching-learning process within ABE should not only be harmonized with the children’s physical, psychological and social development, but the educational content should be related to the social reality of the communities and contribute to alleviate the existing social and economic problems. After completing ABE, the students are expected to have skills of reading, writing and calculation equivalent to those specified for grade 4 in Formal school. They are also expected to have understanding of themselves, their families and their surrounding and appreciate the feeling of responsibility, as well as understanding and appreciate the type of work that prevails in their respective surroundings. Further they are expected to be in position to investigate and compare cultural malpractices and promote useful beliefs and practices, attempt to inquire and understand and at the same time give solutions to confronting problems (challenges). They should show considerable interest commensurate to their level of capacity and skills in acquiring and mastering various trades of their localities, aspire to keep their personal hygiene and appreciate their local environment. Furthermore ABE-graduates are expected to be ever ready to
actively participate in group and collective works and with the acquired knowledge be motivated to remain in the value of lifelong learning and continuing education (Amhara REB 2003).

Facilitators in ABE should be recruited from the kebele, or if no appropriate candidates exist there, facilitators may be recruited from the neighboring kebeles and woredas, and must be approved by the community members. The criteria for recruitment of facilitators may be set in accordance with the realities in the communities. Criteria which should be considered are grade 10 or better of the available qualification in the community and candidates who pass the efficiency assessment examination should be preferred. Other preferred features of candidates are long-time residency in the community and awareness and respect of the community’s norms and traditions, decent behavior and societal approval, health enough to teach and love of the profession. At least 30% of the facilitators should be women, and if there are male and female candidates with equal qualifications female candidates should have an advantage. Training of the facilitators should be given at woreda level, and should include a one month intensive pre-service training including teaching practice, and in-service training courses by the supervisors at every quarter. The facilitators should in addition to their tasks as teachers be enabled to act as organizers and advocates of ABE in the communities, and to work as secretaries in the education committees. Evaluation of the facilitators should include feedback from students, community members and supervisors. Facilitators performing well may be given incentives, while those who are week should be given more training and support and those who are considered to be unable to improve should be dismissed (Amhara REB 2003).

2.3.2 The study area

The present study was conducted in Ayckel town and the surrounding rural area Teber-Serako in Chilga Woreda which is located in the North Gonder Zone at 61 km from the zonal capital Gonder town. Chilga Woreda covers an area of 2,769 square kilometers, of which 33% is midland and 67% lowland, and is divided into 43 rural and 4 urban kebeles (World Vision Ethiopia 2008). According to figures from the 2007 national census residents in the rural kebeles made up a population of 242,431 (51.4% male, 48.6% female), with 50,506 household leaders. 8.8% of the population was resident in the urban kebeles and 91.2% in rural areas (CSA 2008). Ayckel town is the woreda capital and is divided into 2 administrative kebeles; Ayckel 01 and Ayckel 02.

Household leaders are counted instead of households as the household-constellations in the area are diverse.
which together cover about 4 square kilometers. According to BOFED there were in 2006/2007 a population of 16,926 inhabitants (44.7% male, 55.3% female) in Ayckel town, with 3,526 household leaders. In Teber-Serako, which surrounds Ayckel town there were in the same year 5,254 (50.5% male, 49.5% female) inhabitants, with 1,095 household leaders (BOFED 2006/07). The town has 4 churches and a mosque, 10 health institutions including 1 health center, and 11 educational institutions including one secondary school and one preparatory school/kindergarten. As for infrastructure there are all-weather roads along the main street, telephone service, post service, hydroelectric power for 24 hours as well as two financial institutions (Tesfaye 2008). 95% of the woreda population are Christian Orthodox, 4% are Muslims and 1% Protestants (World Vision Ethiopia 2008). The large majority of the population in the woreda and in particular the rural population is predominantly dependent on mixed agriculture; crop production and livestock rearing. Average land holding size per household is 1.25 ha, and the major crops grown in the area are teff, barley, wheat, sorghum and maize, and in addition niger seeds are grown as cash crop. The livestock resources are sheep, goats, cattle, donkey, mule, horse and poultry (World Vision Ethiopia 2008). In the urban areas the majority of the inhabitants are engaged in trade, while other income-generating activities include service, construction, work in government offices or small-scale income-generating activities such as shoe-shining or portable shops (Tesfaye 2008, Bere Enyew 13.03.09). The percentage of economically active people in the woreda was in 2008 estimated to 48% (World Vision Ethiopia 2008). The head of the woreda administration suggested that the inhabitants in the woreda on average lived by approximately 10 Birr per day, which is slightly less than 1 USD, though the living-standards are higher in the urban areas than in the rural (Bere Enyew 13.03.09). 11 of the kebeles are accessible by vehicle both in rainy and dry seasons, the rest only accessed by foot. According to a 2008 assessment report on the Woreda Development Program, the woreda’s major development problems may in the area of agriculture be summed up as poor irrigation technology, poor agricultural extension service such as shortage of inputs and shortage of veterinary services. Health institutions are poorly constructed, with shortage of equipment and drugs, there is low access to potable water supply, as well as there are challenges with illnesses such as Malaria and HIV/AIDS, which has a prevalence of 7.8%. The reasons for the spread of the HIV/AIDS epidemic include the location of Ayckel town on the highway to Sudan, a big military base situated in the woreda and road construction, which have all resulted in growth of prostitution. There is high prevalence of child labor and HTPs such as early marriage and FGM, as well as generally low awareness on gender equity and high levels of work load and lower status in the community for
females. Among the challenges in relation to education mentioned in this report is low coverage, poorly constructed and equipped schools and shortage of potable water and toilets in schools. Development potentials of the area mentioned in the report are that there is irrigable land and practice of traditional irrigation, abundance of materials like stone and labor and qualified personnel in local government offices and at kebele level (World Vision Ethiopia 2008). After this general presentation of the study area we shall now look closer at the educational situation in the woreda and the educational institutions which were included in the study.

2.3.3 The educational situation in Chilga Woreda

Though figures on the adult education levels or literacy rates were not available at woreda or kebele level, the impression was that the adult literacy level was rather low in the study area. As mentioned earlier, the adult literacy rate in the rural areas of the Amhara Region is among the lowest in the country. According to figures from BOFED there were 50 003 residents aged 7-14 years old in the woreda in the year 2006/07, and based on this and figures provided by the Woreda Education Office (WEO) (Table 5) the GER for that school year would be 104 %. Other things the figures from the WEO reveals are that the enrolment in Formal primary schools has been decreasing the last few years (from 22 143 students in 2006/07 to 20 466 students in 2008/09) while the enrollment in ABE has been increasing (from 2 521 to 3603 students), and a substantially larger share of the students in the first cycle of primary school were enrolled in ABE in 2008/09 than 2 years earlier (20, 2% compared to 13%). The total enrolment at primary level has however been decreasing, and in particular in the first cycle of primary school. The large majority of the students in Formal school are in the first cycle of primary school, but an increasing share is in the second cycle. There is a fairly equal number of boys and girls enrolled in the first cycle of primary school, while in the second cycle the girls are in the majority. The gender disparity also increased slightly the last few years. In ABE boys are in the majority, but the gender-disparity has been decreasing the last few years. Drop out rates in the Formal schools\(^7\) are rather moderate for the first cycle, but slightly higher for the second cycle and there are overall higher drop out rates for boys than for girls. The repetition rates in both cycles of Formal primary school were however higher for the girls. Both drop out rates and repetition rates increased from 2006/07 to 2008/09 (Dessalegn 2009).

\(^7\) Data on drop out and repetition was only available for the Formal schools in the woreda.
## Table 5: Education statistics for Chilga Woreda 2006/07-2008/09

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2006/07</th>
<th></th>
<th>2007/08</th>
<th></th>
<th>2008/09</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Boys</td>
<td>Girls</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Boys</td>
<td>Girls</td>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No of Formal primary schools</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>57</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No of ABECs</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>40</td>
<td></td>
<td>40</td>
<td>40</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enrolment grades 1-4 Formal school (%)</td>
<td>16 766</td>
<td>16 542</td>
<td>33 308</td>
<td>16 221</td>
<td>14 622</td>
<td>30 843</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>50.3%</td>
<td>49.7%</td>
<td></td>
<td>52.6%</td>
<td>47.4%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enrolment grades 5-8 Formal school (%)</td>
<td>5 377</td>
<td>8 596</td>
<td>13 973</td>
<td>5 784</td>
<td>9 392</td>
<td>15 176</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>38.5%</td>
<td>61.5%</td>
<td></td>
<td>38.1%</td>
<td>61.9%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enrolment grade 1-8 Formal school (%)</td>
<td>22 143</td>
<td>25 138</td>
<td>47 281</td>
<td>22 005</td>
<td>24 014</td>
<td>46 019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>46.8%</td>
<td>53.2%</td>
<td></td>
<td>47.8%</td>
<td>52.2%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drop out grades 1-4 Formal school (% of students enrolled)</td>
<td>207</td>
<td>260</td>
<td>467</td>
<td>778</td>
<td>574</td>
<td>1362</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1.2%</td>
<td>1.5%</td>
<td>1.4%</td>
<td>4.8%</td>
<td>3.9%</td>
<td>4.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drop out grades 5-8 Formal school (% of students enrolled)</td>
<td>274</td>
<td>215</td>
<td>489</td>
<td>348</td>
<td>322</td>
<td>570</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5.1%</td>
<td>2.5%</td>
<td>3.5%</td>
<td>6.0%</td>
<td>3.4%</td>
<td>3.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Repetition grades 1-4 Formal school (% of students enrolled)</td>
<td>1297</td>
<td>1642</td>
<td>2939</td>
<td>1 141</td>
<td>1 667</td>
<td>2 708</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7.7%</td>
<td>9.9%</td>
<td>8.8%</td>
<td>7.0%</td>
<td>11.4%</td>
<td>8.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Repetition Formal school grades 5-8 (% of students enrolled)</td>
<td>221</td>
<td>550</td>
<td>771</td>
<td>350</td>
<td>678</td>
<td>1 028</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4.1%</td>
<td>6.4%</td>
<td>5.5%</td>
<td>6.1%</td>
<td>7.2%</td>
<td>6.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enrolment ABE grades 1-3 (%)</td>
<td>2 521</td>
<td>4 636</td>
<td>7 157</td>
<td>3 659</td>
<td>6 044</td>
<td>9 703</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>54.8%</td>
<td>45.2%</td>
<td></td>
<td>54.6%</td>
<td>45.4%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Enrolment grades 1-4 (%)</td>
<td>19 287</td>
<td>37 944</td>
<td>57 231</td>
<td>19 880</td>
<td>37 546</td>
<td>57 426</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>50.8%</td>
<td>49.2%</td>
<td></td>
<td>52.9%</td>
<td>47.1%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Enrolment grades 1-8 (%)</td>
<td>24 664</td>
<td>51 917</td>
<td>76 581</td>
<td>25 664</td>
<td>52 722</td>
<td>78 386</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>47.5%</td>
<td>52.5%</td>
<td></td>
<td>48.7%</td>
<td>51.3%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Enrolment in ABE of Total enrolment grades 1-4</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>11.3%</td>
<td>12.2%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>17.2%</td>
<td>17.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Plan and Information Department at the Woreda Education Office in Chilga (Dessalegn 2009)

The schools and ABECs in the woreda are organized in clusters of 7-12 educational institutions. In addition to the ordinary Formal schools and the ABECs in the area, there are also satellite-schools, situated in remote areas. The satellites consist of 1-2 grades and are part of the ordinary schools; the satellite-classes count as sections of a grade in the school to which it belongs. There was for example a satellite-school located not far from ABEC 3 in the present study, which belonged to School A. The head of the local NGO Handicap National commented that these satellites may grow up into full primary schools with time. ABE was initiated in the woreda by SCN-E in 1998 and was
piloted in 10 ABECs until 2003. The ABE program was then adopted as part of the governmental education strategy and the responsibility for implementation was transferred to the REB and the WEO. SCN-E is however still present in the woreda with several projects, including within education, involving several partners. One of the projects is the Inclusive Education project in which Handicap National is the partner and another project is the Quality Education Project which is run by SCN-E itself. In the Orphans and Vulnerable Children (OVC) project SCN-E collaborates with the woreda administration. Through this project financial support is given to school clubs and to shelter and provision of education materials to orphans and vulnerable children. SCN-E is also involved in the construction of classrooms, toilets etc in order to minimize large classes and to construct safe and smart school compounds which are also accessible to physically disabled persons, which is an aim of the Inclusive Education project (Ewnetu 05-06.03.09). In the following sections some information on the 3 ABECs, which were all established by SCN-E used as pilot- ABECs and opened in 1998, and the two Formal schools which were included in the study is presented.

2.3.4 The ABECs included in the study

The following section is based on information provided by the WEO, the facilitators at the ABECs, the education program coordinator at SCN-E in the North Gonder Zone as well as a few observations made when visiting the ABECs during field-studies.

2.3.4.1 ABEC 1

This ABEC was located in town, within a walking distance of about 10 minutes from School B, and the students attending this ABEC came from the urban area. The school-building consisted of 2 classrooms and a teacher office and was made out of bricks and tin, with cemented floor. Unlike the rural ABECs it had no farmland but a rather large compound, though there was virtually nothing in it. The building was about 3 years old, and previously a neighboring building had been used which was of much lower standard, made of wood and dung, and there had not been proper chairs or desks. The head teacher at ABEC 1 said that there one of the present challenges was the shortage of classrooms in the ABEC. At the time of the field studies they had two grade 1 classes and she wondered what they would do in the future if they continued to enrol more students. She also pointed out that they had no toilets, no water and that the ABEC needed to be fenced. To solve the water-problem there were however people assigned to find water and they were working in the
compound at the time of the field studies. On a visit to grade 3 most of the students had their own books, while a few read together in pairs. There were rather few students present at the time, which explains why quite many benches were not in use, but with a full class it would probably have been a challenge to find space for everybody. According to the grade 3 school records there were 44 students enrolled in total. Most of these students (27) were 9 years old, 15 were 10 years old, 2 students were 11 and 12 years old respectively, 4 were 13 years old and 6 were registered as being 14 years old. The head teacher however said that out of the total number of students in the grade around 15 students might be older than 14 years. She also said that about 4 or 5 in students in grade 1 were younger than 7 years. The head teacher said that students younger than 7 years were allowed to enroll in ABE since students were allowed to enter Formal school even if they were younger than school-age, if they were “able” enough. On a visit to one of the grade 1 classes many of the students claimed to be both 6 and 5 years old, and they also looked very young. According to the head teacher approximately 5 students per class were orphans, and in addition several if not most of the older boys supported themselves financially. The head teacher had not heard of any extra help in terms of learning materials or other things for students who supported themselves in the two years she had worked there. She did not believe that there was any shortage of textbooks, though the students in grade 1 often did not have books in all subjects, but maybe only one or two books, since the parents thought they would lose them. Since the ABEC had no guard and bad locks on the doors some books, desks and other things had however been stolen. There was also a Disabled Children’s school club at the ABEC run through SCN-E, which used to have meetings once a month (Head teacher ABEC 1 12.03.09).

2.3.4.2 ABEC 2

ABEC 2 was located within about 10 minutes walking distance from School B, in the rural area. The ABEC consisted of a school-building with 2 classrooms and a teacher office and was made of wood, dung and tin. Close to the ABEC there was also a small building where one of the facilitators lived, a latrine which was not used since it was made of wood and was considered dangerous, and the ABECs’ own farmland. According to the grade 3 facilitator, most children lived within 15-20 minutes distance from the ABEC, though there were some students who had to walk up to 1, 5 hour from their homes to get there (Grade 3 -facilitator ABEC 2 10.03.09). According to the student-records, there were 63 students enrolled in grade 3. Of these 33 were 9 years old, 19 were 10 years
old, 6 were 11 years old, 4 were 12 years old and 1 was registered as 13 years old. Students several years older than this were however interviewed at the ABEC.

2.3.4.3 ABEC 3

This ABEC was located about 15 minutes from School A. According to one of the facilitators, most of the children enrolled there lived within 5-10 minutes, or at most 20 minutes, walking distance from the ABEC. The school-building was constructed of wood and dung, with mud-floor and doors, windows and roof of tin, and consisted of 2 classrooms and a teacher office. The ABEC had no toilet and though it earlier had been available, there was no longer water available. The head teacher said that some of the negative sides of the ABECs infrastructure were that it was not fenced, and that they more or less shared their compound with the Agricultural Office. When the Agricultural Office planted crops in the compound, the children could not play around the ABEC during the breaks and had to go far away from it to play. The compound was also very small and did not have the structure of a real school compound, according to the head teacher. From what was observed during the visits to the ABEC there was virtually nothing in the compound but empty ground. The ABEC had its own farm land as an income generating activity, but it appeared as if there was not much work going on. One group of girls interviewed at the ABEC reported that money had been raised from the students’ families and that the students themselves had painted the ABEC. According to the grade 2 facilitator the youngest children in grade 1 were 6 years old, and in grade 3 most of the children were 11-12 years old but they had students who were up to 24 years old. The older students were boys, while most girls enrolled were in the younger group. More boys than girls were enrolled in ABEC 3, which as mentioned earlier is not the usual situation in the area. The explanation given by this facilitator was that the girls in the community went to Formal school, but the boys had to work more and then ABE suited them better (Grade 2-facilitator ABEC 3 25.02.09). The head teacher and grade 3 facilitator also gave as a reason for this that the older girls often got married and then dropped out, while the boys continued their education even after getting married. Presently there were several older boys enrolled in the ABEC who were married (Head teacher and Grade 3-facilitator ABEC 3 11.03.09).

The availability of textbooks in the ABEC was not a problem according to the head teacher, and according to observations in grade 3 it did not appear to be a problem either. The support to students in terms of free learning materials had however deteriorated the last few years. According to the
head teacher this was related to that there was no longer any separate administration for ABE in the woreda, but it was now administered by the WEO, and there were also many more ABECs in the area than in earlier years. Exercise books and some other learning materials were however still being given for free to orphans and children of poor families. The ABEC had an HIV/AIDS-club, which among other things supported persons showing symptoms of HIV to get tested. Although they could not give monetary support, they also helped people who were infected with practical matters, such as cooking food and cleaning. The club also engaged in challenging HTPs in the area and among other activities they taught about these issues in church on Sundays (Head teacher and Grade 3-facilitator ABEC 3 11.03.09).

2.3.4.4 Enrolment, Promotion and Drop Out in the ABECs 2006/07-2008/09

**Table 6 Enrolment in the ABECs included in the study 2006/07-2008/09**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ABEC/Year</th>
<th>2006/07</th>
<th>2007/08</th>
<th>2008/09</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABEC 1</td>
<td>209 (106 m, 103 girls)</td>
<td>194 (80 m, 114 girls)</td>
<td>223 (107 boys, 116 girls)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABEC 2</td>
<td>215 (116 m, 99 girls)</td>
<td>237 (130 m, 107 girls)</td>
<td>214 (114 boys, 100 girls)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABEC 3</td>
<td>208 (107 boys, 101 girls)</td>
<td>190 (114 boys, 76 girls)</td>
<td>179 (98 boys, 81 girls)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Plan and Information Department at the Woreda Education Office in Chilga (Dessalegn 2009)

**Table 7 Students’ promoted and repeated in the ABECs included in the study 2006/07-2008/09**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ABEC/Year</th>
<th>2006/07</th>
<th>2007/08</th>
<th>2008/09</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABEC 1</td>
<td>(figures not available)</td>
<td>66 (19 boys, 47 girls)</td>
<td>(figures not available)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- promoted</td>
<td>32 (15 boys, 17 girls)</td>
<td>183 (101 boys, 82 girls)</td>
<td>(figures not available)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- not promoted</td>
<td>21 (10 boys, 11 girls)</td>
<td>69 (38 boys, 31 girls)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABEC 3</td>
<td>93 (98 boys, 93 girls)</td>
<td>173</td>
<td>(figures not available)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- promoted</td>
<td>15 (9 boys, 6 girls)</td>
<td>17</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Plan and Information Department at the Woreda Education Office in Chilga (Dessalegn 2009)
Table 8 Students dropped out from the 3 ABECs included in the study 2006/07-2008/09

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ABEC/Year</th>
<th>2006/07</th>
<th>2007/08</th>
<th>2008/09</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABEC 1</td>
<td>10 (5 boys, 5 girls)</td>
<td>16 (15 boys, 1 girls)</td>
<td>(figures not available)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABEC 2</td>
<td>(figures not available)</td>
<td>31 (26 boys, 5 girls)</td>
<td>(figures not available)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABEC 3</td>
<td>1 (1 boys)</td>
<td>2 (2 girls)</td>
<td>(figures not available)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Plan and Information Department at the Woreda Education Office in Chilga (Dessalegn 2009)

2.3.4.5 Facilitators

In all 3 ABECs there were 3 facilitators, who were all female, in the years 2006/07-2008/09. In ABEC 1 they would soon be 4 facilitators. All the facilitators in ABEC 1 had graduated from grade 10 and held TTI-certificates. Two of the there facilitators claimed that they had not gone through any training in relation to their work in ABE, but the education program coordinator at SCN-E said that all ABE facilitators got some training, and said that it could be that they did not consider it training since there was no certification. In the other two ABECs the facilitators’ background was not inquired, but according to education program coordinator at SCN-E all ABE facilitators had finished at least grade 10 and held TTIs, and received at least a minimum of pre-service training (Shenkutie 23.02.09 -19.02.09).

2.3.4.6 Attendance

It was not possible to obtain reliable and updated attendance-records, neither on the students nor on the facilitators’ attendance. According to the education program coordinator at SCN-E there was usually high absence in the schools and ABECs in January and February, to become lower in March- May, due to the farming-seasons. Then attendance was lower again in May and June and in particular among the grade 3 students since they are older. June is both the harvesting time and a time of the year when many weddings are arranged, and the older students are more affected by this. From mid-September when the school year starts to November there is as well usually high absence among the students due to farming (Shenkutie 23.02.09 -19.02.09). According to the head teacher at ABEC 3, they usually experienced high absence among the students in December due to harvesting, and also in June because of farming. These were the times of the year when they most often scheduled lessons to the weekends instead of the week-days to let the students work. She also estimated that the boys who lived on their own, like some of the older ones in ABEC 3 did, might be absent around 20 days per semester, while the students who lived with their parents might only
be absent 3-4 days per semester. Girls who lived with their families were more often absent than the boys because they generally helped out more in the household and were the ones who fetched water, she said. In ABEC 2 the grade 3 attendance records for the present year were rather incomplete. The last month appeared to have been completely filled in afterwards, revealing virtually no absence among the student. It was also not registered when classes had been held, and thus when the facilitators had been present, though the ABEC was visited and found empty a couple of times during the field studies at times when there should have been classes. On one occasion when we visited grade 3 in ABEC 1 there were 26 students present (15 boys and 11 girls) out of the 44 students enrolled in that grade. When we visited grade 3 in ABEC 3 on another occasion there were 35 students present (about half were girls and half boys) out of the 53 students enrolled in the class.

After having presented the 3 ABECs included in the study, including some statistics on the enrolment, promotion and drop out in the ABECs, in the following sections the Formal schools included in the study are presented.

2.3.5 The Formal schools included in the study

Both the Formal schools included in the study were located in the town of Ayckel, at about 20 minutes walking-distance from each other. Both schools were full-circle primary schools (grade 1-8) and were also school cluster-centers.

2.3.5.1 School A

In the school-cluster where School A was the cluster-center, there were 3 elementary schools with grades 1-8, one school with grades 1-7, one school with grades 1-4 and one school grade 1-3. The cluster also included 4 ABECs and 3 satellites with grades 1-2 (Head of Handicap National 05-06.03.09). School A was also model-school for the woreda and the center for the OVC project and the Inclusive Education project, which according to the director of the school was the most prominent project in the school. The school compound had a library, a school-cluster resource center and an educational center. Some of the school buildings were accessible with wheel-chair and some classrooms had handrails along the walls to facilitate the mobility of physically disabled students. There was also an outdoor ramp for training in the schoolyard. There was sign-language painted on the walls of some of the buildings. According to the director all the teachers in the school
had some training in sign-language. The director also said that there was an ongoing school-
 improvement program and that the plan-objectives for the academic achievement of the students
 and the co-curricular activities recently had been changed. All the teachers in the school had been
 assigned to one of the 13 school-clubs (for example HIV/AIDS, Civic and Ethical Education, Social
 and Environmental Club and Gender Equity) and all students were supposed to be a member of at
 least one club of their choice. There were also plans for moving away from the shift-system, which
 at the time consisted of 2 shifts. The change was partly due to the idea that each class ought to have
 their own classroom. With the shift-system different classes used the classrooms and teaching-
 materials were being destroyed by those who did not own them. The plan was to first run one
 model-class in each grade with full-day lessons from 8-14 hours. There were also plans to hold
 tutorials in the afternoons and in the weekends for the weaker students (Director School A
 13.03.09).

In the 2007/08 school year there were 2684 students (46% boys and 54% girls) enrolled in grades 1-
8 in School A. The repetition rates were 9% for the boys and 11% for the girls and 8% of the boys
and 4% of the girls dropped out. The repetition-as well as the drop out rates were highest in grade
1, 5 and 7. In the school year 2008/09 there were 2424 (45% boys and 55% girls) students in the
school. Since the figures were obtained at the beginning of the second semester of the school year
2008/09, there were no firm figures on drop out rates or promotion for this year. The director’s
office however estimated the figures, based on the achievements and attendance of the students, that
11% of the boys and 16% of the girls would have to repeat and that 3% of both boys and girls would
drop out. The highest numbers of students who had repeated in 2007/08 and probably would repeat
in 2008/09 were found in grades 1 and 5-8, and the highest numbers of students who dropped outs
were in grades 6 and 7. The PTR for these two years were 1:44 and 1:40 respectively and the PSR
1:60 and 1:55 respectively. In 2008/09 there were 67 teachers (33 male and 34 female) working in
the school and 21 of the male teachers and 12 of the female teachers held Diplomas, the rest held
TTI-certificates. The director said that many of the teachers were older and there was a need to
implement curriculum-programs in order to help the teachers to adapt to the ongoing and future
changes in the school. There were no figures available on the total number of previous ABE-
students in the school, but according to the director there were 45 (29 boys and 16 girls) students in
grade 5 with background from ABE. He estimated that there were more than 150 students with
background from ABE in total in the school, and that the majority were girls. The students coming from ABE were generally older than the Formal school students (Director School A 13.03.09).

### 2.3.5.2 School B

School B was the cluster-center for a school-cluster including 2 elementary schools grade 1-8, one private elementary school and 2 ABECs (Ewnetu 05-06.03.09). Apart from being a cluster-center this school was by the education program coordinator at SCN-E and the head of Handicap National considered to be a rather typical Formal primary school for the area. The school had in the school years 2006/07 and 2007/08, 2 223 and 1 981 students respectively (46% boys and 54% girls in both years). In 2006/07, 9% of the boys and 10% of the girls repeated their grade and 4% of the boys and 2% of the girls dropped out. Repetition rates were highest for grades 1 (25%), 3 and 8 and the drop-out rates were highest for grades 2, 6 and 7. In 2007/08 the repetition rate for boys was 10% for both boys and 10% girls and 11% of the boys and 7% of the girls dropped out. The repetition rates were highest in grades 1-5, in particular grades 1 (14%), and 8 (23, 1%) and the drop-out rates were highest for grades 6 and 7 (18, 4%). The PTR for these years were 1:43 and 1:33 respectively and had improved further in 2008/09 to 1:28, 5. In the present school year 2008/09 there were 66 teachers in the school (41 male and 25 female). 16 of the male teachers and 7 of the female teachers held Diplomas, the rest had TTI-certificates. There were no figures available on the total number of students with background from ABE in the school but in 2008/09 there were 91 students or 29, 6% of students in grade 5 with background from ABE. The director’s office said that the government´s financial support to the school had been cut severely since the previous school year. The school however had their own income-generating activities such as growing and trading plants and trees, and had recently collected money to buy their own printer by which they could print books, examinations etc by themselves (Director School B 12.03.09).

After having introduced the context in which the present study took place, in the following chapter the conceptual framework and review of literature related to the topic under study is presented.
3. Conceptual Framework and Literature Review

In this chapter central concepts, literature and previous research relevant for the interpretation of the present data are discussed. The first part of the chapter discusses Non-formal education (NFE) as a concept and practice-field, the second part looks at the concept of quality of education and demand for education, and the last part aims at giving some insight into Ethiopian children’s daily lives. The literature and studies discussed in this chapter were chosen for their relevance to the present study. Thus for example studies carried out in the Amhara region or in rural Ethiopia have been preferred, according to what was available and accessible.

3.1 Underlying theories

Firstly I will briefly present two theories which are relevant in relation to the topic of the study, and to education in general. The first is not directly used in the discussion of the primary data, but rather to discuss the approach to education in Ethiopia and to understand the driving forces of EFA, including the ABE program and similar educational initiatives. The latter is more directly used in the discussion of the primary data, and is also implicit in some of the literature reviewed, as well as it has had importance for the development of NFE.

3.1.1 Human Capital Theory and education

Human capital theory, in spite of being criticized from different perspectives, may be said to be one of the most important driving forces of education, today. The main idea of human capital theory is that both individuals and society derives benefits from investment in people (Sweetland 1996). The most important investments in human capital are education and training (Becker 1993). Investment in education and building skills or capabilities of the people is alongside physical investment of great importance for economic growth. Human capital analysis assumes in Becker’s (1993: 19) words that…”schooling raises earnings and productivity mainly by providing knowledge, skills and a way of analyzing problems”. It is also of importance what kind of investments are made in education, as the rate of return of the investments differs, both to the individual and the society.
(Becker 1993). As pointed out by among others Brock Utne (2006), influential economists and not the least the World Bank, have concluded that the rates of return are highest when investments are made in primary education, and that this lead to the main focus on primary education and basic competencies in the EFA initiative. Human capital theory is also at the bottom of the increased interest of international and bilateral aid agencies, as well as the World Bank, to invest in “capacity-building” in developing countries, rather than physical plant. Among the main criticism against human capital theory is that it does not emphasize the non-quantifiable benefits of education such as improvements in health and nutrition, impact on population growth, improvements of the overall quality of life, or that it provides the means enable people to participate in democratic and legal due process, and to pursue values such as equality, solidarity, and liberty at both a private and societal level (Sweetland 1996). In the following section a perspective on education is presented, which emphasizes the latter.
3.1.2 Empowerment theory and education

Empowerment theory is concerned with power, and the distribution of power and the power relations in society. The term empowerment in a simple meaning implies that people, with relatively little power, are made able to gain power. The theoretical and practical meaning of the concept is however much debated, and as well are the means to empowerment. Rowlands (1995) suggests that it is the differences in the understanding of power which make people and organizations as different as feminists, mainstream Western politicians and the World Bank to embrace the concept of empowerment. Rowlands (1995) distinguish between power over, when power is defined in relation to obedience and may be considered the conventional definition of power, and power to which is achieved by increasing one’s ability to resist and challenge power over. The term power from within is used in relation to the need of challenging internalized oppression, which may be the consequence when people are subjugated by power over. The latter is also pointed out by Freire (1998). With the conventional understanding of power, empowerment is about bringing people outside the decision-making process into it, while Rowlands (1995:102) argues that empowerment must also include the processes that lead ”...people to perceive themselves as able and entitled to occupy that decision-making space”. It is pointed out clearly that a process of empowerment that seeks to engage poor and marginalized people must not be ‘top-down’ and directive, or encourage dependency. Although external support and intervention may speed up and encourage the process, empowerment cannot be imposed by outsiders.

Sen (1999) as well argues that change must be based in the initiative and priorities of the people. For Sen, freedoms are at the center of development, and expansion of freedoms is not only the end of development but also among the principal means. Freedoms have in other words both intrinsic and instrumental value. Different kind of freedoms may also strengthen each other. Political freedoms helps to promote economic security, and social opportunities (freedoms) such as education and health facilities facilitate economic participation. Economic facilities may generate both individual and public resources, which may be used for social facilities. As freedoms are individual the priorities and direction of development should be decided upon by the people themselves. Another reason that decisions for change and action must come from the people themselves is that reaching these freedoms requires the use of capabilities; the freedoms to achieve various lifestyles, a person already has. This set of capabilities will be main contributing factors in decision making, and
more importantly to achieve change (Sen 1999). Criticism has been raised against the arguments
that empowerment, or collective development, must come from people themselves, as much
responsibility is seemingly laid on the poor and the marginalized. The danger then becomes, as I
will further on also discuss in relation to Non-formal education and in particular the `community
schools´ movement that the states responsibility in the development process becomes less
emphasized and the people in most need of change are left to their own destiny.

Rowlands (1995) also refers the following definition of empowerment, which is given as an
example of a rather typical definition of empowerment from practitioners in fields such as
education, counseling, and social work.

“The process by which people, organizations or groups who are powerless
(a) become aware of the power dynamics at work in their life context,
(b) develop the skills and capacity for gaining some reasonable control over their lives,
(c) exercise this control without infringing upon the rights of others and
(d) support the empowerment of others in the community” (McWhirter 1991 in Rowlands 1995:103)

In the `situation of empowerment´ all four of the above conditions are met, while in `an empowering
situation´ one or more of the conditions is in place or being developed, but the full requirements are
not met. A similar process of empowerment as the above is also described by Karl (1995).
Rowlands (1995) points to the similarity of these definitions with Freire’s concept of
conscientisation. The idea that change must come from the people is also here much emphasized.
Conscientisation refers to a process through which individuals, by understanding their
circumstances, become `subjects´ in their own lives, and develop a `critical consciousness´ which
leads to acting upon their situation (Freire 1998). Freire’s critical pedagogy has been much
influential in various areas of science and practice, and in particular in the field of Non-formal
(adult) education (Freire and Macedo 1998). Freire (1998) distinguishes between the banking-model
of education, which is considered to be the dominating model of education in the world, and
libertarian education, which is considered a necessary measure for liberating the masses of
marginalized (oppressed) people around the world. In the former knowledge is considered a gift
from those who consider themselves knowledgeable to those who them consider ignorant, and are
treated as `objects´, a notion which is also internalized by the students. The educational process
ultimately fosters oppression. The latter begins with the reconciliation of the two poles of the
contradiction between teacher and student, so that both are simultaneously teachers and students and
presupposes dialogue. “Liberating education consists in acts of cognition, not transferrals of
information” (Freire 1998:74). Through thematic exploration and problem-posing education reality is gradually revealed, the participants in the educational process become aware of their situation and role in the world, and by this awareness stimulated to act upon it.

3.2 Non-formal education (NFE) as a concept and practice-field

In order to understand what type of educational program the ABE program is and what may thus be expected of it, the concept of and debate on NFE in the past and the contemporary understanding of the concept, is here discussed. This included how the concept and ideas have materialized in the practice-field of education. First the understanding and practice of NFE in the past is discussed, as it is useful to see where one is coming from to understand a present situation.

3.2.1 A brief history of the concept of NFE

NFE should not be mistaken for a new invention, since it resembles features of traditional/indigenous forms of education, but NFE as a concept within modern education can be claimed to have a shorter history. Rogers (2005) argues that the concept of NFE arose at a time, in the late 60s and in the 70s, when major changes were taking place within the field of development. Elaborating on this the author (ibid) suggests that 3 main paradigms may be discerned in discussions about development. The first is the deficit paradigm, which as a main feature holds that internal factors, such as lack of educated and skilled people, and even “traditional patterns” are the main problems of developing countries. The goal of development is modernization modeled after western industrialized countries, and the measure to achieve this is input, mainly of technology and capital.

The second paradigm which won ground in the late 60s is the disadvantage paradigm which holds that the deficit discourses “blamed the victim” and that the causes of poverty and under-development lay outside of the poor communities, with social, political, and economic systems. The third main development paradigm is that of difference, which emphasizes the diversity of goals, and holds that there are no universal solutions, but that development is and should be self-defined. From this perspective there is not only one source of oppression of the poor in society, but multiple. The perspective taken on development has had and continues to have great impact on the practice of education. The deficit paradigm sees education as a tool for development, not a goal of it. Within this paradigm the focus has been on manpower planning, specialist technical and higher education
for the elites, human capital theories and human resource development, as well as basic human needs with integrated rural development and mass education especially for rural people. In the post welfare discourse of today there is an emphasis on Universal Primary Education (UPE) and continuing education, with the Lifelong Learning discourse and Learning For Work related activities as well as involvement of civil society in the provision of education. Within the disadvantage paradigm, where for example Freire and Nyerere were central, the dependency discourse emphasize vocational training and capacity-building for self-reliance, while the social transformation discourse has sought to promote alternative education and NFE, and to some extent replaced by Universal Primary Education by Universal Basic Education. The difference paradigm has in line with its view on development promoted diversity in provision, multicultural and intercultural education, involvement of civil society, so called `community schools´ and education free-for-all (Rogers 2005).

There were as well changes taking place in the analysis of education in developing countries in the 60s and 70s, with calls for and programs of reform to enable education to achieve developmental goals more effectively. Formal education came under hard attack from different strands, and Rogers (2005) distinguish between the approaches taken with regards to whether the problems identified with Formal education were seen as redeemable or irredeemable. Those who saw the problems as redeemable held that the Formal education systems around the world were not keeping up with demand and that it was high cost and low cost-effective. It was also considered that there was a problem regarding equity, where the poor paid for the education of the rich, and education was considered to be of low quality in many places. Those who saw the problems of the Formal education system as irredeemable pointed out that this system, in the shape it took in most places at the time, was not something natural, universal and inevitable. Rather it was a Western model and shaped at a certain time, namely the second half of the 19th century, and designed with the goal of disciplining the people for participation in an industrial society. It was a system which implied selection for failure, isolation from the life world and it was domesticating rather than liberating. Other pressures for change in the contemporary educational practice of the 60s and 70s were that globalization led to commodification of knowledge and globalization of education systems, and on the other hand that it provoked new awareness of local issues, including the needs and demands of indigenous populations. There was also a change in the understandings of education and learning with a spreading of the constructivist approach to knowledge and the theories on learning by
pedagogues such as Dewey and an increasing emphasis on continuing education and lifelong learning. The elitism in education was as well challenged from a human rights and democracy – perspective, and finally there was the up rise of self-help groups created around the world with various missions who demanded the education they needed to fulfill their goals and which the Formal system of education could not provide. NFE was taken up by internationals agencies and western education planners, especially USAID, the World Bank, FAO and ILO, and at this time arose “the great debate” on NFE. It started about 1968 and declined rapidly after 1986. The main strands in the debate, as identified by Rogers (2005) were: the advocates, who saw NFE as all education outside the Formal system (extra-Formal) and the ideologues who saw NFE as inherently opposed to Formal Education (anti-Formal). There were also the empiricists who studied NFE in the field and claimed that it was much the same as formal education (para-Formal), and the pragmatists: who saw the possibility of non-formal elements within a formal education situation (intra-Formal). The changes in financial support to NFE from international agencies followed the up rise and the decline of the debate. Among the reasons for the loss of interest in NFE by the mid-80s, as suggested by Rogers (2005) were that the legitimacy of NFE was undermined by other discourses used by international bodies such as UNESCO, OECD and the EU and also that the post-modernist discourse of diversity won ground. There was a revival of support for the Formal education system, as NFE was from some perspectives seen as an attack on Formal education and as second rate to it, and there was general disillusion with NFE as being ineffective when theories were put into practice. Some also saw ideological and political issues as lying behind the interest in NFE, with co-option of NFE as a tool of global capitalism, providing second rate education for developing countries. (Rogers 2005). During the 1990s in the post-Jomtien era, when the focus was primarily on expanding and improving Formal education, NFE was the “...poor and badly dressed guest at the education table” (Hoppers 2006:13).

We have now looked at the NFE discourse in the past 30-40 years. In the following sections some of the perspectives in the contemporary discussion on NFE are discussed, and some of the experiences from more recent practice of NFE in the field of education are presented.

3.2.2 NFE today

Both Rogers (2005) and Hoppers (2006) point to the renewed interest in NFE in the new millennium. Examples given by these authors on the revival of NFE are international as well as
regional seminars and conferences held on NFE, the opening of courses in universities in both the West and the South on NFE, and not the least that international and bilateral agencies and organization such as the World Bank, SIDA, USAID, The European Union, again are concerned with and strengthening their support for NFE for adults and/or children and youth. Hoppers (2006) even claim that the debate on NFE is stronger now than in the 70s. As a vantage point for the discussion on what NFE actually means today, one may look at the contemporary standardized definitions of education;

The standardized definition of **Formal education** is “…education provided in the system of schools, colleges, universities and other formal educational institutions that normally constitutes a continuous “ladder” of full-time education for children and young people, generally beginning at age five to seven and continuing up to 20 or 25 years old” (UNESCO 2005:36).

**Non-Formal Education** is defined as “…any organized and sustained educational activities that do not correspond exactly to the above definition of formal education. Non-formal education may therefore take place within and outside educational institutions, and cater to persons of all ages. Depending on country contexts, it may cover educational programs to impart adult literacy, basic education for out-of-school children, work skills, and general culture. Non-formal education programs do not necessarily follow the ‘ladder’ system and may have different duration” (UNESCO 2005:36).

**Informal learning** is learning that is “…intentional, but less organized and less structured…and may include for example learning events (activities) that occur in the family, in the workplace, in the daily life of every person, on a self-directed, family-directed, or socially-directed basis” (UNESCO 2005:36).

**Random learning** refers to unintentional learning occurring at any time and in any place, in everyday life (UNESCO 2005). These definitions however appear insufficient when looking into the practice-field. From an analysis of a number of case studies of variations of NFE, Rogers (2005) arrives at the conclusion that NFE today can mean: a wide range of discrete and disparate activities by different agencies for adults, usually small-scale and localized, with some examples of scaling up, co-ordination and integration, forming a NFE sector. It may however also involve institutionalization, meaning large-scale national systems of vocational education and training, or basic education with accreditation and equivalency of the Formal school system and of training for NFE. It can also mean reform of the Formal schools system and integration of non-formal educational activities within the Formal education and feeder schools within the educational system, or alternative primary education for out-of-school children (Rogers 2005: 173). The judgment over the status of NFE as a concept is that “A once powerful concept has lost its way” (Rogers 2005: 3) and that “NFE today is a-theoretical, lacking any clear logic frame” (Rogers 2005: 169). Another comment made by this author (ibid) on the current practice-field is that
NFE has lost much of the adult dimension it earlier had. The renewed interest in NFE for children and young adults can in Rogers (2005) view be related to the pressure of EFA, and the insight that the desired progress is not being achieved through Formal education. Governments are increasingly also facilitators rather than direct implementers in the provision of NFE and this may be a motivator in adhering to NFE. A related factor may be the changed relations between governments in developing countries and the many national and international NGOs who operate in the field of education and development. “Many NGOs are now keen to work closely with the state rather than in opposition to government, just as the state is seeking to co-opt civil society to its goals” (Rogers 2005:227). It is also pointed out that there may be other reasons for the generally renewed interest in NFE in relation to human rights, which are increasingly seen as relative rather than universal, and with regard to the perspective that education is localized rather than global. The author (ibid) further comments that not all governments have a positive view on NFE, as they may fear a backdoor privatization of education. Some governments are also critical towards the role of some NGOs’ relation with civil society and the radical agenda of some NGO-driven NFE-programs (Rogers 2005). UNESCO (2005) as well notes that the understanding of NFE varies between nations. The confusion of the concept of NFE makes according to UNESCO cross-country comparative studies of NFE difficult, as well as a clear understanding of the meaning of NFE is necessary for relevant and efficient policy making, planning and monitoring of NFE. In their view, without a coherent cross-sectoral conceptual framework and/or policy frameworks, NFE is often misconceived as being limited to equivalency schooling, or aspects of adult- or continuing education, or targeting ‘marginalized’ or ‘special needs’ groups. The confusion on NFE and its possibilities tend to favor funding of primary Formal education to the detriment of NFE, and as a consequence monitoring mechanisms for managers of NFE activities become inefficient, or nonexistent. This in turn leads to a scarcity of NFE data, and lack of practical and appropriate demand and supply-side indicators, resulting in lack of co-ordination within administrative hierarchies, between sectors, and between governments and the NGO community (UNESCO 2005). In an attempt to clear up the confusion UNESCO (2005) provides a prototype conceptual framework for NFE, whose main features are presented in the following section.
3.2.3 UNESCO’s prototype conceptual framework for NFE

In order to describe a NFE program the type of activity, the target group, the type of provider and the target age must be defined, according to UNESCO (2005). The core categories for types of NFE activities suggested are:

- **Early Childhood Care and Education** (ECCE) which is described as the care and education services for young children from birth to the age of entry into primary education, and for parents with children of this age cohort

- **Equivalency schooling** which is primarily organized for children and youth who did not have access to or who have dropped out of Formal basic education, and typically aim at providing the equivalency to this education as well as mainstreaming the target groups into the Formal system when completing the NFE program

- **Life skills training** which are specific programs and activities organized to impart abilities to better function in daily life and improve society

- **Income-generating training/ Non-formal vocational training** which is also referred to as `livelihood training´

- **Rural development** which is education, training and extension services organized in rural communities primarily to improve agricultural practices, animal husbandry, management of natural resources and to promote rural development

- **Further education/ Further professional development**

- **Religious education**

- **Cultural/ Traditional education**

- **Literacy** (UNESCO 2005)

The core categories for types of NFE-providers, which may be main- or co-provider and is not necessarily the same as sponsor suggested are different levels of the government, co-operatives, public or private enterprise, educational- or training institutions and professional associations or trade unions. It also includes religious bodies or missions, national branches INGOs, local branches of national NGOs, local NGOs, community based organizations, private bodies/individuals and international organizations/development agencies. The target groups for NFE can be divided into illiterates, literates -basic and -advanced level, out-of-school children and school drop-outs, rural- and urban- poor, and marginalized adolescents and youth. The
latter group is described as those young people who did not have access to or have dropped out of
Formal schooling, and are living in conditions of difficulty due to social exclusion, physical
disabilities, marginalization and discrimination or economic circumstances that make them more
vulnerable. It also includes women and girls, ethnic or linguistic minority groups, and groups
living in special circumstances, for example migrant workers, refugees and demobilized soldiers,
which all may overlap with one or several of the other categories (UNESCO 2005). The core
categories for NFE target ages are young children, children, youth, adults and senior adults
(UNESCO 2005).

Another attempt to clear up the confusion on NFE is provided by Rogers (2005), who suggests that
a whole new paradigm for education would be useful both for the aims of analysis of educational
initiatives and in the planning of education. The following section presents his suggestion, and the
argumentation behind it.

3.2.4 Rogers´ suggestion on a new paradigm for education

Rogers (2005) points out that the language used on education today tends to universalize both
Formal education and NFE and that this is problematic since both are characterized more by
diversity than by unity. NFE in his view however points to educational opportunities “…outside of
the educational silo” (Rogers 2005:248). If the language of NFE was lost, the NFE activities might
be marginalized and less attention may be paid to the non-formality concept of flexibility and NFE
as a field of innovation. In Rogers´ view “…the prescriptive elements in the discourse of NFE
encourage new developments in the way the diversity discourses do not” (Rogers 2005:249). It is in
particular pointed to “…the need for innovative and flexible modes of education, the ability to
employ non-professional and para-professional teachers along the formal education teaching
profession, the need to adapt the curriculum or to develop new curricula to meet local needs, the
need to adopt different assessment processes in certain situations” and “…the need to adopt locally
determined timetables rather than a national uniform program” (Rogers 2005:249). A more clear
discourse on NFE is however needed, and in redefining NFE, Rogers also points to the need for
defining the concept of education as distinct from learning or activities which may lead to learning
although this is not a primary aim of the activity. In Rogers´ (2005:244) view what should be
counted as education are “…planned processes of learning undertaken by intent”, and according to
this definition much of what is labeled NFE today is in Rogers´ view actually non-formal schooling, meaning alternative and more flexible forms of schools.

Noticing that participation in education is claimed by the NFE programs to be lying behind the flexibility, which Rogers points to is the perhaps main strength of NFE, one factor to look at when defining an educational program is as well the way participation is interpreted and practiced. Participation can be understood and practiced as:

- **presence** in already determined activities and is achieved through persuasion (participation for incorporation).

- **activity**, again implying persuasion to join in already determined activities of a project; consultation being the keyword.

- **control**, seen as paramount for sustainability and self-determination.

The last and fullest form of participation implies that there can be no universal solutions. Rogers (2005) points to that in most NFE programs there is not full participation, and gives among others Save the Children's Village School program in Mali, BRAC in Bangladesh and ACCESS which is found in several African and Asian countries to exemplify this. All are projects often referred to as success-stories of NFE. In Rogers´ view;

“…what we are dealing with here is really an alternative school system with different criteria for teachers, a different but uniform management system involving the local community, a slightly different curriculum which however is used universally in the program, more informal premises, and in a few cases some adaptation of forms of assessment, but there is very little local control“ (Rogers 2005:254).

Borrowing concepts from organizational theory and group dynamics, Rogers also points to the possibility of defining education programs by looking at the formality of groups or organizations, which here can be understood as the educational programs, -projects or -courses and contextualization of the education provided. Shortly described a formal group is a group which does not change when the participants of the group changes, while an informal group changes when participants change. In between these extremes hybrids are found and formality of an activity may be seen as a continuum. Contextualization may like formality be seen as a matter of degree, where at one extreme contextualized activities are found and at the other end are the decontextualized activities. In between these there are degrees of contextualization and Rogers choose to operate with
`context-adjusted activities´, which means slightly adaptation to participants, and `context-sensitive activities´, meaning more fully adaptation to participants. A future paradigm is suggested, where Formal education is education which is highly decontextualized, not adapted to the individual participants, while Non-Formal Education may stand for the context-adjusted or -sensitive approaches (‘flexible schooling’). For education which is highly contextualized, individualized and small scale (‘participatory education’) the term Informal education is suggested (Rogers 2005).

Until now the focus of this chapter has been on NFE at a theoretical- or policy level and different variations of NFE, including initiatives for adults, as well as two suggestions on how the contemporary confusion on the concept of NFE may be solved. In the next section some of the experiences with NFE for children and young people are discussed, as the ABE program is an initiative aimed at serving these target groups.

3.2.5 Strengths and weaknesses of basic education NFE initiatives for children and young people

Hoppers (2005a) examines strengths and weaknesses of initiatives of NFE serving as a vehicle for basic education provision for young people. According to the author (ibid) main characteristics of NFE is that is has invariably adopted a demand-side approach and that it often is short term. Strengths of NFE initiatives for children and young people are reported to be:

- **Participatory school management**: meaning that communities can initiate and manage small village schools in collaboration with education authorities and NGOs.
- **Flexible admission**: children tend to enter at a later stage and classes tend to be multi-age and multi-grade.
- **Flexible school organization**: with adjusted school calendar and schedules better suited to learners and the communities needs with regard to for example farming and work responsibilities
- **Greater participation of girls**: which is often due to set targets by the providers of the programs, as well as higher survival rates of girls than in the regular school system (which appears to be due to the learning environment and school organization).
- **Curricular adaptation**: which is often a condensed form of the regular school systems curriculum. Sometimes fewer conventional subjects are provided, and often more life skills.
and sometimes pre-vocational skills are part of the curriculum.

- **Use of para-professional staff;** who are often local volunteers, including Formal school teachers, and though often poorly trained and paid, they are often highly motivated.

- **Teacher development and Support;** In some cases this responsibility is taken on by NGOs or the district education office. There is also evidence of effective social and moral supervision of local school committees and parents.

- **The use of local language as language of instruction and communication;** which improves learner participation and general comprehension

- **Conducive learning environment;** a more inclusive and stimulating learning environment, although the impact on actual learner-centeredness remains unclear

- **Equal or better learning achievement than the Formal school students** in reading, writing and arithmetic in some NFE programs

- **Low cost;** meaning that although the recurrent cost are often comparable to the costs of regular schools, these costs are often carried by the local communities, as well as the initial costs, and some recurrent costs, tend to be carried by supporting agencies

- **Partnerships** between the education authorities, NGOs and the community are often the base for provision of NFE, and leave more autonomy for local decision-making.

A list of weaknesses with NFE is also presented by Hoppers (2005a) and the author comments that they are often the flip side of the coin of what is perceived to be strengths;

- **Low level of (central) state involvement;** including lack of formal recognition, lack of professional and financial support, as well as lack of quality promotion.

- **Low teacher salaries;** or sometimes non-existent payment, as well as exclusion from or poor access to national training and development services for the NFE teachers.

- **NFE programs often don’t lead to completion of primary education;** and there is also lack of bridges with the formal system in many places.

- **Inefficiencies;** with regard to incompleteness of the primary cycle and repetition though the former appears to be a greater problem than the latter.

- **Little community-involvement** in decisions regarding curriculum, content and learning-organization has been experienced. There is also **little evidence that NFE centers are serving as centers for community learning and development.**
There is no evidence of NFE programs “empowering” students, affected by poverty and marginalization, to effectively overcome socio-cultural and economic constraints.

Most programs remain small-scale, fragmented and ad hoc and dependent on local initiative.

One variation of NFE for children and youth is the “community schools” approach which appears particularly relevant to the present study. The “community schools” are discussed in the following section, with emphasis on the experienced strengths and weaknesses of the approach.

3.2.5.1 The “Community schools” approach

Hoppers (2005a) makes a division of the field of NFE at the level of basic education for children and young people including three categories;

1. Supplementary provision; which consists of learning arrangements which add on to or follow the Formal education.

2. Compensatory programs; which aim at compensating for lack of access to, drop out from or poor performance in the school system.

3. Alternative programs; which aim at providing education which is different in form and content, more relevant and better suited to clients’ basic educational needs, than Formal education.

The author (ibid) concludes that with only a few exceptions, the so called “community schools”, are rather compensatory than alternative. Hoppers (2005b) looks closer at the phenomena of “community schools”, reanalyzing data on community school programs in different parts of Africa in the 1990s. “Community schools” are defined as “…schools established, run and largely supported by the local organizations, whether they be geographic neighborhoods (villages or urban townships), religious groups or non-profit educational trusts” (Hoppers 2005b:118). The community school programs reviewed were however often initiated by the state or an INGO. Characteristics of the community schools were that they tended to be small, generally consisting of a one- or two-room structure, built from local materials and with space for 30-80 students. Usually there were one or two teachers per school. In several of the programs there was a stipulation which...

---

8 The Supplementary category falls out as the community schools are meant as a substitution to Formal primary school.
usually was set by a sponsoring agency for a minimum percentage of female pupils, and where such regulation did not exist sometimes the majority of students were girls. The schools tended to have their own management committees, including parents and village elders (rural areas) or local associations (urban areas) whose main tasks were construction, maintenance and management of the schools, including teacher recruitment, supervision of attendance, and determination of the school calendar and schedule. The general practice was that the community paid the teachers through parental or community levies and other income-generating activities (Hoppers 2005b). The main aim of Hoppers (ibid) was to assess whether the community schools initiatives, in addition to enhancing access to education, also possibly offered learning experiences different from those in the Formal school systems. In this relation the author (ibid) operates with yet a categorization of NFE as an alternative means for providing basic education to children and young people;

“1. Variation for providing the same content as in regular public education for the purpose of equivalent learning outcomes, but by different modes of delivery.

2. Provision of an adaptation of regular public education in terms not only of mode of delivery, but also of curriculum and pedagogical practices, and thus of anticipated learning outcomes.

3. Practices of transformation, aiming at personal and community empowerment, thus promoting learning experiences and outcomes which are in fundamental ways antagonistic to those prevailing in the regular system; and

4. Different forms of enculturation, constituting other ‘learning systems’ associated with socio-cultural or religious traditions such as forms of indigenous education or Islamic schools” (Hoppers 2005b:118-119).

In the analysis of the community schools programs adaption and transformation as characteristics of the programs is emphasized. The former is defined as;

“…those characteristics that appear to take the existing provisions and regulations of the formal public system as their prime reference point, with a view to either doing the same or making adjustments that suited local situations and needs” (Hoppers 2005b:123).

Adaptive characteristics may be found in the dimensions of motivation (for the establishment of the schools), decision-making (community participation), learning organization, pedagogy (curriculum, content and teaching-learning methods), equity and articulation with the Formal school system, and resources, and relate to the 1st and 2nd category in the above scheme. Transformative responses are;

“…those characteristics that appear to constitute a rupture with conventional education values and practices by effectively promoting the transcendence of disadvantage, poverty and marginality,
rather than the acquiescence in its existence and adjustment to its conditions” (Hoppers 2005b:127).

Efforts towards transformation appear in the parameters of motivation, decision-making, pedagogy and equity and the transformative responses point to the 3rd and 4th category in the above scheme. The overall judgment of Hoppers (2005b) is that most of the community school programs reviewed fall in the first category, a clearly adaptive response, while none clearly fall into the 3rd or 4th category. A few fall in the second category, and in Hoppers view these programs also contain some potentially transformative elements. The conclusion on the community schools, keeping in mind that most are so called “adaptive” responses, is that although much is left to be desired, they also have some important positive features. This being that they effectively enhance access to and participation in basic education, and especially so for children and adolescents who otherwise might have been excluded from participation for reasons of age, work duties, household responsibilities, illness and poverty. Community involvement in the management of the schools promotes flexibility in adapting the organization to local circumstances, and adaptations of the curriculum to local needs and interests can be made in a manner that is acceptable to learners and their community. Other positive features are that the quality of the learning environment can improve when communities are directly involved in school supervision, as well as the use of mother tongue as LOI at least in the early years, may improve the quality of the pedagogical practice and the learning outcomes. The author (ibid) also refers to that there is already some evidence that community schools can produce similar if not better results than their local public counterparts in the core curricular areas. Some research also indicates that the different learning environment in community schools has been positive to girls’ participation in education. With regards to costs, Hoppers (2005b) points out that when initial development costs have been made the schools may also be low resource intensive. Some problems with the community school approach are however that the costs are more or less the same as public education in total, and in relation to this there is a question regarding equity to be raised: who carries the burden (and to whose benefit?). The financial responsibility of running the schools may weigh heavily on the communities and the inequities associated with teachers’ salaries and materials provision are constant sources of frustrations and tensions. It is commented that

“…whereas equity would require above average resource allocations to educational initiatives in marginal communities, the reality appears to be precisely the opposite. As a result, community schools may well contribute to the continued entrapment in conditions of poverty and marginality” (Hoppers 2005b:127).
It is also reported that there appears to be a strong parental concern over equivalence with and the transition to the Formal school system and especially so when the educational program is a condensed form of the Formal school curriculum and stops short of the primary completion level. In the end Hoppers (2005b) questions whether the positive features and possibilities of the community schools can add up to a significantly different learning experience, and even more to one that responds to the interests of learners and their communities. It is as well suggested that the up rise of such schools may signify an emergence of an ‘informal’ sector in education, where the state fails to take direct responsibility.

After having looked at the historical and more contemporary discussions on and practice of NFE, the following sections outline some perspectives taken on what quality of education means, including factors which have shown to contribute to enhanced quality of education. Factors influencing the demand for education in developing countries, including Ethiopia, and the relationship between dimensions of quality of education and the demand for education are also discussed. This is relevant for the present study, as high quality of education is an aim no matter how an educational initiative is labeled, and also because it is frequently claimed that NFE takes a demand-side approach to the provision of education, and often takes measures to make it more relevant to learners and their surroundings.

3.3 Quality of education and Demand for education

How quality of education should be defined, and whether a universal definition is at all possible are topics for debate. For example Johannessen (2006:6) argues that;

”…it is futile to search for a universal definition of quality of education. Instead, we should explore a variety of definitions that take into account the context within which education takes place”.

Bergmann (1996:586) states that;

“...a major definitional problem is that quality is not a system element like teachers, school books, pupils or classrooms. Quality is an attribute of any element which can vary according to at least one aspect or dimension. Since any element has a number of quality dimensions, perceived quality is subject to socio-cultural valuation”.

With this in mind I do not lean on one single definition of quality of education in the present study. In the following section some of the perspectives of the most influential organizations in the field of
education are presented, to be followed by a discussion on demand for education and findings of research on the demand for education in Ethiopia, and some perspectives which relates various perspectives of and dimensions of quality of education to demand for education.

3.3.1 Quality of Education within the framework of EFA

In the EFA Global Monitoring Report 2005, which was dedicated to issues regarding the quality of education, it is commented that in 1990, the World Declaration on Education for All noted that the quality of education in many places needed to be improved and made more relevant. Only expanding access would not be sufficient for making education contribute to the development of the individual and society to its full extent. Quality was also identified as a prerequisite for achieving equity, viewed as a fundamental goal. The notion of quality was however not fully developed at this point, while the Dakar Framework for action, as access to quality education was declared the right of every child, defined quality of education as the desirable characteristics of learners (healthy, motivated students), processes (competent teachers using active pedagogies), content (relevant curricula) and systems (good governance and equitable resource allocation) (UNESCO 2005).

UNESCO and UNICEF takes a child rights-based perspective to the quality of education. For UNESCO (2003) quality education is inclusive, it can adapt to meet diverse learning needs and uses a wide range of modalities in “…recognizing that learning is linked to experience, language and cultural practices, gifts, traits, the external environment and personal interests” (UNESCO 2003: 144-145).

Secondly the importance of what the learner brings to the learning-process in shape of for example experiences, physical and psychological prerequisites and work skills, is underlined. UNICEF (2002:4) points to that quality education requires “…learners who are healthy, well-nourished and ready to participate and learn, and supported in learning by their families and communities”. The impact of parental education is here important as it not only influences parent-child interactions related to learning, but also affects parents’ income and need for help in the home or field which has an impact on children’s possibilities of attending school. As for the content of education, UNESCO (2003) holds that much of what is taught world wide today is not relevant to the learners. Among others Hallak, in Brock-Utne (2006) has pointed out that for many parents, quality means more than simply a better school environment, more qualified teachers and more textbooks. It also means
relevance to local needs and adaptability to local cultural and economic conditions. Education must help children get on better in their daily lives, as well as help them to adapt to other environments. The “facts and skills for life”, which should be an aim of education along literacy and numeracy, should include “…education about rights, gender equity, respect for nature and other life forms, health, nutrition, HIV/AIDS, peace, and a respect for nature and an appreciation of diversity” (UNESCO 2003:145). ‘Life skills´ are by UNICEF (2002:12) defined as “psycho-social and interpersonal skills used in everyday interactions…not specific to getting a job or earning an income” including “assertion and refusal skills, goal setting ,decision making and coping skills”. UNICEF also argues that to teach and learn life skills student-centered methods are required. It is also pointed out that academic achievement is used often as an indicator of school quality and compared to other outcomes measures it as easy to measure, but that other outcomes of education can also be evaluated. Examples given are `education for citizenship´, implying participation in and contribution to the community, learner confidence and self-esteem, and `skills for behavioral development and change´, for example behavior related to health and hygiene (UNICEF 2002). For UNESCO (2003:145) the processes of education, include “…how learners are enabled to frame and solve problems, how different learners in the same group are treated and behave, and to what extent families and communities are engaged in education”. Quality education requires properly trained teachers who are able to use learner-centered teaching and learning methods, which includes addressing issues of disparity and discrimination with regard to, for example culture, language and gender, as well as life skills approaches.

Regarding the role of the learning environment in quality education UNESCO (2003) points to the need for adequate hygiene and sanitation facilities in the school and if possible health and nutrition services in the vicinity, as well as school policies and implementation of these promoting physical and mental health, safety and security. UNICEF (2000) points out that research has come to varying conclusions on the effect of the quality of school facilities on student achievement when taking students background into account. It however seem to have an indirect effect on learning as the quality of school infrastructure may be related to other school quality issues such as the working conditions for students and teachers, the presence of adequate instructional materials and textbooks and the ability of teachers to undertake certain instructional approaches. The availability of facilities such as toilets and clean water may also have an impact on the critical learning factor ´time on task´. The learning environment may also affect the demand for education as parents often consider the

56
location and condition of learning environments when assessing the quality of the school (UNICEF 2000). The importance of the psycho-social environment is underlined by both UNESCO and UNICEF, and includes elimination of harmful practices such as discrimination with regard to disabilities, gender and socio-economic background, bullying, corporal punishment and forced work. Policies on for example drug and tobacco use, HIV/AIDS and pregnancy are also needed (UNESCO 2003, UNICEF 2002). UNICEF (2000) also comments that maintaining order, constructive discipline and reinforcing positive behavior also are components in a quality learning environment as it communicates a seriousness of purpose to the students. As for quality of education at the system level, UNESCO (2003) states that quality education must be offered within a managerial and administrative system that supports effective learning. This presupposes a system which is well-managed with transparent processes, which is guided by the implementation of good policies and an appropriate legislative framework, and that sufficient resources are dedicated to the education system. There must also be necessary means to measure learning outcomes.

Among initiatives found to contribute to overall quality UNESCO (2003) points out that ECCE has been found to equip children for a good start in formal learning and that mother tongue instruction in the early years of schooling helps ease the transition between the home and the school. This is as well noted by UNICEF (2000), but also that there is some resistance in African countries against using vernaculars as LOI, both for political reasons, lack of resources to make the transition from using for example English or French as LOI and parents and teachers attitudes and beliefs on what serves the children best and towards African languages. UNESCO (2003) also recognizes that healthy and properly nourished children learn better and that school feeding programs can be helpful. It is also pointed out that there is need for capacity development in secondary, vocational, technical, higher and adult education, to respond to the increased access in basic education, and in order to create “knowledge societies”. The private sector and NGOs may also make valuable contributions to promote quality education, and assessing outcomes, including that some states find international student assessments useful, is important for the improvement of quality in education (UNESCO 2003). UNICEF (2002) refers that schools have organized the schedule according to children’s work and family obligations and have hence seen greater success in student persistence and achievement.
3.3.2 Demand for education

Bergmann (1996) argues that demand for education can be divided into two components: demand for access to education and demand to remain in the education system. Demand reactions are enrolment, repetition and drop out. Where education is compulsory and effectively enforced repetition is not related to demand but to the perceived capacity of a student to continue successfully in the next higher grade. The author (ibid) also points out the importance of perceived external efficiency of education; it’s potential to provide access to income in general, and in particular paid jobs, and that this may partly explain the situation in many developing countries with overcrowded classrooms in urban areas while in remote rural areas schools may be found half empty. Bergmann holds that external efficiency is probably the main factor determining the total volume of demand for education in developing countries (Bergmann 1996). Camfield and Tafere (2009) found that the large majority of guardians of children and youth in five different communities across Ethiopia had high aspirations for their children, such as completing university, having professional salaried occupations such as doctor, teacher or civil servants. The large majority of the guardians also expected their children to help themselves and siblings when they grew up. Many parents also expressed that schools should concentrate on “useful” knowledge and prepare the children for work, rather than “civic lessons” and school clubs debating for example HTPs. In the following section findings of research on factors which influence demand for education in the Ethiopian context are outlined.

3.3.2.1 Factors outside the school system affecting the demand for education in Ethiopia

The Young Lives Project has investigated the issue of demand for education, approximated by children’s enrolment in Ethiopia and the correlation with factors outside the school system affecting enrolment (Jones and Pereznieto 2006). Among the findings of the study, were that the following factors (presented in order of their relative impact) had positive impact on children's enrolment:

1. Household wealth
2. Maximum level of education obtained by female adults in the household
3. Ownership or rental of land
4. Maximum level of education obtained by male adults
5. Structural social capital (defined as citizens’ participation in community groups)
Factors with negative impact on children’s enrolment were found to be:

1. The number of household members over the age of 15 years
2. Ownership of livestock
3. The number of events/shocks that decrease household welfare
4. Distance to primary school
5. Structural social capital
6. The number of children between 5 and 15 years in the household
7. Hours spent on chores, household work or childcare
8. The involvement of the child in paid work (Jones and Perez nieto 2006)

Household wealth impacts demand for education in several ways. Direct costs as well as indirect costs of schooling, relative to the household’s ability to take on these costs are important determinates in the decision to send children to school or not. Direct costs include clothing, including school uniforms, books, transport, and school fees. Loss of children’s income from eventual paid work, or the loss of children’s labor in the household’s income-generating activities, for example on the family farm, or doing household chores represent indirect costs. Rural households are more sensitive to costs of schooling and even small charges can have a greater impact on rural households and demand-reactions in relation to education than in urban areas. Asset ownership such as ownership of farming land and livestock may both have a positive and negative impact on demand for education. If the assets generate enough wealth for the household to be able to hire labor the children may be allowed to take on education instead of working for the family, while it may also require the labor of the children and thus prevent them from going to school. As for the impact of the parents’ education, the 2006 Young Lives study confirmed that higher parental education does have a significantly positive effect on the probability of Ethiopian children being in school. It is assumed that educated parents are more able to recognize the long term benefits of education and educated parents may also derive more satisfaction from educated children than illiterate parents. The size and composition of the family or household is another factor that can affect children’s schooling. In the Ethiopian context, it has been argued that the greater the number of children within a family, the greater the probability of their enrolment, because of the greater availability of labor in the household. There is also the birth order effect, which means that children with older siblings are more likely to go to school, as the labor burdens of the family are shared.
among older family members. It has also been argued that children in female-headed households are more likely to enroll in school, and the probable explanations to this is that women have stronger beliefs that educated children are less likely to become poor adults and/or that the children's improved outlooks for future income enhances the outlooks to reduce their own old-age poverty. Distance to school was in the 2006 Young Lives study found to also be one of the most common factors related to non-attendance. According to the MOE, a quarter of the Ethiopian population lives four or more kilometers away from primary schools, and this implies high direct as well as indirect costs in terms of time, transport, energy and safety for the children (Jones and Pereznieto 2006). It should further be noticed that there is a gender-aspect to many of the factors listed here as influencing the demand for education, which is elaborated on under section 3.3 of this chapter. In the following section we turn to the relationship between quality of education and demand for education.

3.3.2.2 The impact of quality of education and school quality on the demand for education

Verwimp (1999) on the other hand explored the impact of school specific characteristics on demand for education in the Ethiopian rural context, focusing on demand for enrolment. The analysis was based on data from the Ethiopian Rural Household Survey and data from a case study on the quality of schooling in 4 villages in different parts of Ethiopia covering different agro-ecological conditions. Verwimp suggests that “...one way to understand ‘quality’ of education in a resource constraint environment (such as rural Ethiopia) is the degree of responsiveness to household needs shown by the educational institution” (Verwimp 1999:181) The short explanation to this is that since farming and household work keep children away from school, due to difficult economic situations of households, a “good” school is a school which tries to adapt to this, meaning that it tries to reduce the opportunity costs of children going to school. Verwimp constructed a school quality-index, inductively derived from accounts of the school directors of the schools included in the study, where teacher effort, both to get children into school and to engage children in school activities was placed on top. Next came the calendar system, including use of a shift system or limited school hours and the school not holding classes during harvest season. Given the same importance as the school calendar system is the infrastructure of the school, limited to meaning the availability of seats or benches for all pupils. The author (ibid) points out that the index is constructed by factors that can be affected by school policy. Other factors that influence enrollment
as mentioned by the school directors, which by Verwimp were not deemed to be in (direct) reach of school policy, were farm work, marriage, religion, household work, language, war, poverty, distance, severe sickness and age of the child. Verwimp found a strong positive correlation between the school quality index and enrolment in the schools included in the study (Verwimp 1999).

A quality of teaching measure was as well constructed by interviewing the teachers in the schools about their behavior, mainly whether they are pupil-oriented, and their attitudes towards pupils, ranging from “liberal” to “authoritarian”. Among other things it is found that teachers working in schools with low PTR score higher on the teaching-quality. It is suggested that if the PTR in a particular school is low, there is more room for the teachers to engage in non-teaching activities, like making pedagogical material, preparing classes and organizing extracurricular activities, and this may raise the quality of the teaching in the school. The hypothesis is tested on the sample of schools and the result is close to significant. It is as well suggested by the author (ibid) that the schools scoring high on the school quality-index and therefore enroll more children, pay for the success with a decrease in the quality of teaching (Verwimp 1999).

Bergmann (1996) focuses on the relationship between quality of education and demand for education in developing countries, and the points made appear relevant also in the Ethiopian context. 4 types of quality of education are in this relation postulated; value-, input-, process- and output-quality.

- **Value quality** of education is defined by Bergmann as the quality of the overall goals and objectives of education; the degree to which the overall goals of an education system relate to a society’s dominant value system. An example related to this is for example Muslims preferring Quranic schools over secular public education in some places (Bergmann 1996).

- **Output quality** of education is briefly defined as the quality of students’ achievements, at a minimum level consisting of full functional literacy and numeracy. The output quality depends according to Bergmann mainly on the characteristics of pupils and of the process quality.

- **Process quality** refers to the quality of the teacher-pupil interaction in the teaching-learning process. It means according to Bergmann that in a given situation suited teaching methods are used so that pupils learning opportunities are optimized. The author (ibid) argues that “…usually, if classroom conditions permit it means pupil-centered methods, full mastery of lesson content by the
teacher, a calm and `orderly´ learning environment, and the availability of the basic materials needed for pupils activities and exercises. It means error-free and relevant teaching content as much as absence of fear among pupils" (Bergmann 1996:587). This implies that process quality depends on the input quality.

- Input quality regards the curriculum and content, methods and the manner if their implementation. The curriculum implementation quality depends in turn on among other things the teaching-learning materials, the working conditions of teachers and students, the pedagogical skills of the teachers and the total instructional time.

Bergmann (1996) found that the quality of education influences demand at the primary school level, although the relative importance of it varies between contexts. Quality issues are most important in relation to the decision to remain in the education system or not, while enrolment is affected by a combination of guardians considerations of the educational quality and an evaluation of direct and opportunity costs. The author (ibid) further argues that value quality mainly is related to enrolment, while process quality of education and hence indirectly the input quality affect drop out and irregular attendance, as well as repetition. Process quality is also an important, in Bergmann´s view the decisive, factor in the choice of some parents to enroll children in private schools which cost more than the public school, due to for example the use of foreign languages as LOI and the belief in that this enhances the external efficiency. Output quality is also a criterion for selecting a school or school system, and as suggested by Bergmann then probably used as a predictor of external efficiency, as well as it affects drop out and irregular attendance, and repetition (1996). In light of these findings Bergmann (1996) puts forward 4 hypothesizes:

1. “The less education is culturally valued for its own sake, the less it is institutionalized, the more purely economic considerations of costs and benefits govern the demand for education. Education is perceived as a vehicle for social mobility.
2. The larger the segment of a population that can make a decent living according to local standards without schooling, the weaker the economic pressure for education.
3. The more realistic alternatives there are for a life without formal education, the slower will be the process of institutionalization of education.
4. The poorer a household, the more its decisions will be governed by short term considerations” (Bergmann 1996:602)

After having looked at perspectives and research on quality of education and demand for education, we now turn to discussing some research on Ethiopian children’s life worlds. This is important as a
claimed strength of NFE, including the ABE program, is that the education is more contextualized and adapted to the needs of the learners and their communities.

3.4 Ethiopian children’s life worlds

There is a growing body of research dedicated to Ethiopian children’s life worlds, including increasing use of qualitative or cross-methodological approaches, as contrary to earlier research which was mainly quantitative and often focused on adults or studied children through adults. Among those currently engaged in this research area are for example the Population Council, Forum for Social Studies at the University of Addis Ababa, and the Young Lives Project. In this section I with help of some of the available literature intend to create a picture of Ethiopian children´s life worlds, and special attention is given to gender roles and what role they play in relation to different parts of life and in different arenas.

3.4.1 Children in the Ethiopian social landscape

Poluha (2004) is also a frequently cited publication. This publication was based mainly on ethnographic research on 4th grade children in a private though poor primary school in Addis Ababa, including as well other arenas in which the children moved in their daily lives, in the year 2000. The findings were also contrasted with the author’s own experience with the children in a rural area in the Amhara Regional state for over 30 years. The aim of the study was to investigate why relations between state and people, adults and children, men and women in Ethiopia have been so visibly authoritarian and durable, despite radical government changes; from a ‘feudal’, to a ‘socialist’, to a ‘democratic’ regime and the concern was approached through studying how Ethiopian children acquire cultural competence. Among the findings were that the relations between adults and children, between siblings and among children were often explicitly hierarchical and in particular determined by age, adult status, gender, social status, physical size and strength. The children ought to show respect and obedience towards adults, and especially their parents, but also older siblings, and adults close to the children, such as neighbors and other family-members and teachers. Respect towards adults was for example shown by doing what the adults told them to do, and fulfilling their wishes and needs, and also to avoid them or “be invisible” around adults (Poluha 2004). This is also described by Børke (2004) in a Norwegian Master-thesis on “Children's social landscapes” built on
ethnographic studies in Addis Ababa. Adults were in turn expected to control and supervise the children. According to Camfield and Tafere (2009), drawing on data from a Young Lives 2006 survey, important values which Ethiopian parents wants to transfer to their children included: ‘hard work’, ‘independence’, ‘religious faith’, ‘obedience’, and ‘cooperation and conforming within your community’.

The teaching-learning process in school was by Poluha (2004) described as marked by rote learning, subservience and discouragement of initiatives in class, though there was some room for questioning and alternative behavior. Both in- and outside school, children’s positive behavior was mainly reinforced by blessings and negative behavior corrected through advice and punishments, including physical punishments. The use of physical violence in school was outlawed in 1988, but was still common, and was carried out by teachers or student monitors. There was a limit to what was considered by students to be deserved punishments with an aim (to learn from it), and what was perceived as meaningless or abusive punishments (Poluha 2004). Teachers were expected to treat the children with respect; to act like their parents or older siblings towards them, and if not the role is fulfilled they would loose the respect of the students. According to Tamene (2007) who examined how children grow up in the town of Debre Markos and the adjacent rural area in the Amhara society, children were expected to obey and show respect to the teachers, but practiced it towards those considered to deserve it. For example; if a teacher had good personality and showed affection, was punctual and well-prepared for classes, the students behaved well by doing their homework, paying attention in class, running errands and so on. Some of the children in the rural area also expressed that they even respected teachers more than they respected their parents, since they imparted knowledge. If a teacher on the other hand beat and disgraced students, did not teach properly or did not keep his personality (for example by drinking, smoking or chewing chat), the students were unwilling to show the teacher obedience and respect, but rather the opposite. They might miss classes, not do their homework or call the teacher by name instead of `teacher´ or even threaten the teacher verbally and physically (Tamene 2007).

3.4.2 Work, responsibilities and school

Tamene´s (2007) research aimed at investigating the rights of girls and boys in their home, the gender induced duties and activities of children and local views and practices regarding children's education. 40 children, 10-18 years old and 10 adults over 30 years old were involved in the study.
Among the findings were that the activities, social interactions, and expectations on the children varied both between girls and boys and between the children in the rural and the urban area. In both areas the general pattern was that boys were expected to do activities outside the home, while domestic activities mainly belonged to the girls, as in line with male and female adults’ traditional responsibilities in Ethiopia (Kidanu and Rhamato 2000). But the rural children had more burdensome tasks than the children in town, and there were also exceptions to the traditional gender divisions. The boys in the rural areas mostly worked with farming or husbandry, such as ploughing, looking after the animals, digging of irrigation canals, milking cows etc, while in town they mostly did lighter work like running errands and shopping, and some also carried out domestic tasks such as cooking or cleaning the house. The girls in town worked with for examples preparing food and coffee, cleaning the house, washing clothes and taking care of younger siblings. The rural girls carried out similar tasks, but in addition also did some of the work outside of home, such as looking after the domestic animals, milking cows and harvesting (Tamene 2007). Chuta’s (2007) research on children in rural and urban Oromia also found that rural children had more responsibilities, and from an earlier age than urban children. Rural children were in this study also depicted as less articulate, shyer and less aware of their rights than urban children. According to a Young Lives study on children's transitions published in 2009, girls in a rural community at the outskirts of Aksum, at the age of 5-7 started doing activities like fetching water (at least 5 liters), serving the food in the house, looking after domestic animals and carrying siblings. This was also the age when they started going to school. The boys might around the same age start herding animals, watch the house and also start school. Girls who were 12-13 years old were expected to carry out all kinds of domestic chores without guidance from adults and fetch 20 liters of water, and boys were working hard in farming and herding at this age (Camfield and Tafare 2009).

The Child Labor Force Survey from 2001 which included 6.5 million children aged 10 to 14, revealed that for the large majority of children in this age group work was part of their daily life. Only 3% were just going to school, while 26 % were students and also working outside the home and 23 % were students who also worked in the household. 36% of the children were not going to school but working outside the home and 10 % were not going to school but working in the household. Less than 2% were unemployed and 30 % of these were sick or disabled. The majority

---

9 It should however be noted that figures of children in and out of school have changed since the survey was carried out.
of the children worked in agriculture (91%), retail and services (5%) and manufacturing (2%). Most of the children were unpaid family workers (92%), 3% were employees and 2.6% self-employed. For 91% of respondents, the main motive for working was to assist in household enterprises or supplement household income. On average, girls reported to spend 27.6 hours per week working and boys 34.4 hours. Over a third of children who worked felt that work had affected their schooling (Camfield and Tafere 2009). In a study on “the experience of adolescence in the Amhara Region” involving 1735 boys and girls 10 to 19 years old, 13% of the boys and 3% of the girls had ever worked for pay, while 89% of boys and 94% of girls were engaged in unpaid domestic and agricultural work. On average 30 hours per week were spent on work, with more working hours for out-of-school youth than for school youth. Most of the unpaid work was done for the family, but in the girls’ cases they also did it for their spouses. The adolescents who had worked for pay had in the boys cases mostly worked with herding or farming and in the girls cases they also worked as domestic workers or in the production of local alcohol. Most of the adolescents who had done or were engaged in paid work reported to use the earnings for basic living expenses and support to the family (Erulkar et al 2004). Camfield and Tafere (2009) suggested that combining work with school is perhaps less detrimental to the education in urban areas as there is a wider range of educational options, such as night-classes, compared to rural areas. They also noticed that there generally was a balance between whether working was actually what allowed the children to go to school, and when it affected their education negatively.

3.4.3 Factors affecting girls education

Tamene (2007) found in his study that because the girls were more heavily burdened with tasks aside their education, they often had less time than boys for the schoolwork. It was also found that girls had less participation in class than boys, and that this was more or less expected. The girls were expected to have good academic performances and do their homework, but maintain silence in class to not be considered disrespectful or “talkative”. Alemeyhu (2007) findings from research on children in SNNPR were similar. Many girls in Tamene’s (2007) study were also found to be victims of early marriage, and whether it had lead them to dropping out of school or not, it most often affected their education negatively. In spite of that the Ethiopian law states that marriage should be entered into with the free and full consent of the intending spouses, that the legal age for
and that Ethiopian authorities have campaigned against it, the occurrence of early marriage is rather high in parts of Ethiopia. The influence of family members and considerations of family wealth or poverty often make marriage a primarily economic transaction, including payment of types of bride wealth, and non-arranged marriages are still relatively unusual, at least in rural areas. Types of arranged early marriages are the promissory, child marriage and adolescent marriage. The first signifies a promise at birth or during infancy and is typically made between rich families and the future spouses may be close in age. The second type is where the bride is aged less than 10 years old and the third is where the bride is 10 to 15 years old (Camfield and Tafere 2009). One may also speak of Early Adolescent Marriage, which is the most common marriage for rural girls, where the bride is between the ages 10 and 14 years old and the bridegroom usually in the late adolescent age bracket, Adolescent Marriage where the bride is around 15 years old and Late Adolescent Marriage when the bride is over 15 years old. Late marriage for boys is however considered to be after the age of 20 years (Aspen and Mekonnen 2007). There are regional differences in the occurrence of early marriage, with the highest being in Amhara and Tigray with median ages 14.4 and 15.7 years among those aged 20 to 49 according to data from 2005 (Camfield and Tafere 2009). A survey on early marriage in Amhara National Region revealed that the average age of girls at marriage was 13.2 years for North Gonder (Aspen and Mekonnen 2007). Consequences of early marriage are among others early sexual debut, and pregnancy, which also may lead to health problems such as fistula, higher maternal mortality and morbidity, and increased infant and child mortality (Camfield and Tafere 2009). Early marriage, and having children early in life, also prevents girls from developing social capabilities such as educational and occupational skills, as was indicated in the study conducted by Tamane (2007). Erulkar et al (2004) found that just over half of the adolescents included in a survey made in relation to the study had never been to school. While the most common reason for this was reported to be poverty, marriage came in second place for girls, while for boys domestic responsibilities came in second place of factors stated to prevent them from going to school. Only 12% of the ever married girls reported having dropped out of school due to marriage, but this was mainly because most of them had never been to school in the first place (83% compared to 35% among the girls never married). It was also indicated that going to school might prevent the girls from being married away or delay it (Erulkar et al 2004). Early marriage can thus be said to reproduce both poverty and gender-inequities in that

10 Until 2003 the legal age for marriage was 15 years for girls and 18 years for boys (Aspen 2008).
it may reinforce women’s lower status and lack of decision making power, and especially so if there is a large age difference between the husband and wife and the wife live in the husband’s household or community (Erulkar et al 2004, Camfield and Tafere 2009). Rape, related to the in some cases long distances between the home and school, and incest, were other factors found by Tamene (2007) to be obstacles to girls’ education. Girls may also be prevented from going to school, or withdrawn when they reach puberty, because societal attitudes towards girls schooling and fear for the security of the girl or that the girl may have pre-marital relations with boys (Jones and Pereznieto 2006, Camfield and Tafere 2009). Although the daily lives of girls appeared more challenging than the boys’ daily lives, the girls did however not passively submit to this order, according to Tamene (2007), but questioned, sometimes challenged it and tried to improve their situation. The same was noted by Poluha (2004). Kidanu and Rhamato (2000) as well as Børke (2004) also noted that the gender-division of labor, duties and rights among adults, and especially in urban areas are changing in favor of women. Poverty appeared to be one of the factors bringing about the changes as it required women to engage in income-generating activities outside the household. The spread of education among women and the influence of mass media also appeared to play a role.

3.4.4 The role of religion in children’s lives- in urban and rural areas

According to Poluha (2004), religion had an important role in the lives of the children in Addis Ababa. It influenced their everyday practices, their worldviews and their conceptualizations of good and bad, including whom their parents preferred them to spend time with, whom they themselves preferred as friends and that some of them went to religious schools. In the Christian Orthodox village in Northwest Ethiopia, which Poluha has several decades of experience with, the children only had limited contact with the church and religion did not seem to have such an outspoken role in their everyday lives. Tamene (2007) however found that, religion played an important role in for example peer formation among both the urban and rural children in his study.

After having looked at some of the more recent research dedicated to picturing the life worlds of Ethiopian children, findings of a previous study on the quality of basic education and in particular of the ABE program in the Amhara Region are presented. Some personal comments on the findings are also provided.
3.5 Previous findings on the ABE program

A comprehensive study on the quality of basic education in the Amhara Region, with particular focus on the ABE program, was conducted by SCN-E and SCD-E and published in 2007. The study was based on both primary qualitative and quantitative data, and on secondary data from previous studies of the ABE program in the area. The quality of education was in this study assessed in terms of input, process, outcome and support systems and in relation to the formal primary education. Other aims of the study were to examine the current situation and practices within ABE, to reveal determinants of quality within ABE and give suggestions on the future faith and practice of the program. Access issues like enrolment, drop out etc were not considered (Bedanie et al 2007).

The ages of the grade 3 ABE students included in the study varied between 7 and 26 years with a mean age of 11.94 years for boys and 10.53 years for girls, indicating that children aged only 5 years had enrolled in grade 1. The authors (ibid) comment that the education provided in ABE is beyond their capacity, and that the curriculum and the teaching styles in ABE do not match the maturity of under aged children. The mean ages for ABE students were also lower than for the Formal school students and it was suggested that this was a result of locating ABECs closer to children’s homes. Though it may have caused the sending of under aged children to school it appeared to have contributed to correcting the age of students, which was much higher when ABE started (Bedanie et al 2007). Since the student cohorts included in the study were different; grade 3 in ABE and grade 4 in Formal school, this may however also explain the difference in the mean age.

It was found that both ABE students and the Formal school students performed poorly in all subjects, with the ABE students scoring on average 58.36% in Amharic, 34.32% in English, 42.31% in Mathematics and 56.52% in Environmental Science tests. Girls scored less than boys in all subjects in both ABE and Formal school and both groups of students performed more poorly in English and Mathematics than in Amharic and Environmental Science. Observations of personal hygiene and sanitation of the majority of the students was not deemed to be to the desired level. FGs with regional, zonal and woreda education authorities, teachers, supervisors and ABE facilitators also indicated that there was a long way to go for the students in improving personal hygiene, creatively solving problems, avoiding HTPs, and to learn to appreciate themselves and others. The conclusion by Bedanie et al (2007) was that the ABE strategy objectives were not attained to a
satisfactory level, but that the expectations of the outcomes of the program may partly explain the gap. It is argued that;

“...it is questionable to expect a child between 7-11 ages to be in position to `investigate and compare cultural malpractices and promote useful beliefs and practices´. The same holds true with the ambition to anticipate a child of such an age to `attempt to inquire and understand and at the same time give solutions to confronting problems (challenges)´” (Bedanie et al 2007: 37).

It was also reported by participants in the study that both physical and emotional abuses at both ABECs and Formal schools had been very much reduced both in rural and urban areas, and that child marriage decreased from time to time due to that a lot of community awareness workshops, discussions with judiciary bodies, children’s drama club activities and legal actions were taken by the government (Bedanie et al 2007).

The student-textbook ratio in ABE was found to be 1:1 for all subjects, but nearly half of the students reported that they never read supplementary reading materials. The textbooks in all 3 grades were analyzed and the conclusion was that with some few exceptions the curriculum seemed to be “appropriate”. It was also found that students in full-day ABECs scored higher than those in shift-system in all subjects and the authors claim that this; “...confirms that the government’s initiative of abandoning shift system (in Formal schools) is the right move to the improvement of the quality of education” (Bedanie et al 2007:6).

The so called flexible time table of ABE was found to be becoming similar to that of the Formal schools. The study team claimed that reasons for this were that it seemed that parents perceived ABE as inferior to Formal school when seeing that their children were not following the regular school time table, and at the same time that facilitators played hidden roles to persuade the parents to oppose the flexible time table as they preferred to follow a regular time table. The study team also believed that adequate promotion work had not been done by the WEOs in the creation of awareness about the flexibility of the ABE program (Bedanie et al 2007).

It was found that only 30% ABECs compared to 41% of the Formal schools had potable water and that more than half of ABECs compared to 25% of the Formal schools had no pit latrines. About half of the ABECs, compared to 25% of the Formal schools had no playgrounds and sports materials. Some of the school compounds at both ABECs and Formal schools were used as farmlands as an income generating activity for the schools. The majority of the ABECs had no
reading corners and no supplementary reading materials, except the ABECs which had been pilot centers. A considerable number of the ABECs were also found to be delivering lessons in overcrowded, unclean classrooms with poor seating arrangements. The academic scores of students who said that they did not attend in overcrowded classrooms were slightly higher than of those who said they did. The scores of those students who responded that their classrooms were neat and had suitable seats also performed better than those who responded otherwise, consistent across all subjects (Bedanie et al 2007).

Issues regarding the facilitators in ABE were found to be among the most important factors affecting the quality of ABE. The ages of ABE facilitators ranged between 18 and 27 years, with the majority being 24 to 27 years old while the ages of the Formal school teachers ranged between 21 to over 32 years, with the majority being over the age of 32 years. 65% of ABE facilitators were males compared to 81% of the Formal school teachers. 30% of the ABE facilitators had completed grade 12 and 70% had TTI or TTC qualifications compared to the Formal school teachers of whom 45% had TTC and 55% Diploma level qualification. Although there was a 1:1 students- textbook ratio facilitators often used a teacher-centered approach with the students spending most of their time copying from the blackboards. The test scores of those students who said that their facilitators used active learning methodology and teaching-learning aids were better than those who responded otherwise. WEOs and Zonal departments strongly questioned the abilities of facilitators to handle the teachings of all subjects and many facilitators reported that they had difficulties understanding the contents of some of the subjects, especially English, Mathematics and Environmental Sciences (in order of difficulty). The supervisors, community members and ABE committee members also expressed doubt on the academic abilities of facilitators, and a majority of them were said to have difficulty in reading and writing. The overall judgment of Bedanie et al (2007) was that the ABE-facilitators rather badly lacked the proper capacity and the short-time training-programs, the cluster program and the mobile supervisors were found to show little effect on facilitators’ ability to teach. It was also found that the different salary scales, ranging from 200 to 300 birr for facilitators in ABE, which also were lower relative to the teacher salaries in Formal school, as well as different practices on payment in the ABECs had created dissatisfaction among the facilitators. Lack of proper facilities like housing, market and clinic in the vicinity of schools were also found to negatively affect the morals of facilitators.
Only 1.7% of the ABE students compared to 2.5% of the Formal school students reported that the facilitators were absent for about 3 days in a week. The study team commented that the reported lower absenteeism in ABE may reflect that there is more control of the ABECs than of the Formal schools exercised by the community members. It was as well reported that 2.8% of students in ABE compared to 3.4% students in Formal school were absent for about 3 days in a week. According to the authors of the report this may be related to the locations of the ABECs and the flexibility of the schedule in some of the ABECs (Bedanie et al. 2007). It may however be questioned whether 3 days of absence in a week should make the difference between low and higher absenteeism, as 1 or 2 days of absence on average in a week makes the total absence rather high.

Regarding home environment factors impacting the quality of education it was found that the majority of both students in ABE and in Formal schools lacked the opportunity to be assisted by their family members, as the majority (53% and out of these 52.1% were in ABE) of students parents (fathers) were illiterate. There were however no differences found in the achievements of the students on the basis on whether they reported to get support from their families or not. It was also found that students who had many responsibilities at home, such as herding cattle, fetching water, taking care of siblings etc had poor academic achievements. The majority (68.62%) of the respondent students reported there was a meal available for them before going to school, but according to observations made by the consultancy-team the greater majority seemed to be malnourished. Facilitators and teachers also reported that the students yawned and slept in classrooms even in the early morning lessons, indicating that they either had not eaten before going to school or did not get enough food to energize them. The respondents who reported that they got meal before school showed much higher test scores in both programs (Bedanie et al. 2007).

It was also found that stakeholders others than INGOs (SCN-E, SCD-E, Plan Ethiopia, Action Aid Ethiopia etc), were hardly contributing to ABE to the expected level, including district education offices, and that this was due to both human and material capacity limitations. The overall conclusion of the study was that the quality of ABE was rather poor, and that the major determinant of ABE quality is a function of home and school environment, facilitators, the curricula and support systems. It was deemed that there was need for profound improvement in the areas of learning environment, recruitment, training and placement of facilitators, closer supervision of activities and outcomes by duty bearers and continuous awareness creation among communities. It was suggested that the ABECs should be transformed into Formal schools when the catchments area of ABEC was
found to be adequate for primary school standard, the contribution from the community or an investor is ensured to construct and furnish a full fledged primary school, there is no primary school at a distance of 3 kilometers, government recurrent budget allocation is ensured and the WEO is ready to deploy required teaching and administrative staff (Bedanie et al 2007).

Before the findings from the field studies are presented and discussed in relation to the literature which has been presented in this chapter in the following chapter the methodology, research design and methods applied for data collection in the present study is presented.
4. Methodology

In this chapter the methodological approach taken to answer the research questions in the study is outlined. The research design, methods for data collection and mode of analysis are presented, and ethical concerns and other methodological issues are discussed.

4.1 Methodological approach

In this study I wanted to explore the participants’ experiences with and views and opinions on the ABE program, and in particular try to capture their perspective on its quality and relevance. Because of the nature of the research questions it was appropriate to take a qualitative methodological approach to the study. Qualitative research can be construed as a research strategy that usually emphasizes words rather than quantification in the collection and analysis of data, and is most often not aimed at generalisation. It emphasizes an inductive approach to the relationship between theory and research, although the contrary is also possible. It also takes an interpretivist epistemological position and a constructionist ontological position. This means that it to a large extent rejects the natural scientific model and instead emphasizes the ways in which individuals interpret their social world and see social reality as constantly shifting and created by individuals interactions. Emphasis is laid on direct engagement by the researcher with the social world under study. The researcher is often said to be the main instrument of both data collection and data interpretation (Bryman 2004, Patton 2002). More specifically the study takes a phenomenological perspective. The foundational question in phenomenology is has according to Patton (2002:104) “What is the meaning, structure, and essence of the lived experience of this phenomenon for this person or group of people?”. The phenomenon in focus of the research may be an emotion, a job or working place, a relationship, a program or an organization etc. The perspective builds on the view that there is no objective reality for people, but the reality is what people perceive it to be. What hence is of importance in phenomenological research is to inquire what people experience and how they interpret their experiences. Methodologically phenomenology emphasizes participant observation and in-depth interviewing in the collection of data. An important difference should be pointed out; the present study is not a phenomenological study, which focuses on finding the essence of people’s experiences, but takes a phenomenological perspective, as described above (Patton 2002).
In line with the basic ideas of qualitative research, and the more specific ideas of phenomenology, the thesis relies heavily on primary data gathered through field studies in Ethiopia. The qualitative primary data is also supplemented by both qualitative and quantitative secondary data in order to create a more complete picture. Since the researcher is not only the main instrument of data collection in qualitative research but also at center of the analytic process in qualitative research, the validity of qualitative research is especially dependent on the credibility of the researcher. This includes the researcher’s methodological skill, sensitivity and integrity. Reflexivity of the researcher, self-awareness and critical self-reflection on potential biases and predispositions, and openness around these issues, is therefore of high importance (Patton 2002). Moreover, as important as it is that the researcher promotes validity and assess reliability of the research in appropriate ways, the researcher should also provide the study’s future audience with enough information to assess the quality of the work, and its possible further use. This means that the researcher should not only present the data according to the principle of thick, holistic description, including low-inference description, but is also obligated to report sufficient details on data collection and the processes of analysis, in order for others to be able to judge the quality of the study (Bryman 2004, Patton 2002). Specific measures which I found appropriate to take to enhance the validity of the study are presented in this chapter. I have also emphasized openness around the procedures around producing the thesis, and on providing as much and detailed information as possible on the participants, their responses and accounts, including direct quotations.

4.2 Research design

The research design of the present study has features of a multiple (instrumental) case study (Stake 2005), which in Bryman´s (2004) words is a comparative design applied in relation to a qualitative research strategy (Patton 2002). A case study is *instrumental* when “…*a particular case is examined mainly to provide insight into an issue or to redraw a generalization. The case is of secondary interest, it plays a supportive role, and it facilitates our understanding of something else*” (Stake 2205:445). Moreover, “...*when there is even less interest in one particular case a number of cases may be studied jointly in order to investigate a phenomenon, population or general condition.*”(Stake 2005:445), i.e a multiple case design is used. The study also had some aspects of formative evaluation. Formative evaluations aims at improving a specific program, policy, group of
staff, or product (Patton 2002). The program was not evaluated as a whole, but the focus of the study was participants and guardians views on a number of issues which may be related to the quality and relevance of the program to them. The findings are context specific and most often it is not attempted to generalize findings beyond the setting in which the evaluation takes place (Patton 2002). The present study is not aimed at generalization of the findings, though hopefully the thesis is of use to stakeholders of the ABE program possibly also in other parts of Ethiopia than were the study was conducted, and possibly also to other actors in the field of education.

4.3 Field studies

Field studies were conducted between the 23d of February and the 20th of March 2009, which was more or less in the middle of the second semester of the school year. It was not during farming-seasons, which makes presence of students lower. It was also not in the middle of exams or holidays which also would have been inappropriate or inconvenient times of the year to conduct the field studies. It should however be mentioned that I went on field studies in the dry season, when there is usually severe lack of water in the study area. How the study site was chosen is outlined in the following section.

4.3.1 Study site

Field studies were conducted in Ayckel town and the surrounding rural area Teber-Serako in Chilga Woreda, which is part of the North Gonder Zone in the Amhara Region. The study site was described in detail in sections 2.3.2 and 2.3.3. The study site was picked in cooperation with SCN-E, who were important gatekeepers for conducting the field studies. Physical access and overall feasibility of conducting the study within the time available for field studies were important issues in deciding the study site. SCN-E are involved in educational activities in two woredas in the North Gonder Zone; Chilga and Lai Armachiho, and the possibilities of conducting the study in Lai Armachiho or in both woredas were also discussed. Although Lai Armachiho was closer to Gonder town, only one ABEC in this woreda was accessible with car. I therefore choose to do the study in Chilga Woreda, in spite of that it required spending more time, energy and resources on traveling. For reasons of lack of accommodation in Ayckel town at the time of the field studies and also for security reasons I traveled back and forth from Gonder town to Chilga. A special feature of Chilga
Woreda with regard to the ABE program is that the program was piloted there by SCN-E and therefore had been run longer there than in any other part of the country. In the following section the role of SCN-E, and also on of their partner organization, in relation to the present study and during the field studies is described.

4.3.2 Gatekeepers and access

The main and important gatekeepers for conducting the study were SCN-E. Contact was made with the organization while I was developing the research proposal. The first contact was made with the country office in Addis Ababa who directed me to the North Gonder Zone field office. In Gonder and in Chilga Woreda the studies were facilitated by both the staff at SCN-E and also by their partner organization Handicap National in Ayckel town. The staff at SCN-E in Gonder arranged with a lot of practical things, such as private transportation, and their Program Education Coordinator traveled with me and the RA for over a week to introduce us to the study site and put us in connection with key persons at the study site. The head of Handicap National in Ayckel town also facilitated conducting study at the study site in this way, and by arranging meetings with guardians, the directors of the Formal schools and administrative personnel of the woreda. The staff at both organizations as well shared information about the study site, about the implementation of the ABE program, and other things relevant to know in relation to the study. For various reasons I initially did not want to rely to a great extent on SCN-Es support. My concerns included among others things that I did not want to put unnecessary workload on SCN-Es staff, and also issues concerning the reliability of the data collection, for example that the participants might see me as a representative of SCN-E and it could possibly then affect their responses. The study was however welcomed by SCN- E at the North Gonder Zone field office, and the field studies were facilitated to an unexpected extent. My relationship to SCN-E and the purpose of the study was clarified to the participants when introducing the study and receiving their informed consent for participation. My role as a researcher is further discussed in the following section.

4.3.3 Positioning of the researcher

Patton (2002) points out that international and cross-cultural short term site visits are much more vulnerable to misinterpretations and miscommunication than traditional, long term anthropological
fieldwork. Cheney (2007) also tells on her experience as a white foreign female adult doing research on children in Uganda, that it took quite some time to get the children comfortable enough to share stories about themselves with her. Going for field studies for only 4 weeks did not point to my advantage on these matters. It would be naive to believe that being a non-Ethiopian, non-Amharic-speaking, secular western white urban woman doing field studies at the specific study site, and with children as the main group of participants of the study, did not have some effect on the study. My mere presence drew the attention of at least the children in most places I walked during the stay in Ethiopia, and with regards to the individual interviews with students it appeared as at least part of the reason that these worked out the way they did was because of who I was. In one interview with a 12 year girl the interviewee was during the whole session not only not looking at me, but covering the side of her face which was on my side (we were sitting in a triangular form) and frenetically scratching her school uniform with a pen, leaving marks. In what I thought was a friendly and not intimidating manner I commented on that it might be hard to wash away, and gave her the exercise book which she was going to get after the interview, suggesting that she could write on that instead. The girl then became very embarrassed, giggled nervously and literally shrunk together, now trying to cover her whole face with both her hands. At the end of the interview when she was asked if she had something more to tell us, she answered to the RA “No, I don’t, but could I please have a look at her (the researcher’s) face?”. She was allowed to and did, and as if she had seen a ghost she quickly looked down again and hurried out of the room. I tried to minimize the effect of these issues during the filed studies through the choice of methods, and as described above, adjusting these according to the experiences in the field, as well as by trying to behave and dress in a socially acceptable way when I was in contact with the participants during the field studies. In the following section I also discuss my experiences with working with a research assistant, which though it had it’s challenges was a necessity during the field studies.

4.3.4 Working with a Research Assistant

First and foremost due to the language barriers, I was dependent on a research assistant (RA) during the field studies. The staff at SCN-E and Handicap National as well as most of the administrative staff of Chilga Woreda spoke English, but when communicating with the students, guardians and ABE facilitators’ translation was necessary. I however prefer to call my right hand during the field studies research assistant, rather than translator or interpreter because she did not only interpret
during interviews and FGs and help in transcribing some of them afterwards, but she also provided assistance to me in several other ways. I had tried to get in contact with possible RAs before leaving Norway, but came in contact with my actual RA only after arriving in Ethiopia. Due to the limitations of time there were limited possibilities of going through the whole procedure of validating the translation forehand and testing several translators, and therefore chose a girl who I considered could to the job well. I had initially hoped for an RA from the study area, but this woman was a 20 year old Bachelor-student in Economics from the University of Gonder, originally from Addis Ababa. As Patton (2002) points out there is always a risk for misunderstandings when translation is involved and translators often want to, most often with the best intentions, summarize and explain what is being said, which may contaminate the data. There are also the untranslatable expressions and words that almost every culture and language has, and differing customs on how to pose and interpret questions, answers and comments. Initially I hoped for using direct translation as much as possible during interviews, although still remaining open for that this perhaps was not possible, due to my limited knowledge on the local culture and customs of the study site. It soon turned out that interpretation was needed, which in turn made it more important that the RA was familiar with the local culture, customs and language. Though the RA was not originally from the area I considered I hoped that this would be weighed up by that she had been living in the Gonder area for some years and by her English proficiency, which I considered to be very good. I also did not consider the methods or interview guides to be complicated or the questions to be sensitive to the extent that I would have needed a more experienced RA, which would have cost more to contract. We as well had a common understanding on that if one or both of us were not satisfied with the cooperation I would have to try to find another RA. During the first days of field studies and a few times later during the field studies I asked the education program coordinator at SCN-E and the head of Handicap National if there was anything in the translation outside of interview-settings to be sceptical about, but I was not given any negative feedback. The RA also often cross-checked information received during FGs and interviews with the staff at SCN-E, Handicap National, or fellow students at the University, and if she was uncertain about the meaning of something expressed by participants in the study, she would ask them directly to clarify. The RA helped in transcribing about half of the FGs and interviews and pointed out eventual misunderstandings or things which were missed in the immediate translation. A fellow Amharic-speaking student at the University of Oslo also cross-checked some of the translations. The first few days in the field, were very frustrating as I was not be able to communicate with the participants
directly, and I was worried about misunderstandings and that important information would be missed. The RA also appeared quite frustrated, not the least when I sometimes questioned her work. But after discussing some of the challenges we faced during the first interviews, having revised the interview guides, and I had accepted the interpreting-mode of translation, the cooperation between us went better. Some parts of the first interviews have been analysed, keeping in mind the initial challenges. I could have considered these first interviews pilots, and excluded them completely from the data analysis, but have chosen not to do so since valuable data would be lost.

In the previous sections some important issues and choices made in relation to the field studies were described. In the following sections the procedures for sampling ABECs and Formal schools in the study area, from which individual participant where chosen, are outlined.

4.4 Sampling procedures and sample size

In qualitative research one of the sampling procedures is called *purposeful sampling*, with the aim of sampling *information rich cases*. Information rich cases are those from which one believes most can be learned about the topic or phenomenon of interest. There are several strategies for selecting these cases, whose appropriateness depends on the topic and purpose of the study. This study attempted to select *typical cases* of ABECs. *Convenience* sampling was also taken into consideration, and a *deviant* case of an ABEC (ABEC 1 which, unlike most ABECs, was located in an urban setting) was included. Individual participants in the study were chosen using *stratified* and *random* sampling in combination when the students were chosen and in the case of guardians and drop-outs, *convenience sampling* had to be used for reasons described further on in this chapter. In one case *opportunistic* sampling was used when we were told that an ABE student who had earlier dropped out from ABE but recently returned, and who might have an interesting story to tell, was present at one of the ABECs when we visited the ABEC for another purpose (Patton 2002). The question of sample size is also left open in qualitative research as a suitable sample size depends on the topic and purpose of the study. Lincoln and Guba (in Patton 2002) have the view that in qualitative research the sampling is terminated when no new information is forthcoming from new sampled units. This makes redundancy the primary criterion in question of the sample size. In Patton´s view this is however an ideal which works best for basic research and when there are no limits of time and resources (Patton 2002). In the present study the time frames did not permit
sampling to redundancy and as many participants as possible were included during available time of field studies. Some time during the field studies was dedicated to cross-checking of translation and transcription of the FGs and interviews, and collection of other types of data, such as information about the study area.

4.4.1 Selection of ABECs

It was an aim to, with help of the staff from SCN-E and Handicap National, identify typical cases of ABECs to include in the study as the starting point for inclusion of present and former students and guardians. Typical cases her means that the ABECs included in the study are ”... not in any major way atypical, extreme, deviant or intensely unusual” (Patton 2002:236). This however does not mean that the ABECs included are necessarily representative of all existing ABECs in the country, region or even woreda. The ABECs were picked with consideration to the Formal Schools in the area, depending on to which school the students from a certain or more than one ABEC within the woreda normally transferred to. Physical accessibility and travel distances had an influence on the choices. ABEC 2 and 3 were by SCN- E considered as fairly typical for ABECs in rural areas, although they were pilot-centers when the program was piloted by SCN- E. It was also considered interesting to include ABEC 1, being the only urban ABEC in the area, for reasons of comparison between rural and urban students, and School B, since ABE-students transferred there from both an urban and a rural ABEC. ABEC 1 should then be seen as a deviant case rather than a typical case of ABEC (Patton 2002). It should also be mentioned that, although the issue of typicality mainly concerns the ABECs, School A is a model-school for the woreda.

4.4.2 Selecting students

In total 74 (37 boys and 37 girls) present or former participants in ABE were included in the study. It should be noted that the terms ‘boys’ and ‘girls’ which are used with regard to the present and former ABE students also include adolescents and young adults, but the terms are used to separate them from the guardians. The students included in the study from the ABECs and Formal Schools were in grade 3 and grade 5 respectively. This was a choice made as in the case of the present ABE students those in grade 3 had longest experience with ABE of the students there, and in the cases of the Formal Schools the grade 5 students had the freshest experience with ABE among students who
had transferred to Formal school. In almost all cases students enrolled in ABE or Formal school were chosen randomly, stratified by gender, by the researcher and the RA. Both older and younger students and an equal number of girls and boys, men and women were chosen for participation in the study. This was done with the consideration that both age and gender were factors which might have an influence on how the ABE-program was viewed or experienced. FGs and interviews with students were conducted within school hours. This was because it was the easiest way to get in touch with the students and we did not have to arrange meetings forehand. Whenever possible we however made appointments with the facilitators of the ABECs and directors of the Formal schools before coming to conduct interviews and FGs. Another reason for contacting students within school hours were that many students had duties outside school hours, so although we took up time that should have been spent in lessons, it was deemed less intruding to take up half to one and a half hour of the students time in school, than outside of school. Students who had dropped out of ABE were contacted by the ABE facilitators, but we only managed to get in touch with 4 (2 boys and 2 girls) students who had dropped out of ABEC 3. Poverty and students´ need to work, including moving away from the area to farm in the desert-areas were stated by both students, guardians and the staff at SCN-E and Handicap National as both real and hypothetical main reasons for dropping out from school. This might have been reasons for not being able to get in touch with more students who had dropped out from the ABECs included in the study.

4.4.3 Selecting guardians of present and former ABE students

23 guardians of present and former students (11 men and 12 women) participated in the study. These were contacted through the ABE facilitators and the directors of the Formal schools, and in one case by the Woreda Education Administrator. The guardians were appointed at the respective ABEC or school where they presently or previously had children enrolled. The only criterion for inclusion was that they were guardians of a child or children who were or had attended ABE. It would have been perhaps even more interesting to interview guardians of the specific students who participated in the study, in order to both compare and cross-check their accounts. Such matching was however not possible within the time frames of the field studies. Because of some families living at far distances from the ABECs and Schools, and the opportunity-costs of spending both time and energy on the interviews and on travelling back and forth to the interview sites, only the guardians who lived close to the ABEC or schools were asked to participate.
4.5 Data collection methods

Main methods chosen for the data collection were Focus Groups (FG) and Individual Interviews. These methods were chosen as qualitative interviewing can be especially appropriate when the goal of the study is to learn how something is interpreted by people, and to develop detailed holistic description of the accounts (Weiss 1994). In both cases interview guides were used. The strengths of using an interview guide, compared to structured interviewing and conversational interviewing, is that you as the interviewer remain free to build the conversation within a particular subject area and word questions spontaneously and it allows the interviewer to be responsive to individual differences and situational changes. The focus on a particular predetermined subject helps in making the interview good use of time and it also makes interviewing across a number of people more systematic and comprehensive and analysis easier, than using a conversational style in interviewing (Patton 2002). The interview guides (Appendix 1) were formulated in English and later translated into Amharic during the field studies. Responses from the interviews and FGs were also translated from Amharic into English by the research assistant (RA).

The interview guides were developed before going to Ethiopia, and initially more open questions were planned. When the interview guides were used during the first interviews getting anything but very brief and vague answers on some of the more open questions was however hard. Thus I considered it useful to revise the interview guides and ended up asking more specific questions. Questions which then come up are for example: were the “right” questions posed? Does the data reflect the participants´ views and priorities with regard to themes brought up in relation to ABE, and the issues of quality and relevance? Or did my priorities with regard to themes brought up, and eventually the way the questions were posed, esquew the focus? In retrospective there are questions I wish I had posed more systematically. I for example wish that I had gotten more insight into both students´ and parents´ views on education, on quality and relevance of education in general and also what their expectations on the ABE program were. Limitations of time however made it necessary to limit the number of questions posed during the interviews and FGs. Sometimes I had the feeling that I underestimated the participants, especially the students, and their ability to evaluate and give personal accounts on their experiences or elaborate on certain themes while in other cases questions were perhaps too challenging. Some questions appeared difficult to understand for many of the participants, in particular the questions on the usefulness of the education, and therefore resulted in a lot of discussion during the interviews and FGs.
4.5.1 Focus Groups

The strength of Focus Groups (FG) is often claimed to be the interaction taking place between participants during the session, most often called FG discussion, including the comparisons that participants make among each others experiences and opinions (Morgan 1997). Patton (2002) points out that a FG is still an interview, but at the same time says that the objective of the arrangement is “…to get high quality data in a social context where people can consider their own views in the context of the views of others.” Bryman (2004) also notes that the distinction between FGs and group interviews is not clear-cut and the two terms are often used interchangeably. Apart from the effects of group dynamics the strengths in FGs is also supposed to lie in that through FGs, you can gather data from several persons at the same time. Between 4 and 10 participants appear to be the most common group-size (Bryman 2004). FGs can also provide some quality control on data collection as the participants according to Patton (2002:386)"...tend to provide checks and balances on each other, which weeds out false or extreme views”. Patton (2002) also considers it fairly easy to assess consistency and shared or deviant views in FGs, and thus facilitates data analysis. Main limitations to FGs are that the questions or topics must be quite few and the available response time for each individual restrained so that everybody gets to say what they want on the topics. Some participants might as well dominate the discussions, and everybody is therefore not heard. It can also be hard to monitor alone and at the same time taking notes, which is often necessary even though one uses a recorder, in order to keep track of who said what and noting non-verbal behavior. It is also not possible to guarantee the individual participants confidentiality, and apart from being an ethical issue, it might also affect the discussion. The group’s influence on the individual, which includes both a tendency to conformity and a tendency to polarization is a classic theme in social psychology. The outcome is however deemed to at least to some extent be dependent on the topic that is being discussed (Patton 2002, Morgan 1997). FGs as a main data collection tool in this study were in line with the above, chosen for several reasons. One reason was to get the participants, especially the younger children to talk more unrestricted about the themes of interest to the study, through assumed positive group-dynamics and a more relaxed social setting than an individual interview when they would be on their own with me and the RA. Ethiopian children are for cultural reasons not supposed to speak freely and often not at all in the presence of adults, as described by for example Poluha (2004) and Børke (2004) and it was also commented by both the RA and the staff at SCN-E and Handicap National with regards to the children in the study area. Other reasons
for using FGs were to gather data from several people at the same time due to limitations of time and resources and to more easily capture similarities and deviations in experiences and opinions among participants in the study. It was initially also an aim to use FGs to get in touch with and build rapport with participants as a preparation for individual interviews, planned to be conducted with some or all of the participants in the FGs a few days later.

In total 22 FGs were conducted. 9 were conducted with ABE-students, 7 with Formal School students, 1 with students who had dropped out from ABE and 5 with guardians. The numbers of participants in the FGs were 3-5, in most cases 4, and the sessions lasted between 1 and 1.5 hours. The FGs were monitored by me in cooperation with the RA and all FGs were recorded by a dictaphone and transcribed afterwards, as recommended by for example Bryman (2004) and Morgan (1997). Weiss (1994) points out that there is always the risk of constraining interviewees by using a recorder, but we started out the FGs with pointing out clearly that it was used for practical reason, that the records would be kept confidential and listened to by the researcher and the RA only, and if necessary by another translator. Names were not recorder but written on a note separate from the notes from the session, and we tried to pay little attention to the recorder. Efforts were made to conduct the FGs in a quiet undisturbed setting. Many FGs were however, hard to conduct without any disturbance or interruption. When conducting them outside there was often wind or other children who came and wanted to watch and listen. When we were allowed to use the teachers’ office or a classroom there was noise from lessons close by or teachers going in and out of the room.

The first reason for using FGs appeared to, when comparing with the experiences from the initial individual interviews which are described below, be quite important, and especially so with regards to the younger children and the girls. The students were separated by sex, while the FGs with guardians were in some cases single-sex and in some cases mixed. The one group with students who had dropped out of ABE was mixed sexes. We tried to gather groups of students of more or less the same age, which we quickly judged by their appearance, since the power-relations due to age might make the older ones dominate in the group setting. Getting a true discussion between the participants was however rather difficult in most if not all of the groups of students interviewed, but may partly be blamed on the use of an interpreter. Because of the hesitation of some children to speak much or at all, especially some of the younger ones and also some of the both younger and older girls, we probed directly to some participants. On some questions we wanted an answer from each and everyone in the group and asked them in random order. As for the groups influence on the
individual, there were a few students who apparently repeated almost systematically what one of the other students had said, or the common opinion expressed in the group. On the whole we however most often to some extent got differing answers within the groups. It has also been taken into consideration in the data analysis when the conformity of the answers of one or more participants was almost systematic. The guardians more frequently discussed the questions or topics and commented on each others answers, especially in the single-sex groups. In the mixed-sex groups some women spoke less than the men did, although there were also examples of the opposite. A challenge with interviewing some of the guardians was however to get them to talk about the actual topic. With regards to he last reason for using FGs both I and the RA, did not consider the initial individual interviews conducted to work very well. To build rapport through one single FG to get the participants to elaborate more on the themes brought up in the FGs in following individual interviews seemed also rather unlikely. It would of course have been possible to bring in other themes in follow-up interviews. The limitations of time and the trade off between interviewing fewer participants, only possibly more in-depth, or interviewing more participants on a limited number of themes, were also taken into consideration. Instead of following up participants from the FGs with individual interviews, whenever need arose we therefore followed up what one or more participants of the FGs expressed more individually with individual questions during the FGs. The way the FGs turned out when it came to interaction between the participants, also made this possible.

4.5.2 Semi-structured individual interviews

In total 9 individual interviews were conducted in the present study. 5 of these were with students in the Formal Schools, 2 with guardians, 1 with a student who had dropped out of ABE, and 1 with a student who had dropped out of ABE but recently enrolled there again. All interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed afterwards and contrary to the FGs we were able to conduct most of the individual interviews without disturbance or interruption. An interview guide similar to the one used in the FGs was used in the individual interviews and the interviews lasted between 30 and 45 minutes. In Patton (2002) ´s view there is more reason to be skeptical about a piece of qualitative research which goes exactly according to the plan, than one which is adjusted in the process. Initially more individual interviews were planned but the method turned out, in comparison with the FGs, not working as well as we had hoped for. Both I and the RA felt that the interviews were very
static and we had to probe a lot to get any responses from the interviewees. Some of the interviewees also appeared quite uncomfortable in the interview setting, one example was provided in section 4.3.3. The reasons for these experiences may be various, and probably differed between the interviews, but both the RA and I soon preferred FGs to individual interviews. The individual interviews conducted with the guardians and one of the students who had dropped out of ABE were in fact also planned to be FGs, but for various reasons we ended up with only one participant. In these interviews the mode of interviewing felt fairly suitable, meaning we got some valuable information and interesting accounts and the interviewees did not appear very uncomfortable, but the conversation was still less engaging compared to the FGs. The interview with the ABE-student who had dropped out earlier but recently returned was a result of coincidence, it was not planned like most of the as the others and was more conversational.

4.5.3 Informal interviews and conversations

Informal interviews and conversations with some of the facilitators and head teachers at the ABECs, the directors at the both Formal schools and the staff at SCN-E and Handicap National, were also used to get relevant information, cross-check information given by other participants in the study and for asking about opinions on various matters. The interviews or conversations were informal in the sense that they were most often not planned beforehand and took place in the immediate setting, though themes brought up were sometimes planned forehand.

4.5.4 Observation

Formal observation of activities at the ABECs was not considered a suitable method to use in this study. This was mainly due to the language barriers and few possibilities of translating simultaneously within the small classrooms since it would disturb the lessons. The unfamiliarity with the setting and short time for field studies also contributed to the choice of not using observation as a method. I did however consider it useful to get some first hand impression of the activities and culture at the ABECs and Formal Schools at the beginning of the field studies and therefore sat in on a few lessons. Naturally I also got some impressions of the ABECs, the teaching-learning process, the Formal Schools, teachers and facilitators etc., throughout the field studies because of my mere presence. A few observations is therefore used in the data and discussion, but
the observations have been cautiously used with regards to the reliability and interpretation of what was observed, and if possible complemented or contrasted with other kinds of data.

4.5.5 Documents and Secondary Sources

Documents and secondary sources used in this thesis have mainly been literature gathered mainly at the University of Oslo Library or from other Norwegian libraries, at the library of the Nordic Africa Institute in Uppsala, Sweden, from academic journals, the Internet and from SCN-E in the form of policy and program documents. I also received some documents with information about the study area and from the staff at SCN-E and Handicap National, administrative staff in Chilga Woreda and the Zonal Education Bureau (ZEB) in the North Gonder Zone during field studies. I am aware of the importance of assessing `authenticity’, `credibility’, `representativeness’ and `meaning´ when using documents in academic work (Bryman 2004). Or as Lund Moberg (2005) puts it; you must always ask the questions Who? (author/publisher), Why? (purpose) and When? (is the information up to date?). When reading or using a document, and when consulting Internet sources, she also points to the need of asking How? meaning that you should ask yourself how you arrived at a particular site. I have to my highest ability tried to employ these principles when using literature in the thesis.

4.6 Ethical considerations

According to Sieber (1992), there are 3 general ethical principles that must guide human research. The first principle concerns beneficence; that the research ought to maximize the good outcomes for science, humanity and the individual research participants, and at the same time avoid risk, harm or wrong. The second principle is that the research should respect the autonomy of persons, including the non-autonomous such as for example infants or senile persons. The third principle concerns justice; that reasonable, non-exploitative and carefully considered procedures should be applied for the research. These principles again translates into norms of scientific behavior such as adaption of a valid research design and that the researcher is competent to carry out the procedures validly, voluntary informed consent of participants in the study, adjustment of procedures to respect privacy of participants, ensure confidentiality, minimize risks and maximize benefits and that the researcher is responsible for the consequences of the research. This study also involved children and adolescents, and they as a research population are special in several senses. Among other things this
research population have limited psychological and legal capacity to give informed consent, there are external constraints on their self-determination and independent decision-making, and there is an asymmetric power-relation between children and authorities such as parents, teachers and also researchers. Including children in research often requires not only the child’s own agreement to participate, based on his or her understanding of the purpose of the research and the consequences of participation, but also the agreement of parents or other caretakers and normally documentation of this. There are some exceptions to this, and the school can then give permission without involving parents (Sieber 1992).

4.6.1 Reciprocity

With regards to the beneficence, or reciprocity, of the study I from the start of this project have tried to put weight on the relevance of the study for stakeholders of the ABE program and possibly other actors in the field of education and also for the participants in the study. Whether the findings and conclusions of the thesis will actually be of benefit of the participants, meaning that they will be taken into consideration for improving the ABE program in the area, I am however not in a position to decide. To avoid harm I tried to interfere in participants’ daily lives to the least extent possible. Although in some cases it could not make up for the time and energy spent on participation in the study, the participants were also given a small token of appreciation after the FG or interview. It might have worked as an incentive to participation in some cases, but since the participants did not volunteer, put were chosen for participation, it might only have made the participants in the study less inclined to deny participation when they were asked to participate. It also requires that they had heard about the possibility of receiving remuneration for participating forehand, but most participants probably knew nothing about it before they met us. The remuneration was also not very big. The students received two exercise books and a pen or pencil, and the guardians and students who had dropped out of ABE were given half a kilo of sugar.

4.6.2 Informed consent

The informed consent from participants was obtained orally and recorded after the participants had stated their first names (Appendix 3). The permission to select students from the classes to participate in the study was given by the ABE facilitators and the school directors, but the students
themselves decided on whether they would participate or even get out of the classroom to hear what we wanted them to participate in.

4.6.3 Confidentiality

Confidentiality of the individual participants was assured before participating in the study, and their real names or other features that would identify them are not used throughout the thesis. The ABECs and Formal schools included in the study could probably be identified by someone with good knowledge about the study site. The school directors and ABE facilitators could probably also be identified by someone with good knowledge of the area but they were however not assured confidentiality. The information given and opinions expressed by them has still been handled with care, in order to avoid causing harm to any individuals.

4.6.4 Research Permit

A formal written research permit was not obtained, mainly due to challenges on finding the authorities responsible for issuing it. Permission to conduct the study in SCN-Es project areas was given by the organization itself, and by the ZEB in the North Gonder Zone who also provided me with valuable information. I also traveled on a business visa, issued on the basis of that I was going on field studies with the purpose of writing a Master thesis about the ABE program, and carried a letter from the Institute for Educational Research at the University of Oslo which confirmed that I was in Ethiopia to conduct field studies.

4.7 Validity and Reliability of the study

In assessing the quality of qualitative social research the issues of reliability and validity are central. The question of reliability (by some the term dependability is preferred in relation to qualitative research) concerns whether the data in a study are independent of the particular circumstances of the data collection or in other words whether the findings of the study are (theoretically) repeatable (Bryman 2004). I have throughout this chapter provided information on the data collection process, its challenges and measures taken to improve the reliability of the data, also with the hope that the information given is sufficient for others to judge the reliability of the data. The question of validity
of a piece of qualitative research, also often called trustworthiness, primarily concerns the integrity of the conclusions drawn from the research (Bryman 2004, Patton 1990). This would actually be parallel to the criteria of internal validity in quantitative research, and a term often used for this in relation to qualitative research is credibility. Some strategies for promoting validity in qualitative research are various kinds of triangulation (researcher-, data- and theory-), extended fieldwork, negative case sampling and testing of rival explanations (Patton 2002). In this thesis multiple perspectives and theories are used in interpreting the data and also some data triangulation was applied. With reference to Patton’s (2002) recommendations regarding peer reviews, researchers with experience in the field or related fields has been consulted to enhance the validity of this study. As commented under section 4.1 I have also emphasized openness around the procedure of producing this thesis, and tried to follow the principles of thick description and low-inference accounts.

4.8 Limitations and Delimitations of the study

The present study is based on data which was collected in a particular part of the Amhara National Region of Ethiopia. The sample of participants was limited in size and was selected purposefully for this study. The field studies were also conducted at a particular time of the school year, and the time dedicated for field studies was only about one month. Hence may the findings and conclusions of the study not be automatically generalized, but the relevance and use of the thesis in relation to other programs, settings and populations must be assessed by eventual users of the thesis. Challenges met during the process of producing this thesis have otherwise been pointed out throughout the chapter, and the choices made and measures taken to overcome the challenges have been described.

4.9 Analysis

All recordings from the dictaphone were transcribed into words on computer. The transcripts from interviews and FGs were analysed using simple meaning condensation (Brinkmann and Kvale 2009) and categorized partly according to the themes brought up in the interview questions and partly according to categories arising during the analysis. The data presented in chapter 5 is presented in line with this organization. Relationships between the opinions and experiences expressed by the
participants and their background and present status in relation to ABE, were checked through organizing of the (condensed) data in tables, as it facilitated comparison, identification of eventual patterns and deviations from the patterns which emerged. The findings from the field studies, which are presented in the following chapter, are discussed in light of literature on various perspectives on quality and relevance of education and research on Non-formal education, demand for education and Ethiopian children’s life worlds, which were presented in the previous chapter. Underlying theories such as Human Capital Theory and Empowerment Theory are also used in the discussion of the primary as well as secondary data.
5. Findings

In this chapter, I will present the findings from the FGs and interviews with students who were either presently or previously enrolled in ABE, and guardians of children who had been enrolled in and/or were enrolled in ABE. The findings also include some comments or views expressed by the ABE facilitators, the Formal school directors and the education program coordinator at SCN- E in the North Gonder Zone. The findings are presented partly according to the questions posed (Appendix 1) and partly according to themes brought up by the participants.

5.1 Background of the participants

5.1.1 Participants in the study and their relation to ABE

Table 9 Number of participants in the study and their relation to ABE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>ABEC 1 (urban)</th>
<th>ABEC 2 (rural)</th>
<th>ABEC 3 (rural)</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Students ABE</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students ABE</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Girls</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boys</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Drop Outs ABE</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Girls</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boys</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Students School A</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Girls</td>
<td></td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boys</td>
<td></td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Students School B</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Girls</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boys</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Guardians</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In total 37 (21 boys, 16 girls), students in ABE grade 3, 33 (14 boys, 19 girls) students in Formal school grade 5, 4 students who had dropped out from ABE and 23 (11 men, 12 women) guardians of children who presently and/or previously attended ABE participated in the study. Two of the male guardians interviewed at ABEC 3 were as well engaged as ABE promoters. Table 9 presents the participants’ in the study, according to their relation to the ABE program. That for example a student participating in the study at the time of the field studies was enrolled in School B, and had earlier been enrolled in ABEC 2, is shown by placing the student in row “School B”, and column “ABEC 2”. The guardians are placed in the table according to in which ABEC they at the time of the field studies had or previously had a child or children enrolled.

5.1.2 Participants´ (students´) age

In Table 10 the age of students participation in the study is presented. To give some indication on how many of the students which may be considered children and youth respectively the number of students above 13 and above 15 are is pointed out. Some students, and in particular the boys in ABEC 2 might have been older than they said, as they were uncertain about their age. The age of the guardians was not inquired.

Table 10 Participants´ (students´) age

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sex/Age</th>
<th>Students ABE</th>
<th>Students Formal school</th>
<th>Drop outs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Girls</td>
<td>8-(16-18) years old</td>
<td>10-15 years old</td>
<td>(9-10)-15 years old</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 years or older</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 years or older</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boys</td>
<td>9-20 years old</td>
<td>10-19</td>
<td>23 years old</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 years or older</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 years or older</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5.1.3 Participants´ religious affiliation

One boy in ABE, one boy and one girl in Formal school and the two girls who had dropped out of ABE were Muslims. One girl in ABE was Protestant. The rest of the participants, including all the guardians were Christian Orthodox.
5.1.4 Participants’ households/families

The majority of the students were living with both their parents, which may also include stepparents, as “parents”, and also “brother” and “sister” are also terms used to denominate non-biological caretakers and household-members (Børke 2004). Most students had 2-8 siblings. Some students also lived with other relatives, in most cases the grandparents or a sibling, and eventually also cousins, uncles, aunts or the spouse of the sibling. Only one girl in ABEC 1 lived on her own, due to a physical disability which prevented her from going back and forth to the desert-areas and farm, like the rest of her family. Of those students living with one of their parents, and in most cases also siblings, all but one lived in female-headed households. The size of the households ranged between 1 and 20, though those in the biggest households and those living in smaller households were few. Among the guardians, 8 of the women lived in female-headed households, in 7 of the cases because the husband had died and in the last case because the woman was unmarried. 4 of these households consisted of the woman and one child only. The rest lived in households with at least two adults and there was also one possible polygamous family. Most of the guardians had 5-8 children. Of the students who had dropped out of ABE, one of the girl lived with both her parents and 3 siblings and the other girl with her mother and 3 siblings. One of the boys was living on his own and the other had recently gotten married and lived with his wife.

5.1.5 Family/household-members occupation

The large majority of the students had guardians who were farmers or where the father was engaged in farming and the mother was a housewife. There were also some who had guardians who were traders, running a small shop or living by for example selling injera or tela\textsuperscript{11} or fathers working as guards, in construction or transport. A few participants had family members living and working in the desert areas. Among the students who had dropped out of ABE the boys’ families were or had been farmers and the girls’ parents worked in trade. Among the guardians who participated in the study most of the men were farmers, and so were also the male spouses of the female participants.

\textsuperscript{11} Injera is a type of pancake-like bread made of teff which is served with basically every meal in Ethiopia. Tela is a type of locally produced alcohol.
farmer was a part time student in High school. The women who participated in the study and the female spouses of the male participants were either farmers, housewives or small-scale traders, one was a shopkeeper and two elder women lived partly on charity from the church.

The large majority of the students’ siblings, both brothers and sisters, and the guardians’ children, were either in school or had finished grade 10 or higher. At least 16 girls and 22 of the boys had siblings who either were in or had been to ABE. There were however a higher number of boys than girls, and though the exact age of all of them is unknown, quite many were in the school age group but were either out of school or had dropped out from ABE or from the second cycle of primary school. There were also more girls than boys who either were in or had finished post primary education, and some of these girls held TTI. While some of the girls with post primary education were employed, mostly as teachers, more girls than boys had finished their education and were at home or looking for employment, including some holding TTI. More girls than boys were engaged in farming. There were also a few more of the older sisters than brothers who were reported to be married and had not gone to school or were illiterate. In most cases, it was understood that these were older; above 20 or even 30 years of age.

5.1.6 Literacy in the households of the participants

6 Girls and 3 boys in ABE and one girl in Formal school had fathers whom were literate and one girl in Formal school had a literate mother. 2 girls and 1 boy in ABE and 2 girls and 2 boys in Formal school had parents whom were both literate. Apart from this all students and the 4 students who had dropped out of ABE, had guardians who were illiterate. With a few exceptions, the fathers had higher education than the mothers. Of the guardians who participated in the study, only 4 of the men and 2 of the women were literate, and of the spouses of the guardians only one was literate, and he was the husband of one of the literate women. From these findings it is possible to conclude that in most households of the participants in the study none of the guardians were literate. Most of the students however had siblings who were in higher grades than themselves. All but 4 girls and 2 boys in ABE and 4 girls and 2 boys in Formal school had either one or in a few cases two literate guardians or siblings in higher grades than themselves.
5.1.7 Distance from home to the ABECs

Table 11 Participants’ distance from home to the ABECs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Longest distance</th>
<th>Distance over 1 hour</th>
<th>Most frequent distance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Girls</td>
<td>2 hours</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Less than 30 min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boys</td>
<td>1.5 hours</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guardians</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Less than 30 min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drop Outs</td>
<td>1.5 hours</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>30-40 min</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In Table 11 the distance between where the participants in the study lived and the respective ABECs is presented. That most of the guardians included in the study lived less than 30 min from the ABECs has to do with the sampling of guardians, as only those living close to the ABECs or Formal schools were asked to participate. 9 of the guardians lived in the urban area, 14 lived in rural areas. After having presented the background of the participants in the study, we shall now turn to the decision to enrol in ABE and the reasons that the participants stated for this choice.

5.2 Enrolment in ABE

5.2.1 The decision to enrol the students in ABE

One 15 years old girl in grade 3 ABE, who lived with her sister and the sister’s husband, had decided on her own to enroll in ABE. Two other girls also said that it had been themselves who had insisted on enrolling in ABE. 6 of the boys in ABE, 5 of the boys in Formal school and the two male students who had dropped out of ABE had also decided themselves to go to ABE. It had otherwise been the guardians’ decision to enroll the students in ABE. The guardians participating in the study all said that it had been their decision to enroll the children in ABE. Most of the students who had decided themselves to enroll in ABE were 13 years or older. 5 boys had guardians who did not approve this choice. One of them had convinced his parents to let him enroll and another had gone to School 1 in grade 1 but dropped out of his own will and continued in ABE. 3 of the boys had gone to ABE against the will of their parents. One of them said;
“The reason that they (the family) did not want me to learn was that my brother was hired by the neighbours for different kinds of work, so I was the only boy left to help around the home. They also said “the educated don’t get job so what is the point? You should work and earn some money.” But when I grew up I wanted to go to school. So it was my choice.” (Boy, 13, in ABEC 2 03.03.2009)

5.2.2 Reasons for enrolling in ABE

Table 12 Participants’ stated reasons for enrolling in ABE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Girls</th>
<th>Boys</th>
<th>Guardians</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The ABEC is located close to home or closer to home than Formal school (17)</td>
<td>The ABEC is located close to home (11)</td>
<td>Prospects of free learning materials (15)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- reduced opportunity costs (5)</td>
<td>- reduced opportunity costs (5)</td>
<td>The ABEC is located close to home (11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- security (3)</td>
<td>Good education or better education than in Formal school (7)</td>
<td>- reduced opportunity costs (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- “town problems” (rural) (1)</td>
<td></td>
<td>- ”town problems” (rural) (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reduced time in school (6)</td>
<td>Prospects of free learning materials (4)</td>
<td>&quot;ABE is suitable for younger children” (7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To learn (5)</td>
<td>Flexibility of the calendar and/or schedule (4)</td>
<td>To learn (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Needed to be in different shift than siblings (3)</td>
<td>No school uniform required (4)</td>
<td>Good education (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No registration fee (2)</td>
<td>No registration fee (3)</td>
<td>External efficiency (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prospects of free learning materials (2)</td>
<td>High availability of books (3)</td>
<td>No registration fee (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wanted to go where their friends went to school (2)</td>
<td>External efficiency (2)</td>
<td>&quot;ABE is for poor people”(1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good education or better education than in Formal school (2)</td>
<td>Reduced time in school (2)</td>
<td>No school uniform (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hard education (1)</td>
<td>”ABE is for poor students”(2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formal school registration was full (1)</td>
<td>Fewer students and therefore less disturbance than in Formal school (1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The police forced the family (1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Most of the participant stated several reasons for enrolling in ABE. Among the students’ most frequently stated reasons was that the ABEC was located close to where they lived. This was most
frequently related to security, and the absence of traffic around the ABEC or on the way to school. Some of the students and guardians in the rural ABECs also talked about other problems related to their children attending a Formal school located in town. Examples given were fighting in town, that there were youth hanging around in town who might bother the children on their way to school or that the children might adapt to bad habits in town. That the location of the ABEC close to where students lived was also seen as beneficial as it reduced opportunity costs; the children did not spend a lot of time traveling to and from school and thus could help their parents more at home or with for example farming and keeping livestock. If the children went to a school close to their homes the parents would also have overview of both what their children did around school-hours, and whether the teachers were present. There were also some boys stating the flexibility of ABE as a main reason for enrolling in ABE. One boy had come back too late from farming in the desert to register in Formal school, but he was allowed to register in ABE. Two boys thought that it was positive that they could get into class in ABE even if they arrived late and another boy said the following:

"Because I heard that the education is suitable. *) What do you mean by “suitable”? Because I directly go from grade 3 to grade 5. And I know it is my problem, but I have to ask permission from the teachers to skip some classes, because I have to work with the farming. In Formal school they might not allow you to be absent for more than 2 days. And the education is more intensive in ABE. So when I go from grade 3 to grade 5 I might be better". (Boy, 15, in ABEC 1 05.03.09)

One 15 year old boy said that his family had been forced by the police to send him to ABE. The police came and registered him and some other 100 children and youth in the area. The boy however said that after having started school both him and his family were glad that he had been enrolled.

Some students said that they had enrolled into ABE “to learn”, and some guardians also stated this as one or the main reason for enrolling their children in the program. While it may be considered self-enlightening that one goes to school for the aim of learning, some of the participants also elaborated on the importance of learning and education for them. Two of the students who had dropped out of ABE for example talked about how envious they were when they saw their friends going to school while they themselves did not. Several of the guardians expressed that it was very important for the children to be educated, for the sake of enhancing their knowledge and improving their personality. Some examples of what they said are presented further on. Among the guardians, there were as well several notions on that “ABE is for younger children”, which they in many cases related to the location of the ABECs close to the communities and the security of the children. Several guardians also said that “ABE starts with the basic things” unlike Formal school where
children “must have some knowledge when starting” or that the teachers took better care of the children in ABE than in the Formal schools. For these reasons they considered it more suitable for them to send their younger children to ABE. What was meant by “younger children” was not so clear in all cases, but it appeared that they meant children around the age of 7, or slightly younger. The following account represents many of the thoughts expressed by the guardians on reasons for enrolling the children in ABE:

“ It was our decision, because as I told you he is just a kid 10 years old, and we could send him to School A or another school, but the Formal schools are located far and he would have to pass roads, and there might be accidents with cars or wagons. The ABEC is located in the rural area where we live so he goes to school and gets back home very early....In ABE they start teaching them the very basic things. These children are just kids. The Formal school is also very far. In town there are town-children who might cheat them and bother them in different ways, and if they see shiny things, they just stand there and forget to go to school. And they may cross the road and it can lead to a car accident. And we cannot find shops here, but in towns many shops are found and these things are new to our children. So they spend their time in the shops for many hours looking at gums, candy and sugarcanes. And it may not be useful, because they should go to school immediately but they spend their time wondering around the towns. Since the ABECs are close to our homes we can see when the teachers get in to school and we can tell the children that the teachers have come and send them to the ABEC. And if they are late from school, because we know at what time they leave school, we can ask them why they are late. We can control them better. But when they get older we will send them to Formal school. ...ABE also shortens the time that it takes them to get to grade 5, because it will only take 3 years. But they also get a more intense education, which is sufficient for these grades. So they can jump from grade 3 to grade 5...In Formal school there is age-restriction and you should at least know some things (when starting grade 1). They will test if they are old enough, and if I send my children to Formal school they might not be old enough and they tell us to send them when they are older. But in ABE, if they can walk and talk, my children do not have to know almost anything, they are allowed to get in.” (Aunt of a boy in grade 1 ABEC 3 28.02.09)

Another account, related to the theme that “ABE is for younger children” was given by a man whose son used to attend ABE, but dropped out from grade 3 and became a priest. He stated that:

“We can send them to ABE... when they are old enough to walk and talk, that is: when they can walk around the area and can speak well. We would send them here when they are 6-7 year old, but to Formal school, since it is far away, we would not send them this young. We would wait until they are older.” (Father of a boy who dropped out from grade 3 ABEC 2 to become a priest 28.02.09)

Some guardians also mentioned the active promotion of ABE in their area as a reason for having enrolled their children there. Two of these guardians were currently working as ABE promoters in the communities around ABEC 3. They were asked what they usually said when they talked to parents about ABE and one of them said:

“The first thing we will say is that they will be free from car-accidents... And since it is close to their homes they can get back to their work as soon as they finish school. The younger ones will look after the cattle and the older ones do harder jobs. But if we send them to Formal school they wonder around the town, they will
make friends with town-children and they will turn into “bad children”, they become accustomed to town-habits....They spend their time wondering around the town, which their families do not want, because it might take 2 or 3 hours which is not the actual time to go home after school.” (Grandfather of a girl in grade 2 ABEC 3 and ABE promoter 28.02.09)

One of the boys in ABEC 1 had graduated from ABE and transferred to School 2, but dropped out at the end of grade 5 and returned to grade 3 in ABE at the start of the 2nd semester. He could hypothetically enroll in grade 5 in Formal school again, but it was the wrong time of the year and he therefore went back to ABE. After having heard the participants’ reasons for enrolling in ABE, in the following sections we shall turn to what the participants had to say about their experiences with participating in ABE, and their views and opinions about different dimensions of the program.

5.3 Views and experiences with ABE and comparisons with Formal school

5.3.1 Views and experiences with the school calendar and schedule

The use of a shift system was mentioned by several guardians as a positive feature of ABE, as this allowed the children to help them in the household, with the farming and the livestock. One man whose children had gone to ABEC 2 said that the guardians in the area had been asked on their opinion on shifting to full-day school, but that they had responded that it was not suitable in their village as they needed the children’s labor. Some guardians also talked about the flexibility of the schedule and that ABE was tolerant on the students’ absence. Two of them said the following;

“The ABEC is near our house, so the youth (boys) can go back to the home and help us. And the youngsters who have to go to the desert farm, they go in the summer (June-July); they harvest the sesame in September and get back here in November. And Formal school doesn’t allow that children come and go as they want, but ABE does. (Father of 1 girl and 1 boy in grade 9 High school who attended ABE and 1 boy presently in grade 3 ABEC 3 and ABE promoter 28.02.09)

"...And they might have to work with different things, f ex cutting the crops, on Monday and Tuesday, so there will not be class on Monday and Tuesday, but there will be a class on Saturday and Sunday instead. So they arrange the program so that the youngsters can manage both their farming and their education.... In Formal school if you are absent just one day, you might be dismissed...You can freely study as you want in ABE, but in Formal school you cannot freely study as you want. In ABE they do not push them as hard as they do in Formal school.” (Grandfather of a girl in grade 2 ABEC 3 and ABE promoter 28.02.09)

Quite many students on the other hand said that the facilitators rather scheduled lessons according to what was more suitable for themselves, than for the students or the communities. The director at
School B was also of the opinion that in reality there was not much flexibility to talk about with regard to the organization of the education in ABEC 2 and ABEC 1 (Director School B 12.03.09). One of the facilitators in ABEC 3 said that she viewed the flexibility of the schedule as one of the main challenges or negative features of ABE. For example, she said, the farmers come on Monday and say it is farming season, so they schedule the class for the following Saturday. Then other parents complained about the class being held on a Saturday, and they would end up having no lessons that week. “This does not happen in formal school”, she pointed out. The same facilitator also said that one of the strengths of ABE was that they held lessons on holidays as this gave the children more time in school. For example in Epiphany the Formal schools closed for 4 days while they only closed the ABEC for 1 day (Grade 1 facilitator ABEC 3 25.02.09).

Guardians in both the rural ABECs expressed a strong wish for “upgrading” the ABECs, as they would have preferred to have the children going to school in the community rather than starting to go to Formal school in town after a few years. In ABEC 3 the suggestion was to upgrade the ABEC to at least grades 5 or 6 and in ABEC 2 to at least grades 6 or 7.

5.3.3 Views and experiences with the teaching-learning process and the facilitators in ABE

Most of the students who were still in ABE had positive views on the facilitators in ABE. Both boys and girls in ABEC1, although there were some exceptions, appeared particularly satisfied with their teacher, as they thought she followed up the students well and readily helped them if there was something they struggled with understanding. She was also neither late for class nor absent much. In ABEC 2 the students also appeared to be satisfied with the way the teacher taught them, and the follow-up of students, including extra tutoring of weak students. One boy also said that if somebody skipped classes just a few days the teacher would be very upset and go to the student’s home and talk and shout at the parents. The grade 3 facilitator in ABEC 2 however said that the facilitators first sent letters 3 times to the households of students who were missing classes, before they went to their house to find out about their whereabouts and try to get the student back to school (Grade 3 facilitator ABEC 2 10.03.2009). Some girls in ABEC 2 however said that their teacher was absent a lot and did not give notice about it beforehand, and that they did not think she was particularly good at teaching. Most of the students in ABEC 3 were also satisfied with their teacher. One boy complained about the teacher coming late and being absent, and not giving notice about it
beforehand. The rest of the students however said that the teacher was seldom absent, and that she found someone else to cover her class if she was unable to attend. They also believed that she taught well and that they were followed up well, including the week students who were given tutorial classes in the weekends. Many guardians were also positive towards the teachers and the teaching-methods used in ABE. One parent for example said the following:

“To Formal school the children must be sent at older ages, because they might be beaten up by youngsters, and they are not cared about. But in ABE, since the teachers have grown up in this area, they care about the children. They teach and control them like a family...In ABE in one class there are 40-50 students, but in Formal school there are 80 to100 students, so the knowledge there is very weak. Since the students are 80 to100 in one class and there is 45 minutes for one lesson, the teacher just writes on the blackboard and does not care how much the students have learned or not learned from his teaching. He does not care if the students fail. But in ABE since there are 40-50 students in one class, the teachers can follow everything that the students do in detail, and they can control and manage the students’ activities. And it is very useful for the students. And they care more about them.” (Father of 2 boys in grade 5 and 7 in School B who had attended ABEC 2 28.02.09)

There were however more varying opinions about the capability of the facilitators in ABE among the students who had transferred to Formal school. Most of the students who had been to ABEC 3 were rather positive towards their former facilitators’ capability to teach, but thought that they arrived late for class and were absent a bit too much. Some of the girls also disliked that the teachers made coffee in their office, as it distracted them during lessons. Two of the girls were very critical towards the facilitators in ABEC 3. One of them said that her teacher had been very careless and unwilling to help the students, and that she used to beat the students a lot. The other girl said the students in ABE were followed up poorly, and also accused the facilitators in ABE of what she saw as corruption. She believed that the older boys got better marks because they put pressure on the teachers while the (younger) girls got worse marks, since the teachers knew that the girls were not any threat to them. A girl who had been to ABEC 1 also talked about what she experienced as carelessness of the teachers, and use of violence;

“...The teachers did not come to the lessons. They came late and were also absent. *) How often were they absent? Like 3 times in a week. *) What did you do then? The students went to the teachers’ house and asked if the teacher was around, and we were told that they were not so everybody went home...The teachers didn’t teach us well, and then they gave us hard questions in the exams. And when we asked our teacher, when we said that we didn’t understand, she didn’t answer but told us to go to hell or just left the classroom. *) Did she beat you? No, I have never been beaten by a teacher *) Did she beat other students? Yes, there were students who disturbed very much and she beat the ones who disturbed. But I didn’t disturb so she did not beat me.” (Girl, 13, in School 2 03.03.09)
According to one boy in ABEC 1, all the facilitators in that ABEC used to beat the students as a form of disciplining them. For example, if they had not done their homework or did not have clean exercise books, they had to get down on their knees and were beaten with a stick. When discussing the use of violence in school with some students, most of them did not think that they should be beaten in order to maintain discipline and order, but that they should rather be advised or eventually punished in other ways if they did something wrong. But they thought that at least some sort of consequences for wrong-doing was necessary, because at the moment they thought there was a serious lack of rules and regulations in ABE. There were complaints from both boys and girls with experience from all the 3 ABECs in the study over the lack of order and discipline in ABE. Part of the complaints was that teachers came late and were absent too much, which was related to lack of supervision of the teachers. Another problem was that student in ABE were not disciplined or well-behaving, which was related to the general lack of rules and regulations, that the teachers were incapable of maintaining the order, that there were no student monitors in ABE and some students related it to the facilitators being young. Others however related these problems more to carelessness of the students, and it was lamented that both the students and the lack of rules and regulations gave the teachers a hard time to do their job. One boy who had attended ABEC 2 reasoned around the problem of order and discipline in the following way:

“In ABE there are no rules or regulations. The students are disturbing very much; they get in even if they are late. In Formal school if you are late you don’t get into class, you just have to go home, and get disciplined the day after. *) Are you saying that there is less discipline in ABE? Yes, the students have no discipline so even the teachers get beaten up, because there are no guards, and no rules and regulations...The reason that students get late is that there are no rules and regulations. But it is also our fault, because we leave home too late, like at 8. ...The teachers in ABE are suffering a lot, because for example for example the students break the doors and they have to pay from their own pockets. In Formal school if you even open a window without permission you are told to leave the class.” (Boy, 18, in School 2 26.02.09)

Another boy who had attended ABEC 1 followed up this by saying that;

“...Since there are no rules there is no respect for the teachers. For example one student was late and came in and disturbed. So the teacher got mad and wanted to leave the class, but the student grabbed her hand and pulled her back.”(Boy, 19, in School 1 26.02.09)

One boy also suggested that it was perhaps the combination of young and rather inexperienced teachers and young and inexperienced students which created disorder. Some guardians also expressed worries over low levels of regulations and control in ABE, and the teachers’ capability and morals. The two most critical accounts on these issues were the following:
“...They do not teach well, and there is lack of manners from the teachers. For example they might not come to class and they are not strict about giving full courses. They do not bother if the children are not having classes if for example if the teacher is giving birth. Somebody else should cover them then, but it does not happen...I want somebody to supervise them, if they get in class at the right time and when they are getting in and out.” (Mother of a girl in grade 2 ABEC 1 28.02.09)

“At earlier times the teachers used to teach them very well. And the students when they transferred to grade 5 became outstanding students. But now the teachers don’t teach them so well anymore. And there are no rules or management. They don’t control them much. The smart students study their textbooks very well, but the students who need supervision and control don’t study much. So when they pass to grade 5 they become lazy students.” (Mother of a girl in grade 5 School 2 who had attended ABEC 1 07.03.09)

A number of students expressed that they would have preferred subject-teachers instead of having one single teacher for all subjects in ABE, reasons being that they thought the subject-teachers were more specialized and had more experience on their respective subjects. There were students who had experience with facilitators in ABE who were “excellent” in some subjects, but did not handle other subjects well. There were also students holding that there was a shortage of teachers in ABE. Some students, in particular some of the older boys also wished that radio-education, which is a teaching-method in Formal school, was used in ABE.

5.3.4 Students’ perceptions of the ABE subjects’ level of difficulty

Most of the students experienced English and Mathematics as the most difficult or among the more difficult subject in ABE. For example, Mathematics was mentioned by as many as 12 out of the 16 girls in ABE as difficult or the most difficult subject in ABE. The difficulties students expressed with English were most often related to speaking it. Amharic and Environmental Sciences were also mentioned as difficult by some very few students. Quite many of the boys however also expressed that Mathematics was easy, or that even though it was hard that they enjoyed learning it and that the subject was taught well. The boys in ABEC 3 were particularly satisfied with the teaching in Mathematics. Environmental Science, Amharic, Aesthetics and Sports were however most often stated as being the easier subjects, and Environmental Science and Amharic were frequently mentioned as the most interesting subjects.
5.3.5 Opinions on the infrastructure at the ABECs and teaching-learning materials

Both students and guardians expressed dissatisfaction with the infrastructure in all 3 ABECs in the study. The guardians of children previously or presently enrolled in ABEC 1 were critical on the sanitation and hygiene, including lack of water and toilets. One of them expressed the following:

“...The hygiene around the school is not very good; the school is very dirty and dusty. I would like it if something could be done about it ...Our children begged us to take them to Formal school...That Formal school (School B) which is not funded by anybody can provide a clean environment. Why can’t ABE? Our children, when they come from class, they look like monsters!...Why can’t ABE provide a clean environment when it is funded by the government?...When the school was established, it should have water-power, but it does not have. It also has no toilet...I want somebody to check how dirty the school is and how the children are handling it.” (Mother of a girl in grade 2 ABEC 1 28.02.09)

Another guardian of a student in ABEC 1 said that her child used to wake up at night and cough and was ill, and she blamed it on the dirty environment in the ABEC. Students in ABEC 1 were also dissatisfied with the absence of a fence and school guard, and as also mentioned by the head teacher there, people had broken into the ABEC and furniture and books had been stolen. Both students and guardians of children previously or presently enrolled in ABEC 2 expressed wishes for a brick building, that the windows which were broken should be mended, a playground, toilets, water and more benches and desks. The guardians also wanted a library, and there were some students who complained over the lack of reference books. Some of the boys also missed sports-equipment, in particular footballs, which they used to have in the ABEC earlier. The security of the ABEC was apparently also a problem, as there was no fence around it. The students said that the area around the ABEC was rather unsafe, because of “gangsters” hanging around, and that since there was no fence and no guard at the ABEC, things like desks and sports-equipment had been stolen from the ABEC. Benches and desks had also been broken by intruders, animals which were herded in the area defecated in the compound and people had even defecated in the classrooms.

In ABEC 3 the students said that there were insufficient numbers of benches and desks. According to one girl they used to sit 4 students on one bench and two of the boys said that;

“There is a really big problem with the benches. In grade 1 there are about 86 students, and their classroom is very small. And in one bench there are 5 students. And we cannot give them our benches, because they are broken. So we really want more benches or the ones that are broken to be mended. ...Because we have brothers and sisters learning in grade 1. ...First: We care about them, and next: if they are packed in one bench in their class we are forced to give them our benches and we will also be packed in one bench. And we don’t want that.” (Boy, 10 and Boy, 10 in ABEC 3 25.02.2009)
Wishes were also expressed by both students and guardians to build a bigger and better building, preferably by bricks, as they way it was constructed now, by mud and wood, it might fall apart. There was also a need to mend the broken doors and windows, and the ABEC lacked toilet and access to water. There had been water in the compound earlier but the water pipe had broken down and had not been mended during about a year’s time. The lack of a fence around the compound was also seen as a problematic, in particular by the guardians who also said that they had tried to fence it themselves. As they had built it out of wood and had no wires it however kept falling down. One girl said that if the compound was fenced, they could plant things there, but without a fence the cattle got in and ate the crops. The guardians also said that the size of the compound should be increased for the purpose of farming and planting trees. Some of the students wished there was electricity so that night classes could be held. Some students also said that there was shortage of textbooks in the ABEC and that the exercise books were in bad shape.

The lack or deterioration of support to students, and in particular to the needy students, in terms of free learning materials was also what the guardians were overall most disappointed over with ABE. The perception that ABE was “Norway-school” or an organization which should provide more than just the school building was strong in some of their accounts, like the following:

“We sent our children to ABE because of these benefits, because when I sent my older boys to Formal school they did not only ask us for fees, but also for other things like construction. Here they do not ask for anything. But why is there no support in this organization, which is opened by foreigners? Why can they not bring small thing like bags, pens and books? This ABE is not just a school but an organization, which should give support. They opened it not only to teach but also to support children who cannot afford it, or children without parents.” (Mother of a girl in grade 2 in ABEC 1 28.02.09)

The students also mentioned that the support in terms of free learning-materials had deteriorated. One boy who had attended ABEC 1 claimed:

“The status of ABE is declining (in the eyes of people). Before I started in ABE they used to have books, exercise-books, pen and pencils. But when I got in they only gave us two textbooks, and a few pens and pencils. So the status is declining.” (Boy, 18, in School 2 26.02.09)

According to the head teacher in ABEC 3, the facilitators in that ABEC had been told to go and collect new textbooks at the woreda administration some weeks earlier, they had just not gone there yet. The head teacher related the decreasing availability of other learning materials to the closing of the ABE administration office, i.e. that the responsibility for ABE was handed over to the WEO, and that the number of ABEC and ABE students was steadily increasing in the area.
5.3.6 Views and experiences with the transfer to Formal school and the equivalency of ABE with Formal school

All students who were enrolled in ABE at the time of the field studies planned to continue their education in grade 5 in the Formal school system. Some students in ABE stated explicitly that they saw no differences in content of the education provided in ABE and in Formal school, but many students expressed that they thought ABE was very difficult or harder than Formal education due to the condensed version of the curriculum. Some few students in ABE believed that their education was inferior to the education provided in Formal school and that it probably would be more difficult for them when transferring to grade 5 than for the students who had attended the first cycle of primary school in a Formal school. The girls in ABEC 2 in particular doubted the equivalency of their education with the education in Formal school. Reasons given by the students for believing that they would struggle more with their continued education after ABE compared to the students in Formal school were that they thought the teachers in Formal school were better than in ABE, that they learned less in ABE since they “skipped” 1 grade, or that the Formal school students spent more time learning what they themselves learned in 3 years. The following quotes are examples of what they said:

"The students from Formal school are much better than us because they have done grade 4. Even though grade 3 and grade 4 are integrated here, I think they will be much better.” (Girl, 10 in ABEC 2 03.03.09)

“The Formal school students are better because they get better education. Because they go through grade 4. They learn what we learn in 1 year in 2 years, so they will capture the knowledge better.” (Girl, 11 in ABEC 2 03.03.09)

Most students however believed that they would be equal to their counterparts in Formal school, and some even believed that they would be better. Some students believed that through the condensed form of the education in ABE they learned to study hard and therefore became better prepared for the future studies. Other students believed that they learned more in ABE than in Formal school, and that even grade 5, 6 and 7 courses were part of their education. As one boy said:

“When we move on to grade 5 and grade 6 it might be like repeating the same subjects or the same topics or ideas as we have now. There might be nothing new.” (Boy, 10 in ABEC 3 25.02.09)

Some students also believed that they learned more in ABE since they had fewer subjects per day in ABE and more time for each lesson, that there was more contact between the students and the facilitators and higher availability of teaching-learning materials in ABE than in Formal school.
The students who had actually transferred to Formal school were however not as positive towards ABE as the students who were still enrolled there. Though more than one third of the girls who had transferred to Formal school said that they experienced no difference between themselves and the students who had done grades 1 to 4 in Formal school, and some said they thought the content of their education and the books were good, there were also quite many of the girls who thought Formal school provided a better education than ABE. Of the boys in Formal school, the ones who had attended ABEC 3 had a lot of positive things to say about their experiences with ABE while students who had attended ABEC 2 and ABEC 1 were overall more critical. Those who were positive said for example that the smaller classes and the higher availability of textbooks had been beneficial. Some said that for these reasons they experienced Formal school as rather easy. One boy also said that they had learned grade 5 and grade 6 courses in ABE. Others said that they had a hard time in Formal school and explained this by having "skipped" one grade, as well as that the education in ABE or parts of it had been too difficult; "beyond the students capacity" or beyond what could be expected of students in the first cycle of primary school. Many of the boys also believed that the facilitators in ABE were not as competent as the teachers in Formal school.

Other reflections on eventual differences between ABE and Formal school, which were not necessarily value laden, were for example the difference in standards of the infrastructure; that the ABECs were of lower standard than the Formal schools. As seen above, the infrastructure of the ABECs was to the dissatisfaction of most of the students. Some of the students also reflected upon the use of school uniform, which was not a requirement in ABE, and while some apparently thought this was good, others missed it in ABE. The main reason these students wanted uniforms in ABE was that it created a sense of equity among the students. The one Muslim girl interviewed said that they were not allowed to wear scarf (hijab) in ABE. Other girls pointed out that they did not have to wear trousers in the sports lesson in ABE. Many students, as also described earlier, said that one main difference between ABE and Formal school were the rules and regulation, and for example that they were allowed into class in ABEC even if they arrived late, while this was not the case in Formal school. Many students also said that the availability of textbooks was much higher in ABE, while in Formal school the student-textbook ratio were as low as 1:4 to 1:6. Some boys pointed out that they did not use radio-education in ABE, and that they would have liked that in ABE too.

Many of the guardians pointed out the higher availability of books, in some cases also other types of free learning-materials, that the education was free and no school-uniforms were required, the use of
shift-system and the flexibility of the schedule as positive features of ABE. Most guardians also believed that the children who had attended ABE were equally prepared for the future studies as the Formal school students when they transferred to grade 5. Some even believed that students who had gone to ABE were better prepared. This is for example expressed in the following account:

“I believe that students in grade 6 and 7 would have problems with understanding the ABE books in grade 3, especially in English. There are many things that they would not understand. For example when my children study together at night and the boy who is in grade 3 in ABE asks his brothers (in grade 6 and 7), for help they cannot answer or help him, so he finds out on his own. So this implies he beats them...My neighbor and I registered our children in ABE, but he changed his mind and sent him to Formal School. Now my boy is in grade 10 while my neighbor’s boy is in 8, because he could not skip one grade like my boy, and he also repeated one grade. He argues with his father: ‘you should have taken me to ABE; I would have been like the other boy. ...You thought this was a good school but look where it has gotten me.’ And there are students who were in ABE who find jobs before the others.’” (Father of 1 boy in grade 5 in School 2, 1 boy and 1 girl in grade 9 and 10 who had attended ABEC 2 and 1 girl working as facilitator in ABE 28.02.09)

There were however some guardians, most of whom presently or previously had children enrolled in ABEC 1, who did not believe that ABE provided education equivalent to that of Formal school. A group of guardians of students in ABEC 1 had at one point withdrawn their children from ABE and sent them to School B. The main reason given by these guardians was the lack of hygiene and sanitation in the ABEC, but they also expressed doubts about the equivalency of ABE with Formal school. In particular they were skeptical to whether the 3 years in ABE actually covered the 4 years of the first cycle in primary school, and they would rather see their children doing 4 grades as well.

One of the guardians expressed her doubts in the following way:

“...Why would it be easy for the students if they do not learn grade 4? How could they get a good grade in grade 5 if they jump grade 4? When they get to grade 5 they will be asked about things from grade 4. How can they manage this? And the teaching in ABE is very weak, the books try to incorporate grade 4 in grade 1 to 3. If they have learned grade 4 the teaching in grade 5 will not be very hard. But here they only care about the years, they do not care how much they know about for example mathematics and calculation, and when they get to Formal school they will be taught by teachers with Diploma and degree so it will be very hard for them to understand anything.” (Mother of a girl in grade 2 ABEC 1 28.02.09)

The head teacher in ABEC 1 said about the incidence with the students who had been withdrawn from the ABEC before graduating, that 24 students from grade 2 and grade 3 had been sent to School B at the beginning of the school year, and they were there placed in grade 1. The children had however been sent back to continue their education in ABE. The Director at School B explained that it was not allowed to transfer children before they had finished grade 3 in ABE as it was not possible to know in which grade the students ought to be placed. According to the head teacher in
ABEC 1 the PTA had not discussed this with the facilitators in the ABEC beforehand. She believed that the parents had withdrawn their children since they perceived ABE as kindergarten or preschool and thought that they should send the children to Formal school when they had learnt to read and write (Head teacher ABEC 1 12.03.2009). The director at School B thought that parents may not have enough information about ABE and see it as a form of kindergarten or preschool. They might in practice also use it as a kindergarten or preschool, regardless of how they perceived ABE, as the only actual kindergarten in Ayckel Town was located far from ABEC 1. There were also only room for 20-30 children there, and the personnel was not trained as preschool teachers. He also believed that parents sent their younger children to ABEC 1 because it was closer to their homes and safer since they would not have to cross car-roads. After a while the parents did not experience any major changes in their children, they might think that the children did not learn enough in ABE and try to transfer them to Formal school. The director expected that it would happen again that parents would try to transfer their children to his school before they had graduated from ABE (Director School B 12.03.09). The education program coordinator at SCN-E, did not however believe that there should be any major misconceptions about ABE in the area, such as that it was a form of preschool, as the ABE project had been running there for many years and the information about it was well spread (Shenkutie 23.02.09 -19.02.09).

The director in School A had the impression that the students who transferred to ABE to his school studied hard and had relatively the same or better achievement as the Formal school students (Director School A 13.03.09. The director in school B had no firm figures on this, but believed that the former ABE students were in the majority among the students who had to repeat grades in the second cycle of primary school, or even be replaced in lower grades in the second cycle. He had however also done his own investigation on the achievements of students in grade 5 and found that there were many students with background from ABE ranking high (1-5) in their classes. Relative to the lower number of students who had attended ABE, than the numbers of students with background from Formal school, the share of ABE students in the ranking high in class was slightly higher than the share of Formal school students ranking high. He was also of the impression that the students from ABEC 2 did better than the students from ABEC 1 and suggested that this had to do with, that more of the students from ABEC 2 lived with their parents, and that they were older though not very old and thus with demands to support themselves, than the students from ABEC 1. The students
transferring to School B from ABEC 1 often lived of their own and were often very young, from 9 years old, when they transferred to grade 5 (Director School B 12.03.09).

If the students’ overall views on ABE compared to Formal school did not come clearly forward through the responses on other questions, it did in the responses to the question on whether they would have sent their own children to Formal school or to ABE, which are presented in the following section.

5.3.8 Students´ preferences for their own children´s education

The reasons given for wanting to send the children to ABE were in line with the previously stated reasons for enrolling in ABE, and the positive experiences the students had with ABE. The reasons for wanting to send the children to Formal school rather than to ABE, had for most of the students to do with negative experiences with the teachers, the lack of order and discipline and that they overall saw the education provided in Formal school as better than the education provided in ABE. Among the other reasons for opting for Formal school were for example the lack of reference books in ABE, that radio-education was not used in ABE, the poor infrastructure of the ABECs or that one grade was “missing” in ABE. One girl said that she wanted her children to attend Formal school, as the students in ABE were more shy than students in Formal school, and that they were not aware of their rights and did not know how to speak up for themselves, and the other girls in the particular FG agreed with her.

Table 13 Students’ preferences for their own children’s education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>&quot;Would you send you own children to ABE or Formal school?&quot;</th>
<th>Girls in ABE (4 did not respond the question)</th>
<th>Boys in ABE</th>
<th>Girls in Formal school</th>
<th>Boys in Formal school</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To ABE</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To Formal school</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pragmatic:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- the school closest to home</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- ABE, if there are rules and regulations</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-the school with highest quality</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- any place where they can learn safely</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

112
The responses are presented in Table 13, and it is notable that while many of the students still in ABE were very positive towards ABE, more of the students who had transferred to Formal school, including all but one of the girls, would have opted for Formal school. After having focused on the process of participating in ABE, and participants perspectives on the education provided, the participants were asked about the outcomes of the education, and their responses are presented in the following section.

5.4 Outcomes and Benefits of the education

5.4.1 Literacy and Numeracy skills among the students

All of the boys and girls in ABE, but one who said it was very difficult and another who expressed that it was somewhat difficult for her, said they could read and write Amharic. All the Formal school students also said that they could read and write Amharic when they graduated from ABE. One of the boys at ABEC 2 added that he believed that only 3-4 students in the class could not read and write Amharic. 2 of the girls in Formal school who had been to ABEC 1 however said that there were students coming from ABE who could not read and write Amharic. One of these girls even claimed that there were students writing upside down. All the 4 students who had dropped outs had difficulties with reading and especially with reading other peoples handwriting. One of the older boys could apparently not write much but his name, but was happy about it as he no longer used his fingerprint as his personal signature.

All of the girls at ABE and the Formal school who were asked whether they could count and calculate said that they could, but 8 girls said they had some difficulties with the calculation. 7 of the 21 boys attending ABE said that they had some problems with calculation, and all the 4 students who had dropped out of ABE said that they had difficulties with calculation, but that they could count and do easier calculations. Most of the boys at the Formal schools said that they managed Mathematics well, and could count and calculate after graduating from ABE. Two boys however said that some of the calculation was hard. When students specified what was hard in mathematics, division and in a few cases geometry was most frequently mentioned. According to the grade 3 facilitator in ABEC 2 the majority of the students could read and write when they graduated from
that ABEC, though there were some who could not. In her view there were only 7 of the grade 3 students who completely understood the calculation in the Mathematics subject, and about half of the class “tried” to calculate but did not entirely manage. It was hardest for the girls, she said. The facilitator in grade 1 in ABEC 3 said that most of the students in that ABEC learned to read and write Amharic in grade 1 or 2. English was more difficult she said, but when they transferred to grade 5 in Formal school they could usually read and write some phrases and sentences in English.

5.4.2 Usefulness of the education

When students were asked about whether any of the things learnt in school had been of use to them outside school, personal hygiene and health and environmental sanitation was by far most frequently mentioned. They mentioned for example having learned why and how to keep their bodies clean, to wash their clothes, food hygiene, protection against HIV/AIDS, Malaria and other diseases, exercises to keep their body in shape, and to gather and burn or bury garbage to keep the communities clean. Some of them reported how they used their knowledge to help their families, or about having taught or inspired their families to apply what they had learnt. What was most frequently mentioned among the guardians as benefits of their children’s education, or knowledge they saw the children applying at home, was also that the children had learnt about hygiene and health and environmental sanitation. The following are some of the examples given:

“For example we learn about water hygiene, to divide the water for the cows and for people. So we have separated the water by a kind of bridge.” (Boy, 10 in ABEC 1 05.03.09)

“I am different than before I got in to school. Before I went to school I did not know what hygiene was. I did not know that I should wash my clothes when they were dirty, and that I should keep my body clean. Now I wash my clothes and myself, and I learned about environmental sanitation and so many other things. ...For example I learned that I should defecate in far areas, and cover it. And I clean the backyard and pick up the garbage.” (Boy, 23, dropped out from grade 3 ABEC 3 05.03.09)

“For example we learn in Environmental Science about different kinds of illnesses, that we can get illnesses from f ex mosquito-bites. And that almost all mosquitoes are found in stagnant water, and water with dirt, so we should avoid these kinds of places.” (Boy, in ABEC 2 03.03.09)

“For example we may wash a servise12 and flies may fly around it, and before we went to ABE we might think that it did not bring disease and use it before washing it. And we wash our sisters and brothers. We wash their arms, legs and faces, especially their faces, because we do not want them to be exposed to

---

12 Servise = big plate for serving injera.
trachoma. ...We were told to not use a toilet which is not clean, because we might get diarrhea and it might change into typhoid.” (Girl, 15, in School 1 who had attended ABEC 3 25.02.09)

“They teach our children that they should be clean, and they come home and apply what they learn. They say that our clothes should be clean so they clean our clothes, and they say that we should not spill water on the ground, so they cut of grass and they clean the ground, they gather the garbage and bury it under ground. They also tell us to keep the house clean from termites and flee, so they clean the house. And they “paint” the houses with dung to make our houses better.” (Father of 1 boy in grade 5 in School B, 1 boy and 1 girl in grade 9 and 10 who had attended ABEC 2 and 1 girl working as facilitator in ABE 28.02.09)

“They taught us things we did not know before. They have changed our living standards. They changed the food we eat; they say that we should not eat the same kind of food every day. And they say that we should not wear dirty clothes. Since they are literate and we are not, they have taught us. We did not learn, but we sent our children to learn. When we compare their living-standards to ours, theirs are much better, and they tell us to follow them.” (Father of a boy who was in ABEC 2 but dropped out from grade 3 to become a priest 28.02.09)

The usefulness of numeracy was also frequently mentioned by both students and guardians. The students gave examples such as to keep track of resources, for instance food, in the household, but most often in relation to money. The guardians also talked about how their children helped them in counting and calculating in daily affairs. The following were some examples given:

“For example if I go to the market and I sell something and with that money I may be planning to buy some good. We might agree on 8 birr, but the seller tries to take 11 birr from me thinking that I cannot count the money. But if I have the knowledge I cannot be cheated.” (Girl, 9, in ABEC 3 25.02.09)

“For example if my parents sell something at the market somebody might pay them 10 birr, but there might be some amount of money that they did not pay. They should maybe get 30 birr and they only get 10. It is like a credit. So I will tell my parents that they should have 20 more birr from that person.” (Girl, 12, in ABEC 1 05.03.09)

“For example if I have some money in my pocket, and I go to the market to sell some ox or goat, when I return home I may not know how much money I should have. So I will ask my children to calculate what amount of money I got from selling; how much money I had in my pocket, what I got from selling and what I should have afterwards. And also with government loans, like for fertilizer, what amount of money I should pay to the lender, and other personal expenses. For example salary to the shepherd, and asrat for example. So generally they will tell me if the money I have is sufficient for those things.” (Father of 1 boy in grade 5 in School 2, 1 boy and 1 girl in grade 9 and 10 who had attended ABEC 2 and 1 girl working as facilitator in ABE 28.02.09)

Some boys also said that they had learnt farming techniques, such as in the following example;

“We learn how to separate the land for farming, the fertile soil for the farming, and other land for the cattle. And we learn about irrigation, planting trees to hold on to the soil, and different kinds of farming.

Asrat = tenth of agricultural product paid in cash or in kind to the church.
Other examples which were not so frequently mentioned included literacy, which was more often mentioned by the guardians than by the students. One guardian said:

“Because of my child I have learned the alphabet and now I am starting to learn to read and write Amharic.” (Mother of a girl in grade 5 School 2 who had attended ABEC 1 12.03.09)

The students also talked about having learnt how to plant trees and plants, how to avoid erosion, about forest degradation, to not waste money or time and in that relation how to budget and use schedules. It also included attitudes towards their parents; that they should respect and obey their parents and behave well at home, and attitudes towards disabled people and persons infected by HIV, that they should not express negative attitudes towards them but take care of them. Some of the students also reported how they tried to teach their families for example the alphabet, simple phrases in English or just “what is good and bad”. There were not as many examples given among the few guardians who had some educational background and were literate, and especially so if their children were in lower grades. It should also be recalled, when interpreting what the guardians said about the benefits of their children’s education that many of them also had children in higher grades. The examples they gave may thus not only stem from the education that their children had participated in through ABE. The benefits the guardians mentioned were however similar to the examples given by the students who participated in the study.

The participants frequently touched upon issues which were related to how their home-environment affected the educational process, and these issues are addressed in the following sections.

5.5 Challenges and support to education in the home-environment

5.5.1 Guardians support or lack of support to the children’s education

Most of the guardians stated that they were trying very hard to keep their children in school and supported their continued education, though there were some who told us that they did not give their children much time to study outside school. Many guardians also talked about the general benefits
of education, such as expected external efficiency and personal development. The following are examples of what the guardians said:

“If it is possible: there is nothing like learning. It improves your mind.” (Mother of a girl in grade 2 ABEC 1 28.02.09)

“A person who has gone to school; a knowledgeable person, will be very interesting in everything he does. Not only because he graduates from school and gets a job, but it looks good. Having knowledge is good, it makes everybody happy.” (Grandfather of a girl in grade 2 ABEC 3 and ABE-promoter 28.02.09)

“Whether you get anything out of it or not, there is nothing like learning. And it brings about jobs and other things. Learning brings you luck. You will learn and then you try your luck. When you finish school you will go and try your luck, like going and get a job or not.” (Mother of a girl in grade 2 ABEC 1 28.02.09)

Some of the girls in ABE, and also a few of the girls in Formal school, said specifically that they would probably not drop out of school since their guardians wanted them to continue. About half of the boys in ABE also did not mention any specific challenges they faced in relation to their education, and deemed the probability of them dropping out of school as rather low, because they had support from home. Even though they said that they sometimes had to help their parents with for example the farming they would only be absent for a limited time. 3 boys in Formal school also said specifically that they did not believe that they would drop out of school. Two of them specified that this was because their guardians had decided that they should go to school and thus wanted them to continue. Some students in ABE however talked about having challenges with getting enough time to study. There were students who had difficulties with making ends meet and at the same time manage their education in particular among the older boys. One boy also said that his parents wanted him to attend church school rather than secular basic education, even though he ranked 1st in his class in ABE. He said;

“I am also learning in church, and I have to go there too. Sometimes my parents give more emphasis to this church program, so I miss classes in ABE...Even though I benefited from going to school, like I learned about Mathematics and calculations and in Science about hygiene, they tell me that I should follow the church program. Rather I should drop out of this class. ...They are telling me to drop out, but I want to continue.” (Boy, 10, in ABEC 3 25.02.09)

Among the older boys who had enrolled in ABE against the will of their parents, one of the boys said that his parents had accepted that he was in school and did neither press him to skip classes, nor drop out of school. Two other boys however still struggled with lack of support for their education from their families. They narrated their situations saying;
“Still now when April comes, and both the farming-season and the exam-period starts they say that ‘you just sit in school’ and insist on that I should skip classes and help with the farming. We tell them that we have to do the exams. I go to school by force. *) **Do you get time to do your homework?** Since they are not willing to send us to school in the first place they are not happy about it. They don’t want to support with candles, since there is no electricity, pens and so. They say ‘Why would we give you? You spend all your time at school and now you ask for this.’ *) **So how do you get around?** For example if I have class in the afternoon I will tell my family that we have class at 10 and come and do homework here (at the ABEC).’”

(Boy, 13, in ABEC 2 03.03.2009)

“We do homework in the weekend, on Saturdays and Sundays when we don’t have classes. But we have other things to do then too. For example transport grains, look after cattle and so. *) **So do you get enough time for the homework?** In the week I most of the times do my homework at night. I use battery-light at night, come early to school, like 9.30, or say I have make-up classes. *) **Do other students do like this; tell they have make-up classes and the like to get time for the homework?** Maybe 1 in 10. We live in different villages at different distances from the school, some live far, and they get in at different times here. So I don’t really know about the others, I only know about myself. But the older students have adapted this pattern.”

(Boy, 14, in ABEC 2 03.03.2009)

Some of the girls also had difficulties with getting enough time to study, due to responsibilities at home. One girl said:

“**After we finish class, they (the parents) say: ‘You have been wondering around everywhere for many hours. It is time to work hard, no time for studying’**.”

(Girl, 10, in ABEC 3 25.02.09)

The students who had dropped out of ABE were asked about the reasons for the drop out, and also the students who were still in school were asked about whether there were any possible reasons that they could drop out of their education. The responses are presented in the following section.

### 5.5.2 Actual and possible reasons for dropping out of school

All the 4 students who had dropped out of ABE had dropped out of grade 3, and one of the boys had dropped out twice from grade 3. While the reasons for dropping out were different in all cases, they were all related to limited resources in the household. One of the boys said:

“I used to live with my parents and went to school but there was dissatisfaction... My family was very upset with me and we had a dispute. They said ‘you spend the time sitting all day doing nothing’. So I went to live on my own. But I could not handle it. I did not even have money for my breakfast... I use to go to the desert to farm between June and November. School has already started when I come back. Most of the rest of the year I live by the money I have gathered, but if I find daily work like being hired by other people to do fencing, farming and the like, I do that too. I did that (went back and forth to the desert) also when I was in school, but the education became harder and I could not handle it so I dropped out.”

(Boy, 23, who had dropped out from grade 3 in ABEC 3 05.03.09)

The other boy was an orphan because the father had died in the war, and the mother died shortly after he was born. He said;
"We had money to start with but spent a lot on my mother's funeral, and there was nothing left for me. I have an older sister who raised me like a mother and we had 2 pieces of land that we shared. I looked after her cattle. Then I went to live with my grandmother. I used to look after their cattle, and she said that if you go to school you must leave my home. So I went to the desert. I had only one piece of clothes and one pair of shoes. After getting back from the desert I bought some clothes, and went back to school. Since I was on my own I was advised to get married, especially by my uncles. Because of HIV they said I should settle with one woman. So I did. But I had to drop out of school again because I had to take care of my family, managing both was impossible ...I asked my relatives for some money before I got married, but everybody said no. I was pressured by my grandmother and uncle to marry. I used to go to school part-time and do daily work, but I couldn't manage. I have to support my wife. My wife has to eat to survive.” (Boy, 23, who had dropped out from grade 3 in ABEC 3 05.03.09)

One of the girls claimed that it was her own decision to drop out of school, so that she could stay at home and take care of her younger siblings and the household, when her mother and older sister were working. The other girl was however forced to drop out by her father. She said;

“My father told me that I should stop school and go to my relatives in Addis Ababa and work as a housemaid. He said that he had to take care of his other children and could not support me. I did not want to drop out but he said that if you don’t go to Addis you should not go to school either. And I knew that in grade 5 I would need support from my father to buy school-equipment, like uniform and other things, which he could not give.”(Girl, 15, who had dropped out from grade 3 in ABEC 3 05.03.09)

All the students who had dropped out of ABE said that if they had a possibility of going back to school they would, and that they then would have returned to ABE. They preferred going back to ABE rather than to Formal school, because they would get ahead with their education faster since ABE is only 3 years, and also for the prospects of support in terms of learning materials. Both of the boys found it rather unlikely that they would continue their education, as did the girl who had been forced by her father to drop out. Continuing their education would require that they got a job which could be combined with the education. In the case of the married boy, he said that it could be a possibility if his wife got a job and supported them, or that they got a loan. The girl who had younger siblings thought it might be possible for her to go back and continue her education, since her siblings were growing older and could help her at home.

The students who were either in grade 3 in ABE or grade 5 in Formal school all planned to continue their education. The students in ABE said that they aimed at transferring to the Formal school system after graduating from ABE, and the students in Formal school said that they aimed at continuing in secondary education after graduating from grade 8. Among possible reasons for dropping out of school mentioned by the students the most frequently mentioned ones were eventual health problems, poverty or the need to work to either support themselves or their families in for example farming or with domestic work. In particular the older students said that they might have to
drop out because of demands to support themselves or contribute more in the household. Some of the older boys also said that they might have to go to the desert and farm, and that this might lead to them dropping out of school, as the farming seasons were not compatible with the school calendar. The risks of having to drop out also appeared more likely for the older students, while many of the younger students appeared to state more hypothetical reasons for dropping out. Also possible reasons for drop out mentioned by the guardians were mostly related to lack of resources. The following quotes are two examples of the guardians’ accounts, though the last one also points to the incompatibility of the school calendar with the farming seasons. The guardians said;

“If she failed some grade. I might sell my assets and send her to a private school, but this might even not be enough. I can’t give people stones for money, so if I can’t afford to keep her in private school she would have to drop out.” (Father of 2 girls in grade 9 High school, 1 girl in grade 5 School 1 who were in ABEC 3 and 1 girl working as facilitator in ABE 07.03.09)

"Since there is a shortage of land here they have to go to the desert and farm in June, and it is the month when exams are held, so they do not take their exams. And when they have finished the harvesting they return to the village in November. And they did not take the exams and they have not registered, so there might be a problem to continue.” (Aunt of a boy in grade 1 ABEC 3 28.02.08)

A number of students also spoke of eventual “family-problems”, as a reason for leaving school. These “family-problems” could be in the form of illness in the household or that their guardians died, and they would thus be left alone to support themselves. But the problems could also be in the form of arguments or disagreements with the family. One boy said;

“If I don’t have good communication with the family, it might lead me to leave home to go to work, and then I would have to drop out. Since I don’t have anybody the only thing left to do is work. I have to work. But If I have somebody to help me I want to go to school.” (Boy, 15, in School 2 who had attended ABEC 2 26.02.09)

A similar example was given by one of the older girls, saying;

“Since I live with my relatives – if they do not want me to learn in school, I might leave the house. And I must work to survive, and I cannot handle this and I would be forced to drop out.” (Girl, 16-18, in ABEC 1 05.03.09)

Another boy told us;

“If a student drops out it is not because he wants to, but because of some kind of accident. For example if a student has a dispute with the teachers, he might be asked to bring his parents, and he might be forced to leave school... And for example when they become teenagers they might ask their parents for more money and it may lead to a dispute with the parents. And they may leave home to go to the desert and work and when they come back it is too late to continue the education. Or they might not want to continue.” (Boy, 16, in School 1 who had attended ABEC 3 27.02.09)
He also claimed that this was rather common in the area. One of the older boys who already had been working on construction projects also said that if a job opportunity turned up, he would rather work than go to school. The boy in ABEC 1, who had dropped out from Formal school and returned to ABE, blamed his drop out on health problems, though the challenges he faced when transferring to Formal school were also part of the problem. He said:

“When I transferred to grade 5 it was very hard for me so my brother started beating me. He also sometimes taught me and told me to study very hard. After a while the beating changed in to this (the boy shows big scars on the stomach and back). So I went to my uncles far away from here, who took me to church and I was baptized with holy water. The wounds are from childhood, and had recovered, but when the beating started it came back. It would not heal. And it starts every summer, it is kind of seasonal. It was about 2 months ago that I came back.” (Boy, 12, in ABEC 1 06.03.09)

One girl said that she would drop out of school if her family said it was “enough” for her and another girl said that she would drop out if somebody “took” (abducted) her, which is a way of enforcing marriage. It was notable that none of the girls directly mentioned marriage as a possible reason for dropping out of school. The head teacher in ABEC 3 reported that early marriages were common in the communities in the area, and that it often leads to the girls dropping out. Although the legal age for marriage is 18 years, since birth certificates are not used, the age of a child may be decided according to what is convenient depending on the purpose, she explained. The previous year a girl who was registered in the ABEC as being 15 years old, had suddenly claimed that she was 18 when she got an offer to marry. The head teacher had gone to the police and to the women’s protection office, but the girl said that she was the only one who knew her correct age, and went ahead and got married. This particular girl was however still studying at the ABEC. The head teacher further reported that the girls who had older parents, who might get worried about the future of their daughters, were often set up to marriage. Although these girls might disagree at the beginning, they tended to agree with the parents after a while. Some future husbands also lied to the girls and told them that they would allow them to continue their education after getting married, but then moved away from the area with them. The head teacher said that the school tried to stop or delay the girls from moving away by making them take a HIV/AIDS test before marrying, which is required by law. But after the test was taken and if it was negative the couple could move away, and the girls left school. The director in School 1 believed that the majority of students dropping out from his school were students with a background from Formal school. The main reason was that more of these students than previously ABE students came from communities at far distances from the school, up to 5 or 6 hours away. Quite many of these students lived on their own in Ayckel
town, but did not manage to support themselves and the education and thus dropped out of school (Director School A 13.03.09).

The director at School B however believed that in his school, though there were no firm figures available, the majority of the students who dropped out from this school were students who had attended ABE. His explanation was similar to that of the director of School A, but according to him it was not the Formal school students but ABE students who came from places and ABECs far away and went to town to live by themselves. For the ABE students from the ABECs closer to School B, such as ABEC 1 and ABEC 2, the reasons for dropping out were according to him the same as for the students with backgrounds from Formal school. General explanations as to why children dropped out from this school, given by the director were the families´ opportunity costs of the education, and that parents often felt that they lost control over the children, with regard to morals and behavior etc, when they spent a lot of time in school and the parents for these reasons rather wanted their children to stay at home. There might also be family-conflicts if the children disagreed with their parents on these or other matters which might lead to the children running away or being kicked out of home to live on their own, which was not favorable for their education. As many as 60 students had not come back for the second semester at the time of the field studies, but the director said that the teachers in the school would try to find them and get them back to school. The teachers had already been sent out to find out about the whereabouts of other missing students 3 times in the fall semester (Director School B 12.03.09). The ABE facilitators also talked about their efforts to keep the students in school. According to the grade 3 facilitator in ABEC 2, a student was only counted as having dropped out after the facilitators had first sent a letter to the student´s household 3 times, and then went there to find out the reason for the absence and tried to get the student back (Grade 3 facilitator ABEC 2 10.03.2009).

This chapter has been descriptive, presenting the findings from the field studies. In the following chapter I discuss how the findings presented in the present chapter may be interpreted, in light of the literature and research presented in the chapter 4, and the conclusions of the study are presented.
6. Discussion of the findings and Conclusions

In this chapter the findings of the present study are discussed in light of the literature and research presented in the chapter 4. Firstly, what type of NFE program ABE is, and what can be expected from such a program is discussed in short. Next, a summary of the views and experiences with the ABE program expressed by participants in the present study is presented, where the findings are divided into what can be deemed as positive and negative features of the program respectively. Significant differences in the views and experiences with regard to the participants’ background and relation to ABE are also pointed out. Then the participants’ views and opinions on and experiences with the ABE program are discussed in light of previous research on the program, perspectives on quality of education, and research and perspectives on demand for education. Finally some additional aspects of the program and the present findings are discussed, and the conclusions of the study are presented.

6. 1 What type of NFE program is ABE? And what can thus be expected of it?

From what is stated by the MOE (2005) on it’s view on development and the role of education in development it is rather clear that Ethiopia’s overall educational strategy relies mainly on human capital theory or what Rogers (2005) calls a deficit approach to development in its view on education. Most efforts are also put into primary education, in line with the priorities of the EFA movement, which as commented earlier to a large extent is driven by reasoning stemming from human capital theory (Brock-Utne 2006). From what is stated in Ethiopian Education Policy on ABE, and in the strategy for the ABE program in the Amhara National Region it becomes quite clear that the ABE program is primarily aimed at providing access to basic education where the formal system does not manage to do this. The commitment to achieve EFA is outspoken by the Ethiopian authorities, and alternative
approaches to basic education are primarily viewed as temporary solutions, whereas expanding and improving the Formal education system is the goal in the long run (MOE 2005, Amhara REB 2003). In the Bedanie et al.’s (2007) study of basic education in the Amhara Region, it is also expressed that it’s an aim to transform the ABECs into Formal primary schools in the longer run (Bedanie et al 2007). In other words the ABE program is primarily an example of equivalency schooling according to UNESCOs categorization of types of NFE programs. The program is also aimed at enhancing the participation of some groups of children and youth, including girls, and therefore measures are taken which are expected to ease the inclusion of these groups. The education provided, and the organization of this education, is as well aimed at being generally more relevant to the communities than the present provision of Formal primary education. The program could with reference to the distinction used by Hoppers (2005b) in studying the `community schools´ also be called an adaptive response to the present situation and the challenges to provide UPE in Ethiopia, or an example of flexible schooling in Rogers (2005) words. It could with reference to Hoppers (2005b) also be said that at the theoretical or policy level, ABE exhibits some elements aimed at transformation, or empowerment of the participants in the program to cope with and confront challenges in their lives and surroundings. When previous findings of studies on the implementation of the program are taken into account, the picture however appears to be that this is at least not yet a major outcome of the program (Bedanie et al 2007). Bedanie et al (2007) also commented that this partly may be due to unrealistic expectations on the outcomes of the program, when taking into consideration the intended (young) ages of the participants. There were in Bedanie et al´s (2007) study also reports on reduced physical and emotional abuse within the ABECs and challenging of HTPs in the communities in this study, but the extent to which these achievements stem from the ABE program remains unclear to me.

The Amhara REB´s (2003) strategy document on ABE states clearly that the community is the major stakeholder of the program and that community members should be involved in all stages of the program. It is also stated that flexibility is a main feature of the program while
at the same time a quite specific strategy for the implementation of the program at most stages (monitoring and evaluation being exceptions) is presented. These are somewhat contradictory statements which may be interpreted as a sign of that participation of the communities in the planning and implementation of the program, is by the government understood as activity or consultation, rather than that the communities should be in control over the program. This again indicates that ABE is an example of flexible schooling (Rogers 2005). With regard to what can be expected from such an initiative, Hoppers´ (2005b) study of the community schools appears relevant, as the ABE program apparently has much in common with this type of education initiatives. The community schools were with some exceptions deemed by Hoppers (2005b) to be adaptive responses, and some of the strengths of this approach to education were found to be that it enhances participation in basic education, including some of the marginalized groups, that community involvement in the management of the schools may contribute to enhancing the relevance of the education to local needs and interests. Community involvement in the supervision of the schools may also contribute to an improved learning environment, including a more conducive learning environment for girls. The teaching-learning process may also be conducive and the learning outcomes positive due to the use of mother tongue as LOI and in some programs the learning outcomes have been found to be similar or better as those of the Formal school system. Problematic areas are however the financing of the schools, and that the community schools approach may signify that the state lays the responsibility of the education on resource constraint communities, and guardians concerns over equivalence with and the transition to the Formal school system. Some of the findings of Bedanie et al´ (2007) study of the quality of the ABE program in the Amhara Region and the findings in the present study are similar to the reported experiences from other NFE initiatives for children and youth presented by Hoppers (2005a). In the present study what happens above the level of the school-units (the ABECs) in the organization of the program, and the management of the ABECs, is though not focused on directly, and very few participants in the study touched upon these issues.
6.2 Participants´ views and experiences with the ABE program summarized

6.2.1 Positive features of the program

In sum what the participants in the present study viewed or had experienced as positive features of the program can be said to be:

- The location of the ABECs close to the homes of the learners, and in areas without traffic. This reduces the risks of sending the children to school, compared to if they would have to go to school in town were there is traffic and other risks they might be exposed to. The shorter distances to school also reduces the opportunity costs of going to school as many children are involved in work. Guardians and students in the rural areas also appeared to appreciate that the children went to school in the rural area as they feared “town-problems” or even “town culture” as a risk to the children from the rural area.

- The organization of the program was also viewed as reducing opportunity costs of the education. This was due to the shorter duration of the program compared to the first cycle of Formal primary school, the flexibility of the schedule and calendar, the higher tolerance on absence of the students than in Formal school, and the use of a shift-system.

- Students and guardians also experienced the program as low cost to the learners and their families compared to Formal school, because there were no registration fees and school uniforms were not required, there was a more or less full supply of textbooks without costs to the learners and their families, and some students also received other free learning-materials.

- Most of the students and guardians believed that the program gave equivalent learning outcomes as the first cycle of the Formal primary school.
Some students and guardians believed that the students in ABE learned to study hard due to the condensed version of the education, and that this was beneficial for their further education.

Some guardians expressed that they believed that since the facilitators in ABE were from the same communities as the students they cared more about the students.

Many guardians and students said that there were relevant and useful outcomes of the program such as that the students learnt about hygiene and health, environmental sanitation and numeracy. Some of the students and guardians also reported that students used their knowledge and skills acquired at school to the benefit of their families and also passed on their knowledge to their families.

Most students said that they had learned to read and write in Amharic.

6.2.2 Negative features of the program

What the participants viewed and experienced as negative features of the program may be summarized as:

- Most students and guardians were dissatisfied with the infrastructure and the hygiene and sanitation of the ABECs. This also included security-issues, such as that there was no school guard and the ABECs were not fenced.
- Some students and many of the guardians were disappointed that students in ABE were not given free learning materials such as exercise books, pencils, pens, school bags etc. Some guardians thought that ABE was more than just an educational institution and that since it was established by a foreign NGO it should provide free learning materials such as exercise books, pens etc at least to the needy students.
- Many students and guardians experienced that there was lack of proper order and discipline in the ABECs. The problems were blamed on the lack of rules and regulations in ABE, the facilitators’ ability to maintain the order and the students’ lack of discipline.
• Some students said that there was actually not so much flexibility on the schedule as they had wished for and that the facilitators rather scheduled lessons according to their own needs than to the learners needs.

• Some students and guardians questioned and complained about the facilitators’ capability and morals, and some students reported about use of violence as well as other abusive practices from the facilitators.

• Some students and guardians did not believe that the learning outcomes of ABE were equivalent to those of the first cycle of primary Formal school. This was blamed mainly on the facilitators’ incapability to provide quality teaching and on the condensed version of the education. They questioned whether 3 years of education could actually cover a 4-year curriculum.

• Some students would have wanted school uniforms, mainly as it would have created a greater sense of equity among the students.

• The English and Mathematics subjects were by many students experienced as hard or among the harder subjects. Many students also reported to struggle with calculation in their last year of the program or after completion of the program.

• Some students, and in particular the older boys, said that a possible reason for dropping out would be that they would have to go and work with farming in the desert areas and that due to the incompatibility with the school calendar they would have to stop going to school.

6.2.3 Differences in the views and experiences with regards to participants’ background or relation to ABE

Many of the views and experiences with the program were similar both for boys and girls, for present and previous students and for the guardians. Some of the views and experiences were however stronger or more frequent in some groups. For example it seemed that the older boys had more challenges in relation to their education than the other students. There were also some differences in the views of the students presently enrolled in ABE and those who had transferred to Formal school. Those who were still enrolled in ABE were overall
more positive towards ABE and it was among these students that the belief was more frequent that the students attending ABE would not only be equivalent, but even better than their counterparts in Formal school, when transferring to grade 5. There was also a difference in where students would have preferred to send their own children to schools. While most students who were enrolled in ABE would have wanted to send their own children to ABE, more of the students who had transferred to Formal school, including all but one of the girls, who would rather have opted for Formal school. Among the guardians the disappointment with the lack of free learning materials for the students was more frequently expressed than among the students.

After having summarized the positive and the negative features of ABE according to what participants of the study expressed, and pointed out how the views of some groups of participants differed in content or strength in relation to the other groups, we shall now turn to the discussion of the findings.

6.3 The quality and relevance of ABE

6.3.1 Relevance of the organization of the education

Overall the decisions to enroll as well as maintain the children in the educational program seemed largely influenced by economical considerations. This supports Verwimp’s (1999) perspectives on quality of education in poor environments, and the previous findings by for example Jones and Pereznieto (2006) on demand for education in Ethiopia. Like in Verwimp’s (1999) study teacher effort, the calendar system and the infrastructure of the schools (ABECs) were important quality issues of ABE for many participants in the study. The facilitators’ capability, which was questioned by many participants, and the infrastructure of the ABECs, which was deemed as poor by most participants, did however not appear to play such a large role in the decisions to enroll or maintain the children in school as the school organization, which was deemed to be beneficial. The shorter distances
to school, which the establishment of large numbers of ABECs in or close to the communities has contributed to, were important factors in the decision of where and probably also whether to send children to school at all, as was clearly seen in the present data. Reasons for that this was beneficial included the security of the students, and reduced opportunity costs of the education. Some participants also stated that the shorter duration of the program compared to the first cycle of primary Formal school was a reason for enrolling in ABE, and this may also be related to economical considerations and reduced opportunity costs. The flexibility of the schedule and calendar, which are other measures to adapt the education to local needs, and appeared to be appreciated features of the program by both students and guardians, was however not clearly a fact in the ABECs included in the study. There is no data in the present study to say much about the reason or reasons behind this, but as suggested by Bedanie et al (2007) it may be both a matter of comprehension on the ABE strategy among the implementers, and of the communities and guardians of the students, and a preference for a standard schedule among the facilitators. It is also questionable whether there will be much flexibility of the organization if the ABECs are transformed into Formal primary schools, and there are apparently plans to abandon the use of a shift system in the Formal education system (Bedanie et al 2007). This was also suggested for the ABE program by Bedanie et al (2007), as it in this study was found that students attending full day school had better academic achievement than students attending school in a shift system. It may well be that the learning outcomes for students in a full day system may be better than for students attending school in a shift system. But if a full day system was implemented on a full scale both in Formal school and in ABE it is likely that it would exclude many children and youth from education, as the children’s labor is important for many families. The use of shift system was mentioned as strength of the program by many previous and present students of ABE and by the guardians in the present study. One of the guardians also said that the guardians of children in the area around ABEC 2 had been consulted on this issue and responded that they preferred that the ABEC continued using a shift-system. From one perspective one can say that there appears to be a trade off between the quality of the education in terms of quality outcomes and participation in education. But inclusive
education and equity are also questions of quality and with reference to Verwimp (1999) quality education should respond to the household needs in a resource constraint environment. Moreover; the use of a shift system allows for more efficient use of resources of the program while a full day school system would for example require additional classrooms in the ABECs. It would possibly also demand that there was provision of food, and not the least facilities like water and toilets in the ABECs. Not to say that this would not be useful with such facilities and services in the ABECs; they are basic needs, which were called for by many participants in the present study, and such services could enhance the quality of the education as it would most likely improve the learning process and thus possibly the learning outcomes. Positive experiences on school feeding programs were noticed by for example UNESCO (2003), who also point out the advantages of facilities like water and toilets in the vicinity of the school. It would however make the costs of the program higher, and the communities may not afford to take on these costs. If the facilities of the ABECs on the other hand were not improved before shifting to a full day school system, longer hours in school might actually not lead to improved learning outcomes as the students and the facilitators would suffer long working hours under tough working- and learning conditions. The reasons for dropping out, whether hypothetical or actual, stated by the participants in the present study were also often related to poverty. This again gives support to that the program should continue and increasingly attempt to organize the education in a manner which lays the lowest costs possible on the learners and their families.

Another issue regarding the organization of ABE which deserves a comment is the question of ownership of the program, as it is stated by the Amhara REB (2003) that the communities are the major stakeholder of the program and that the communities should be involved at all stages of the program. As pointed out by both educationalists and those concerned with empowerment and development (for example Freire 1998, Sen 1999, Rowlands 1995 and Rogers 2005) it is important that development starts at the grassroot-level and that participation in the sense of control is paramount. There were a few participants who spoke about the respective ABECs in a manner that gave the impression that they had a sense of
ownership of the program, or at least responsibility for the maintenance of the ABECs. On the other hand there were participants who expressed a view that ABE was something which had been set up by outsiders, and in particular when they discussed the issue of the lack of free learning materials for the students in ABE. These participants were disappointed with the lack of follow-up from the initiators (SCN-Es) side. The following quote is a good example of what some of the guardians said:

“….This ABE is not just a school but an organization, which should give support. They opened it not only to teach but also to support children who cannot afford it, or children without parents.”(Mother of a girl in grade 2 in ABEC 1 28.02.09).

It may be that it is a matter of time that the communities get a stronger sense of ownership of the program, as not many years have passed since SCN-E pulled out from the direct implementation. On the other hand, as the responsibility has transferred to governmental authorities and there are plans for transforming the ABECs into Formal schools, any real community-ownership of the program, or even a sense of it, might never materialize. The lack of sense of ownership may also contribute to lower engagement in the program, which would be beneficial for the quality and relevance of the education provided (MOE 2005, Rogers 2005, Hoppers 2005a and 2005b). After having discussed what the participants expressed about the organization of the education, in the following section the role of what Bergmann (1996) calls ‘value quality’ of education in relation to the ABE program and students and guardians perception of the program is discussed.

6.3.2 The role of `value quality´

With reference to Bergmann´s (1996) distinction between value-, input- process- and output quality it is hard to say whether and in what way, value- quality played any important part in the decision to enroll children in ABE among the participants in the present study. It appears though as, with the exception of the boy whose parents wanted him to attend church school instead of basic education, those who decided to enroll children in ABE did not see conflicting values of the education provided and the values they would like to see nurtured in
school. ABE was viewed or experienced as difficult by many participants, and some believed that the students learned to study hard through the program. This was apparently considered as a positive feature of the program by some participants and the guardians. It was pointed out by some participants that they viewed this as positive as it would be beneficial for the students when they transferred to the Formal school system, but it may also be seen as a matter of values, recalling the findings of Camfield and Tafere (2009). In their study it was found that Ethiopian parents considered “hard work” as an important value which children should learn, and this may also apply to education. The perceived lack of order and discipline, which was a complaint by many participants in the study may however also be related to the value dimension of the educational quality, as “obedience” was another important value which Ethiopian children must learn, according to Camfield and Tafere’s (2009) findings. There were on some students on the other hand who said that they had learnt in school that they should respect and obey their parents, and this may be assumed to be appreciated by their families.

If it is correct, as one Muslim girl said, that the female students were not allowed to wear hijab in ABE, this may be an indication of religious intolerance. Since quality education should be inclusive and non-discriminatory, this is a serious issue as it may exclude Muslim students, and in particular the girls, if students and their guardians experience discriminatory practices in relation to the education based on religion. It is in particular serious, as the large majority in the study area and in the Amhara Region is of Christian Orthodox affiliation and the Muslims are a minority. As there were few participants in the study of religious affiliation other than Christian Orthodox, and issues in relation to religious affiliation were not addressed, the issue however requires further investigation.

In the following section the quality of the educational inputs and the teaching-learning process, according to what the participants of the study expressed, is discussed.
6.3.3 Quality inputs and -processes?

An orderly calm learning environment is also part of the process-quality of education, and a quality learning environment as is also pointed out by UNICEF (2000). Though the lack of order and discipline was by some participants blamed on the students, or the combination of the young students and inexperienced facilitators, it was most often related to the lack of rules and regulations in ABE and the facilitators’ incapability to maintain order. It was thus related to the input-quality (the facilitators) but also to the organization of the program. The input-quality in terms of working conditions, were in terms of the physical environment deemed as low, while for example the low PTR was by some participants mentioned as a beneficial feature of ABE. Also the input-quality in terms of learning-materials and in particular the availability of textbooks was considered as high by many participants. The input-quality in terms of the content and curriculum of the education was by some participants criticized for being too difficult, but most participants neither criticized it nor explicitly considered it being of high quality or explicitly relevant.

The quality of the teachers is seen as one of the most critical inputs in the educational process determining quality of education, like was pointed out in the 2007 study of the quality of ABE in the Amhara Region and is also acknowledged by Ethiopian education authorities (Bedanie et al 2007, MOE 2005, MOE 2007). This is perhaps even more so the case where the teaching-learning process is dominated by and like in Ethiopia highly centered around the teachers. When participants in the study were asked about their thoughts on the teaching methods in ABE, they often directly talked about the facilitators. Although most of the students appeared to be satisfied with the facilitators in ABE, some students were also critical and some even mentioned the use of violence and discrimination by the facilitators. These allegations may not be true, but if it was actually the case these are serious issues which ought to be addressed and corrected. The use of violence as a means of obtaining discipline in school is as mentioned earlier prohibited by law, but is still common in Ethiopian schools. It may be addressed through both teacher training, and by creating awareness among the students on their rights.
Some of the students also believed that it would have been more beneficial with subject-teachers than one facilitator teaching all subjects, but one can question whether this is actually a realistic alternative, considering costs and human resources. Many of the participants in the study said that the facilitators were often late for classes or absent. This is important as it both signalizes a lack of seriousness to the students and guardians, and that what may be perceived as low morals on part of the facilitators, may also affect the morals and discipline of the students. Naturally the facilitators’ absence also affects the time on tasks, and may have severe implications for the teaching-learning process and the learning outcomes if the absence is very high. Although the absence and latecoming may in fact be a result of facilitators low morals, it may also be a sign of difficult working conditions of the facilitators as well as there may be other reasons for the facilitators’ behavior. Before judging the facilitators’ morals as the problem, the facilitators who have unfavorable records on attendance should probably be consulted and their perspective taken into account, though still the problem ought to be addressed.

In the following section it is discussed to what extent the participants of the study perceived the ABE program as being equivalent to the first cycle of Formal primary school.

6.3.4 ABE´s equivalence to the first cycle of Formal primary school

It has been questioned by scholars in the field of education, for example Hoppers (2005b), whether it is actually realistic to expect that an educational program or school system, which makes use of lower quality inputs can provide equal or better teaching-learning processes and outcomes than the Formal school system. The inputs are not intended to be of lower quality; the use of para-professional local staff is for example viewed as serving the needs of the learners and the communities better. The (intended) use of for example locally produced teaching-learning material is also aimed at enhancing the quality of the education. When the reality is that the educational inputs are partly of lower quality than in the Formal school system as indicated by the findings of the present study and also by Bedanie et al (2007), I however believe that it is reason enough to say that the concerns are relevant.
Some students and guardians in the study also questioned whether it was actually realistic to believe that the students in ABE would learn the same in 3 years as the Formal primary school students learnt in 4 years. For the expectation of equivalent schooling of a condensed version of the curriculum to be fulfilled, it requires either that the education provided in Formal school is so meager that it is possible to provide the same in less time or that the shorter program is somehow is better than the Formal school program. With regard to ABE, it appears to be a combination, but I would say that it appears as a main reason for that ABE can produce the same results as the Formal school is the low quality of Formal schooling in Ethiopia. For example, many students in the present study said that they experienced Mathematics and English as being the, or among the most difficult subjects. Many present and former students also expressed that they had challenges with the Mathematics, when they were asked about whether they were literate and could count and calculate. This matches the findings of Bedanie et al (2007) that the ABE students’ average scores in these subjects were lower than in the other subjects. It was however also found that the achievements in these subjects were low also among the Formal school students. This implies that learning outcomes in these subjects may well be equivalent in the both programs, but it is not an encouraging finding. Bedanie et al (2007) in fact found that both programs were of rather low quality. The Ethiopian government aims at improving the quality of Formal school education, and at the same time it appears as if the state is laying most of the responsibility for ABE on the communities, although it at the same time encourages NGOs and private investors to engage in NFE. It may well be that if the Formal primary education is improved the quality of ABE relative to the quality of Formal schooling, is not enough to provide equivalent education. It may in fact become “education for the poor” meaning education that is of second rate, but the only kind that is available for poor people or marginalized communities. There were guardians in the present study who explicitly said that “ABE is for poor people” and though it might have meant that ABE was seen as more suitable for poor people, there might have been an underlying meaning that ABE was seen as a sort of a second rate education. Many guardians expressed that they valued education highly and they believed that it was important that their children attended school. At the same time there
were signs that they struggled with allowing the children to attend school. ABE might not have been the first choice if they could afford Formal school, although they appreciated that there was an educational program which could provide at least some education for their children. In the following section the perceived usefulness of the outcomes of the ABE program is discussed.

6.3.5 The quality and relevance of the learning outcomes

The ABE program should not only provide education equivalent to that of the Formal school system. It should also provide education which is relevant in the participants’ daily lives and help them to cope with present and future challenges. Useful outcomes, which can improve the living standard of the participants and their families, which were most often mentioned by the participants in the present study was the knowledge acquired about personal hygiene and health and environmental sanitation. These are important outcomes as illnesses such as Malaria and HIV/AIDS are severe problems in the area, and the access to health services, in particular in the rural areas, is limited. When natural resources are the primary source of income, like in the study area, knowledge about how to avoid damage to those resources is also paramount. According to Bekalo and Bangay (2002) it is of high importance to address environmental degradation in Ethiopia as it is both a cause and effect of poverty through environmental education which enables the society to make informed choices and carry out practices leading to sustainable lifestyles.

Most students also said that they had learned to read and write in Amharic. Bedanie et al (2007) however found that many ABE students did not read and write to a satisfactory level, and in the NLAs for the Formal school system most students in the 4th grade also performed below the desired level (MOE 2008a). As mentioned under section 2.2.4, the World Bank (2005) has also noticed that the first cycle of primary school may not be sufficient for obtaining full functional literacy. In light of this, it may not necessarily mean that all of the students had acquired full functional literacy when they said they were literate. Some level of
literacy is however still a very important prerequisite for future learning, whether in continued education or outside school.

Whether there were any signs of empowerment, even in its most simple meaning, in the responses of the participants in the present study, or whether the participants had acquired ‘life skills’ in the sense UNICEF (2000) interprets the term, as a result of the ABE program, is difficult to judge. The REB’s (2003) intentions are that the educational content should be related to the social reality of the communities and contribute to alleviate the existing social and economic problems. There were no clear indications that the content of the education was localized or contextualized, but this does not necessarily mean that it was not. A few students apparently expected improved living standards for themselves in the future, and some also believed they had better living standards compared to their parents. Most students however appeared to take their living conditions as a permanent life situation. This was seen in for example the responses to the question on where they would send their own children to school. Most students then took their present life situation and its frames and challenges as the vantage point. Some students also said that students in ABE were shy and not articulate like the children in Formal school, and one girl said that students in ABE were not aware of their rights. This may however not be accurate and the lack of signs of empowerment in the participants’ responses may also have to do with the questions posed. It may also be that the participants did not know how to express other kinds of learning outcomes other than more practical examples. One interesting question in this relation is why the students, and particularly the girls as it affects them at an earlier age than the boys, did not mention marriage as a possible reason for dropping out. There was also no mention of marriage as a possible reason for the children dropping out of school among the guardians. This may have to do with the issue that it was not something one talked about and in particular as the legal age for marriage is 18 and most of the students, including all but one of the girls, were younger than 18 years of age. It may also have to do with that the students were so young that marriage might not have taken place until several years later, and thus the students did not see it as a relevant or actual reason for dropping out of school. It may also be that the
students viewed it as unlikely that they stopped going to school even if they got married. On the other hand, it may also be that the chances actually were small that the students or the children of the guardians in the study would be married at an early age, or before they finished their education, and that their education was playing a role in this. As mentioned in section 3.3.3 there were some signs in Erulkar et al.’s (2004) study in the Amhara Region that going to school might prevent girls from being married away or delay the timing of the marriage. There were efforts being made in relation to the education in ABE, such as through school clubs, the engagement of the facilitators in the ABECs and the involvement of NGOs and the government in the area to challenge the practice of early marriage. In the following section the role of ABE in addressing gender-equality in education is discussed.

6.3.6 Addressing gender-equality in education

One of the aims of the ABE program is to increase the participation of girls in education, and the measures taken include locating the ABECs close to communities’ residential areas, involving women in the management committees and recruiting female facilitators (REB 2003). The ABE program and the ABECs included in the present study seem to have a neat record in the study area. It was however notable that all but one girl who had transferred to Formal school would have opted for Formal school, rather than ABE, in the choice of school for their own children. Most of them argued this choice with that the teachers were better in Formal school, that the teachers had low morals and were not properly supervised in ABE or that there was no order and discipline in ABE. It was also from this group of students that most of the allegations on use of violence and discrimination from the facilitators were reported, and they were overall also more critical towards ABE when they discussed other issues regarding ABE. This indicates that although participation rates among the girls are high in ABE, the learning environment, contrary to findings of other NFE programs, including the ‘community schools’, referred to by for example Hoppers (2005a and 2005b), is perhaps not as conducive for girls as hoped for at least in the ABECs included in the present study.
It was also noted that the gender-inequities in participation in education in the study area were rather to the detriment of the boys than to the girls. Boys appeared to more often than girls start school late and according to the education statistics from the WEO in Chilga, it appears as more boys than girls didn’t continue beyond the first cycle of primary school (Dessalegn 2009). There were also some indications that more girls than boys had higher educational levels in the data on the participants’ households. More boys than girls in the present study also reported that they had challenges with coping with their education due to responsibilities outside of school, or that they lacked support for their education at home. More boys than girls were according to the WEOs data also enrolled in ABE in Chilga Woreda the last few years, though the disparity has decreased and is small at present (Dessalegn 2009). Moreover, there were more boys than girls in the present study who reported that they appreciated the features of ABE which reduced opportunity costs of the education. This is important to take into account in the future implementation of the program, so that the program is not only organized in order to ease the participation of girls, but also takes into account the challenges and demands of the boys. There is not necessarily any contradiction between focusing on enhancing the participation of girls and easing the inclusion of boys, but it mainly again supports continued and expanded use of measures to lower the opportunity costs of the education. In the following section it is further discussed the implications and possible challenges of the wide age-span of the students in ABE.

6.3.7 Possible challenges of multi-age classes

In light of what both Bedanie et al (2007) reported on the actual ages of participants in ABE, and what was found in the present study regarding the age range for students participating in the program I believe there is reason to make some critical comments on the composition of the ABE classes. In the strategy document on ABE (REB 2003) it is stated that the program should be harmonized with the children’s physical, psychological and social development. With reference to UNESCO (2003), this is part of inclusive education, and it is also a basic pedagogical principle to take the student’s present situation, knowledge and skills as vantage
points for further educational development. Classes in ABE are composed of children and youth from as young as 5 to over 20 of age. As long as at the same time ABE is, like was expressed by some of the participants in the present study, perceived as suitable for young children, and there are children older than the school age who are not attending any kind of education, it is likely that the ages of the participants in ABE spans more widely than the intended 7-14 years of age. It is a goal to arrange separate classes for the over-aged children in the Formal school system, but according to my knowledge this is not the case in ABE. There were also not any separate classes for the older students in the ABECs included in the study. This may be problematic as the life worlds of for example a 7 year old girl and a 22 year old boy differs and they have different experiences and knowledge which they can relate to the education provided in school. One may assume that it takes quite some skill for the facilitators to, with reference to Bergmann (1996), use suited teaching methods which optimizes pupils learning opportunities in this situation. It is theoretically possible to create a teaching-learning process which suites the needs of all students and optimizes learning, but I would say that in a class of up to 80 students which might actually be the case in some ABECs, and when many facilitators have little training and working experience it is rather unlikely. Moreover, although part of the curriculum may be relevant to all learners, in the sense that it is either directly useful to them or lays ground for further learning there are most probably some things that older students find more useful than the younger students, and vice versa. The curriculum is thus most likely not the most relevant possible curriculum for all students. It is also likely that the older students dominate in the classroom situation. One participant in the present study said that the older boys got better grades than the younger girls in the ABEC she attended, because they were able to put pressure on the facilitators. Though this issue may have a gender-factor, and also have to do wit the facilitators’ incapability or morals, one can argue that it also has to do with the age hierarchy in the classes and that the older students are allowed to dominate.
6.4 Conclusions

It appears, with reference to for example Rogers (2004) and Hoppers (2005a and 2004b) that the ABE program is primarily aimed at filling a gap in the Formal education system in Ethiopia. The Ethiopian educational authorities are dedicated to achieve the EFA goals as stated in the Dakar Framework for Action, and these goals cannot be met only through provision by conventional means. Moreover, the Formal education system does not meet the needs of the predominantly rural populations, and the marginalized groups, and through alternative forms of establishment, organization and delivery of the education the ABE program is seen as a way of making the education more relevant, and also less costly (MOE 2005, Amhara REB). It is also obvious that the ABE program is in fact making an important contribution in the progress towards achieving EFA in Ethiopia (MOE 2007, Bedanie et al 2003). The program has contributed severely to enhancing general participation in the country, and also the participation of girls, and this includes populations which previously have not had access to primary schools. In the study area the ABE program counted in 2008/09 for 6949 students, or 20, 2% of the total enrolment at the first cycle of primary school level (Desalegn 2009). To what extent the program has in fact managed to include marginalized populations remains however unclear. In Bedanie et al´s (2007) study of ABE conducted in the Amhara Region there were for example apparently no orphans participating, or if there were it was not pointed out. In the ABECs included in the present study, there were however orphans participating in the program. In the particular study area there was however a project providing special support to orphans and vulnerable children, and the inclusion of marginalized children may does not only be attributed to the ABE program. The reviewed literature and the findings of the present study also reveal that there are serious issues regarding the quality of the education which needs to be further addressed. Furthermore, the ABECs appear to have an unfulfilled potential as also serving as venues for adult education, and thus contribute to the 3d and 4th goals stated in the Dakar Framework for Action. This was commented on in Bedanie et al´s (2009) study and participants in the
The present study also asked specifically for example electricity so that night-classes, including for adults, could be held in the ABECs.

Among the most important factors in the decision to enroll in the ABE program was the organization of the program. This included the location of the ABECs close to the homes of the learners, the flexibility of the school calendar and the schedule, the shorter duration of the program compared to the first cycle of Formal primary school and the use of a shift-system for delivering lessons. There were however varying accounts on the flexibility with some participants in the study claiming that the schedule was not arranged according to their needs. It may also be questioned whether the school calendar matches the needs of the communities in the sense that it does not follow the farming seasons and final exams are held at a time of the year when many people in the area, including children and youth, are engaged in farming. Some of the guardians also expressed that they wanted the ABECs to be “upgraded”, as they preferred to have the children going to school nearby the community also after grade 4.

Another reason for enrolling in ABE, which was in particular mentioned by many of the guardians, was that they believed there would be free learning materials such as exercise books, pens, pencils etc. It appeared however to be a great disappointment to most of them, as there were no longer much free learning materials available. It appears as the situation had deteriorated in relation to that the SCN-E pulled out from direct implementation of the program, and the responsibility was transferred to the WEO. Some participants perceived the program as an organization which was put in place by foreigners (SCN-E) and thought that this foreign organization should provide more than just the school buildings. This may also indicate that there was not a strong sense of ownership of the program among guardians in the communities, contrary to what was intended by regional authorities (REB 2003).

The ABE facilitators, who are an important factor in the input- and process quality of the education, were by many participants viewed as capable. Their record on attendance was however not so consistent according to the participants experiences. There was also a strong
concern over the lack of order and discipline, which is another important factor in the process quality of the education, in ABE. These are issues which ought to be addressed and corrected, as they affect both the teaching-learning process and the learning outcomes, and apparently affects the perception of ABE negatively. As a consequence it may have a negative effect on demand for the ABE education.

A concern for many of the participants was also the infrastructure, hygiene and sanitation of the ABECs, which was deemed to be of low quality. The impact of the physical learning environment and the facilities of schools, as pointed out by UNICEF (2000), may have an indirect impact on students’ achievements and are likely to pose challenges to the teaching-learning process if not adequate. A safe and neat learning environment is most likely beneficial for the learning-process and also the wellbeing of both students and facilitators. Low quality infrastructure and lack of basic facilities such as water and toilets in the ABECs may also have a negative impact on the demand for the education provided and contribute to the perception of ABE as rated second to Formal school. Like one guardian said:

“They provide them good education, but they don’t have a clean compound and because of this it might lead our children to have different diseases. So what is the point if my daughter gets sick?” (Mother of a girl in grade 2 ABEC 1 28.02.09).

Although it was not inquired directly in the present study the impression gained was that the content of the education was perhaps more aimed at being equivalent to that of the first cycle of Formal primary education than localized (contextualized). On the question of equivalence with the first cycle of Formal primary school most of the participants believed or had experienced that the students transferring to grade 5 were as capable as the students whom had gone through grade 1-4 in the Formal system. Some participants even thought the students with background from ABE were better than the students from Formal school when they transferred to grade 5. There were however some of the participants in the study questioning whether students in ABE received an education which was equivalent to the education in Formal school, and would rather see that there was a grade 4 in the ABE program. Most of the students who believed that students from ABE were better than the
Formal school students were also those who were still enrolled in ABE, while those who had actually transferred to Formal school had a more modest view on the matter. That most participants in the study experienced that the education provided in ABE was equivalent to that provided in the Formal schools is however not necessarily an entirely positive finding, as the quality of education in the Formal system may be deemed to be rather low. The academic achievements of the students in ABE and in Formal school included in Bedanie et al’s (2007) study in the Amhara Region may for example be said not to be equally high, but rather equally low. There is thus reason try to improve the quality of the education in ABE further through various means.

Among useful learning outcomes of ABE, it was most frequently mentioned by participants in the study that the students learned about personal hygiene and health and about environmental sanitation. These are important outcomes, and are directly applicable in the daily lives of the students and their families. Other important outcomes were numeracy, which also appeared to be important in students’ daily lives, and literacy, which is important in future learning, though the students’ level of achievement in these areas is unknown. Whether there were any indications in the present findings of empowerment of the students or the communities as a result of the education provided in ABE is however questionable. Some of the intended learning outcomes of the program, as stated by the REB (2003) however seem rather over-ambitious to acquire at this level, and with the rather low record in even core areas of learning. I also believe that there is reason to question whether the education, and the learning outcomes of ABE are the most relevant possible to all students the program is serving at present. Possibly a more differentiated program could to a larger extent meet the needs of the different participants in the program. A suggestion in this relation is that more vocational elements possibly would be of higher relevance to the older students who face stronger demands to contribute to their households or even to support themselves. There is also the question on what impact the large age-span of the students in ABE has on the teaching-learning process, as it may be deemed a large challenge to tailor the
To summarize; according to the findings of the present study, participants of the program and guardians of participants in ABE to a large extent seemed to value the ABE program, but the program scored higher or lower on different quality-dimensions. In some areas, such as the infrastructure of the ABECs, the order and discipline in the ABECs and the attendance of the facilitators, there is apparently a lot of room for improvement and these issues deserves serious attention from the implementers. In other areas, such as the organization of the education, the intended strategies on adapting to local needs seemed to be correct, but it should be ensured that intentions are followed up in practice. Some modifications of the school calendar, in order to make it more compatible with the farming seasons would possibly also signify an improvement and lower the risks of some students dropping out from school. There is also room for improvement of the curriculum, which with regards to the wide age-range of the participants in ABE, preferably should be differentiated to suit the needs of the different groups of participants. As earlier mentioned there is moreover an unfulfilled potential of the ABECs in also serving as centers for adult education.
References


Dessalegn, EsEMALEW (2009), Head of the Plan and Information Department at the Woreda Education Office in Chilga


Freire, Ana Maria Araújo and Macedo, Donaldo (1998) Introduction to The Paolo Freire Reader. New York: Continuum


Johannessen, Eva Marion (2006) Basic Education – also a question of quality. Oslo: Save the Children Norway’s Research Fund


Morgan, David L (1997) Focus Groups as qualitative research. Qualitative Research Methods Series vol 16 2nd ed. Sage publications


Appendix 1 Interview guides

Interview Guide Present Students of ABE

- Name, Age, (Sex), Religious affiliation, Years in ABE, distance to ABE (and Formal school if they know)

- Family background/Household; Who do you live with? What do your parents/caretakers do? Are they literate + years of schooling? Siblings? (Age?) What do they do?

- Who decided that you should go to ABE? Why?

- (Can you please tell me in your own words about your education?)

- What do you think about the content of your education? This question frequently turned into; What do you think of the things you learned in ABE? + What do you think about the subjects in ABE? What was good and what was not so good? Why? Was there anything that was harder and/or easier? Why? What did you like/not like?

- What do you think about the methods used in ABE? This question frequently turned into What do you think about the way of studying/learning in ABE? + What do you think about the teachers in ABE?

- Can you please compare ABE and Formal school? What are the similarities and the differences?

- What are your plans after finishing primary school?

- How do you think it will be for you when you move on to formal school? Do you believe it is the same or that it makes a difference for you that you have gone to ABE if you compare with the students who have gone to formal school all the way?

- Is there anything particular that you miss in ABE? Is there something else that you would like to be different with ABE?

- If you had a child or children: would you try to get him/her/them into ABE or formal school? Why?

- Is there anything that you have learnt through the education in ABE that has been or is of use to you outside school? Can you please give examples?

- Is there anything that could make you drop out of school? What would that be?
Interview Guide Former Students of ABE in Formal school

- Name, Age, (Sex), Religious affiliation, Years in ABE + moved on to Formal school immediately after ABE?, distance to ABE and Formal school

- Family background/Household; Who do you live with? What do your parents/caretakers do? Are they literate + years of schooling? Siblings? (Age?) What do they do?

- (What do you think about education (as such)? What is good education?)

- Who decided that you should go to ABE? Why?

- (Can you please tell me in your own words about your experience with ABE?)

- What do you think about the content of the education in ABE? This question frequently turned into; What do you think of the things you learned in ABE? + What do you think about the subjects in ABE? What was good and what was not so good? Why? Was there anything that was harder and/or easier? Why? What did you like/not like?

- What do you think about the methods used in ABE? This question frequently turned into; What do you think about the way of studying/learning in ABE? + What do you think about the teachers in ABE?

- Can you please compare ABE and Formal school? What are the similarities and the differences?

- How has it been moving on to formal school? Do you believe it is the same or that it makes a difference for you that you have gone to ABE if you compare with your fellow students who have gone to formal school all the way? (elaborate)

- Is there anything particular that you missed in ABE?

- Is there something else that you would like to be different in ABE?

- If you had a child or children: would you try to get him/her/them into ABE or formal school? Why?

- Is there anything that you have learnt through the education in ABE that has been or is of use to you outside school? Can you please give examples?

- What are your plans after finishing primary school?

- Is there anything that could make you drop out of school? What would that be?
Interview Guide Guardians of present and former ABE-students

- Name, (Sex), Religious affiliation, Occupation, Child/ren in ABE- Age? Years in ABE?, distance to ABE + Formal school

- Family/Household situation; Who do you live with? Children-how many, boys/girls? What do the other members of the household do? Have you gone to school yourself? Are you literate? What about your husband/wife?

- (What do you think of education (as such)? What is good education?)

- Who decided that your child/ren should go to ABE? Why? (If not the child/ren: Did the child/ren take part in the decision?)

- (Please, tell me in your own words about how it has been to have your child/ren participating in ABE)

- Can you please compare formal school and ABE? What are the similarities and what are the differences?

- Do you believe that it is the same or that it makes a difference that your child/ren goes or has gone to ABE and not formal school the first years? (elaborate)

- What do you think about the content of the education in ABE? What is/was good and what is/was not so good?

- What do you think about the methods used in ABE? or What do you think about the way of studying/learning in ABE + What do you think about the teachers in ABE?

- What do you think about the way the school and education is organised?

- Is there anything that your child/ren has learnt through his/her/their education that has been of use to the family up until now? Can you please give examples?

- Is there anything particular that you think is missing in ABE? Is there something else that you would like to be different with ABE?

- What will your child/ren do after finishing ABE/ primary school?

- Are there any possible reasons that he/she/they would drop out? What would that be?
Interview Guide Students who have dropped out of ABE - FGs/ Individual interviews

- Name, Age, Sex, Religious affiliation, Years in ABE + when dropped out?, present occupation

- **Family background/Household situation:** Who do you live with? What do your parents/caretakers/wife/husband/(children) do? Are they literate + years of schooling? Siblings? (Age?) What do they do?

- **Who decided that you should go to ABE? Why?**

- **What are the reason(s) that you stopped your education?**

- **Would you go back to school if you could? What would it require?** Would it be in ABE or formal school? Why?

- **(What do you think about the content of the education in ABE? or What do you think of the things you learned in ABE? + What do you think about the subjects in ABE? What was good and what was not so good? Why? Was there anything that was harder and/or easier? Why? What did you like/not like?)**

- **(What do you think about the methods in ABE?)**

- **Is there anything particular that you missed in ABE? Is there something else that you would like to be different with the ABE-program?**

- **Is there anything that you have learnt through the education in ABE that has been of use to you up until now outside school?** Can you please give examples?
# Appendix 2 Interviews and Focus groups conducted

*Focus groups conducted during field studies*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Boys/Girls</th>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>School</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Grade 3</td>
<td>ABEC 3</td>
<td>25.02.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Grade 3</td>
<td>ABEC 3</td>
<td>25.02.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Grade 5</td>
<td>School A</td>
<td>25.02.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Grade 3</td>
<td>ABEC 1</td>
<td>26.02.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Grade 5</td>
<td>School B</td>
<td>26.02.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Grade 5</td>
<td>School B</td>
<td>26.02.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Grade 5</td>
<td>School A</td>
<td>27.02.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Women</td>
<td>ABEC 1</td>
<td>28.02.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Men and Women</td>
<td>ABEC 3</td>
<td>28.02.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Men</td>
<td>ABEC 2</td>
<td>28.02.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Grade 3</td>
<td>ABEC 2</td>
<td>03.03.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Grade 3</td>
<td>ABEC 2</td>
<td>03.03.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Grade 3</td>
<td>ABEC 1</td>
<td>05.03.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Grade 3</td>
<td>ABEC 1</td>
<td>05.03.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Grade 3</td>
<td>ABEC 3</td>
<td>11.03.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Grade 3</td>
<td>ABEC 3</td>
<td>11.03.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Grade 5</td>
<td>School B</td>
<td>12.03.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Women and 1 Man</td>
<td>School B</td>
<td>12.03.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Men and Women</td>
<td>School A</td>
<td>12.03.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Grade 5</td>
<td>School A</td>
<td>13.03.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Grade 5</td>
<td>School A</td>
<td>13.03.09</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Interviews conducted during field studies**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview Type</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grade 2- facilitator ABEC 3. Informal interview</td>
<td>25.02.09</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Girl Grade 5 School A. Semi-structured Interview</td>
<td>27.02.09</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Girl Grade 5 School A. Semi-structured Interview</td>
<td>27.02.09</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Girl Grade 5 School B. Semi-structured Interview</td>
<td>03.03.09</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boy Grade 5 School B. Semi-structured Interview</td>
<td>03.03.09</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boy Grade 5 School B. Semi-structured Interview</td>
<td>03.03.09</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ewnetu, Nurele’gne. Head of Handicap National. Informal interviews</td>
<td>05 - 06.03.09</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boy Grade 3 ABEC 1. Semi-structured Interview</td>
<td>06.03.09</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woman School A. Semi-structured Interview</td>
<td>07.03.09</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Man School B. Semi-structured Interview</td>
<td>07.03.09</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 3-facilitator ABEC 2. Informal interview</td>
<td>10.03.09</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Headteacher and Grade 3-facilitator ABEC 3. Informal interview</td>
<td>11.03.09</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Director School B. Informal interview</td>
<td>12.03.09</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Headteacher ABEC 1. Informal interview</td>
<td>12.03.09</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Director School A. Informal interview</td>
<td>13.03.09</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bere Enyew, Amare. Head of the Chilga Woreda Administration, Informal interview</td>
<td>13.03.09</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shenkutie, Negusie. Education Program Coordinator SCN-E in the North Gonder Zone. Several conversations during field studies</td>
<td>23.02.09 -19.02.09</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 3 Informed Consent Form

Informed Consent for Qualitative Research Project

Title of Study: Students´ and guardians´ views and experiences with the Alternative Basic Education (ABE) program in the Amhara National Regional State of Ethiopia.

Principal Investigator: Åsa Elisabeth Linusson, Master of Philosophy in Comparative and International Education candidate

Research Assistant: Eden Abebe

Institution: Institute for Educational Research, University of Oslo, Norway

Thesis Advisor: Rosah Moonga Malambo, Oslo University College

Research: The purpose of this research is to examine the experiences of the Alternative Basic Education program in the Amhara National Regional State of Ethiopia. Special attention is given the quality of the education and the relevance of the education to the participants´ and their families´ daily lives, as well as the views and experiences with the process of transfer to the formal education system after finishing the ABE-program. Primary data will be collected through individual interviews and Focus groups with present and former students of the program, and guardians of present and former students. Secondary data to be used in the thesis are program documents from SCN-E, policy documents from Ethiopian education authorities and scholarly literature on non-formal education in Ethiopia and elsewhere.

Participation/Process: Participation consists of one individual interview, lasting approximately 1-1,5 hour or participation in a Focus group, of the approximate same duration. The interviews and Focus groups will be recorder, so that the researcher and research assistant can go through the interviews afterwords, unless otherwise is requested by the participant. Privacy will be ensured in the final thesis or any publication based on the findings of the research and records will be kept confidential during the working process. The records will only be available to the researcher and the research assistant, or if needed another translator, and audio records will be erased after being transcribed. Participation is voluntary and the interviewee has the right to withdraw from participation at any time. A summary of the thesis will be available to participants upon request, and questions about the study may be asked by participants at any point.

Participant’s Understanding
- I agree to participate in this study that I understand will be submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Education at Oslo University College.
- I understand that my participation is voluntary, that I can decline participation and that I can choose to end the interview at any point if I wish not to participate further.
- I understand that the interview or Focus group will be recorded, but that the audio recorder may be turned off at any time if I wish so.
- I understand that all data collected will be limited to this use or other research-related usage as authorized by the University of Oslo.
- I understand that I will not be identified by name, nor other personal attributes, in the final product.
- I am aware that all records will be kept confidential in the secure possession of the researcher.

(The participant´s oral agreement)